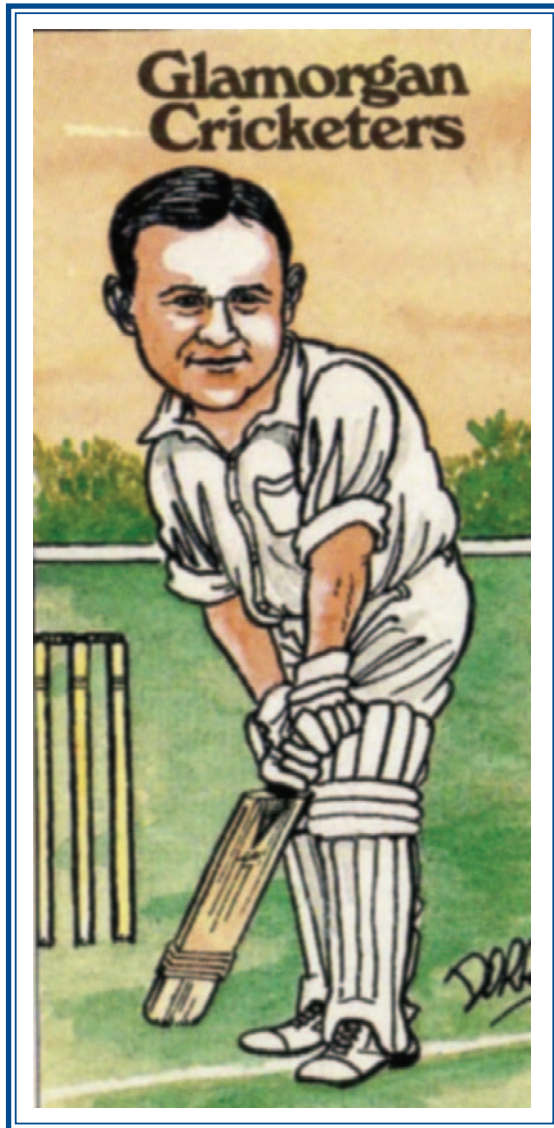


Billy Spiller

Policeman and Sportsman





Billy Spiller



*A painting of Billy Spiller in the collection of the National Museum Wales.
The image is reproduced with their kind permission. The inscription to the painting reads:*

***“Presented to W. Spiller by a few friends in commemoration of his attaining his
Welsh cap 26th April 1911”***

Billy Spiller

Policeman and Sportsman

1886-1970

Remembered with Pride

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SOUTH WALES POLICE
HERITAGE CENTRE
CANOLFAN TREFTADAETH
HEDDLU DE CYMRU



INTRODUCTION



Billy Spiller was a remarkable man.

As will be seen in this booklet, his sporting achievements were considerable but, in addition, throughout his period of success as a rugby player and cricketer, he continued to perform his duties as a police officer serving the communities of Glamorgan. In doing so he followed in the footsteps of his father who had also been a Glamorgan policeman, as was one of his brothers.

He lived at a time when sport was largely amateur and when it was possible for leading players to hold down day to day jobs as well as being the heroes of their communities on

the fields of play. This is in marked contrast to the highly professional and commercialised world of sport we know today.

Billy can, therefore, be seen as a product of his time, the peoples' policeman and sportsman. A man who was easily identified as the one who played cricket for the village where he had been born, and where his father was a policeman, but who also shone on the wider rugby and cricket stages.

Sports historians consider that the first three decades of the 20th century were totemic years for recreational activities in South Wales. This was the period which saw the Welsh rugby team defeat New Zealand for the



first-ever time, with the victory over the All Blacks at Cardiff Arms Park in 1905 being also regarded as the coming-of-age for Wales as a nation.

It was the period which also saw Cardiff City, Swansea Town, Merthyr Town and Newport County football clubs all join the Football League. Cardiff also won the FA Cup Final at Wembley Stadium in 1927 with the “Bluebirds” victory over Arsenal seeing football’s most prestigious trophy heading west across Offa’s Dyke for the first time.



In addition, it was the period when Glamorgan County Cricket Club was elevated from being a minor county, with the club staging their inaugural game as a first-class team in the County Championship during May 1921.

As well as these landmark achievements, the first three decades of the 20th century also witnessed major social and economic change across South Wales, with sport helping to boost local as well as national identity. Rugby, football and cricket became major spectator sports, with clubs developing their grounds and facilities and local authorities too playing their part in providing sporting amenities, whilst newspapers gave increasing coverage to recreational activities in general.

These were the years when Billy was one of the leading amateur sportsmen in South Wales, writing his name into the annals of Welsh sport by making the inaugural first-class century for Glamorgan. His hundred came during the Welsh county’s away match against Northamptonshire on 26th July 1921.

Remarkably, it was achieved sixteen years after his first appearance for the club and followed a period where he also won rugby honours for Wales and proudly wore the red jersey on ten occasions, besides playing with credit for Cardiff RFC as well as the Glamorgan Police team. It was also a time which saw some of Billy’s colleagues turn professional and play rugby league rather than the union

code, but Billy stayed true to his Corinthian beliefs and remained an amateur, playing for the love of the game rather than money.

His story of success, and prowess in both winter and summer sports, is tinged though with sadness with his sporting career spanning the Great War, when so many of his sporting pals and police colleagues were killed during the bloody fighting, whilst in his later life, he and his devoted wife suffered personal tragedy when their son died shortly after the end of the

Second World War whilst serving with the Royal Air Force.

South Wales Police (as the successor of the Glamorgan Constabulary) and Glamorgan Cricket are delighted to be able to join together to recognise the life of Billy Spiller. It's hoped that this booklet, produced to mark the centenary of that July day in 1921 when he scored the historic first first-class century for Glamorgan, will be of interest and will be a fitting tribute to a fine sportsman.

Gareth Madge

South Wales Police Heritage Centre

Andrew Hignell

Heritage and Education Co-ordinator, Glamorgan Cricket

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the following for their assistance with the production of this booklet

- Glamorgan Archives, Cardiff
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- South Wales Police Printing Department (*Ian Oakley, Neil Melbourne & Gareth Jones*)
- South Wales Police Heritage Officer, *Jake McDonald*

THE FAMILY

Gareth Madge

William Spiller (or “Billy” as he was known) was born on 8th July 1886 in the village of St. Fagans, on the western outskirts of Cardiff in the then county of Glamorgan.

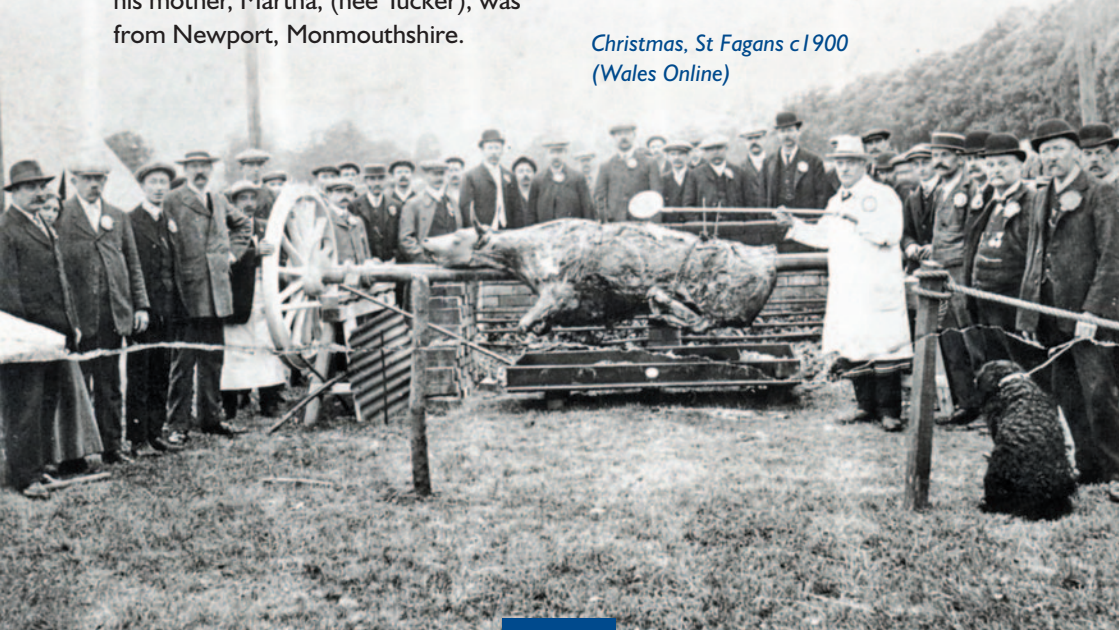
The village was dominated by St Fagans Castle, the mansion and estate owned by Lord Windsor who became the Earl of Plymouth. It is now the site of the Welsh National Museum of History. The Castle played a leading role in the social and sporting life of the village and the Spiller family was very much part of those activities.

Billy’s father, also called William, was originally from Devon, having been born in the village of Clayhidon, whilst his mother, Martha, (née Tucker), was from Newport, Monmouthshire.

Billy was one of four children. His sister, Jane, was the eldest and he had two older brothers, Charles and Henry (who seems to have been known as Harry). At the census of 1891, the family was living in St. Fagans where Billy’s father was stationed as a policeman with the Glamorgan Constabulary. He had joined the force in 1875 as PC 37 when he was 21 years of age. He had previously been employed as a blacksmith.

William Senior served for several years in the village as a constable and as an acting sergeant. The cases he dealt with were, according to newspaper reports, typical of those which arose in rural villages like St. Fagans and its

*Christmas, St Fagans c1900
(Wales Online)*





*The Police Station
(in the centre with the
Post Office to the right),
St. Fagans 1936
(Wales Online)*

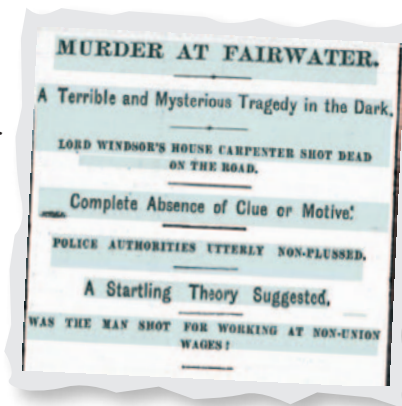
surrounding areas at that time, such as failure by a farmer to report swine fever amongst his pigs, horse theft, poaching and drunkenness.

A far more serious case in which Billy's father was involved was one which excited great public interest and led to extensive newspaper coverage.

On 10th July 1896, forty-one year old David Thomas of St.Fagans, a carpenter employed on the estate of Lord Windsor, was shot and killed at nearby Fairwater. Billy's father undertook enquiries near the scene of the murder and recovered a

cartridge case which was believed to be from the murder weapon.

However, there were no witnesses to the murder and despite several men being arrested, the investigation, which involved the police forces of the Cardiff Borough and of Glamorgan, failed to result in the prosecution of anyone for the crime.



*The headlines in the Evening
Express of 11th July 1896*

Public interest in the case was heightened when a young local woman, who was a clairvoyant, claimed that she had experienced the murder as David Thomas! Needless to say, this was the subject of sensationalised newspaper coverage.



*The Illustrated Police News
of 22nd August 1896*

neighbourhood. He then called upon Mr. J.C. Brace, who acted as secretary, to read the address and list of subscribers which comprised all the landowners, farmers etc., in the district, after which he handed over a

Billy's father retired from the police force in September 1898 and there was a presentation to him on behalf of the village of St Fagans as reported in the *Western Mail* of 1st October that year: "Police-sergeant W. Spiller, who has been in charge at St Fagans for the past fifteen years, was on Thursday evening the recipient of a testimonial from the inhabitants of the village and the neighbourhood. In the absence of Captain W. Forrest, who was unfortunately unable to attend Mr H.C. Roberts, of the Windsor Estate Office, presided at the



Billy's father as portrayed by the Evening Express

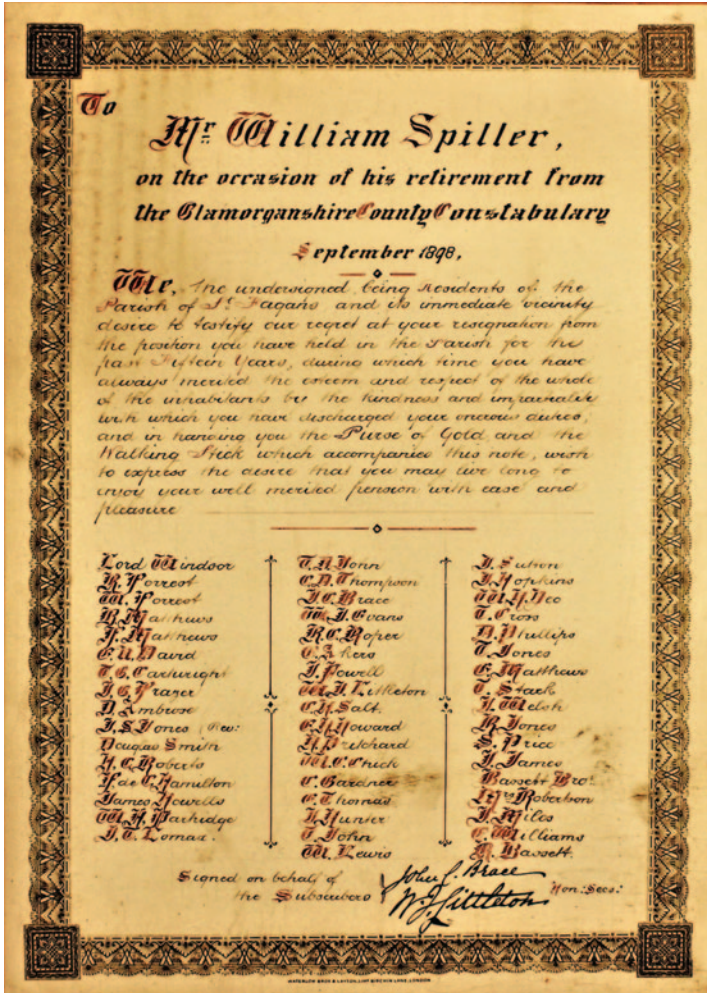
meeting in the National School. The Chairman, in the course of an interesting speech, testified to the respect in which Mr. Spiller was held by all classes in the

substantial purse of gold, together with an ebony walking stick and the address. The stick, which was mounted with a massive silver band, had an inscription upon the same giving the name of the recipient and date..."

The Address recorded:

"...you have always merited the esteem and respect of the whole of the inhabitants by the kindness and impartiality with which you have discharged your onerous duties and... wish to express the desire that you may live long to enjoy your well merited pension with ease and pleasure."

In his retirement Billy's father turned his attention to other pursuits. The census of 1901 refers to him as a poultry keeper and he was also a keen gardener as the following extract from the *Evening Express* of 9th August 1910, reporting on the St. Fagans



The Address presented to Billy's father on his retirement. The first name on it is that of Lord Windsor, later the Earl of Plymouth (South Wales Police Collection/Glamorgan Archives DSWP/77/10)

Flower Show, held in the grounds of the Castle, indicates:

“Another successful exhibitor, Mr. W. Spiller, is not content with the fame of being the father of an international

footballer, and was again a prominent prize-winner at St. Fagan's. Nine first prizes, four seconds and two thirds is an achievement to be proud of.”

According to the census of 1901, the family was then living at 16 Little Village, St. Fagans. In addition to Billy's father and mother, the household comprised of his sister Jane, who was a self-employed dressmaker, Charles, a Land Agent's Clerk, and Harry, a carpenter's apprentice. Billy was then at school. He attended the Church

There is no caption to this photograph which was apparently taken at St. Fagans Cricket Club. It includes the Chief Constable of Glamorgan, Lionel Lindsay, who is wearing a suit and is seated in the centre of the front row. Harry is sitting next to him on his left and Billy can be seen wearing a hat standing third from the left in the back row (South Wales Police Collection/Glamorgan Archives DSWP/PH/SPO/151)

School in the village between 1889 and 1898 and later the Lansdowne Road School in Cardiff where, as we shall see later, he became an accomplished schoolboy footballer.

In 1902 Harry, then 20 years of age, followed in his father's footsteps, and joined the Glamorgan Constabulary as PC 497. Billy was, in turn, to follow Harry into the force in 1904. We shall look more closely at Billy's police career in the next section.

As for Harry, he too attended the Church School at St. Fagans and, like Billy, he excelled at sports. He played cricket for the village and other teams including the Glamorgan Police team.



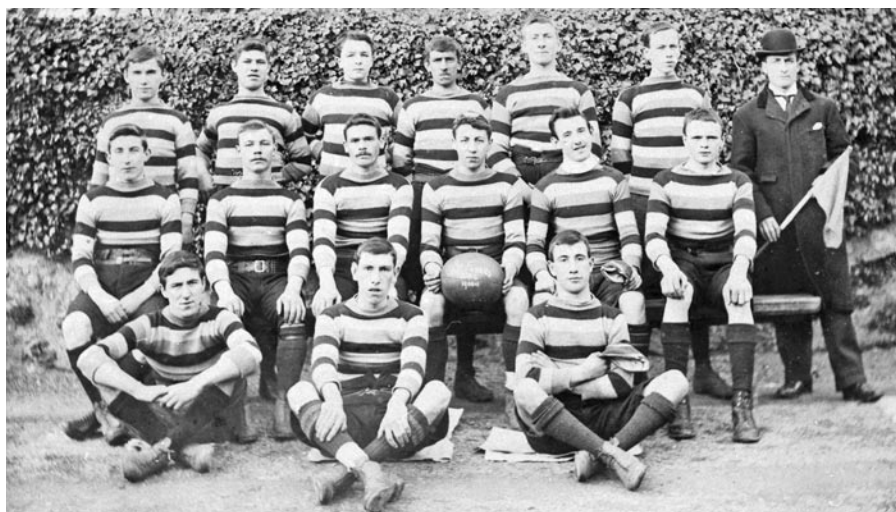
Harry was also a rugby player of note having commenced his career in that respect with the St. Fagans team as the photograph below shows.

As a result of his police service, Harry was stationed in several places in the county, including Pontypridd. It was natural, therefore, that as a promising player he should be enlisted by the town's rugby club.

He was clearly highly regarded, as this extract from a report which appeared in the *Evening Express* of 17th December 1904 demonstrates:

"One of the most prominent forwards in the Pontypridd team is P.C. Spiller... He commenced his career ...at St. Fagan's,

where his brother had already a record as a wielder of the willow, having only last season put up several centuries... The subject of our sketch joined the Glamorgan Constabulary about two years ago, and was selected towards the end of last season to play for Pontypridd, where he is stationed. He quickly came into prominence, his following up being particularly noticeable by the critical eye of the committee, and as a tackler he proved a perfect terror to the enemy. In backing up the three quarters he gets there every time; how, no one knows, but he gets there, and that is sufficient. Absolutely without fear, still he is not reckless, but plays with his head as well as his feet. With luck there can be little



St Fagans rugby team in 1901 with Harry sitting furthest right in the second row and brother Charles standing immediately behind him (National Museum Wales)

doubt that he is likely to find a place sooner or later in the county team, and, possibly, eventually gain international honours. He is an ardent supporter of the Glamorgan Police team, for which he has done, and hopes to continue to do, yeoman service, as opportunity affords."

Alas, unlike Billy, Harry didn't achieve international honours although he remained a prominent member of the Glamorgan Police rugby team, often appearing alongside Billy.

Billy's mother, Martha, passed away in 1923 whilst his father outlived her by ten years, dying in hospital in Pontypridd in 1933 aged seventy-nine.

A sad note in relation to Harry is that he and his wife, Elizabeth, suffered the loss of their son, John, in November 1927 when he died of typhoid whilst



Harry was serving as a wireless operator on the merchant vessel *Roserie*. He was eighteen years of age.

Harry as a member of the Glamorgan Police rugby team, 1908 (South Wales Police Collection/Glamorgan Archives DSWP/PH/SPO/10)

Harry died in 1941, aged fifty-seven, having by then retired from the police force.

Mention has been made of Billy and Harry's brother, Charles, as a member of the St. Fagans rugby team. He was also a club cricketer. Unlike his father and brothers, he didn't become a police officer but had, as was referred to in the census of 1901, a career in land management.

Returning to Billy, marriage to Blodwen Price came in 1912 and the couple had two sons: William Edward (1914-1978) and Kenneth Clive who was born in 1921.

Sadly, Kenneth, who before the Second World War worked as a local government official, died on 18th September 1945 whilst serving as Leading Aircraftman 932043 in 46 Squadron, Royal Air Force. This squadron flew fighter planes in the Battle of Britain but from the beginning of 1945 it was based at Stoney Cross in Hampshire flying Stirling aircraft as part of Transport Command. It maintained a transport link between the UK and the Far East.

Kenneth died at the RAF Hospital at Innsorth, Gloucestershire as a result of illness. He is commemorated by the Commonwealth War Graves

Commission and is buried at Whitchurch (Pantmawr) Cemetery, Cardiff. The inscription on his grave reads:

“At the going down of the sun and in the morning we will remember them.”

By the time the National Register was compiled in 1939 Billy had retired from the police and he and Blodwen were living in Kyle Crescent South, Whitchurch. Billy was then stated to be working as an estate agent’s clerk.

Blodwen died at Cardiff on 29th October 1967 and nearly three years later, on 7th June, 1970, Billy died at the age of 83.

They are both buried at Whitchurch (Pantmawr) Cemetery together with Kenneth.



*Billy and Blodwen
(Glamorgan Cricket Archives)*



*Billy, Blodwen and
Kenneth rest
together in peace
(Find a Grave
Website)*

THE POLICEMAN

Jake McDonald

Billy's career as a police officer began in November 1904 when, at the age of eighteen, he became a constable in the Glamorgan Constabulary.

Prior to that he had been employed by the Cardiff stockbroking firm of J.W. Courtis and Co, as a clerk. Sir

John Wesley Courtis was a prominent Cardiff businessman,

councillor and magistrate. He was Lord Mayor of Cardiff in 1911-12.

He played cricket for Cardiff and also in one match for the Glamorgan County Cricket Club in 1893.

After joining the police Billy was stationed at the force headquarters at Canton in Cardiff. It seems that initially his force number was 28 but at some stage it became 456.

It appears that Billy was a highly regarded young constable and was assigned to roles supporting the force's senior officers who were based at Canton. A report in the *Evening Express* of 12th February 1909 dealt with the death in mysterious



*(South Wales Police Collection/
Glamorgan Archives DSWP/PH/GRO/15)*

circumstances of a man at the Cardiff Workhouse. Superintendent A. Thomas was stated to be present at the inquest to watch the proceedings accompanied by Billy as his Chief Clerk.

Being in the eye of senior officers it's unsurprising that Billy achieved promotion to merit class constable in

November that year and continued to serve at Canton.

At the time of the census of 1911 he was living, with other police officers, as a boarder at the force headquarters at Canton.

Also living there were Mrs Esther Smith and her children, Stanley (who was to be killed in action whilst serving with the Royal Warwickshire Regiment in 1918, aged 19), Leslie and Phyllis. This was the family of Fred Smith who was a member of the Glamorgan Constabulary. He commanded the 16th Battalion (Cardiff City), Welsh Regiment, as a lieutenant colonel during the First

Glamorgan Constabulary.

Declaration to be made by Each Applicant for the situation of Constable in the Glamorgan Police Force.

QUESTIONS.	ANSWERS.
	(In applicant's own hand-writing)
Name of Applicant	<i>Billy Spiller</i>
Trade or Calling	<i>Black</i>
Age and Date of Birth	<i>18 July 8th 1886</i>
Height without boots	<i>5' 10 1/2"</i>
Exact Chest Measurement, without Cloak	<i>34"</i>
Eyes, colour of	<i>Blue</i>
Hair	<i>Brown</i>
Complexion	<i>Fair</i>
Works on the premises	<i>St. Fagans</i>
Where born	<i>Cardiff</i>
County	<i>Glamorgan</i>
Whether Single, Married, or Widowed	<i>Single</i>
Number of Children	<i>None</i>
If the Candidate has been in the Service, Police, or any other Public Office, or employed by any Industrial Company, he must state the length of time, &c. If he were then one such service give the particulars of each, and if in neither say "In neither of these services"	<i>In neither of these services</i>
By whom last employed	<i>St. Fagans the Cardiff</i>
Duration of last employment	<i>from March to December 1910</i>

This Form must be duly filled up and returned to the Office properly filled up within seven days, and if its contents should appear satisfactory the Applicant will receive notice to attend at the Chief Constable's Office, Canton, Cardiff, to be seen by the Chief Constable, and finally examined.

Applicants are to understand that no arrears will be allowed.

Billy's application to join the Glamorgan Police (South Wales Police Collection/Glamorgan Archives DCON/321/1278/3)

World War after which he rose in the police ranks to become a Superintendent and Deputy Chief Constable of Glamorgan. He played rugby with Billy for the Glamorgan Police team and for Cardiff Rugby Club. At the time of the census he was, along with a large number of other Glamorgan policemen, stationed in the Rhondda in connection with the industrial disputes there.



Sir John Wesley Courtis (Cardiff Rugby Museum)

In later years further promotion followed for Billy. The *Western Mail* of 10th February 1914 reported that he had been promoted from Acting Sergeant to Sergeant at Canton where he continued to serve until December 1917 when he transferred to the industrial village of Hirwaun, near Aberdare.



Fred Smith in the Glamorgan Police team of 1908 (South Wales Police Collection/Glamorgan Archives DSWP/PH/SPO/10)



Glamorgan Constabulary Headquarters, Canton, Cardiff photographed after the First World War (Wales Online)

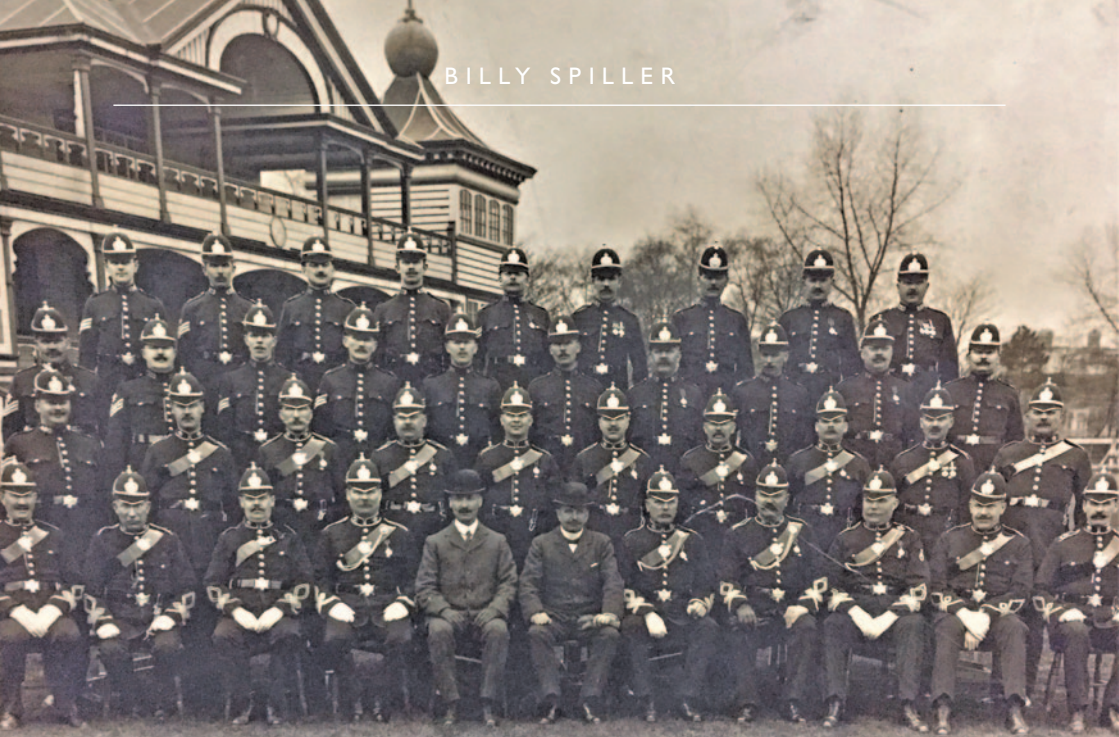
From this it can be seen that Billy didn't serve in the armed forces during the First World War but contributed to the war effort through policing the "Home Front" as it was described. As we shall see from the section on his career as a rugby player, he also played his part in raising money for various war related charitable causes during and after the conflict.

The years that Billy spent in the village appear to have been busy ones. Billy was reported in the local press as being involved in cases concerning the

theft of coal, straying horses and cruelty to a horse, and the illegal sale of alcohol by the landlady of a public house.

Whilst horses were an important part of life in the valleys at that time a hint of things to come arose in a case where Billy gave evidence as to the driving of a motor vehicle without a licence.

In those days the police were also expected to deal with public gambling. In a case reported by the *Aberdare Leader* on 13th September 1919, Billy



*Glamorgan Constabulary Mutual Benefit Association 1913 (Billy is first left in the back row)
(South Wales Police Collection/Glamorgan Archives DSWP/PH/GRO/15)*

was involved in the apprehension of several young men for illegal card playing, Billy locating them by using his field glasses.

It's also ironic to note, bearing in mind Billy's prowess as a schoolboy footballer and his successful career as an international rugby player, that on 29th November 1919 the *Aberdare Leader* reported that he gave evidence against a youth who was playing football in the street. The youth's response was "that he didn't think he was doing any harm." Nevertheless, he was fined ten shillings!

On a more serious note, one case stands out as revealing Billy as a compassionate police officer.

The *Aberdare Leader* of 4th January 1919, described a case involving an allegation that a local woman was neglecting her children. The report makes for sad reading:

"...the house ...consisted of two small rooms... The woman and her six children slept on one bed, which was in a filthy condition, and the house was also in a very bad state. The ages of the children ranged from 13 years to 16 months. They were not badly nourished but were in a dirty condition and thinly clad."

It appears that the woman was drinking heavily and was frequently away from home. She was also expecting another child.

Billy, who was a father himself by this point, was clearly concerned by what he saw at the family home, as the *Aberdare Leader* went on to report:

“PS Spiller said that the woman spent a great deal of her time in Aberdare. She was absent the whole of one night, and there was not a crust of bread at home for the children. Witness (Spiller) took some bread and margarine for them.”

The magistrates considered the case “a most distressing one” and clearly had little sympathy for the mother who was sentenced to three months imprisonment with hard labour. One wonders what good that did the children.

It’s plain to see that as well being a man of the law, Billy was very much a man of the community too, as the *Aberdare Leader* reported on 22nd November 1919:

“Vicar D.J. Wills. M.A., is again interesting himself in the social and physical welfare of the local lads. Under his auspices a general meeting was held in the Mission Room on Tuesday evening. It was decided to form a Gymnastic Club, and an Association football team.

Farrier-Sergt. Reg. James, M.M., and PSergt. W. Spiller have offered their services as instructors.”

In January 1921, while still a Sergeant, Billy was transferred from Hirwaun to Barry where he would remain until 1929 when he was succeeded by Sergeant Thomas Beale.



Thomas Beale pictured as an Inspector (South Wales Police Collection/Glamorgan Archives DSWP/PH/SPO/49)

Beale had served with distinction during the First World War and was awarded the Military Cross for his bravery in October 1918 whilst serving as an officer in the North Staffordshire Regiment.

There was praise for the police in Barry from Her Majesty’s Inspector of Constabulary, Sir Leonard Dunning, when he carried out his inspection in

November 1924, the *Western Mail* reporting him as saying:

“You have a smart, efficient and alert unit in this division of Glamorgan and the chief constable and superintendent officer—indeed, the township of Barry generally—should be proud and grateful that they possess such an imposing force.”

Billy must have been a proud man to be present at the inspection along with the Chief Constable, Captain Lionel Lindsay, and other senior officers.

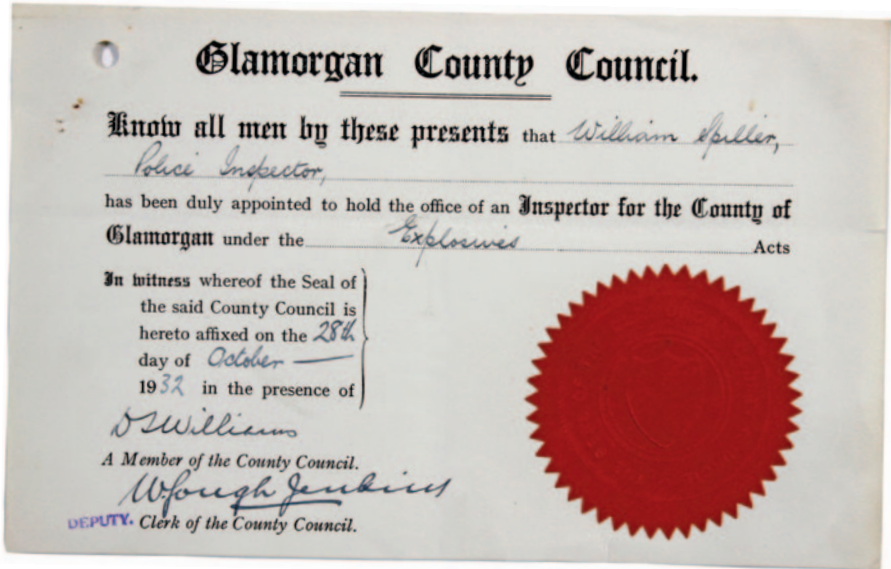
In contrast to Billy’s experiences in policing at Hirwaun, there were other, different, challenges at Barry arising from its popularity for holidays and as a destination for day trippers escaping the confines of the valley areas.

This must have been especially so on Bank Holiday Monday, 1st August 1927, following the tribulations of the previous year’s General Strike and miners’ strike, as the following report from the next day’s *Western Mail*, under the heading “*Barry Makes Holiday History*,” shows:

“August Bank Holiday Monday of 1927 has made history for Barry. Never in the long years of Barry’s association with seaside popularity have there been greater crowds. On Sunday night

hundreds of people arrived in readiness for the Bank Holiday and spent the night round fires on the sands at Whitmore Bay. With the dawn came visitors by train and motor coach, and by nine o’clock thousands of trippers had started the day’s amusements. Over 100,000 people visited Barry Island and Cold Knap during the day, and up to two o’clock this morning there were remarkable scenes of activity both at the railway station at Barry Island and the various bus stands. At ten o’clock on Monday night thousands of people from all parts of Wales and Monmouthshire were either on the sands or crowding in the station approach, and no sooner had the railway officials despatched one crowded train than another was in readiness.

The police, under Superintendent D.G. Morris, Inspector Frank Evans, and Sergeants W. Spiller and D.J. Henry, were at work until after midnight, and even then the crowds were as heavy as they were earlier in the day. So severe was the crush at some parts that ambulance workers had to treat scores of cases of women and girls fainting, but, considering the tremendous traffic, the utmost good humour prevailed. At eleven o’clock a party of several thousand Rhondda people on the banks overlooking the station joined in hymn singing.



Billy's appointment as an inspector under the Explosive Acts (South Wales Police Collection/Glamorgan Archives DCON/321/1278/10)

A railway official stated: 'We have never had a busier time. We have dealt with over 50,000 people in trains alone.' The buses, too, poured in from all parts of the country, and over 3,000 motor cars passed one spot at Barry Island in fifteen hours.

...Many people are spending the night on the sands, but so far as traffic is concerned the last excursion left the island shortly after one o'clock this morning for the Rhondda Valley."

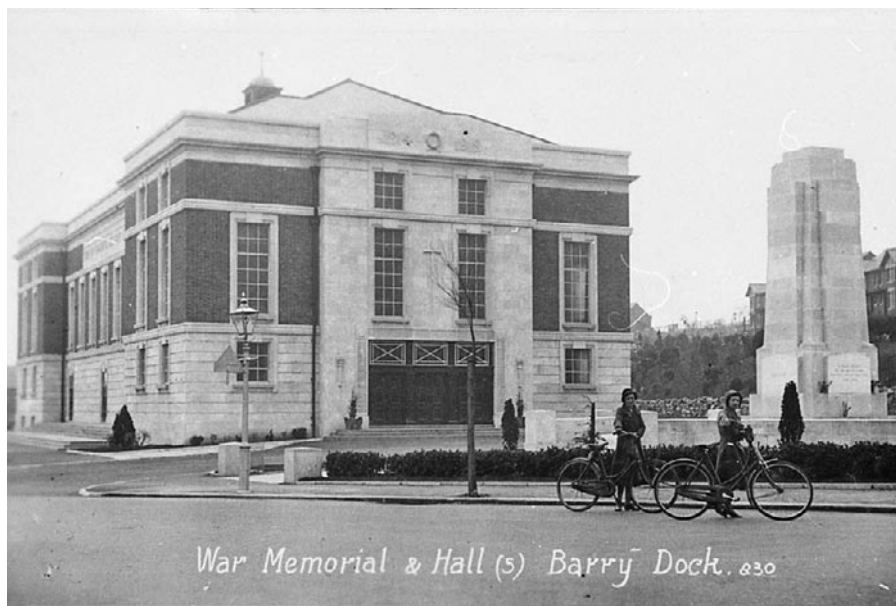
In March 1929, Billy was promoted to the rank of Inspector, and transferred to Whitchurch in Cardiff replacing Inspector J. Bennett. He would

remain there until his retirement in 1937.

In addition to the usual policing duties Billy also became responsible as an inspector in respect of legislation governing milk and dairies, fertilisers, food and drugs and explosives.

After his transfer to Whitchurch, there are two newspaper reports of Billy returning to Barry on official duties.

In November 1929, he was present at another inspection by Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary when long service medals were presented to seven special constables from Whitchurch.



*Barry War Memorial Hall
(Peoples Collection Wales/Vale of Glamorgan Libraries)*

He was also on duty for a much larger event when, on Friday 11th November 1932, Armistice Day, Lord Davies of Llandinam was present when his sister opened the War Memorial Hall at Barry. It was a large gathering of local dignitaries and townspeople to remember those who had made the ultimate sacrifice during the First World War. Billy, along with other police officers took part in a procession which also included the fire brigade, territorial army units and other organisations.

During his time at Whitchurch another instance arose of Billy's community involvement. In 1935 he helped to organise a dance at the Scout Hall in Whitchurch in aid of a summer camp fund for poor Scouts in the area. Billy and his wife were among over two hundred people present at the event.

In September 1936, Billy suffered a dislocated shoulder when he fell whilst undertaking enquiries regarding a plane crash in Rhiwbina in Cardiff. On the 20th of September a light



The Western Mail report of the Rhiwbina air crash

plane had collided with overhead wires. It crashed in Wenallt Road and caught fire, killing the pilot and both his passengers.

Billy retired in April 1937 but shortly before then he had to deal with a serious road accident when a lorry went out of control down Nantgarw Hill near Cardiff and collided with a wall, killing the owner of the lorry who was a passenger in it and seriously injuring the driver.

Billy's police career came to an end after over 32 years' service and the Special Constabulary in Whitchurch marked the occasion by presenting him with a gold wrist watch.

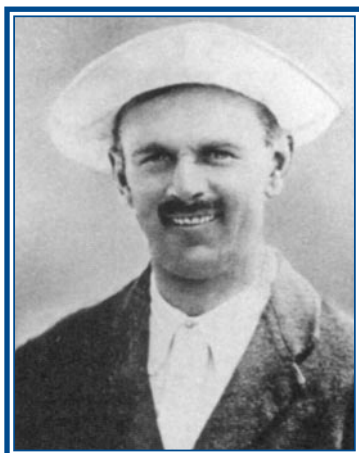
There's little doubt that he was as highly regarded as a police officer as he was considered one of the leading sportsmen of his day.

THE CRICKETER

Andrew Hignell

Whereas thousands grew up in the dockland communities of Cardiff, without any open space or encouragement to take part in recreational activities, Billy was fortunate to spend his formative years in the leafy green surroundings of St. Fagans – a village a few miles to the west of the city where the local vicar, Rev. William David, was a strong advocate of Muscular Christianity and whose son, Edmund, had captained Glamorgan County Cricket Club in their inaugural match in 1889.

Moreover, the local landowner – The Earl of Plymouth (or Robert Windsor-Clive) – was also a keen sportsman and like other grandees in South Wales, he encouraged the playing of healthy and masculine games on his land and provided land for St. Fagans Cricket Club, which had been created in 1862. Educated at Eton and St. John's, Cambridge, he was also a decent player himself and often played alongside his sons in the local team, which was renamed The Earl of



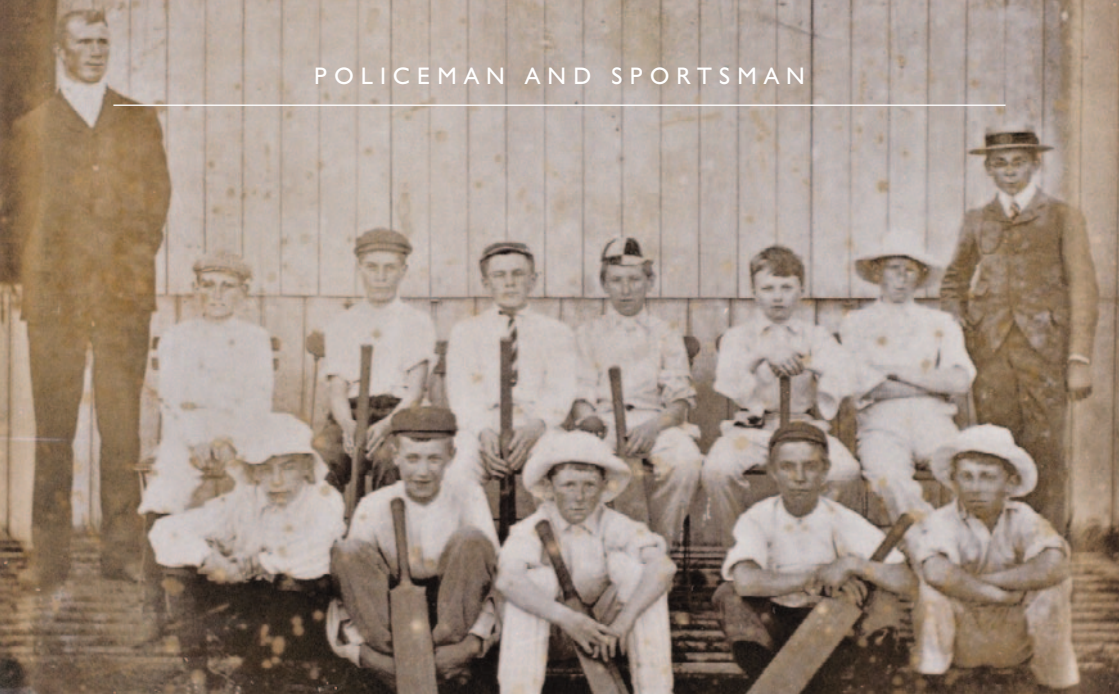
(Glamorgan Cricket Archives)

Plymouth's XI whenever he turned out and, quite fittingly, captained the team which became a central part of village life.

He was a generous patron to the cricket club, spending £2,880 in 1900 on creating a ground at Court Field – now the home of Glamorgan Wanderers RFC – before

overseeing in 1907 a move to their present home at Penhefyd Farm off Croft-y-Gennau Road. Having decent facilities was very helpful for young Billy but the real bonus though for the policeman's son and his young friends was that the Earl also hired professionals who, not only tended the wicket, but provided coaching for the local cricketers and the boys who aspired to play in the team. Through the Earl's encouragement, a St. Fagans Boys team was also created allowing young Billy to play alongside the Earl's sons – Other (b. 1884), Ivor (b.1889) and Archer (b.1890)

Billy was initially coached by William Lambert, the former Middlesex, Hertfordshire and Northumberland



St Fagans Boys Team c1899. Billy is seated in the front row, second from the left. (Glamorgan Cricket Archives)

bowler who was attached to the St. Fagans club in the late 1890s. His prowess with the bat led to coaching sessions as well with Frank Binch, the Penarth and Glamorgan professional, with Billy duly making his debut for the St. Fagans 1st XI during 1901. He became a regular in their side the following summer and during 1903 he also played, together with his brother Charlie, for the Earl's team in their annual match against an eleven representing Hewell Grange, the Earl's other property at Redditch in Worcestershire.

1903 also saw Billy play for the Earl's XI in their match at the Arms Park in Cardiff against a team raised by John

Wesley Courtis, the Australian-born entrepreneur whose brickworks in North Cardiff supplied the needs of so many of the builders in the thriving coal metropolis. He later served as Lord Mayor of Cardiff, besides being knighted and, in such august company, Billy was the top-scorer in the game in which Ivor and Archer Windsor-Clive also appeared.

By this time, St. Fagans also had the services of Douglas Smith, the former Worcestershire and Somerset batsman and it was through his encouragement that Billy moved up to open the batting with the former county player in 1904. It proved to be a success and was further evidence of



Archer Windsor-Clive
(© IWM HU 127704)

the high regard in which Douglas was held as a coach - he later emigrated to South Africa to work at St. Andrew's College in Grahamstown where an annual scholarship still exists in his memory for promising sportsmen to attend Cambridge University.

The match between St. Fagans and Cardiff 2nd XI during 1904 saw Billy score an unbeaten 105 with his efforts also leading to an invitation to play for the city club. Shortly afterwards, he made his debut for them against Bridgend but as the correspondent of the *Evening Express* observed:

"It was however soon apparent that the young man was too nervous to show his proper form and only succeeded in making 17 runs."

The same report, however, described him as *"one of the most promising cricketers in the district"* and with Douglas' guidance and words of confidence Billy was able to quell his nerves and do himself justice.

By this time, the Earl of Plymouth had also become the President of Glamorgan CCC and his generous benevolence extended to helping the county club as, fuelled by their success in being joint-winners of the Minor County Championship in 1900 (with



Billy as he appeared in the Evening Express of 25th June 1904

Northamptonshire and Durham), the Welsh county's ambitious officials planned a campaign for elevation into the world of first-class cricket as well

as undertaking some extensive ground improvements at the Arms Park in the hope that the MCC would award the Club a Test Match. With this in mind, a lavish pavilion was erected at the Cardiff ground and during the Autumn 1904 the Club made a bid to host the First Test of the following summer's series between England and Australia.

They lost by just one vote, with the mandarins at Lord's opting instead for Nottingham, but they had been mightily impressed with Glamorgan's application and awarded them a consolation prize of a two-day game during early August against the Australians. The only proviso was that Glamorgan should combine with Monmouthshire and play as 'South Wales', and with Jack Brain – the county's captain and leading batsman – together with other businessmen in the city helping to underwrite the guarantees set down by the tourists, plans were set in motion for their visit on 7th and 8th August. This also included contacting a number of promising youngsters who might take part in an exhibition game should the game finish early on the second day and the crowd needed entertaining before the tourist's departure on an express from Cardiff General in the early evening.

Billy was delighted to be sounded out, especially as it was a clear indication that he was in the thoughts of the county's selectors as they planned ahead for life in the County Championship. Although Billy was not needed for the match against the Australians, he was delighted to soak up some of the atmosphere as over 10,000 people attended the match. A fortnight later, he was overjoyed to receive the call-up from the county's selectors for the closing matches of the summer – against Devon at Exeter and Surrey 2nd XI at Swansea.

He duly travelled by train with the Glamorgan party to Devon, alongside Norman Riches and Arthur Gibson, with whom he had played whilst 'guesting' for Cardiff and two men who sixteen years later were to play a role again in his remarkable sporting career. The teenager duly batted at number nine on his county debut although he spent his first day as a county player in the pavilion at the County Ground in Exeter, watching the rain fall. The weather was less inclement the following day but the wicket was nevertheless quite spiteful with Billy making just 1 and 14 as Devon eased to a five-wicket win in the drying conditions.

The weather also interrupted the match at Swansea against Surrey 2nd XI with play not starting until 3.20pm on the opening day and 4.00pm the following afternoon. Nevertheless, Billy showed his prowess with the bat and made an unbeaten 24 on the second day and defended for over half an hour with Harry Creber, the Swansea professional, to prevent the visitors from securing the bonus point associated with a first innings lead.

The hard-nosed professionals and experienced amateurs in the Glamorgan line-up had been mightily impressed by Billy's pluck and resolve, and during 1906 – after a series of fine innings for both Cardiff and St. Fagans - he received further invitations to play for the county side. However, the fact that the Minor County games were played during the week meant that Billy had to decline most of these, owing to his duties with the Glamorgan Constabulary. However, he was able to secure leave to play in the match at Swansea in mid-June against Monmouthshire. Promoted up the order to number eight, he made 4 in his only innings in what proved to be yet another rain-affected contest.

Despite the fact that he was not able to play on a regular basis, the Glamorgan selectors had been very

impressed by Billy's steadfast innings for the Club, as well as his performances in club games for St. Fagans and Cardiff, besides some decent innings for the Glamorgan Police side. A measure of the high standing in which he was held came in September 1908 when Glamorgan qualified for the final of the Minor County competition against Staffordshire. With their campaign for first-class recognition gaining momentum, the county's selectors were eager to field their strongest possible eleven, so they were delighted when Billy – who had scored 125 for the Earl of Plymouth's XI against Hewell Grange - gained leave of absence to play in the match at Stoke-on-Trent on 7th and 8th September. He had been in decent form in club cricket but Staffordshire held a trump card in having the services of Sydney Barnes, the Warwickshire, Lancashire and England bowler. Batting at number six, Billy was dismissed for 3 and 0 in each innings by the legendary bowler as Staffordshire secured a nine wicket victory.

It was an inglorious way to end what hitherto had been a decent summer for Glamorgan as well as Billy, and undaunted by the reversal, the county



St Fagans Cricket Team 1910. Archer Windsor-Clive is on the left in the front row with his brother Ivor in the centre. Billy is standing, fifth from the left (St. Fagans Cricket Club)

continued their bid for higher recognition with the Earl of Plymouth leading a fund-raising campaign over the course of the next couple of years as the county's officials hoped to follow the example of Northamptonshire in 1905 in joining the County Championship. Further matches were secured with touring teams but the downswing in the economy during the 1910s put a dampener on things.

Billy, though, continued to be a heavy scorer both for St. Fagans and the

Glamorgan Police. Having taken over as captain of the village club – whenever the Earl was not available – the highlight of the summer was an unbeaten 174 during a double-century stand with Archer Windsor-Clive during the annual match against Hewell Grange. Having played together for the St. Fagans Boys team, it was gratifying for Billy to play alongside Archer in men's cricket with many fine judges speculating that one day both might be the mainstays of the Glamorgan side. Tragically, this

was not to be the case as far as Archer was concerned, as the young officer in the Coldstream Guards was killed in France in late August 1914 during the early days of the Great War.

Two of Billy's other colleagues in the Glamorgan Police team of the early 1910s also saw active service during World War One, with Gerald Stratton and Arthur Oppenheim (later O'Bree) both playing with success. Stratton subsequently became a Major in the Welsh Horse Yeomanry and Royal Garrison Artillery whilst Oppenheim served as a Lieutenant Colonel with the Welsh Regiment. With such talented cricketers in their ranks, the Glamorgan Police team enjoyed four

unbeaten seasons, with Billy scoring a fine hundred against Barry Wednesdays during June 1914, before the following month, their unbeaten record came to an end in the match with Briton Ferry Town as they lost by nine runs.

It's also worth noting that O'Bree was to play in Glamorgan's first first-class match against Sussex at Cardiff Arms Park in May 1921.

By the time of the outbreak of the Great War, the downswing in the local economy had ended whatever hopes Glamorgan held of applying to the MCC for first-class status. Without the benefactors who could help



Gerald Stratton



Arthur Oppenheim (O'Bree)



Glamorgan Constabulary Christmas card signed by the Chief Constable, Lionel Lindsay, and featuring Billy as a cricketer. The rugby player in the top left hand corner is Welsh international, Dick Thomas (Richard Thomas)

underwrite the match guarantees demanded by the English counties as well as the other expenses in hiring professionals, these lofty ambitions withered on the vine. It was an entirely different matter during 1920, fuelled by post-War euphoria, economic recovery and a nest-egg to the tune of £1,000 over a ten-year period from Sir Sidney Byass, the owner of the Margam Steelworks to meet any guarantees demanded by the English counties.

During 1920/21, Tom Whittington, in his role as Glamorgan's secretary, approached the existing first-class clubs for fixtures the following summer against the Welsh county. All went well and having gained the support of the minimum requirement of eight, the MCC endorsed

Glamorgan's application during their meeting during mid-February for elevation into the County Championship for 1921. Plans were then set in place for Glamorgan to field as strong a team as possible for their inaugural summer of 'big cricket'. Agreements with several professionals fell through, largely because of the modest terms which the Welsh county could offer, given their flimsy finances.

Fortunately, there was a decent pool of amateurs to draw upon with Billy, who was still a regular in the Cardiff line-up, still being one of the finest batsmen in the region. His good friend and team-mate Norman Riches, who had been Glamorgan's most successful batsman before the War, secured a sabbatical from his father's dental



Billy batting for Cardiff against Penarth in 1920 (Glamorgan Cricket Archives)

practice and agreed to captain the Club during their inaugural summer of Championship cricket. Billy also threw his hat into the ring by approaching the Police authorities and asking for a four-month leave of absence, knowing that his presence in the team on a regular basis would significantly help Glamorgan's cause. He had also been saddened by the tragic loss of Archer Windsor-Clive – a man who had played some highly promising innings for Cambridge University and Glamorgan, and had been tipped to become Glamorgan's captain when they entered the world of first-class cricket. It was, therefore, out of

loyalty to his late friend that he planned a summer break from his duties with the Police.

As it turned out, the worsening labour situation and the threat of strikes and civic unrest meant that Billy could only secure an eight-week break from mid-July, plus a long-weekend earlier that month when Glamorgan were playing Worcestershire at Kidderminster. It was here at the Chester Road ground on 9 July 1921 that Billy made his first-class debut. Batting at number five, he top-scored in Glamorgan's first innings with an assertive innings of 40, decorated with

the flowing drives which he had unfurled during Club games in South Wales. Second time around, he was promoted up to number four and made a quickfire 13, but his efforts could not prevent a Worcestershire victory.

The presence of the 35 year-old on a regular basis from 23 July was looked forward to with great anticipation, especially after his breezy innings at Kidderminster. Billy did not let his friends down and in his next Championship outing, at Northampton, he duly wrote his name into Glamorgan's record books by becoming their first-ever centurion in first-class cricket. It came after Billy had been dismissed for a duck in Glamorgan's first innings and, like so many of the Welsh county's games in their early years in first-class cricket, in difficult circumstances as Glamorgan were set the task of scoring 460 to win on the second evening by the Northants captain.

They made a dreadful start to their second innings with both Tom Whittington and Norman Riches having departed with just a single extra on the scoreboard. It therefore read 1-2 as Billy, batting at four, made his way to the middle. He duly unleashed some typically strong and

graceful drives to reach a half-century shortly before the close of play but, with further wickets tumbling at the other end, Glamorgan ended the day on 134-7.

Billy and his partner Stan Hacker continued to play freely the following morning when play resumed at 11.30am. Billy in particular struck some forceful leg-side blows and gave stumping chances on 92 and 94, but each time was missed by Walter Buswell, the Northants wicket-keeper. He duly celebrated his good fortune with an all-run four on the legside having batted for just under two and three-quarter hours, and having hit 13 fours. There were loud cheers and plenty of applause for Billy from the Glamorgan contingent but shortly afterwards Stan was caught at mid-off, whilst Billy was caught behind driving at the medium-pace of George Thompson. The final wicket fell next over as Glamorgan lost by 244 runs after an historic hour's play.

There was plenty of back-slapping for Billy as he returned to South Wales for the back-to-back games which followed at Swansea against Worcestershire and the Australians. There was further cause for celebration in the first of these games at St. Helen's as Glamorgan defeated

the West Midlands side by an innings – only their second win of a difficult summer – with schoolmaster Frank Pinch emulating Billy by also scoring a hundred on what was his Championship debut. Soon afterwards, Billy was also delighted to hear that in appreciation of the honour which he had brought to himself and the Glamorgan Police, members of the force contributed £21 to enable an inscribed bureau to be purchased for him, and which was presented to him at the end of the season by the Chief Constable.

By this time, Billy had been on Glamorgan's southern tour, with away games at Weston-super-Mare, Hastings and Southampton, before making his one and only appearance on his home turf at the Arms Park in the return match with Hampshire during mid-August. The county's season ended with their northern tour to Chesterfield, Leicester and Manchester. Further victories and centuries proved elusive for both Billy and his Glamorgan colleagues, with the policeman ending the summer with only one further half-century, with 58 in the away match with Sussex, and an overall tally of 378 runs at an average of 21.00.

Billy duly returned to South Wales and his duties with the Glamorgan Police, delighted to have written his name into the county's record books. He continued to be a prolific run-scorer in club cricket, having switched his allegiance to Barry Athletic CC, besides receiving further enquiries about his availability to turn out for Glamorgan over the course of the next few summers. Billy was only able to secure sufficient leave to play in two further games, with both being away, against Yorkshire in July 1922 and Gloucestershire in June 1923. Batting at number four, he made 5 and 20 at Headingley before the following year making 4 in each innings during another heavy defeat at the Victoria Ground in Cheltenham.

Billy Spiller's playing record for Glamorgan County Cricket Club

Batting and fielding

Minor Counties Matches

Played: 4

Innings: 6

Not out: 1

Runs: 46

Average: 9.20

Best Innings: 24 not out v Surrey
at St. Helen's, Swansea, 1905

Catches: 1

First Class Matches

Played: 13

Innings: 22

Not out: 0

Runs: 411

Average: 18.68

100's: 1

50's: 1

Best Innings: 104 v
Northamptonshire at
Northampton, 1921

Catches: 7



W. Spiller,

*From a cartoon of Billy, the "run getter"
(Glamorgan Cricket Archives)*

THE RUGBY PLAYER

Gareth Madge

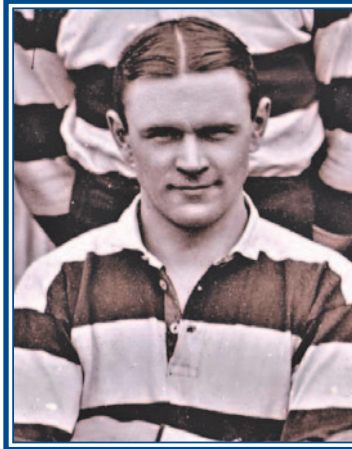
As we have seen, Billy was one of the outstanding amateur cricketers of his generation. However, it could be argued that his achievements in rugby football were even greater and brought him attention on a wider stage.

His playing career encompassed the Cardiff, Pontypridd, Glamorgan Police and Glamorgan County teams as well, of course, as his appearances for the Welsh international team. (Indeed, as we shall see, he even made one appearance for the Australians!)

In order to reflect the breadth of his career on the rugby field we shall consider each aspect in this section.

Billy's International Career for Wales

Billy played in ten international matches scoring four tries and one dropped goal making a total of sixteen points according to the scoring system of the time.



(Cardiff Rugby Museum)

His period in the Welsh team between 1910 and 1913 formed part of what has become known as the first "Golden Era" of Welsh rugby. Between 1900 and 1911 Wales won six Triple Crowns and three Grand Slam of victories over England, Scotland, Ireland and France.

1909-1910 season

Billy was first chosen to play for Wales in the match against Scotland at the Cardiff Arms Park on 5th February 1910, despite some doubts as to his fitness as he had been ill with influenza.

His selection followed a successful period as a club player with

Pontypridd and Cardiff during which press reports often referred to him as a future Welsh international.

On the day of the match the *Evening Express* carried this profile of him:



(South Wales Police Collection/Glamorgan Archives DSWP/PH/SPO/213)

“William Spiller, who is today entitled to the proud honour of wearing a Welsh international cap for the first time in his life is a natural athlete. As a boy, when he used to play for the Lansdowne-road (Cardiff) School Association team, he stood out above all his fellows and at the present day he frequently gives evidence of his early training in the dribbling code. Subsequently Spiller played for the St. Fagan’s village Rugby team, and at the age of eighteen he became a regular playing member of the Pontypridd Rugby Club. After three seasons with Pontypridd he joined the Cardiff team in 1907, and in the early part of that winter he played brilliantly. However, he was badly damaged by a kick on the shin at Gloucester by A. Hudson, the English international, and after being out of the field for a couple of months, it took him a long time to recover his form.

Indeed, at the beginning of the present season he was playing very poorly, but in the early part of December he suddenly jumped into his old form, and in the past seven or eight matches he has shown quite international class. Spiller is a remarkably good kick, has a most elusive swerve, frequently evades a tackler by wriggling from his grasp, and can field the oval ball as well as any other man playing the game.

His judgement which one time was defective, is also much improved, and there is no doubt that his is a meritorious entry into the Welsh team.”

The profile ended by stating that Billy was almost as fast as his Cardiff and Wales team mate, Reg Gibbs, who played on the wing, and gave a description of Billy’s physique as standing just over 5ft 10ins tall and weighing 11st 7lb *“in his birthday attire”!*

Billy had an excellent debut in the red jersey, with Wales winning 14-0 and Billy having the distinction of scoring a try in his first international match. It seems that Percy Bush, Billy’s Cardiff team mate and one of the stars of Welsh rugby, playing at outside half, gave Billy what the *Western Mail* described as *“a difficult pass”* but as the report went on to say:

“... the Cardiff recruit took the ball cleverly, and with a fine burst through the Scottish three-quarters threw himself over the line with a very fine try. The angle was a difficult one, but Jack Bancroft, with a great kick, converted amid a renewed outburst of cheering and the singing of ‘Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau’”

Billy had also put in a fine defensive display with some excellent tackling.



The cartoonist's view of the Welsh victory over Scotland (Evening Express)

His all-round performance clearly impressed the *Western Mail's* correspondent:

"One of the gratifying features of the match was the unqualified success of recruits, especially Spiller, who quite fulfilled the expectations of his friends by playing a game of real international class."

The paper's expert comment came from former Welsh international, R.T. Gabe, who said:

"The best of the Welsh three-quarters was Spiller. His try was a perfect eye-opener, and he must have surprised himself at the manner the Scotchmen, after laying hands on him, let him go. The opening seemed to be microscopic, and it was any odds on Spiller being smothered."

Percy Bush, in giving his post-match thoughts on Billy's try in the *Evening Express* of 12th February, said:

"I was particularly glad to see the 'Splinter' get this try. It seemed a just reward for all his training. It was quite a sight to see Billy striding along the road and up the Leckwith Hill morning after morning before

breakfast to disappear at the top on his ten-mile constitutional. It became known after a bit, and the people who were up in time would line the road and gaze admiringly as Billy trudged along, blushing violently."

Billy's next match was against Ireland at Lansdowne Road in Dublin on 12th March. The *Evening Express* of 9th March set out the instructions which the Welsh Rugby Union had issued to the players selected for it—a far cry from the preparations for today's matches!

Wales won the match comfortably by 19 points to 3. The Welsh backs put in a great performance although Billy seems to have had a relatively subdued game according to the *Western Mail*:

"Spiller was not quite himself, but he played a good, sound game and made no mistakes."

IRELAND V. WALES

Mr. Walter E. Rees has issued from Norwood, Neath, the following final instructions for Saturday's international, Ireland v. Wales, at Dublin:—

1. The team and officials will travel on Thursday morning by train leaving Newport (Fishguard route) at 11.18, Cardiff 11.40, Swansea 12.23, Landore 12.40. A special dining-car will be attached to this train at Newport. All tickets for the Eastern party will be taken by Mr George Dowdell, Newport.
 2. The headquarters in Dublin will be the Hotel Metropole.
 3. You must play in Navy knicks and International jersey
 4. Please bring your club jersey for practice on Friday afternoon.
 5. You are invited to dine with the Irish team and officials after the match.
 6. Players can either return from Dublin by the 7.40 p.m. on Saturday or on Monday morning.
 7. The committee hope you will do your utmost to get fit for the 12th.
- Should anything happen to prevent your playing please wire me without delay to the above address.



*Henry Gore Lindsay,
Chief Constable of
Glamorgan 1867-1891
(South Wales Police
Collection/Glamorgan Archives
DSWP/PH/POS/23/8)*

glorious weather, the sun shining with a bright and genial warmth which gladdened every heart."

This may have been due to the fact that there had, again, been some doubts as to Billy's fitness to play due to an injured leg.

It was clear that Billy's success on the rugby field had created a loyal following amongst his Glamorgan Police colleagues as the newspaper went on to say:

"It was a tribute to W. Spiller's popularity among his comrades in the Glamorgan Police Force that a few score of them attended the match. In common with a couple of thousand of civilian Welshmen, the men in blue were fortunate in finding Dublin favoured with

Amongst the police contingent supporting Billy, was the Chief Constable, Lionel Lindsay, and it was reported that his father, Henry Gore Lindsay, who had preceded him as Chief Constable of Glamorgan and who originated from Ireland, laid on a breakfast for them all before the match.

1910-1911 season

The following season, 1910-11, saw Billy playing an important part in one of Wales' great triumphs of the period when they won the Grand Slam and Triple Crown, with Billy appearing in all four matches. This was to be the

last occasion on which Wales would achieve such success until the 1949-50 season.

The first match was played at St. Helen's, Swansea, on 21st January. Wales scored four tries to England's three to win a hard fought match 15-11 to get their campaign off to a great start. Billy Trew, the Welsh captain, praised the performance of the opponents describing them as:

"The finest English team I have ever played against."

The *Liverpool Daily Post* agreed that it had been a fine performance by England in a match of great quality:

"That England did not deserve to lose was the general opinion of the majority of those who had the good fortune of witnessing the international match at Swansea on Saturday. There were fully 50,000 people round the enclosure, and from start to finish there was not a dull moment in the game, which beyond doubt was one of the best exhibitions of international football ever seen in Swansea."

It's interesting to note that long before the modern world of pre-match entertainment involving fireworks, marching bands and choirs, those who attended the match were entertained in a rather different way as the *Liverpool Daily Post* reported:

"An exciting scene took place on the ground before play was started. An acrobat entered the enclosure with his bicycle and chairs, and refused to go when ordered off by the secretary. Half a dozen policemen were then engaged to remove the man and his machine. A severe struggle ensued, and the acrobat was successfully frogmarched to the ropes. The police came in for a lot of booing and clod-throwing, and the amusing incident provoked much merriment among the crowd."

Billy wasn't originally selected for the match but came in as a replacement for his Cardiff teammate, Louis Dyke. He played an important part in the match, again putting in some good defensive work and scoring an excellent try.

The next match against Scotland at Inverleith, Edinburgh on 4th February, 1911, when Wales won handsomely 32-10, was to prove Billy's best international performance as he scored two tries and dropped a goal.

The *Athletic News* was fulsome in its praise of Wales and Billy:

"The humiliation of Scotland-a brilliant Welsh triumph-superlatives needed: A lexicon would be required to write in praise of Wales. I quite expected their



The Welsh team against Scotland 1911, Billy is sitting second from the left. His Glamorgan Police colleague, Jim Birch, is the second player from the right in the back row (WRU)

success, but I did not anticipate the degree of their triumph....

The great success of the three-quarter backs was Spiller...He took his passes with accuracy, and he either carried on the good work or else ran with great pace. Moreover, his defence was sound, and Spiller's place should be safe for the rest of this season."

A visit to Paris to play France at the Parc des Princes on 28th February followed. Wales won 15-0, scoring three tries.

The match was played on a Tuesday afternoon and the attendance, estimated at around 15,000, was said

to be a record for France which had only been admitted to full international matches a few years earlier.

Wales were captained by John L. Williams, Billy's Cardiff team mate, who scored his seventeenth and final international try that afternoon. Sadly, he was to die of wounds sustained whilst serving as a captain with the Cardiff City Battalion of the Welsh Regiment, during its attack on Mametz Wood on the Somme on 7th July 1916.

The next match against Ireland in Cardiff on 11th March was to be a highlight of the season as Wales won 16-0 (scoring three tries) thus



A cartoon of John L. Williams which appeared in the Evening Express of 18th September 1909

securing the Triple Crown and the Grand Slam following their previous victories over England, Scotland and France.

The match aroused much excited anticipation as described by the *Leicester Daily Post*:

“Great interest attached to the meeting of the Welsh and Ireland rugby fifteens on the Cardiff Arms Park on Saturday, both countries having beaten England and Scotland, and on the result depended the international championship...”

Much rain had fallen in Cardiff for some days, and the ground was in a heavy condition. Happily, the day was fine and, as was to be expected, there was a big



The Welsh team against France 1911. Billy is seated second from the left in the second row, next to John L. Williams, as the captain, holding the ball (WRU)

attendance. Half an hour before the start the enclosure, which accommodates nearly 40,000 spectators, was packed and the gates were closed to all save ticket-holders, hundreds being unable to obtain admission....”

As for Billy it seems he did some good things during the match but apparently the Welsh backs were not at their best.

1911-12 season

After their Grand Slam triumph Wales were brought back down to earth in the first match of the following season’s international matches.

This was against England at Twickenham on 20th January 1912 and the home side won 8-0, scoring two tries. Among the large crowd at the match was the Prince of Wales, the future King Edward VIII.

The headlines to the *Western Mail* report of the match summed up its view of the Welsh performance:

“Welsh hopes buried at Twickenham-Well won victory for England by eight points-Disappointing display of the Cymric backs-Superior pace and stamina win in the end.”

It seems, however, that Billy, whilst he again defended well, wasn’t given many attacking opportunities:

“...W. Spiller, of whom so much was expected, was practically starved, and was given very little of the ball, so that full value was not got out of his partnership with Ewan Davies on the right flank.”



A lineout during the match against England (Western Mail)

Billy missed Wales’ next two matches against Scotland (which they won 21-6) and against Ireland (which they lost 12-5) and came back into the side for the encounter with France at Rodney Parade, Newport, on 25th March when they won 14-8.

This was only the fifth international match between the two countries and the *Western Mail* was greatly impressed by the progress which the French had made in their play. Indeed, it was stated that Wales were fortunate to win.

Billy seems to have made a big impact as the following extracts from the

A Welsh try against France scored by Plummer of Newport (Western Mail)



Watching rugby internationals long before the days of hospitality boxes and debuture seats! The crowd at Rodney Parade for the France match (Western Mail)

Western Mail's report indicate:

*"...the brilliant work put in by W. Spiller and Ewan Davies on the right flank of the Cymric attacking division forced the French to capitulate. Davies racing over with a typical Welsh try, which was converted by Harold Thomas...
...It was fortunate for Wales not only*

that Spiller and Ewan Davies were playing but that both were on the top of their form. It was entirely due to the openings made by Spiller and Ewan Davies' fine turn of speed and determination in going for the line that two, if not three, out of the four Welsh tries were scored."

1912-13 season

The South African team toured Britain and on 14th December 1912 met Wales at the Cardiff Arms Park.

It was a day of heavy rain and a strong wind and it was

little wonder that it seems to have been an error-strewn match which South Africa won 3-0 with a single penalty goal.

Billy, however, played his part in attack, coming close to scoring a try, and in defence. The *Sporting Life* correspondent was impressed with his contribution:

"...I believe if Wales had got a try from an altogether delightful round of passing started by Spiller in the first half they



The Welsh team against South Africa with Billy seated in the middle row second from the left. Fred Perrett is second from the right in the back row with Horace Thomas on the far right of that row next to him. Billy Geen is seated on the far right in the middle row (WRU)

would have won; for the players of Wales were men who would have developed into a mighty side had they got in front... Yes, rugby football in Wales is no puny thing, it is still a wonderful affair."

Billy was caught up in controversy after the match when questions were raised about some of the decisions of the referee, Potter Irwin of England. Billy was reported as being of the view that the South African penalty had not been successful.

On a sad note it's worth remembering that three of the members of the

Welsh team that day in Horace Wyndham Thomas (Blackheath and Cambridge University), Billy Geen (Newport and Oxford University) and Fred Perrett (Neath) were to die in the First World War.

Billy's last match for Wales was played against England at Cardiff Arms Park on 18th January 1913. England won 12-0 thus securing their first ever success in Cardiff.

The *Western Mail* in its report considered that the Welsh performance was such that "drastic changes" were needed to the team:

“By winning at Cardiff on Saturday England scored her third victory over Wales in the last four seasons, and the defeat by the margin of a dozen points was the most decisive inflicted upon the Principality in the long period of fifteen years.”

That said, Billy seems to have contributed to some highlights:

“The crowd were delighted with a beautiful round of passing, in which all the Welsh backs handled, and Spiller, breaking away at top speed, was within ten yards of the line, when he passed to Plummer, who was pushed into touch...”



The Welsh Rugby Union souvenir to which Billy contributed

Billy put in an important tackle just before the referee blew his whistle to end the match. By then, however, many of the Welsh supporters had already started to leave the ground.

It was a sad way for Billy to end his international career but he could look back with pride on his contribution during a famous period in Welsh rugby.

Later Years

In later years Billy reflected on the success of the 1910-11 season in an article he wrote for the Welsh Rugby Union’s souvenir review of the history of the Triple Crown. This was published in 1952 and edited by J.B.G. Thomas, rugby correspondent of the *Western Mail*. In it, Billy said:

“I always think of the season 1910-11 as one of the most enjoyable of my career, because Wales won the Triple Crown and it was my great privilege to be in the winning XV.”

Billy’s standing as a fine player was referred to by J.B.G. Thomas in a series of articles which he wrote for the *Western Mail* in 1956, when he set about choosing those who he considered to be the best players for Wales in each position. Whilst Billy didn’t make the final choice in relation to the three quarters, he was described as one of the “devastating players before World War I.”

Billy's Club Career: Pontypridd RFC

As was seen earlier, Billy's brother, Harry, became a policeman with the Glamorgan Constabulary in 1902 and was posted to Pontypridd where he joined the town's rugby club and enjoyed a successful period playing for them.

It seems that, after Billy became a Glamorgan policeman in 1904, he not only followed in his brother's footsteps in that respect but also as a rugby player when he too joined the club for the 1904-05 season.

He turned in some good performances for them over ensuing seasons, on occasions playing alongside Harry in the same team.

Several newspaper reports speak of his promise as a player with predictions of future honours for him. The *Evening Express* of 7th January 1905 liked his contribution, for example, to Pontypridd's defeat of Maesteg:

"The try scored by young Spiller was a beautiful one, beating the entire defence after picking up the ball in his own territory."

Early in the following season, 1905-06, Billy was clearly contemplating a

move to the Cardiff club. Indeed, he played in their trial match early in September when he appears to have made a good impression leading to him playing in one or two games for the club.

Nevertheless, he seems to have decided to stay with Pontypridd and continued to perform well for them. The *Evening Express* of 28th April 1906, in reviewing the club's performance during the season said:

"The three quarters have been good, at times, brilliant, and never poor. The centres, Duncan McGregor and W. Spiller, though players of different methods, have both been in their different ways excellent. Spiller, perhaps, the more consistent. If he improves as he has done this season he will soon, with his wonderful kicking and speed, be a candidate for the highest honours."

Indeed, the same newspaper on 30th January that year had reported that Billy's form was attracting the attention of Northern Union (Rugby League) professional clubs:

"W.Spiller, the Pontypridd centre three-quarter, who is without an equal in that position in the Rhondda just now, was, so we are informed, approached by Northern Union agents on Monday. He has long been 'angled' for by the

Bradford club, who are prepared to pay him a sum well over £50 to join them. He played a great game on Saturday against Llanelly, who were defeated by Pontypridd eleven points to three."

Billy continued to play for Pontypridd during the 1906-07 season. Misfortune, however, befell in November when, in a match against Pill Harriers, he dislocated his right shoulder after only a few minutes play. He was taken to hospital in Newport and detained there. The match itself ended in a scoreless draw, Billy's enforced absence being remarked upon as handicapping the Pontypridd effort.

By the beginning of the following season, 1907-08, it was clear that Billy was intent on moving to the Cardiff club. In October, a committee of the Welsh Rugby Union met at the Queen's Hotel in Cardiff with Horace Lyne, president of the Union in the chair, to consider a number of applications by players to transfer between clubs.

Several players, Billy included, were required to attend a further meeting of the committee to make application in person. When the meeting was held

shortly afterwards, Billy attended and his application was duly granted.

Pontypridd were, no doubt, disappointed to lose one of their star players and in January 1908, the *Evening Express* was reporting on allegations by Pontypridd that players like Billy were being offered financial inducements to switch to clubs such as Cardiff which the latter strongly denied.

And so, Billy left Pontypridd and moved to play for Cardiff with whom he was to experience the greatest achievements of his rugby career.

Billy's Club Career: Cardiff RFC

After the approval for his transfer had been granted, he played for Cardiff in October 1907 in their 4-0 defeat of

Swansea at the Arms Park before 20,000 spectators and it appears that he made several useful contributions during the match. Unfortunately, a week later, he suffered a leg injury in the match against Gloucester and was carried from the field. It seems that he was then out of first team action for some three months.



Nevertheless, he had made his mark with his new club and on 1st May 1908 the *Evening Express* reported that he had been awarded his reserve team cap.

Thus, it was in 1908-09 that his career with Cardiff really took off as we shall see in the following season by season summary. During his time with the club until the 1913-14 season, he played in a total of 184 matches, scored 90 tries and 4 drop goals.

1908-1909

The legendary Cardiff player Percy Bush was captain for the season with Billy's Glamorgan Police colleague, Fred Smith, as his vice-captain.



Billy's Cardiff RFC First Team cap (National Museum Wales and Cardiff Rugby Museum)

Smith was a notable player at forward who made 175 appearances for the club between 1901-02 and 1910-11 and who, in the eyes of many, was unlucky not to have played for Wales.

During the season Cardiff were the Welsh club champions winning 26 out of the 31 matches played. Billy played in 27 matches and was the top try scorer with 16 tries.

A particular highlight was that he played in the Club's famous 24-8 victory over the touring Australian team, their heaviest defeat on the tour.

His success during the season was reflected by the award to him of his First Team blazer and cap.

An interesting footnote to the season is that on Christmas Eve 1908 Billy played as a guest for the Australian touring team in their match with North Glamorgan at Penydarren Park, Merthyr. It seems that the Australians were short of players and Billy, and other Cardiff players, were brought in to assist! The Australians won, 13-5.

1909-1910

The brilliant Welsh winger John L. Williams was captain and Fred Smith was, again, vice-captain.

At the start of the season, it was once more being reported in the *Evening Express* that Billy was attracting the attention of Northern Union clubs. It was said that the "poachers" who had been "fishing in and around Cardiff" had offered him £160 to turn professional:



The Cardiff team of 1909-10. Billy is seated second from the left next to the captain, John. L. Williams. Fred Smith can be seen standing at the back in the middle of the row behind the players (Cardiff Rugby Museum)

“...with the usual terms for wins and losses, and a promise of suitable permanent employment. The tempting baits were refused...”

Billy went on to prove his worth to the Cardiff club by having another successful season, scoring a total of 14 tries.

This included three tries in one match in Cardiff’s 9-8 victory over their arch rivals Newport in February 1910. Newport were, up until then, unbeaten during the season and a

particularly brutal game ensued with Edwards of Newport and Westacott of Cardiff being sent off. “Pendragon” in the *Evening Express* of 14th February wrote:

“It was a desperately exciting game, and, unfortunately, marred by much undue roughness. Indeed, the outstanding feature was the violence exhibited by the players.”

Nevertheless, he was also able to praise Billy’s creative skills during the match:

“On the Cardiff side Spiller was the outstanding figure, and his three tries gained in this game will be long remembered.”

1910-1911

Billy scored 18 tries in 32 appearances out of Cardiff’s total of 36 matches in a season when they only lost six times.

This was a season of great success for the Welsh national team in which the Cardiff club and Billy played a leading part. Indeed, in three of the four international matches-against Scotland, France and Ireland- Cardiff provided all the three quarters in Reg Gibbs, Louis Dyke, Billy and John L. Williams.

1911-1912

The history of Cardiff Rugby Club by D.E. Davies, states:

“Our international centre three-quarter Billy Spiller played brilliantly during the season and was referred to in the sporting press as the player of the season, ‘the best centre in the country’.”

He scored 15 tries for the club during another good season under the captaincy of Billy’s Welsh international colleague, Louis Dyke. Out of 39 matches played 28 were won.

1912-1913

This was the season in which Billy captained Cardiff. The club’s history records that:

“On the Rugby field, he expected neatness in the players’ attire.”

It was not a particularly successful season-they suffered 10 defeats in 37 matches - with several players having left the club.

Billy captained them against the touring South African side in a match which they lost 6-7. It was reported by the *Western Mail* of 23rd December that Billy was suffering from a knee injury sustained in a previous match against Mountain Ash. Nevertheless, Billy scored a try which was described by the *Western Mail*:

“... Green...ran splendidly ten yards, and gave a perfect transfer to Spiller, who took the ball on the tips of his fingers, but held it safely, and went over with a magnificent try, amid a scene of indescribable enthusiasm.”

During the season he was the top try scorer with 18 tries from 28 appearances.

Another of Billy’s Glamorgan Police colleagues, Jim Birch, who was also a Welsh international, was awarded his first team cap during the season.

The programme for the opening of the new stands containing the autographs of the players, including Billy, who took part in the Cardiff v Newport match (Cardiff Rugby Museum)



A particular highlight of Billy's season as captain was the official opening on 5th October 1912 by Lord Ninian Crichton Stuart, MP for Cardiff, of new stands at the Cardiff Arms Park. Also present was Billy's former employer, Sir John Courtis as Lord Mayor. The ceremony was followed by a match between Cardiff, captained by Billy, and Newport (the latter winning 4-0) and an evening concert.

1913-14

Cardiff had a relatively unsuccessful season, although Billy continued to serve them well as a try scoring centre.

It appears to have been his last season for the club in official matches since

the Welsh Rugby Union suspended all rugby for the duration of the First World War, except for matches for charitable purposes. As we shall see, Billy took part in such matches during the war and afterwards.

On 12th November 1913 a match was held between Cardiff Past, which included such great players as John L. Williams, and Cardiff Present in aid of the relief fund in respect of the Senghenydd mining disaster which had occurred on 14th October 1913, killing 439 miners. Billy played on the left wing, the match ending in a draw, 11-11. Billy's fellow Glamorgan policemen and rugby internationals Dick Thomas and Alfred "Bobby" Brice played for the Past team.



The Cardiff Present team that Billy, seated middle, captained in 1913 in aid of the Senghenydd Disaster Fund (Cardiff Rugby Museum)

Dick Thomas was another who was to become a casualty of the First World War, the start of which was less than a year away. He was killed in action whilst serving as a Company Sergeant Major in the Cardiff City Battalion of the Welsh Regiment. He fell in the first wave of the Battalion's attack on Mametz Wood on 7th July 1916, the same attack which claimed the life of Wales and Cardiff captain, John L. Williams.

During the season Billy also contributed to the development of rugby in the South Wales valleys, as a *Western Mail* report of 24th March 1914 noted:



Dick Thomas in army uniform (Richard Thomas)

“To foster Rugby in the Rhondda, Willie Spiller, the popular centre of Cardiff, took a strong team to the Darran Grounds, Ferndale, on Monday. His side included several international and county players, drawn from Cardiff, Bridgend and Penarth.”

Billy's team won 13-8, with Billy contributing a dropped goal and a try.

Later years

Billy maintained his links with Cardiff Rugby Club after his playing days were over.

In 1935 Billy, along with his Glamorgan Constabulary Chief Constable, Captain Lionel Lindsay, attended a re-union which was reported in the *Western Mail* of 30th September:

"Had any members of the general public been privileged to step into the complimentary dinner to Percy F. Bush (a former Rugby captain of Wales and of Cardiff and one of the greatest figures the game of Rugby has produced) at the Grand Hotel, Cardiff, on Saturday, they would have viewed one of the most remarkable gatherings of modern times (writes 'Old Stager').

Gathered together were the members of the Cardiff teams of 1904-8, all of them

renewing their youth and bidding 'adieu' to Percy, who is about to return to France, where he has been for the last quarter of a century.

In the company was a police chief and several of his subordinates, prominent docksmen, retired tradesmen, retired and active schoolmasters.....

Capt. Lionel Lindsay, Rhys Gabe, 'Billy' Douglas, 'Billy' Spiller, and a number of others had many interesting and intimate stories of the old days to recall...."

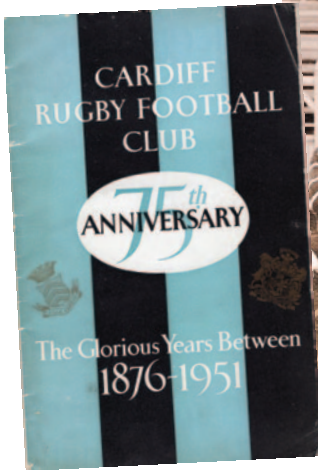
In 1951, Cardiff RFC celebrated its 75th anniversary having been formed in 1876.

A commemorative match and dinner were held on 22nd September when the club played a team representing the British Lions which had toured New Zealand and Australia in 1950.

The Lions won the match narrowly by 14 points to 12 before 45,000



The dinner guests. The Glamorgan Police representatives of Alfred "Bobby" Brice, Fred Smith and Billy are seated on the far right of the front row (Western Mail)



Glamorgan v Australia 1908. Dick Thomas is standing on the far right at the rear and Billy is seated second from the left (Swansea RFC)

The programme for the match against the British Lions

spectators at the Cardiff Arms Park, the *Western Mail* leading its report of it with the headline:

“Magnificent Rugby made anniversary game memorable”

Billy was one of the 400 guests invited to the after-match celebration dinner at the City Hall. He also contributed to the souvenir programme for the match in which he recalled the match against Newport in 1910 in which he scored three tries.

Glamorgan County

Billy played several times for the Glamorgan County RFC in matches against the likes of Yorkshire, the South of Ireland and Gloucestershire.

Dick Thomas also played for the team and he and Billy both played in the county’s match against Australia at the Cardiff Arms Park on 7th October 1908.

Whilst Billy made a few useful contributions during the game, Australia won by sixteen points to three.

The *Western Mail* of 8th October reported that it had been a “A keen and exciting game” but that Glamorgan had been “decisively beaten.”

After the match the players of both teams and guests attended a dinner at the Queen’s Hotel, Cardiff, with the President of the Welsh Rugby Union, Sir John Llewellyn, present.

Glamorgan Police

The team was first formed in 1897 under the direction of the Chief Constable, Lionel Lindsay. After a fallow period, it was re-formed at Lindsay's instigation in 1904. Its first match in its new guise was against Newport Borough Police on 17th March 1904. Included in the team was Billy's brother, Harry.

Billy played mostly for Cardiff but also made an important contribution to police rugby as described by Gordon Westcott in South Wales Police Rugby Club's book, "A Century on the Rugby Beat":

"Right up until the outbreak of the first world war, there was no great rush of frenetic activity in any season which might have stamped the name of



Glamorgan Police v Aberavon 30th April 1908. Billy is seated, first left. His brother, Harry, is standing behind him, second from the left. The team was captained by "Bobby" Brice, centre front row, with Dick Thomas seated next to him on his left. Fred Smith is standing second from the right at the rear (South Wales Police Collection/Glamorgan Archives DSWP/PH/SPO/10)

Glamorgan Police on the minds of rugby followers in the Principality. The most matches played in any one season was seven in 1908-09, and results were variable to say the least. There were highlights, however. One of the best performances of season 1904-05 took place on 21st January, 1905 when after a titanic struggle Glamorgan Police took a three-year ground record from Mountain Ash. One of the try scorers that day was a young constable who was arguably to become one of the best three-quarters the Glamorgan Police has ever produced. He certainly must be one of the most notable of all-round sportsmen to have served in the force. He was Billy Spiller, whose elder brother Harry was already a regular member of the force team. A native of St. Fagan's village, he later captained Cardiff, the club from which he won all his ten caps between 1910 and 1913. He rendered yeoman service to Glamorgan Police rugby playing his first match for his force against Pontypridd on 5th November 1904, and his last against Cardiff City Police on 15th March 1922, a game in which he celebrated his last appearance in the famous blue jersey by scoring a try."

Billy was, without doubt, a star of police rugby at this time as is seen in this account by Westcott:

"The Police team savoured their victory at Mountain Ash on 21st October 1909 when a record crowd saw the first game on the new Recreation Ground in a match played in aid of the local Cottage Hospital, for which the then princely sum of £140 was raised. Billy Spiller scored a glorious try in the 5-0 victory, with the conversion kicked by William Edwards, then the Neath and Glamorgan County full back."

Billy and Harry sometimes played together in the team, the *Evening Express* of 31st March 1906 describing them as the "bright stars" in the police victory over Aberavon.

There were frequent references in the newspaper reports to the quality of Billy's play. The *Evening Express* of 23rd February 1910, in reporting on the drawn match with Abercynon, said that Billy "made a brilliant opening" to enable his cricketing colleague, Gerald Stratton, to score a try. It was another example of the team's charitable activity since it was played, in the presence of Chief Constable Lindsay, for the benefit of the local ambulance brigade.

Westcott also recounts other interesting matches involving Billy and the police team:

"On October 12th 1912 the Welsh Football Union closed Treorchy's ground



Glamorgan Police 1912-13. Billy as the captain holds the ball in the centre of the picture (South Wales Police Collection/Glamorgan Archives DSWP/PH/SPO/15)

after violent scenes at that club's match against Pontypridd. The referee Mr. A.E. Freethy of Neath, together with a number of Pontypridd players, was assaulted by spectators, and the Union decreed that the Treorchy ground be closed until 30th November. The Treorchy club clearly thought that a show of law and order was required for the re-opening of the ground so the Glamorgan Police team was asked to play there on the 5th December. The Chief Constable was present, together with his deputy, a formidable array of Superintendents and a bevy of

local dignitaries. The Police won well by 6 points to nil with Billy Spiller scoring a try and kicking a penalty goal. From then on it must be assumed that peace reigned once more in the Upper Rhondda. The other outstanding performance of that season was the capturing of Maesteg's ground record on 19th February, 1913. Glamorgan Police gave a scintillating display and triumphed by 13 points to 4 with Jesse Stockford, Joe Pullman and Will Hopkins scoring tries and Billy Spiller dropping a goal."

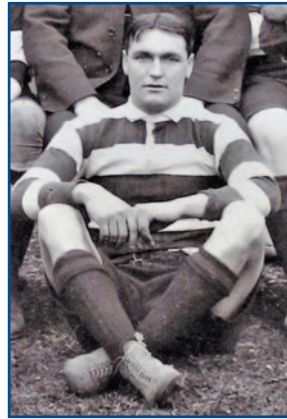
The last match played by Glamorgan Police before the First World War was in March 1914 against Ferndale when

the Police won by 6 points to 3. Billy played in that match along with Dick Thomas who scored a try playing against his old club.

Billy continued to show an interest in police rugby long after he retired. The following report is taken from the Glamorgan Police Magazine for Winter 1956:

“When the Force Rugby Team played the Cardiff City Police team at the Castle Grounds recently and defeated them by 19 points to nil, two very interested and delighted supporters were Ex-Inspector William Spiller and Ex-A.S. 788 Charles Hutchings, both of whom had played for the Force Team in their younger days. Ex-Inspector Spiller played Rugby football for Wales on ten occasions during the period 1910-13 and he was also a playing member of the Glamorgan County Cricket Club. An outstanding sportsman, his name will always be something of a legend with all those who follow and interest themselves in Force recreational activities. Ex-Sergeant Hutchings was also an excellent player in his day, and appeared as scrum-half for the Police Team for a number of seasons. Both these former members of the Force looked very fit, and were obviously still ardent Force men.”

Charles Hutchings was a good all-round sportsman, including playing rugby and cricket. He too served with the Cardiff City Battalion of the Welsh Regiment in the First World War. He was badly wounded in



Charles Hutchings in his playing days with the Glamorgan Police rugby team (South Wales Police Collection/Glamorgan Archives DSWP/PH/SPO/15)

January 1916 whilst serving in France. He and others were engaged in grenade practice when one of the grenades exploded prematurely. One soldier was killed and the officer in charge, Lieutenant Gaskell, later died of his wounds. Charles was discharged from the army because of his injuries but returned to police duty and continued to serve until his retirement. He died in 1979, aged 87.



Although there is no date for this photograph it's possible that it relates to the 1921-22 season as Billy, standing with the ball next to Chief Constable Lindsay, appears to be the captain (South Wales Police Collection/Glamorgan Archives DSWP/PH/SPO/111)

As mentioned earlier, Billy continued to play for the police team until his final match in March 1922. Fittingly he captained the team that season.

Billy and Good Causes

We have seen that the police team often played matches in support of local charities and that Billy took part in some of them.

He also raised, or played in, other teams for similar purposes. As we have noted earlier, the *Western Mail* of 24th March 1914 referred to the

match between “Billy Spiller’s Team” and Ferndale “to foster rugby in the Rhondda.”

Whilst Billy didn’t serve in the armed forces during the First World War he, nevertheless, used his rugby skills and connections to help with war charities. A match between Billy’s Military and Police XV and the Cardiff Garrison on Boxing Day 1914 to raise money for relief funds, was attended by over 5000 who saw Billy’s team win 43-3.

The following December Billy's Cardiff XV defeated W.R. Jones' Penarth Team 6-3 in a match in aid of National War Charities and in May 1916, Billy played in W.P. Thomas' Cardiff and Pontypridd XV against Pontypool in aid of the Pontypridd Cottage Hospital.

It was probably with particular sadness that Billy took a team to play a Pontypridd team on 2nd January 1915. Its purpose was to raise funds for the widow of forward Nick Kehoe, who had played for Pontypridd and also for Cardiff Reserves.

Nick was in the Pontypridd team which won the Glamorgan League in 1911 and was presented with his winner's medal at a dinner in August that year. Another member of that successful team was former Glamorgan policeman Frank Hawkins, who was to be awarded the Military Cross for his bravery whilst serving with the Swansea Battalion of the Welsh Regiment at Mametz Wood in July 1916.

Nick was from County Wexford in Ireland and, before the war, worked as a coal trimmer.

He was killed in action on 26th October 1914 whilst serving with the 1st Battalion, Grenadier Guards. He is buried at the Harlebeke New British Cemetery in Belgium.



Nick Kehoe (*Western Mail*)

In advertising the match, the *Pontypridd Observer* said:

"Pontypridd people should turn out in great numbers to see this match. He did his duty, now it behoves us to do ours."

Billy's involvement in raising money didn't, however, end with the end of war. He was in police teams that played a Rhymney Valley XV in February 1920 in aid of the Welsh National War Memorial Fund and against Bridgend in March that year to raise funds for the town's war memorial.

Billy was also present in 1922 when an ex-servicemen's club was opened at Ynysir in the Rhondda by the Earl of Plymouth and was followed by a match between the Glamorgan Police and Wattstown.

THE ALL-ROUND SPORTSMAN

Jake McDonald

As we have seen, Billy Spiller was acclaimed as an outstanding sportsman on the stages of international rugby and first-class cricket.

However, as will be acknowledged in this final section, Billy's sporting talents and his appetite for competition were not confined to rugby and cricket.

Football

Lansdowne Road School

As a school boy, Billy played association football for Lansdowne Road School in the Cardiff Schools' Football League. His good form for the school team was reported by the *Evening Express* on a number of occasions.

In December 1899, a goal scored by Billy against Grangetown was reported by the paper, as was his performance against Stacey Road Primary several months later in October 1900. The latter report acknowledged Billy's form, noting how he "*attacked very hotly on several occasions*" in the match, and "*scored finely*" to help his team secure a two-nil victory.

Another of Billy's outstanding performances came against Wood Street in November 1900. In a short

match summary printed in the *Evening Express*, he is the only player from either team to receive recognition as his side came out winners by four goals to nil.

Cardiff Schools

Billy's good form for Lansdowne Road School would earn him an invitation to a trial match for the Cardiff Schools' side in April 1900. Held at Sophia Gardens, the match took place between two teams representing the Eastern and Western catchment areas of Cardiff. Billy played in defence for the West and earned recognition for helping his side achieve a clean sheet in a five-nil win.

Billy's performance in the trial clearly made an impression on the selectors, who later picked him to start for the Cardiff Schools' side in a match against Swansea Schools in December 1900. According to a report published in the *Evening Express*, the match was played in front of an "*enthusiastic crowd*" at the Harlequins Ground in Cardiff. This of course would be something Billy would become used to as he grew older.

The match was reported to have been a close encounter, with both sides taking turns to attack. In the dying minutes of play, the match reporter

describes the pressure being mounted on the Cardiff defence:

“Swansea attacked hotly towards the end, only to be repulsed by Heitzman and Spiller. Time was drawing near, and both sides strained every nerve to score the winning goal. Cardiff were the last seen on the attack, a free kick being given them, but a score wouldn’t come, and the game ended in a draw.”

Despite the efforts of both teams, the honours were shared in a nil-nil deadlock.

St Fagans

Billy continued to play club football as he grew older. In years 1901 and 1902 he is reported to have represented his

home village of St Fagans in matches against Cardiff Corinthians, Cardiff Toreadors and local team Plymouth.

In the match against Cardiff Toreadors, Billy is listed on the team sheet alongside his brother Harry, and for the game against Plymouth he is listed as playing alongside both Harry and brother Charlie.

Glamorgan County Police

Billy’s eagerness to play association football appears to have remained during his years as a police officer in Glamorgan. As reported by the *Western Mail* in December 1913, Billy and his Cardiff Rugby teammate Jim Birch had “transferred their services



The Glamorgan County Police Football Team, 1913. Billy stands third from the right with Jim Birch on his left (Western Mail)

to soccer” in order to represent the Glamorgan County Police in their first match under the Association Code.

The police team was successful in its first outing as it defeated a side representing the Cardiff Union.

Billy's Other Sporting Endeavours

Ping Pong

Prior to his service as a police officer in 1902, Billy is reported to have played one of the lesser-known sports of the period: ping-pong.

Ping-pong or table tennis as we know it today, was very much in its infancy at this time, and was widely recognised as a 'parlour game'. St Fagans, whom Billy and his brothers unsurprisingly represented, played their home fixtures in the Plymouth Arms, the village public house.

Billy's efforts at table tennis were reported on several occasions. In December 1902, he played in two matches against Pontyclun and the Bohemians. He won his fixture in the first tie, but lost in the second. Overall, the St Fagans Club lost both contests.

Cycling

During the early years of his police service, Billy appears to have added cycling to his repertoire of sporting talents. In May 1908 the young constable took part in a series of races between a large group of Glamorgan police officers at Sophia Gardens in Cardiff.

The event was summarised by the *Evening Express*:

“Seldom has the Sophia Gardens Field presented such an animated appearance in the early hours of the morning as it did today, when there was a spirited handicap between a large number of members of the Glamorgan County Police.

The heats were well contested, and reflected credit on the handicapper. In the final Police-sergeant Smith, of football fame, came in first, closely followed by that good sport Police-constable W. Spiller, another well-known footballer. The distance was half a mile”.

Bowls

In the summer of 1914, courtesy of reports published by the *Barry Dock News* we learn about another of Billy's sporting past times, lawn bowls. During the period in which he played,

the sport was quickly gaining popularity and in response to public demand, bowling lawns were built and laid in many public parks in South Wales.

According to the reports, Billy represented St Fagans in two fixtures against a team representing Barry. In both matches, he played alongside the Earl of Plymouth, who as we know was also a keen sportsman.

Despite his efforts on the lawns, Billy played in two losing sides.

Summary

What is apparent is that Billy's enthusiasm for sporting competition had no boundaries. He was a contender in every sense of the word - whether he was playing association football for Lansdowne Road School as a boy or cycling against his fellow police officers as a man.



