

A tribute to

Duncan Edwards

“the greatest player I have ever
played with and possibly the most
skilful player I have ever seen”

Sir Bobby Charlton



Prologue

Sir Bobby Charlton described Duncan Edwards as “the greatest player I have ever played with and possibly the most skilful player I have ever seen. He was the only player who made me feel inadequate. He was proud and passionate about Dudley, I know because I spent a lot of time with him over the years and he never stopped talking about Dudley, his background and the Black Country. His death was the biggest single tragedy ever to happen to Manchester United and English football.”



Introduction

England and Manchester United football legend Duncan Edwards was born on Thursday 1 October 1936 in Dudley, in the heart of the Black Country.

The big number 6, who was 5' 10" and weighed just under 13 stone was nicknamed 'the tank'. He played at wing half but could also play centre half, centre forward and inside forward.

Duncan was one of the Busby Babes, the young United team formed under manager Sir Matt Busby in the late 1940s.

He was one of the eight players who tragically died from injuries sustained in the Munich air disaster on Thursday 6 February 1958. Aged just 21, Duncan died 15 days later on Friday 21 February in the Reichs der Isar Hospital in Munich.



Visitor Trail

Duncan Edwards will never be forgotten in his home town of Dudley. To help share the story of one of the country's finest ever footballers we have created this visitor trail to show where various landmarks are located to pay tribute to Duncan.

St. Francis Church, Dudley

Duncan Edwards has a stained glass window dedicated to him depicting the player, designed by Francis Skeat. It was unveiled in St. Francis Church, the parish church for the Priory Estate, by Sir Matt Busby on Sunday 27 August 1961.

Sir Matt Busby is quoted as saying at the unveiling "There will only be one Duncan Edwards and any boy who strives to emulate Duncan or take him as his model, won't go far wrong."

"I unveil these windows on behalf of Manchester United, in memory of this truly amazing boy who, apart from being a great footballer, devoted his life to sport and all the worthwhile things in life. These windows should keep alive his name forever, and they will shine always as monuments and examples to the youth of Dudley and the youth of England."



On the two stained glass windows in the Assisi Chapel of St. Francis Church you can see a coat of arms of Manchester United, Munich and of Brentford and Crystal Palace football clubs, as well as a tiny wren to mark the contribution of the local bowling club. Each window displays Duncan, one in his Manchester United kit and the other in a white England shirt.

The windows are inscribed "Thanking God for the life of Duncan Edwards. Died at Munich February 1958."

You can visit the church from 9.15am to 2pm Monday to Friday or by telephoning 01384 832164. There is car parking available at the back of the church. The address is St Francis Church, Laurel Road, Dudley DY1 3EZ



Next to the church is The Retreat Café offering a small selection of drinks and refreshments. Buffets or meals can be provided by The Retreat Café by booking in advance. The Retreat Café is open from 9.15am to 2pm, Monday to Friday and can be contacted on 01384 356841 or 01384 257873 (answer machine).

There are also rooms of various sizes available to hire for meetings, events and functions. The address is The Retreat Café, St Francis Centre, Poplar Crescent, Dudley DY1 4AF

Duncan Edwards Grave

Duncan Edwards is buried in Dudley Cemetery, Stourbridge Road, Dudley DY1 2DA. Duncan's grave is in section C, plot 722. Access is via the junction of Tanfield Road and Clee Road. The cemetery is open from 9am to 4.30pm, seven days a week. You can contact Dudley Council's bereavement services on 01384 813970.



There are usually a fresh bunch of red and white flowers filling the black granite vase below the 6ft-high headstone on his grave. The other granite vase is in the shape of a football.

There are many visitors who come to visit the grave throughout the year to pay their respects. His grave is still a shrine for pilgrimage by football supporters.

When you enter through the cemetery gates either by car or on foot, walk straight up the main drive (towards the lodge building). As you are walking up, take the first path on the left and carry straight on. Take the next path on your left which will take you down a sloping path. On the right-hand side of this path you will see a water tap. The grave of Duncan Edwards is located directly behind the water tap.

Duncan is buried with his sister Carol Anne, aged 14 weeks. Their parents, Gladstone and Sarah-Anne, had no other children.

Duncan's father died in 1978 and his mother died in 2003. They are buried together in a grave that is only yards away from Duncan, located 10 graves to the right.



Priory Park, Dudley

In 2006, the games area of Priory Park was refurbished by the Friends of Priory Park and The Green with monies from the Transforming Your Space Lottery Fund in commemoration of our local sporting hero Duncan Edwards.

It was officially opened on 16 February 2006 by Sir Bobby Charlton.



Duncan Edwards Close

In 1993, a cul-de-sac housing association homes was named Duncan Edwards Close. It is not far from the cemetery, just opposite in fact. It is located off the main Stourbridge Road.



Duncan Edwards Way

In 2008, Dudley's Southern Bypass was named Duncan Edwards Way in tribute to the great footballer.

Car parking is available on Flood Street car park just on the outskirts of Dudley town centre to enable you to view the sign on foot.



Duncan Edwards Statue Dudley Town Centre

In October 1999, a statue created by sculptor James Butler, commemorating Duncan Edward's life was unveiled in the market place in Dudley town centre, by his mother and Sir Bobby Charlton.

Dudley Council commissioned the statue, which was erected in Dudley Market Place as a tribute to the footballing legend.



Dudley Museum & Art Gallery

Dudley Museum & Art Gallery in Dudley town centre has a permanent exhibition on display dedicated to Duncan Edward's memory.

There you will find memorabilia from trophies, medals and caps, to football shirts, photographs, old newspaper cuttings and pictures, including a ten-minute video-clip of footage celebrating the life of a local treasure.



The museum is open from 10am to 4pm Monday to Saturday and admission is free.

Dudley Museum & Art Gallery can be contacted on 01384 815575 and is located on St. James's Road, Dudley DY1 1HU.



St. Francis Church
See page 4

Elm Road
See page 14

Priory Park
See page 8

Dudley Museum & Art Gallery
See page 11

Dudley Zoo and Castle

Market Place

Duncan Edwards Close
See page 9

Duncan Edwards Way
See page 9

Duncan Edwards Statue
See page 10

Dudley Cemetery
See page 6

Duncan Edwards Visitor Trail

Based upon the Ordnance Survey Mapping with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office Crown Copyright. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown Copyright and may lead to prosecution or Civil Proceedings. Dudley MBC

Black Country Museum

Tributes to Duncan and the Busby Babes outside of Dudley

Duncan Edwards was inducted into the Hall of Fame in 2002 at the National Football Museum in Manchester, the world's biggest and best football museum.



Early days in Dudley

Duncan was born at 23 Malvern Crescent, Holly Hall, Dudley. He was the first child of Gladstone and Sarah Anne Edwards and their only child to survive to adulthood. His younger sister Carol Anne died in 1947 at the age of 14 weeks.

The family later moved to 31 Elm Road on the Priory Estate in Dudley. Duncan attended Priory Primary School from 1941 to 1948 and Wolverhampton Street Secondary School from 1948 to 1952.

He played football for his school as well as for Dudley schools, Worcester County XI and the England under-14 team. He signed a professional contract with Manchester United in the early hours of 4 June 1952.

Standing out from the crowd at school

By the time Duncan was playing for his junior school his footballing skill was already being noticed. One schoolmaster watching the 11-year old noted that the youngster "told all the other 21 players what to do and where to go and that included the referee and linesmen." That same schoolmaster later wrote to a friend "I have just seen a boy of 11 who will one day play for England." How right he was!

Two years later the lad wrote an essay in his classroom in which he mused about "playing at Wembley" and his wish came true that same year as he stood on the "hallowed turf" wearing a white England shirt playing against Wales in a schoolboy international.

That day in April 1951 his footwork on the field dazzled everyone and one talent scout was heard to remark "by God, they've got a good 'un there!"



The Busby Babes

At 14, Duncan was regarded as such a talent that a Manchester United chief scout recommended that manager and future mentor Sir Matt Busby go to Dudley and watch the boy for himself.

Busby did, and after the club had watched him for two years, club coach Bert Whalley drove through the night to get to Duncan's house for sunrise to make sure he signed the contract with the Old Trafford outfit as soon as possible.

The name Duncan Edwards will forever be associated with Manchester United and the 'Busby Babes', a concept developed by United's Manager Sir Matt Busby in the late 1940s when the club was badly in debt and unable to afford to buy 'expensive' players. Busby and his trainer Jimmy Murphy decided to employ a radical youth policy developing their own young players, creating the stars of the future.

Duncan was pivotal in that scheme and he made his debut for the first team on 4 April 1953 against Cardiff City. The team lost 4-0. The lad from Dudley was a mere 16 years old. Three and half years later Duncan celebrated his 100th appearance for United and the 'Busby Babes' were beginning to create the sensational legend that took the footballing world by storm.

- Signed for Manchester United (amateur) 31 May 1952
- League debut (against Cardiff City) 4 April 1953
- FA Cup debut (against Burnley) 9 January 1954
- European Cup debut (against Anderlecht) 26 September 1956
- International debut (against Scotland) 2 April 1955
- Total league appearances 151 (scoring 20 goals)
- International appearances 18 (scoring 5 goals)



Munich Air Disaster 1958

With United players now international stars, they travelled around the world and played before thousands of adoring fans.

The fortunes of the club were riding high and in February 1958 they played against Belgrade's Red Star in Germany. By forcing a 3-3 draw in a hard fought game for the second time in succession, they won their way into the semi-final of the European Cup on aggregate.

On Thursday 6 February 1958, on the return flight to Manchester via Munich, the British European Airways Elizabethan aircraft landed to refuel shortly after 1pm local time.

The weather was appalling, the snow-covered runway was only just open and it was sleeting heavily. Just 40 seconds into take-off the pilot shut down the throttle and braked and it was announced that because of a technical fault the aircraft would be returning to the terminal.

A second attempt was also aborted and again the aircraft returned to the terminal. At that stage the players assumed that the flight would be cancelled until the following day.

Duncan sent a telegram to Mrs Dorman, his landlady in Stretford, Manchester, telling her that "all flights cancelled - flying tomorrow." But to everyone's astonishment, passengers were recalled and the aircraft rolled off down the runway for the third time at 3.04pm that fateful afternoon.

The plane didn't make it and Flight 609 crashed 54 seconds after take-off, killing 21 people on board instantly. Two people died later from their injuries, Duncan being one of them. This brought the total killed to 23 people, eight of whom were journalists and three of whom were club staff.

Of the 44 people on board, 17 of whom were Manchester United players, only 21 people survived.

Duncan laid to rest in Dudley

A special BEA flight flew Duncan's body from Munich to London on Saturday 22 February 1958 and he was then transported via road back to Dudley. Duncan was buried in Dudley cemetery on Wednesday 26 February at 2.30pm. More than 2,000 people gathered outside the church, over 300 wreaths and floral tributes from all over Europe were received and more than 50,000 people stood in silence outside the cemetery and lined the streets in tribute "to the lad from Elm Road on the Priory Estate."

Frank Taylor OBE (the only pressman to survive the Munich air crash) wrote in his book 'The Day a Team Died' published in 1983 that Duncan had received a presentation gold watch that Real Madrid had given him and was wearing it at the time of the plane crash. In hospital, Duncan was shouting for his watch. They searched the wreckage of the airliner and found a battered wristwatch and brought it back and strapped it on Duncan's wrist which "made the big fellow happy." He didn't shout for it anymore. Duncan just kept asking Jim Murphy, Assistant Manager for Manchester United "What time is the kick-off against Wolves, Jim? I mustn't miss that game.'

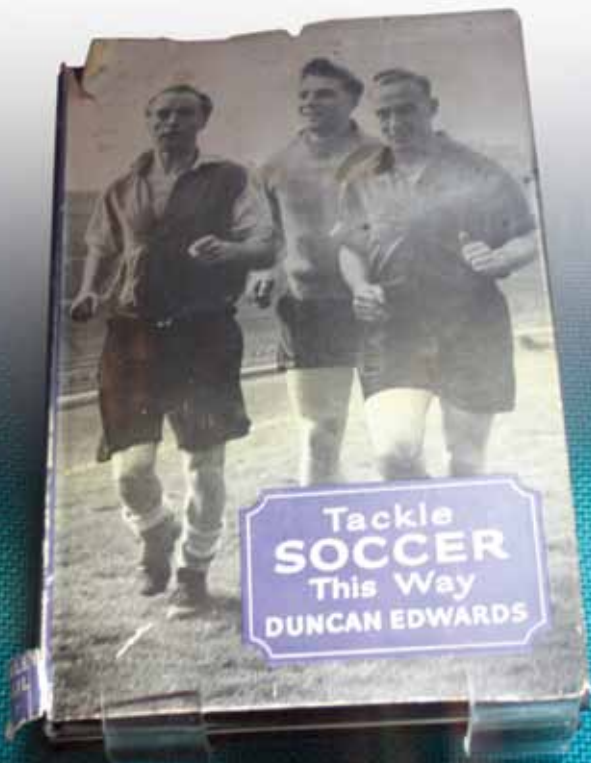


Outside football

Duncan Edwards was teetotal and outside football was known as a very private individual, almost shy and retiring, whose interests included fishing, playing cards and visiting the cinema. Lance Corporal Edwards D. 23145376 served in the army for two years doing National Service.

Duncan became one of the first footballers to earn money endorsing products. He promoted Dextrosol glucose tablets. This supplemented his wage of £15 per week during the season and £12 per week during the non-playing months.

Duncan's football skill far outpaced his rivals. A few days before he went to Belgrade the manuscript for his book 'Tackle Soccer This Way' was handed to his publishers and later printed word for word.



The book was published shortly after his death with the approval of his family and after being out of print for many years was re-published in 2009.



Duncan became engaged to his fiancée, Molly Leach, around 12 months after they had met and just days before Duncan flew to Munich. Molly lived in Sale, Cheshire and worked for Cook and Co Ltd, a textile machine makers, in Altrincham in Cheshire. She was just 22 at the time of his death. They had met at a social event at Manchester Airport Hotel after being introduced by mutual friends. Duncan and Molly had discussed marriage and would most likely have got married after Duncan had completed his next busy football season, had he survived.

After Duncan's death Molly moved to Weston-Super-Mare to live with her brother, eventually marrying a semi-professional footballer and gave birth to two daughters. She came back to Manchester twice a year to visit friends and family but would never discuss the Munich Air Disaster and the loss of her beloved fiancé Duncan. She later emigrated to America. Sadly, she died in September 2004.

Comments from fellow footballers

Terry Venables claimed that, had he lived, it would have been Edwards, not Bobby Moore, who lifted the World Cup trophy as England captain in 1966.

Tommy Docherty stated that “there is no doubt in my mind that Duncan would have become the greatest player ever. Not just in British football, with United and England, but the best in the world. George Best was something special, as was Pele and Maradona, but in my mind Duncan was much better in terms of all-round ability and skill.”

Bobby Robson said “Duncan tackled you with all his weight and if you were expecting a hard tackle he didn’t disappoint you! What was beyond dispute was that Duncan Edwards at the age of 21 was the finest young player in this country at that time and surely would have gone on to be one of the greatest players the world has ever seen.”

Sir Bobby Charlton described Duncan Edwards as “the greatest player I have ever played with and possibly the most skilful player I have ever seen.”



Further information

Further information on Duncan Edwards can be found at The Archives and Local History Centre, Tipton Road, Dudley DY1 4SQ They can be contacted on 01384 812770 or by visiting www.dudley.gov.uk/archives

There are numerous press cuttings featuring Duncan and you can see several copies of rare books about Duncan plus his own book of footballing hints.

The three main biographies are:

Duncan Edwards - A Biography by Iain McCartney and Roy Cavanagh, published by Temple Nostalgia.

Duncan Edwards by Derek Dougan, Hugh Jamieson & Frank Taylor, published by The Duncan Edwards Sports Medicine Centre Appeal.

Duncan Edwards - Manchester United and England by Geoff Warburton, published by The Dulston Press.



Memorials in Manchester

The Quadrant Pub

There is a wall-mounted memorial cabinet at the Quadrant Pub in Stretford.

The pub is in a prime location being next to Lancashire County Cricket Ground and just a ten-minute walk away from the Old Trafford Football Ground! The pub is popular with fans on a match day. For anyone wanting to visit the pub, the address is 89, Great Stone Rd, Stretford, Manchester, M32 8GR. The telephone number of the pub is 0161 882 0967.

Duncan Edwards Honoured in Blue Plaque Scheme

In 2011, two blue plaques were unveiled by Sir Bobby Charlton and Dickie Bird honouring two members of Manchester United's famous Busby Babes team.

Duncan Edwards once lived at 19 Gorse Avenue Stretford and Tommy Taylor at 22 Great Stone Street, Stretford, Manchester.

Trafford Council local studies team approved the plaques following an application by Stretford High School teacher Chris Hirst, who as part of a Year 7 project learning about the famous team, discovered how the players lived just a short distance from the school. Further details can be found at the following address:

www.duncan-edwards.co.uk/duncan-honoured-in-blue-plaque-scheme/

Manchester United Football Club

On 6 February every year fans gather to honour the victims of the Munich Air Disaster by a memorial plaque at the grounds at 3.04pm.

Further details can be found at www.manutd.com

Further enquiries at the football club can be made by contacting 0161 868 8000 or email enquiries@manutd.co.uk

The football club address is Manchester United, Sir Matt Busby Way, Old Trafford, Manchester M16 0RA

The New Munich Plaque

A plaque in memory of those who died was erected at Old Trafford on 25 February 1960. The plaque was paid for by the club and unveiled by Sir Matt Busby.

The original Munich plaque was placed above the old Directors Entrance (South Stand tunnel) but was too fragile to move during ground redevelopments made in the mid 1970s. The club decided to keep it in its original place, however it is no longer possible to see it as it has become part of the building work of Old Trafford.

The current plaque, which currently resides high up on the South Stand corner of K Stand, is actually the third one - the first one is the one which was not possible to move, the second one which replaced it is currently in the museum at the football club. No damage was done to the original plaque when the stadium redevelopment work was done. The third plaque was unveiled in 1996.

We'll Never Die Flag

United legend Gary Neville and supporters have helped pay for a giant flag at Manchester United Football Ground honouring the victims of the Munich Air Disaster. It features the Busby Babes as they lined-up for the final time before the 1958 tragedy.

It was unveiled in the Stretford End to mark the 55th anniversary in 2013 of the disaster, in which 23 players and officials died.

National Football Museum - Manchester

Duncan Edwards was inducted into the Hall of Fame in 2002 at the National Football Museum in Manchester, the world's biggest and best football museum.

Admission is free.

Opening hours: Monday - Saturday 10am-5pm;
Sunday 11am - 5pm

National Football Museum
Urbis Building
Cathedral Gardens
Manchester
M4 3BG

Tel: 0161 605 8200

Further details can be found at
www.nationalfootballmuseum.com

Acknowledgements

Various references to books on Duncan Edwards have been researched during the making of this leaflet.

- Dudley Archives and Local History Centre
- White Shirt - Black Country - A history of Black Country footballers who played for England by Patrick Talbot 2004
- Duncan Edwards - Iain McCartney, Roy Cavanagh 1988
- The Day a Team Died, 25 years on, Frank Taylor OBE 1983
- Duncan Edwards - Tackle soccer this way, 1958
- Duncan Edwards. Manchester United and England, Geoff Warburton 1988
- Wikipedia
- www.duncan-edwards.co.uk
- Manchester United Football Club
www.manutd.com/en/Club/Munich-Remembered.aspx
- www.munich58.co.uk
- Duncan Edwards with Derek Dougan, Hugh Jamieson & Frank Taylor OBE 1988
- The Lost Babes Manchester United and the Forgotten Victims of Munich by Jeff Connor 2006

Disclaimer

Every effort has been made to check the accuracy of details included within this leaflet. This leaflet is a tribute to Duncan Edwards but is not an exhaustive account of his life or a biography.

Further information on Duncan Edwards can be found at The Archives and Local History Centre in Dudley as mentioned earlier in this leaflet.

Dudley Council cannot guarantee the accuracy of the details included and accepts no responsibility for this. Visitors should check details with the locations mentioned within this leaflet before travelling.

Further information is available at www.dudley.gov.uk or www.duncan-edwards.co.uk

Should you have any comments about this guide please email tourism@dudley.gov.uk

