



# Herbert Kilpin... the Lord of Milan: The amazing untold story of a tubby, boozy butcher's son from Nottingham who founded, captained and coached one of the greatest clubs in world football

- Herbert Kilpin - who was from Nottingham, England - founded AC Milan in 1899
- He set up the club as a joint football and cricket club and was coach and captain
- The Rossoneri played in red, to represent the devils, and black, to signify terror
- Nottingham City dedicated a bus to Kilpin in 2016, 100 years since his death

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Flick through [AC Milan's](#) glittering history. You'll recognise local thoroughbreds, dazzling Dutchmen, the Liberian legend, the boyish Brazilian and the Ukrainian whirlwind. What about the tubby, boozy, butcher's son from Nottingham though?

If it hadn't been for a man named Herbert Kilpin (1870-1916), we wouldn't have witnessed Gianni Rivera, Franco Baresi, Paolo Maldini, Ruud Gullit, Marco van Basten, Frank Rijkaard, George Weah, Kaka or Andriy Shevchenko in the famous red and black stripes.

But many fans across the world have no idea that whisky-guzzling Kilpin, who died in poverty aged 46, is the father of the seven-time European champions. A century after Herbie's death, Robert Nieri, a Nottingham lawyer of Italian heritage, decided to change that.



© UNKNOWN

**Herbert Kilpin was a butcher's son from Nottingham and founded AC Milan back in 1899**



© AFP/Getty Images

**He is still celebrated with flags flying proudly in the San Siro, but little is known about him**

Kilpin's story is like a work of fiction, which is exactly why Nieri sprang into action. His book, published in English and Italian, is called 'The Lord of Milan', and details the origins of the Rossoneri and their colourful founder.

The ninth child of butcher Edward Kilpin and Sarah Smith, Herbie was a lacemaker by trade, and when the fabrics industry was booming in Italy, he travelled to Turin in 1891 to work in the mills. Kilpin not only brought textile expertise, but an insatiable love for football, which was yet to establish itself fully in Italy.

He played in Turin, and was a losing finalist in the first two Italian championships. Then he moved to the Lombardy capital. Missing his kick-about, he founded Milan Foot-ball and Cricket Club in 1899, the club we call AC Milan today. Kilpin was the team's first coach, captain, and heart and soul. He led the Rossoneri to their first three Italian championships.

Kilpin and his friends chose the instantly recognisable kit. The Englishman said: 'Our colours will be red, because we will be the devils, and black, signifying the terror we will strike into the hearts of our opponents.'



It was initially founded as Milan Foot-ball and Cricket Club in 1899, he captained both sports



He was a master networker and charm personified. His team included people from all walks of life – business moguls, cobblers, aristocrats and even a temperamental Dutch opera singer in midfield. His name was Francois Menno Knoote, and he was particularly protective of his voice and throat. At the first hint of rain or damp weather, Knoote ran off the pitch and hid in the dressing room (and they say modern players are divas...).

Then there was the time Kilpin was refereeing a match in rainy conditions, and one of the linesmen paused the game so he could get an umbrella. A sharp exchange between Kilpin and the soggy 'lino' followed. Herbie explained that match officials had to put up with terrible weather like the players. The disgruntled linesman, who later became the president of the Referees' Association, reluctantly abandoned his brolly.

Cristiano Ronaldo and Lionel Messi have sophisticated sports drinks and protein milk shakes to keep themselves in tip-top condition. Kilpin had Scotch whisky. It clearly worked, because he played until the age of 43. CR7 and Leo take note.

But after his death just over a century ago, the creator of AC Milan faded into virtual anonymity. A handful of historians and fan groups knew the name, and preserved his

memory through photos on banners in the San Siro stands. But he was still a mysterious figure.



**The AC Milan badge still has the St George's cross which it has had since club was created**



Paolo Maldini, one of the stalwarts of this great club, can credit success at Milan to the Brit



Without Kilpin, legends of the game like Kaka wouldn't have been able to play for the Rossoneri





**The Rossoneri decided to play in red, to represent the devils, and black, to signify terror**

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Milan supporter and expert Luigi La Rocca found Kilpin's unmarked grave and started a campaign to create an appropriate resting place for such a significant personality in calcio history. 'In 1998 I was researching my own book and a lead took me to a cemetery in the north of Milan. In the directory there was a card with 'Alberto Kilpin' written on it, which indicated a small box in the graveyard.

La Rocca continues: 'That box contained Kilpin's bones. We found Herbert's remains and wanted to bury him in a suitable manner. He is the father of football in Italy, he brought order and rules, like offside.' In 1999 the AC Milan paid for a new tomb in the city's prestigious Monumental Cemetery.

In process of writing and promoting his book, Robert Nieri inspired a series of events and commemorations in Nottingham. There is a green heritage plaque on the outer wall of the house where Kilpin's father's butcher's shop stood.





© AFP/Getty Images

Milan supporter and expert Luigi La Rocca claims that Kilpin is the father of football in Italy



© PA Wire/PA Images

A plaque was unveiled in Nottingham last year to commemorate 100 years since he died



**AC Milan badge in the window of 191 Mansfield Road (a former butcher's shop) in Nottingham**

Nottingham City Transport dedicated a bus to the moutaschioed myth, and there is a pub named in his honour. The old boy would certainly have appreciated a drinking establishment bearing his moniker. Nieri also visited inner-city schools recounting Kilpin's story to motivate youngsters to believe in impossible-seeming dreams.

Nieri's book was launched last year at San Siro Stadium on October 20, two days before the 100th anniversary of Kilpin's death. The club were accommodating and embraced the project, hosting events at their plush HQ 'Casa Milan'.

Nieri met European Cup/Champions League winners Giovanni Lodetti and Daniele Massaro. The buzz it created, and rich material provided by its larger than life protagonist, encouraged film company LeftLion to make a movie of Kilpin's extraordinary tale.

The film, titled 'The Lord of Milan' had its preview at the Broadway cinema in Nottingham on Sunday 22 October, marking the 101st anniversary of Kilpin's death. Striker Luther Blissett, who spent a season in red and black in 1983/84, was guest of honour.





**Sign on a bus stop opposite the former butcher's to mark the life of the Nottingham-born man**

The Italian preview will take place on the evening of Saturday November 18 as part of the 2017 Sport Movies and TV 35th Milano International FICTS Festival. LeftLion and Nieri hope Blissett and Mark Hateley, another ex-Milan centre-forward, will attend. It has been nominated for an award in Italy.

Nieri, who researched and wrote the book at the same time as carrying out his full-time job as a lawyer and being a family man, says: 'I first learned of this story nine years ago. Being based in Nottingham, half-Italian and mad on football, I knew I had to learn more about it. Eventually, I realised that so little was known and although I'd never had plans to write a book before, I decided someone had to do it.'

The book and film are a fine tribute to a remarkable man, a maverick who had an enormous appetite for life. His impact on Italian football cannot be underestimated. Equally the dedication and passion of Nieri is astonishing. As Luigi La Rocca says, 'Robert has been phenomenal.'

Yes, Herbert Kilpin was a burly fella with a hip flask of Scotch, but his name genuinely belongs in the same company as Baresi, Maldini, Sheva and Kaka. Raise your generously-filled glass to the founder, president, player, coach and Lord of Milan.



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[actinium123](#), Salford, United Kingdom, less than a minute ago

Great story. It seems only America escaped the football bug. Damn them tea taxers.

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[The Voice of Reason](#), England, United Kingdom, 8 minutes ago

Hi Europe. As for giving you all the game of football and your clubs to support. You're Welcome.

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[COTU](#), Berlin, Germany, 20 minutes ago

Read this years ago on Wki

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[Dispensa Brown](#), London, United Kingdom, 11 minutes ago

The stuff about the opera singer and linesman? The film and book, Nottingham City Council's tributes (which only happened in last year)? No

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[billy\\_3\\_bridges](#), Fife, United Kingdom, 24 minutes ago

If you search any of the older teams you'll find a connection with Britain. Mining, railways, shipbuilding. Most of them started as cricket/football clubs. Tough, tough people who gave so much, but, sadly have been forgotten.

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[MountainMan](#), Football Historian, Antarctica, 11 minutes ago

Genoa,the oldest italian football club,was founded by british expats working in the city of Genoa

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[Thetruth](#), VLC- LFC, 26 minutes ago

Finally abit of real history instead of reporting footballers getting parking fines.. we want more articles where we learn things simple

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**Tattoo Twin**, Sunderland, United Kingdom, 27 minutes ago

Nice read, well done DM.

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**MountainMan**, Football Historian, Antarctica, 30 minutes ago

Many european clubs had english founders,managers and players in the late 19th century and early 20th century,you can see the St George cross on the badge of some clubs and its a reference to England and in the case of Barcelona also a reference to Saint George or Jordi in catalan as the patron saint of Catalonia

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**LC06**, Fatherland, United Kingdom, 15 minutes ago

Actually, it's the flag of st ambrose, the patron saint of Milano

Rated 1 0



**MountainMan**, Football Historian, Antarctica, 15 minutes ago

St Ambrose,patron saint of Milan,also has a similar cross symbol

Rated NaN 0



**blueseven**, Ballymena, 31 minutes ago

What a brilliant story. This is the first time I heard of this man.

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Rated 7 0



**blueseven**, Ballymena, 36 minutes ago

What a brilliant story.

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**AkshaySG**, Buffalo, United States, 38 minutes ago

Brilliant Read..... Why aren't there more articles like this??? Why Spend the whole international break creating stupid lists, Bashing Chelsea at every opportunity and gloryfying 2 nil-nil draws at home when you can do actual journalism

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