

Press release: Football backs Tull 100 to remember one of Britain's best

One hundred years after his death, the achievements of Walter Tull, the first man of black heritage to become an officer and lead men into battle in the British Army and one of this country's first black professional footballers will be commemorated through a series of community engagement projects, backed by the governing bodies of football in England.

Born in Kent to a Barbadian father and local British mother, Tull was orphaned at the age of 8 and spent his formative years in east London children's home. After making his mark as a talented local football player, he went on to become one of Britain's first professional players from a black heritage, playing first for Clapton FC before being signed by Tottenham Hotspur and later transferring to Northampton Town in the then Southern League.

Abandoning his career and enlisting in the 'Football Battalion', Walter Tull rose through the army ranks to become an officer despite the explicit restrictions to promotion at the time. After serving on the Western Front, then in Italy, Walter Tull was killed in action at the second battle of the Somme in March 1918.

Communities Minister Lord Bourne said:

Walter Tull is a true British hero, who went to great lengths to overcome the barriers of class and colour to fight for his country. Tull 100 is an excellent opportunity for all of us to learn more about his courageous actions in the First World War and his extraordinary football career.

This ambitious project will also hold a mirror to our times; allowing young people to see how far we have come and ensure progress continues in creating a society where everyone, regardless of background, can reach their full potential.

The Tull 100 project launches on the centenary of his death, 25 March 2018, and will work through football clubs, youth groups, schools and community networks across the country to undertake innovative projects. Small-scale funding will be available to support activity.

Tull 100 has "No Barriers" as its central message – developed with a Football Association Youth Advisory Group – and will work to counter discrimination by promoting equality and inclusion, regardless of race, gender, sexuality, and age. Commemorative medals will be awarded to those who make their communities more inclusive.

Premier League

The Tull 100 project will be part of the [Premier League Christmas Truce tournament](#). The flagship international tournament for under 12s takes place each year at Ypres, Belgium, on an artificial pitch created and funded by the Premier League, and involves the young players taking part in a series of educational visits and tours of the area as well as playing academy sides from across Europe.

Two of the 6 teams qualify through an education challenge, 4 through qualifying football tournaments played across England on Remembrance weekend. Last year the Academies took part in another Big Ideas project, Passchendaele at Home. In 2018, the education challenge will be the Tull 100 project.

Thousands of schools will also be encouraged to take part in the Tull 100 project through Premier League Clubs' community schemes and the ground-breaking [Primary Stars programme](#).

Richard Scudamore, Premier League Executive Chairman said:

Walter Tull was an inspirational figure and his achievements are rightly recognised in football and beyond.

As Britain's first Army officer of black heritage, and an outstanding footballer, it is important that his story continues to be told and his life commemorated at this important time.

The Premier League's support for this programme complements the range of Centenary activity clubs will this year deliver in schools and Academies, including honouring the lives of former players who served their country during the First World War.

The EFL will work closely with the Tull 100 project supporting its nationwide network of clubs and community trusts to take an active role in ensuring there are "No Barriers" to inclusion and diversity in modern-day football. In addition Northampton Town will be taking a leading role in local commemorations for their celebrated player.

English Football League Chief Executive, Shaun Harvey said:

Walter Tull was an extraordinary individual and his story is deeply rooted in the heritage of the EFL through his career at Northampton Town, with the Walter Tull memorial proudly positioned at Sixfields stadium.

It is important that his life continues to be recognised and the EFL therefore is proud to commemorate his achievements at this landmark time, coming one hundred years after he lost his life during the second battle of the Somme.

Representatives of the FA Leadership Academy and Youth Council network will be invited to participate in the Tull100 project as part of their Youth Leadership pathway this year. Youth leaders will participate in themed events and will engage with grassroots community projects across the country before their graduation in August.

Football Association Chief Executive Martin Glenn said:

Walter Tull is known as a talented footballer, an inspirational leader and a great model for values such as equality, service, collaboration and citizenship.

It's an honour for The FA and our FA Youth Council to be involved in this project and we're keen to share the story of his life and the commitments he made for the benefit of others. We will use our involvement in this project as a catalyst for our youth leadership programme, mobilising more young people to create positive change across their communities through their love of football.

Big Ideas CEO Virginia Crompton said:

The centenary of Walter Tull, a man of dual heritage, offers a unique opportunity to promote inclusion and to celebrate an icon of British history. The Tull 100 project will work with the football sector alongside schools and youth groups. It's a call to action and a challenge: how will you make a difference to honour the memory of Walter Tull?

To commemorate the centenary of Walter Tull's death, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government are funding [Big Ideas](#) to lead nationwide community engagement projects in 2018.

Register interest and request a unique Tull100 poster by emailing Tull100@bigideascompany.org

Follow the project through the hashtags: #Tull100 #FootballRemembers #NoBarriers

Medals for Tull is part of a wider programme of community engagement projects marking the centenary of the First World War, including a continuation of The Unremembered (which marks the contributions of the Labour Corps), as well as new projects including Ringing Remembers (honouring the many bell-ringers who died in the war). Find out more at www.big-ideas.org.

Big Ideas creates programmes that encourage community participation, inclusion and cohesion across the arts, heritage, science and sport. They specialise in projects which bring groups together and create new experiences and relationships on a local, national and international scale.

Historical background

Walter Tull's beginnings were humble – born in Folkestone in 1888, his mother was a local woman from a farming family, his father a carpenter recently arrived from Barbados. Both his parents had passed away by the time Tull was 8 years old.

He was then raised in a London children's home in Bethnal Green, East London and soon made his mark as a footballer, first as a member of his orphanage football team and from 1908, while working as an apprentice printer, for amateur side Clapton F.C. He was then signed by Tottenham Hotspur the following year and in 1911 transferred to Northampton Town in the Southern League for whom he played 111 games.

Attitudes to race in Britain during his lifetime were openly discriminatory. As a professional footballer Tull was in the public eye and there are accounts of racist chanting directed at Tull from crowds.

Walter Tull enlisted in the 17th (Service) Battalion, Middlesex Regiment – known as the 'Football Battalion', as professional footballers were at its core – in the autumn of 1914. In May 1916, the then Sergeant Tull suffered shell shock and spent time recuperating in hospital. Following his recovery he returned to the Western Front and saw action at the Battle of the Somme and at Passchendaele.

The Manual of Military Law at the time stated that only men of 'pure European descent' could be commissioned as officers in the British Army. Despite this, Tull's obvious leadership qualities were recognised and in 1917, he was trained and then commissioned as a Second Lieutenant, even though army regulations should have prohibited his promotion. That year he became the first man of black heritage to be commissioned as an officer leading men into battle in the British Army.

In December 2017 fighting on the Italian front he successfully led the 26 men under his command on 2 missions at the Battle of Piave and was mentioned in dispatches for his "gallantry and coolness". On 17 April 1918, Lieutenant Pickard wrote to Tull's Brother informing him that Walter had been recommended for the Military Cross, although he was never awarded the medal.

In 1918, 2nd Lieutenant Tull was transferred to the Western Front in France to help break through the German lines. On 25 March, 1918, during the second battle of the Somme he was ordered to lead his men on an attack on the German trenches at Favreuil. On entering 'no-mans land', he was soon struck by a bullet and died.

He was 29 years old, unmarried and without children. His body was never found. His closest relative, elder brother Edward Tull was notified of his death as next-of-kin and today Walter Tull's memory is preserved by Edward's descendants.