

Grenoside-born **Arnold Birch** began keeping with his local church team and Tankersley Colliery before the Great War interrupted a promising career: he had just attended Sheffield Wednesday trials when war broke out. Having joined the Royal Navy, Arnold found himself drafted into one of the Naval Divisions raised to make up for the chaotic shortfall in infantry numbers and, as the Germans swept into Belgium, Arnold faced them in the trenches near Antwerp. His division was overrun, but he and around fifteen hundred "shipmates" marched into Holland to avoid becoming prisoners of war. Being neutral, the Dutch interned them, and Arnold looked forward to the prospect of sitting out the rest of the war in a camp at Groningen.

To avoid antagonising the Dutch, escape was not officially sanctioned, so the place was fairly relaxed. Football was played between the different naval divisions in the camp and the internees were allowed to visit nearby towns; in this way Arnold found himself between the sticks for a local side named Be Quick, and he helped them to their divisional championship in 1916.

Arnold was repatriated in 1917. Part of the agreement that allowed men to return home before the war's end was that they would not return to the armed services, and Arnold soon found himself in Sheffield Wednesday's colours again. After signing pro forms for them in 1919 he played 27 times for the Owls but was not given a decent chance in their side, and Chesterfield moved swiftly to sign him upon his release by Wednesday in 1923, with out-of-favour forward Les Roberts and a cheque for £100 going in the opposite direction.

Arnold became an important member of an improving Chesterfield side. In 1923/24 he also became the club's regular penalty taker, and put five spot kicks away during that season. A penalty saved in extra time of that season's Derbyshire FA Senior Cup final proved to be his last effort from the spot: it might have occurred to someone that your opponent's penalty area is not the best place for your goalkeeper, if his penalty is saved and the ball remains in play.

Arnold was ever-present for the first two of his seasons here (at the end of 1923/24, he played at Ashington with a broken finger, just to keep his appearance record going) and he remained first choice for most of the rest, until an FA Cup tie at Fulham in January 1927. He was so fiercely "charged" by Fulham's forwards in the opening few minutes that he remained concussed throughout the rest of the game and made some understandable errors as his side were beaten 4-3. He didn't play again for the club.

Upon his release in 1927, and with 152 competitive appearances (and 5 goals!) to his credit, Arnold moved to non-league Denaby United. He continued to play for works sides in the Sheffield area well into his forties. Arnold's son was on the books of Norwich City around the time of the second world war.

For Chesterfield: 141 league appearances, 5 goals.

Career: 168 league appearances, 5 goals.