

## Chapter One

# The Young Horatio

FOOTBALL WAS in his genes. His father Robert 'Toddler' Carter, had played for Burslem (now Port Vale), Fulham and Southampton before the First World War. This included Fulham's first season in the Football League, 1907-8, when he played ten games, scoring seven times. The nickname derived from his small stature. He was a quick and enterprising winger who would shoot at every opportunity. In 43 appearances for Southampton he scored 12 goals. It is thought he suffered a serious knee injury at the end of the 1909-10 season and did not play again until the 13th November when he turned out for Southampton reserves at Salisbury City. He scored but never played for the first team again. At some point he received a severe blow to the head from which he never fully recovered. He returned to his birthplace in Hendon, Sunderland, to become licensee of the Ocean Queen in June 1912.

The Ocean Queen, in Tower Street Hendon, was in the dockland area of Sunderland. It had a 'beerhouse license' only, considered adequate for the needs of the local dockers. By the time he took over Robert Carter had married Clara Augusta. Their first child, a boy, died while still a baby. The second was christened Horatio Stratton Carter. The origin of the Stratton name was straightforward; it was his mother's maiden name. Carter, himself, said in 1949 that he did not know where the idea for Horatio came from but as his maternal

grandfather was called Horatio the source of the name seems obvious. Whatever, the combined names would certainly have been an unlikely appellation for a lad born into Sunderland's East End in December 1913.

Horatio was undoubtedly an unusual name despite Shakespeare's use of it and Nelson's considerable fame but to young Carter it was a stimulus to excellence and achievement. He was determined to overcome his small size and fancy name by excelling at sport. So Horatio soon became 'Raich' and he determined to become a runner, a cricketer and a footballer. However, according to family legend, young Horatio, aged three, had been promised a trial by Leicester City. He had wandered into a neighbour's backyard to find someone to play with. The neighbour turned out to be George Metcalfe, who had played for South Shields and was by then a scout for Leicester. He is alleged to have told Clara that the boy would be given a trial when he reached 17.

While Raich undoubtedly inherited his footballing abilities from his father, he never received any coaching or encouragement from that source. The repeated headaches that the career ending injury caused had understandably destroyed Robert Carter's interest in the game. He never spoke about his own footballing experiences and never went to watch his son play. However, he put no obstacles in the way of his son's football progress. Probably he did not want a serious injury to blight Raich's life in the way his own had been affected.

In August 1916 the license for the Ocean Queen switched to Clara. At that time Robert was 35 and may have been involved in war-work for a couple of years because the license reverted to him shortly after peace was restored. Meanwhile Raich began to attend Hendon Board School in 1918. This was the school which could claim to be the birthplace of football in Sunderland. James Allen, a Scot, arrived in 1871 to take up a teaching post and introduced the Association code to Wearside where rugby had previously flourished. At a meeting in 1879, Allen helped found the Sunderland and District Teacher Football Club. They played at the Blue House Field in Hendon and soon became Sunderland AFC.

The First World War had kept Sunderland's shipyards busy and an immediate post-war boom continued to keep employment high. Sixty-seven ships totalling a third of a million tonnes were built in the 16 Wear shipyards in 1920. But the boom was brief and the great over-capacity in shipbuilding created by the war made its decline all the more dramatic. By 1926, unemployment in the town had reached

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19,000 and half the yards launched no ships.

Thus schooling in Hendon in the 1920s took place in a tough area in a tough period. Children without shoes relied on the Mayor's Boot Fund, but some still went to school barefooted. The custom at the Ocean Queen was sufficient to protect the Carters from the worst of the recession and young Raich remained determined to make his mark in sport. Initially he took up running because only when you moved from the Junior Department to the Boys' Department was there any chance of organised games. He had some early sprinting successes which stimulated his Aunt Jen to make him some silk running shorts and a vest with a big 'H' on it from Uncle Ted's underwear. In 1923, aged nine, he won the 100 yards on sportsday.

Meanwhile, left-footed, left-handed and diminutive, Raich Carter picked up the basics of football and cricket in the streets. The lampposts acted as goalposts or wickets depending on the season. Alternatively a 'tanner' ball was taken to the beach for an improvised game. Wherever the game, Raich's natural talent was quickly apparent. Further inspiration came from following the fortunes of his local professional team, Sunderland. The club had long been one of the most successful in the country with five league championships. One of the stars of that team, Charles Buchan, was still playing at Roker Park in the early 1920s when Raich Carter first stood at the Roker End. The tall, angular Buchan, who had paid occasional visits to the Ocean Queen, was Raich's great hero. To get to the games Raich walked down the Hendon Road to catch the ferry across to the North Bank and on to Roker Park.

In order to maintain their top level status in the 1920s, Sunderland three times raised the British transfer-fee record without capturing their pre-1914 success. Warney Cresswell cost £5,000 from South Shields in May 1922, but failed to settle although he later won the championship twice with Everton; Bob Kelly, an ageing international forward, was acquired from Burnley for £6,000 and stayed for about a year before moving to Huddersfield, playing for them in two FA Cup finals.

Obviously Charlie Buchan was a more lasting role model for young Raich. He had returned from the horrors of the Western Front to take part in a Victory match in 1919, the only officer among the 22 survivors of World War One. Buchan scored more than 200 goals for Sunderland between 1920 and 1925. His transfer to Arsenal just before his 34th birthday involved an unusual fee. Sunderland valued Buchan at £4,000 but Arsenal would not agree, Sunderland claimed

Buchan would score 20 goals a season so Arsenal challenged them by offering £2,000 plus £100 per goal in his first season. The deal was done. Buchan scored 21 goals and Sunderland collected £4,100. However, even with Buchan, the club under-achieved in the '20s by their standards; runners-up in the top division in 1923 being their best.

Meanwhile, Raich Carter's football progress at Hendon School was a bit unusual. A football competition had been organised for school teams under the age of 13. Although he was only ten at the time and had never played in an organised match, young Carter put down his name. When the team selection took place, boys who had played before took all the places except left-half. For this position there was Raich and one other boy. The master in charge then checked the boys' legs and the young Carter made the team because his legs looked more like a footballer's.

In fact, Raich Carter was comfortable at left-half because he was a natural left-footer. But his ambition was to play at inside-right and in preparation had practised kicking with his right foot. By the age of 12 he was equally efficient with both feet. He maintained throughout his career that the game is played principally with the feet and anyone who could use only one foot was halving his potential.

The next stage in Carter's progress was to play for Hendon School's first team where he was chosen at inside-left. This move to the forward line was maintained throughout his career. Gordon Dreyer, six months younger and also from Sunderland's East End, remembers Raich as an outstanding schoolboy footballer. Dreyer, who attended James Williams' Street School, also went on to play professional football with Hull City, the club Raich was later to player-manage. The two boys were rivals at cricket when their respective schools met in the summer term. Walter Grendale, also a contemporary, remembers Raich as a natural footballer who was in the school team at ten years of age. He also recalls a school cricket cup match in which an enthusiastic Carter caught him in the slips.

Once established in the Hendon School first team, Carter was soon nominated for a trial with Sunderland Boys. His first mention in the local paper, the *Sunderland Echo*, was on 11th April 1925 when he played in the Pickering Schools' Cup final. Hendon beat Moor 2-0 to retain the trophy – Carter scoring a first-half goal – while Moor could not make an impression on a "sterling Hendon defence."

At the trial for Sunderland Boys, Raich was chosen at inside-

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left for one team while another talented football, Sep Smith, was at inside-left for the other. As Sep was two years older, Raich was not optimistic about winning a place in the town team. He had reckoned without the artfulness of the selectors because although Smith won the inside-left position they nominated H S Carter at inside-right. From that point Raich played regularly for Sunderland and Durham Boys at inside-right, his favourite position. But Sep Smith remained an obstacle to further honours if only one boy was to go forward from his team. Sep Smith would in future play for Leicester City so he was a formidable rival.

During the 1925-26 season the two boys represented Sunderland in the English Schools Shield. Both scored in a 3-0 first round victory over Durham and District. They then beat Spennymoor on 30th January 1926 which meant an away tie at Dearne Valley. Again, the Carter—Smith combination was triumphant but the fourth-round involved a difficult away match at Leeds. Victory was achieved on 17th April and within a week they met Grimsby in the fifth-round. It seems Grimsby were a “physical team” because Argus of the *Echo* referred to the match twice. Initially he wrote: “I hear our Sunderland lads had a rough experience at Grimsby. The ambulance men, I am told, were busy for a long while after the match attending to the Sunderland representatives.” In June, when Grimsby had won the final against Liverpool, Argus wrote: “They had beaten Sunderland in an earlier round – well, they did more than beat them! Nine of the Sunderland boys were injured in the game!” He did not say whether Raich Carter was one of them.