



An outside-left of great distinction, **Harold Roberts** was skilful, intelligent and, above all, fast, with an excellent pin-point cross. Liverpool-born, he grew up in a house opposite Anfield and played for Liverpool schoolboys, leaving school at 14 to work as a messenger boy at the Waterloo Dock grain warehouse. Having had a season at Goodison Park as a sixteen year-old, he joined the Spireites from the

Birkenhead-based Harroby FC only weeks before the outbreak of war, and had to wait until hostilities came to an end for his League debut. Before war broke out Harold joined the Territorials in Liverpool and received his call-up papers while in the city with the Chesterfield team that had gone to play an August 1939 friendly against South Liverpool.

Following his capture during a Commando raid, some three and a half years of Harold's war were spent in prisoner of war camps in Bremen, Germany, and in Lamsdorf, in present-day Poland. He had joined the "Independent Companies" soon after being called up, as he "wanted to fight," as he would put it later. These became the basis of British Commando regiments and were called to action for the most difficult and dangerous wartime operations.

One such operation was "Operation Chariot," an attack on the German-occupied French port of St. Nazaire. He was reportedly badly wounded in the raid, and was able to resume a football career thanks only to the skill of a German surgeon. The raid would later be immortalised in the 1952 film. "The Gift Horse." In Lamsdorf, as the Russian advance drew closer, the prisoners woke one morning to find the Germans had left in the night. Harold and some pals made the trek to Munich, some 500 miles away, successfully finding the lines of the US 3rd Army.

Upon his return to Chesterfield Harold worked for Shentall's and lodged with Joe Spence's family. Spence, the former Chesterfield player and coach, took great trouble to help Harold recover his fitness and confidence. Happily, he regained his strength and pace, played for the FA against the Army at Ipswich in 1948 and took his place in what remains the most successful side in Chesterfield's history, as far as League placings are concerned, until Birmingham came in with what constituted a record for a fee received by the Spireites, offering £10,600 for his transfer.

Harold's St Andrew's days were cut short by cartilage and knee ligament damage which caused the loss of his pace and dogged the rest of his career. He joined Shrewsbury Town as they made their Football League debut in 1951 and wound down his Football League career at Scunthorpe in 1953, before spells in the

non-league game at Matlock Town, Gresley Rovers and Burton Albion. Harold's son, Peter, played for Chesterfield during the early 1970s.

Harold spent eight years during the sixties as a youth worker at the Staveley Youth Club. Towards the end of that decade he joined Chesterfield's coaching staff, assisting Reg Wright with the juniors. The team enjoyed some success, and Harold earned and retained the respect of his young charges. He remained at the club until the financial crisis of 1983, when he and his coaching colleagues were sacked as an economy measure by the new board. The rather abrupt circumstances of the end of his association with Chesterfield FC upset many long-standing supporters but Harold evidently felt no bitterness, and continued to attend matches to offer the club his support, right up to his death in 2007, at the age of 87.

For Chesterfield: 92 Football League appearances, 9 goals.

Career: 213 Football League appearances, 28 goals.