

STUDIES OF SPORTS

Norman Baker
State University of New York, Buffalo

Have They Forgotten Bolton?: Official and Popular Reflections on the March 1946 Disaster

On March 9, 1946, thirty-three people died and ‘hundreds’ were injured at Burden Park, Bolton, during an FA Sixth Round Cup-Tie between the Wanderers and visiting Stoke City. The disaster was the subject of an official Inquiry appointed by Home Secretary James Chuter Ede. A number of recommendations made by Justice Hughes, who conducted the Inquiry, provoked the preparation of legislation but this was ultimately dropped. The abandonment of legislative action prompted one newspaper to query: “*Have They Forgotten Bolton?*”

This paper reviews three aspects of the disaster: its causes, seen in the context of an era of record crowds and badly maintained grounds; the reasons why, once the initial public shock had subsided, the Home Office abandoned legislation; and, finally, the contrasts between the official and the popular crowd cultures as reflected through differing interpretations of the events of March 9. The Bolton disaster is also related to broader understandings of crowd behaviors and club/follower relations of the era.

The paper draws upon rarely-used sources from the Home Office and Football Association records, the report of the official Inquiry, local and national newspapers, and materials in the local archives section of Bolton Public Library.

