



Bob Crompton of Blackburn Rovers

forwards, George 'Gatling Gun' Hilsdon and Jimmy 'the Wizard' Windridge, were rampant on the tour, scoring 13 goals between them. Another player, Ben Warren, would join the London club before the 1908-09 season got underway. Warren was a tragic figure who was admitted to a mental hospital a couple of years later and would die very young.

Another player who thrived on tour was Sunderland outside left Arthur Bridgett, a devout Christian who would never play on Good Friday or Christmas Day, which was a requirement during his career. England also included Bob Crompton of Blackburn Rovers, a tough full back who would win 41 caps for his country, a record that remained unchallenged until Billy Wright passed it some years later.

Austria were no competition for England and in the first meeting on June 6 at the Cricketer Platz in front of 3,500 people, they ran out 6-1 winners. Hilsdon and Windridge scored doubles and Woodward and Bridgett netted one apiece. The speed of the England forwards was too much for a pedestrian Austrian back line.

Two days later, at the Hohe Warte stadium, England bettered that scoreline to win 11-1. Woodward, who had caught the eye of the Viennese public, grabbed four goals. Almost half the Austrian side played for clubs in Bohemia.

England moved on to Hungary and on June 10, they beat a Hungarian team drawn almost exclusively from Budapest. They won easily 7-0, with Hilsdon scoring four (plus goals from Windridge, Woodward and Rutherford). Interestingly, the referee was Hugo Meisl, who would later become the manager of the Austrian 'Wunderteam' of the early 1930s.

This really was a whistle-stop tour and on June 13, they travelled to Prague to play Bohemia in front of the biggest crowd of the trip – some 12,000. Bohemia comprised 11 Slavia Prague players. This time England won 4-0. That was it, the tour was over. But the dominant England team had left an impact. The following year, they were invited back and did it all over again – the crowds were more than double the 1908 levels.

By the time they returned to Europe, the team were officially the best in the world, having triumphed at the 1908 London Olympics. The football tournament was held in October of that year. (The games themselves had started in April – long before England had headed off to Austria and Hungary; at six months and four days, these games were the longest in modern Olympic history.)

England had represented Great Britain in the tournament and won the gold medal for the second successive games.

Four of the squad who went on tour – goalkeeper Horace Bailey, half-backs Walter Corbett and Bob Hawkes and the charismatic Woodward – all played a key role. It should be noted, however, that the football tournament comprised only four nations.

Not long after, England began their campaign in the 1908-1909 Home Championship, which would end in victory. Indeed, from April 1906 to April 1910, the team completed an 18-game unbeaten run.

So how good were England in 1908? Football had evolved faster in the UK than anywhere else, and others were still a long way from catching up. International clashes, therefore, often had the feeling of one-sided affairs, with the 'flat-track bully' trouncing still nascent opponents.

It was only a brief moment in the sun, however. Before long, those other countries had caught up.

What has lingered longer than England's supremacy, though, has been England's sense of supremacy. As in other respects, a feeling of exceptionalism – a unique position in history as the pioneer of the sport – still remains. And as another World Cup looms and hopes for the Three Lions start to rise afresh, so that chasm between expectation and reality begins to open once more.

■ Neil Jensen is a freelance business and football writer and editor of *Game of the People* (www.gameofthepeople.com).

■ He is the author of a forthcoming book on Central European football, *Mittel*.

FOOTBALL AND LANGUAGE EUROFILE

IRISH MYSTERIES

Our knowledge of the Irish language is still studded with gaps and (calculated) guesswork. **PETER TRUDGILL** tries to put the pieces together



English has been spoken in the British Isles for no longer than 1,600 years or so. We know quite a lot about its arrival, as Anglo-Saxon speakers of the West Germanic dialects that developed into English started landing in eastern England from coastal areas across the North Sea.

We also know that at the time of the arrival of these Germanic dialects, the British Isles were Celtic-speaking. In Britain, people spoke Brittonic Celtic, the ancestor of modern Welsh, while the inhabitants of Ireland spoke Goidelic Celtic, the ancestor of Modern Irish and Scottish Gaelic. But when did these Celtic languages arrive on our islands, and where did they come from?

The archaeologist Colin Renfrew has argued for a Celtic presence in Britain as early as 4000 BC. Other writers reckon that westward-moving Celtic migrants had advanced no further than Poland by 3000 BC. The traditional linguists' view placed Celts in the British Isles no earlier than 2000 BC, but more recently linguists have come to the view that Celtic speakers didn't arrive in southeastern England until some point after 1000 BC. In other words – we simply don't know.

Archaeology and genetics aren't much help with this problem because archaeological remains cannot tell you what language was spoken by the people who left them; and there is no connection between genes and language: millions of people with originally West African genes are now native English-speakers in the USA and elsewhere.

As far as the 'where' question is concerned, it is obviously rather probable that Celtic speakers crossed over to Britain via the Straits of Dover; and we know that during the Roman period, the Celtic dialects spoken in southern England and in northern Gaul (France) were very similar.

But what about Ireland? Did Goidelic Celtic speakers cross the sea from Scotland – after all, Ireland is only about 12 miles from the Mull of Kintyre – or from Wales or England? Or did the language arrive with voyagers travelling north from Spain, where we know Celtic languages were also spoken?

The distinguished Dutch linguist Peter Schrijver has proposed a rather different theory, namely that Goidelic Celtic was not taken to Ireland at all, but developed there. He suggests that Celtic speakers may not have arrived in Ireland until the first century AD and that they came from Britain, bringing Brittonic Celtic with them. It would be no surprise if these people had left Britain as a result of the

Roman conquest, which began in earnest in the first century AD and involved many decades of violent subjugation of the native population by the Roman invaders.

Once British Celtic speakers had arrived in Ireland, their language came into contact with a pre-Celtic language which was already spoken there. From around 300 AD onwards the speakers of this original language, who must have formed a majority of the population, gradually switched to Celtic, probably because the Celts were perceived as being dominant in some way – militarily, culturally, technologically. In learning Brittonic as a foreign language in large numbers, they then transformed it rather considerably, and rather rapidly, to the extent that it became a rather different language. Welsh and Irish are today no longer mutually intelligible, and yet the historical relationship between them is still clear.

Old Irish written records dating from the 600s AD show that, at that time, Irish was a monolithic language with no regional variation. This supports the thesis that it had not been spoken in Ireland for more than a few centuries – the longer a language is spoken in a particular area, the more dialectal differences it will develop. The fact that all modern Irish dialects can be traced back to this same monolithic Old Irish also reinforces this interpretation.

This still leaves us with the intriguing question as to what the pre-Celtic language of Ireland was. The answer is that this is something else we simply don't know.

Former Celtic star Henrik Larsson
Photo: PA

SELTIC OR KELTIC?

There are two pronunciations of the word *Celtic*, 'Seltic' and 'Keltic'. Both of these are correct, but linguists and anthropologists usually refer to the Celtic languages and peoples as 'Keltic'. This allows us to reserve the pronunciation 'Seltic' for the well-known Glasgow football and Boston basketball teams.