



LIFE'S A BALL 90s

ZAK WATERS

IVOR BADDIEL



THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO FOOTBALLS FANS EVERYWHERE

LIFE'S A BALL 90s

ZAK WATERS

IVOR BADDIEL

MIKE AMOS

HELEN CHAMBERLAIN





Frederick Griffith

Frederick Griffith
Dublin

Dear Mr D. Rocastle

I don't suppose you remember me writing to you some years ago in 1991. You were playing for the Arsenal at the time. Arsenal played Shelbourne on a cold windy wet March night in Dublin. I was on the pitch taking photographs and I showed you a photograph of yourself which I took before that at Dalymount Pk (Dublin). When you found out that I was a die hard Arsenal fan you put your arm across my shoulder and said "thanks for coming to see us". That was one of the most memorable nights of my life and taking photographs of all the Arsenal players that night made up for the weather. Later on I sent you a photograph of George Graham and a letter, which you failed to reply. To my reason you stabbed yourself in the back, George Graham twisted the knife when he transferred you to Leeds at the end of the season. You might think I am a right nutter but you know if the cap fits wear it. If you reply to this letter, I will see if I can get in touch with my mentor George Graham to bring you back home where you belong (Highbury) and to reunite you with your best mate Ian Wright. Instead of fighting relegation with Man City you could win European Trophies with the Arsenal. I can't make any promises but I will certainly do my best.

Yours sincerely


Frederick Griffith

First Half

Dave Burnley	Burnley
Gordon Rae	East Fife
Bazzo	Arsenal
Frank Sidebottom	Altrincham
Dave Downs	Reading
John Westwood	Portsmouth
Mike Salinger	Manchester United
Keith Benjamin	Hereford United
Dundee Arabs	Dundee United
Jesus or The Yeti	Rangers
Diane Anderson	Nottingham Forest
Harry Palmer	Newcastle United
Big Pie	Motherwell
Vinnie The Parrot	Celtic
Jim Mackintosh	Raith Rovers
Mick Norton	Lincoln City
The Charlesworths	Aston Villa
Billy Bluebeat	Chelsea
Karl Fenney	Chester City
Dave Nicholson	Carlisle United
Thomas Leleux	Derby County
Simon Cooper	Brighton & Hove Albion
Copland Nutter	Rangers
PNE Fans	Preston North End
Tango	Sheffield Wednesday
Bryan Hall	Plymouth Argyle
Ted Pit	West Ham United
Dave Roxborough	Groundhopper

Second Half

Groundhoppers
Northern League

Easter 1995

Prudhoe Town vs Peterlee Newtown
Whickham vs Langley Park
Ashington vs Morpeth
Alnwick Town vs Horden CW
Bedlington Terriers vs RTM Newcastle
Washington vs Crook Town
Shotton Comrades vs Easington CW
Tow Law vs Shildon

Easter 1996

Morpeth vs Ashington
Ryhope vs Washington
South Shields vs Prudhoe
Easington vs Norton & Stockton
Stockton vs Seaham Red Star
Whitby Town vs Billingham Synthonia
Stanley United vs South Bank
Durham City vs Chester-Le-Street
Northallerton vs Brandon
Eppleton vs Murton
Willington vs Shotton Comrades



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Our Ref: HR/ZW/SB

Mr. Z. Waters,

19th June, 1995

Dear Mr. Waters,

Thank you for your letter dated 1st June, 1995.

In answer to a memorable experience stated in your letter:
The funniest thing that ever happened along with the
most memorable game has to be when the referee got knocked out and
Bobby Moore picked up the whistle and acted as referee.

I hope that assists you with your enquiries.

Yours sincerely

Harry Redknapp
TEAM MANAGER

3rd June 1995

Dear Zak

Hello please let me introduce myself my name is Martin Gray and I am employed as Forfar Athletic Football Clubs Groundsman and Kit Supervisor. I am now age 25 and have been involved with Forfar since I was 13 years of age.

So how did I become the Groundsman. Well I was in my first year at Forfar Academy, my dad drank in a pub across from my house. The barmaid's husband was Forfar's Kit Supervisor, my dad asked if they needed any ball-boys and they did, as Forfar's ground is small a few balls were kicked out the ground that was my main job. I also turned up and chased the balls at training.

A year later the then Kit-man decided to call it a day I packed the first few hampers for the remainder of the season I was then given the chance of becoming the new Kit man at the age of 13½ I was thought to have been the youngest kit^{man} in Britain. I still remember my first ever time as their kit man. I carried on my duties along with my school work before leaving school at 16. I was working as a furniture porter for a year when the board of directors asked me if I would like to join them full-time and assist the then groundsman as well as painting

and the cleaning of the dressing rooms ect
Just the turn of 1994 then Groundsman fell ill and had to call it a day and for a short spell I was handed the task of looking after the pitch as well as my boots kit and dressing rooms. I was then given the groundsman's job two months later.

Just at the end of the season I was presented with a gold medal from the ~~the~~ board of directors and a gold watch from the players.

I hope my letter is of some use to you and wish you every success. If I can help any more please do not hesitate in contacting me either at home or at the ground.

Yours in Sport

Martin Gray



Scottish fans pishing on a burning England flag

PROGRAMME NOTES

This is a book about football fans, extreme football fans, people who love the game and their teams so much, they show it in extraordinary ways. It was originally shot in the 1990s and has lain dormant for the last 25 years. Now, at last, its kick off is upon us...

First of all though, this book is a bit of fun. The time in which it was shot has long gone, but I have great memories of all the wonderful supporters I met, and I wanted to share this tiny fragment of sporting history with you.

Back in the mid-nineties I was in the early stages of my freelance career as a photographer. Just out of university and fresh-faced in our capital city, I would take on anything that came at me. I began to meet some amazing people from all walks of life, many of whom would be with me in some capacity or another to this present day. I always had ideas about how to make money out of my photography, but as well as earning enough to live on, I also wanted to make enough to pursue my own projects. My second love was football and I started to think about how I could bring these two loves together. Before long, the idea for this book started to evolve.

In fact, the idea first entered my head while I was on the roof of the late photographer Peter Marlow's flat in central London. There I was in a world of my own, painting the railings on the roof of his penthouse flat – just one of the joys of being an assistant photographer – when for some reason, the concept popped in to my mind. After pondering the logistics, I mentioned it to

Peter. “Yeah I like that,” he said, which was a positive enough response for me. Thinking he might nick the idea, I got on with it.

My idea was to photograph a series of images depicting the most fanatical football supporters I could find. I wanted to meet other individuals who shared my passion for football, but who were a hundred or so steps ahead of me in showing how fanatical they were about their respective clubs. The title, Life's a Ball, just jumped out of the ether. It fitted perfectly.

After some research and lots of letter writing, the journey started with a handful of supporters. I contacted Total Football magazine, which I was reading each month at the time, and sent them half a dozen images and fan stories. They loved it. The story ran the following month and it went ballistic. Every major tabloid, and a variety of random TV shows, wanted to speak to me and the supporters I had found. The magazine then invited me to work with them and introduced me to the writer, Ivor Baddiel, one of a trio of people who, along with myself, are confirmed Life A Ballers.

The magazine began sending Ivor and I on numerous assignments around the UK; we got to hang out with players from Torquay, Everton, Blackburn Rovers, QPR, Albion Rovers and occasionally the odd England player. They even sent us to the Orkney Islands for the Euro 96 clash between England and Scotland. We landed at Kirkwall about an hour before kick-off and set off to find the hotel where everyone was watching the game. We

arrived to the sight of about 200 kilted, blue-faced very drunk Scotsmen watching Braveheart – the owner of the hotel had thought it would be a good idea to show it before the match to get them in the mood for the game. Ivor instantly began to regret wearing his England shirt, though my Total Football team strip apparently looked like a Rangers top, so I was okay.

We found a place to sit right in the middle of a mass of tartan, blue and McEwans lager, Ivor doing his best not to look too terrified, and me looking like his rookie sidekick. The game began and you could have cut the tension with a knife. Everyone tried to intimidate me as I started to take the odd picture. Empty beer cans ricocheted off my head every few minutes. Ivor was also targeted, partly because of the England shirt, but also because the mass of tartan had realised he was the brother of David Baddiel, which for some reason didn't help matters.

Throughout the game I became quite an expert at heading these empty cans of McEwan's away from me as they rained down on us both.

Anyway, as I'm sure you know, Gazza scored a wonder goal and England won. In honour of this, an England flag appeared which was set alight and then duly 'pished' on. It was then that the tartan and blue decided to pick Ivor up and take him outside, which was no mean feat.

Once outside Ivor was laid down like a lamb to the slaughter and a number of penises popped out from the surrounding kilts, all pointing like pistols at Ivor's limp

body. We were in trouble, well Ivor was; this was not quite what we had envisaged as a way to celebrate England's victory, though we were in Scotland. Maybe this was an appropriate death.

Suddenly they stopped and started laughing and began hugging us. They put their penises back underneath their respective sporrans and picked Ivor up. One half naked man in a huge ginger wig and blue face came over with a hatful of money and said 'heeurs arl ya beer money fur the neet.' We found out later that their constant hostility was all a ploy to intimidate us. Under the circumstances, the charged pistols pointing at Ivor was quite an understandable thing to do.

As the rest of the day/night progressed we became more accepted into their realm. These young ginger, drunken blue faced men were some of the most welcoming and funny individuals we have ever met. We were fed and watered well, and danced till our feet were almost as blue as the faces around us. I won't go into too much detail, suffice to say we partied long in to the night. Ivor fed vodka to the pubs' potted plants and at some point we formed a band in the pool room with two other lads and mimed along to the jukebox for hours. So thank you Kirkwall, we will never forget your hospitality, lack of sleep and insanity. Thank you.

So Ivor and I were now something of a team, and our next assignment started when, out of the blue, I got a call from the editor of Total Football asking me if I had any more supporters for the Life's a Ball feature. I said that I had a few and he informed me that someone from Pearson Entertainment wanted to speak to me rather urgently. I had no idea who they were, but the someone in question turned out to be the wonderful Liz Lowe, now doing amazing things for grass roots sport in the UK at Coca Cola. A meeting was set up and Ivor and I went along to meet Liz, who was very excited about the

football supporter stories.

Like a whirlwind, within a few days of our meeting, Ivor and I were sitting in the offices of Penguin publishers, who were owned by Pearson at the time, signing a two-book deal for Life's a Ball and handed a 4-figure sum to go out and finish the book. We were given office space on Kings Road, which at the time was Pearsons' HQ. The wheels were in motion. We were flown to Glasgow to sign a deal for a TV documentary on our supporters and The Observer in London was going to serialise the book.

Ivor and I got on with finding supporters, which was not that easy, even though the type of supporter we were after were very open about their fanaticism, most were very wary about how they were going to be portrayed. Regardless, we set about and eventually uncovered more amazing supporters and met some wonderful people along the way.

Whilst all of this was going on, I was asked by Total Football to head to the Sky Sport studios over in West London to grab some images of Soccer AM presenter Helen Chamberlain. They were for an article on her and her association with Torquay United as a supporter.

The day of the job came and I was up before dawn to get to the studio while they were recording the live show. I was guided in and told to hang out just off camera, where I could take a few in situ portrait shots of Helen. It soon dawned on me that this was not going to be possible; they were live and my camera shutter was very loud.

Frustratingly the chance to grab the shots never really came. Helen was so caught up in the show, and even though she knew I was there, she never really had the time to give me what I needed. As the show neared the end I felt ignored and a bit pissed off. I was also beginning to head towards panic mode.

Her co-presenter at the time was Tim Lovejoy, who I had previously met when he was working on the Big Breakfast – a couple of my football supporters had been on the show - but I still didn't feel confident enough to ask him for help in getting the shots of Helen. The show ended and I felt deflated, but then Helen approached me and said she had to leave immediately to get to Bury for the Torquay game. She said if I wanted some images I could come with her as she thought pictures of her at the game would be better for the article. I didn't even realise that I said yes to this.

The next minute we were on the M1 heading north towards Watford in Helen's car. Over the course of the next few hours I went from thinking that she was just another self-obsessed celeb to realising I had just met one of my best mates. Bury was cold and I got my pictures. I was worn out from smoking too many cigarettes, eating too much chocolate and laughing far too much. I can't remember much about the game, the score or the journey. All I remember is talking to someone about anything and everything, as if I had known them forever. We had so much in common. Later that day and back in London, Helen dropped me off at the Sky studios and we said our goodbyes. The article ran and everyone was happy. That day was the beginning of a life long friendship with, what I soon realised was a very considerate and fun individual, as well as someone who was totally nuts.

Helen and I went on numerous adventures together over the years and having her thoughts and insight into the world of a fanatical football supporter for this little book was a no brainer.

The other member of the Life's A Ball gang, is Mike Amos. I eventually met Mike, a passionate and dedicated non-league football supporter, in the mid-nineties after some lengthy correspondence. It was the start of one of my 9

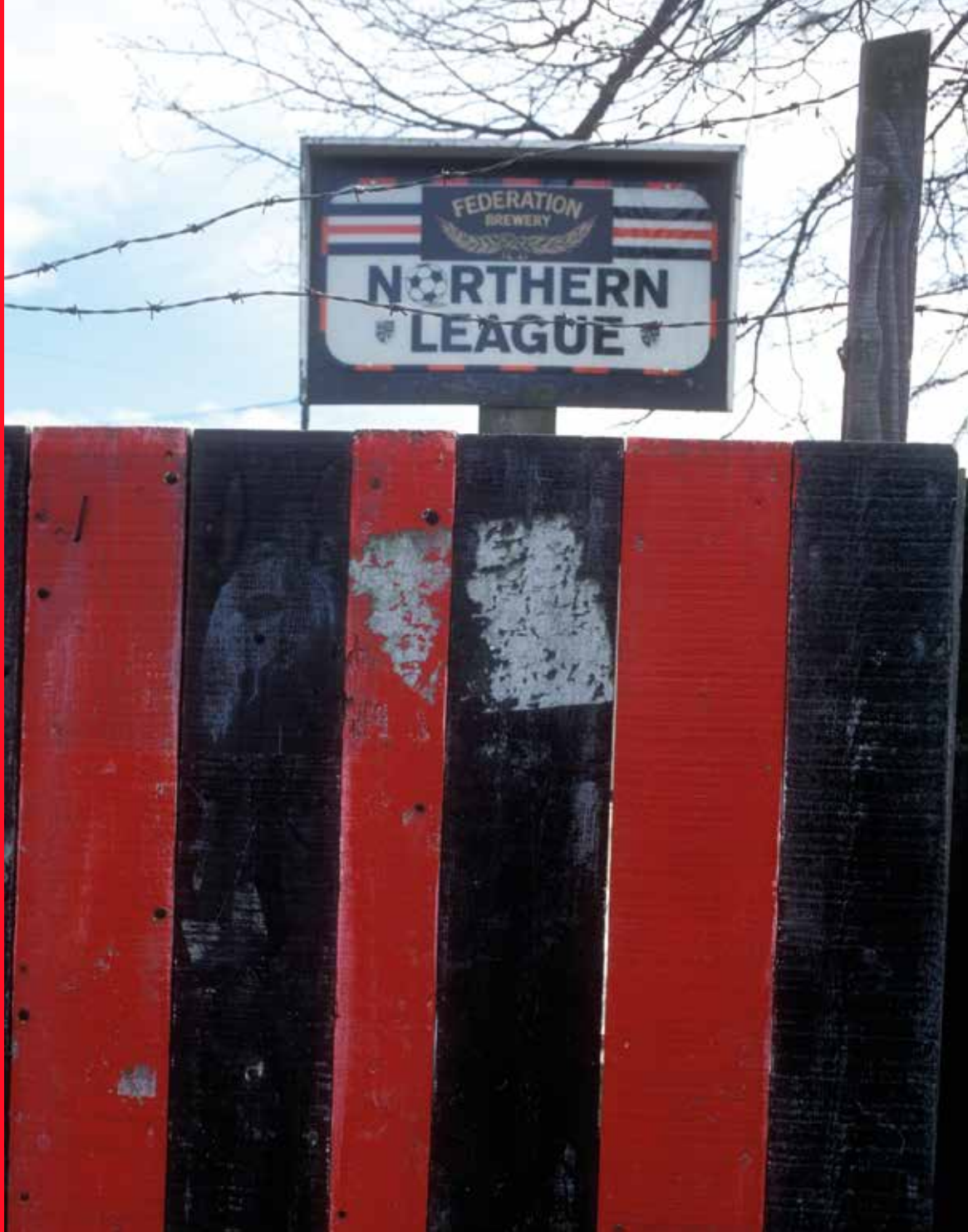
games in 3 days Groundhopping adventures in the northeast.

Mike organised these weekends like a military operation, welcoming mad and not so normal football obsessives from all over the world, to an often cold and windy northeast skyline where they would watch on average 3 non-league football games a day for 3 days. These trips were a great source of revenue for the clubs, who were often struggling to make ends meet.

Mike is a journalist by trade with an impressive CV these days. He's also been Chairman of the Northern League for 30 years and now has an MBE to boot. Mike was my open door to the world of the Groundhopper, and without him I would never have found my way in. When I wanted to resurrect this body of work it was another no brainer that I would ask, in my view, one of the most educated individuals I know to not only shed some factual information on the Groundhopping fraternity, but to see the funny side of it all too.

ZAK WATERS

SUNDERLAND ASSOCIATION FOOTBALL CLUB





Dave Downs' house



Ted Pit's West Ham United rings

FOREWORD

Gigantic wedged shoes, crop tops, low slung cargo trousers, Alanis Morissette, ‘curtains’ hair, The Big Breakfast, Euro 96, Rachel and Ross.

The 90s were brilliant and I didn’t even realise it. But you don’t do you? You don’t know an era is iconic until it’s long gone and you look back and remember some of the mad shit you did.

Football played a huge part in the 90s for me, not necessarily anything to do with the performance of my supported team of Torquay United, but because I’d somehow ended up on TV, presenting a show called Soccer AM. It had already been broadcasting for a season, but I hadn’t heard of it, I didn’t have BskyB as it was called then, not many people did.

Thinking about it, Soccer AM was invented as a massive gap filler, Sky had just launched Sky Sports 2 and needed to fill some time. They bunged on a live football show that looked like it was filmed in lockers. In its original format (Russ Williams, Garry Stevens and me) we were sat on benches and didn’t move for 4 hours. It was supposed to be light hearted, but we did a lot of traffic reports and newspaper reviews. I was happy to be there, but I didn’t really do much.

At the end of my first season Sky bought the rights to the football league and Russ Williams had been head hunted to front the coverage. A bloke called Tim Lovejoy was brought in to produce and present Soccer AM. His vision was to make a show that every week delivered the same atmosphere reminiscent of the build-up to FA Cup final day. He delivered that, and then some.

Television in the 90s was evolving, it broke rules, you saw camera operators in shot, crew members were vocal and often on camera. If things went wrong, it made it better. I was very very happy to be there, and I did a lot more.

The more Sky showed football on the telly, the bigger it got, you could watch it on a Monday night for fuck’s sake, Monday night!! It was glorious and everyone came along for the ride. In the 80s you’d ask someone what their name and star sign was, in the 90s that changed to “Hello, what’s your name? Who do you support?”

My team - Torquay United. I fucking LOVE them. It’s unconditional. Players come and go, managers come and go, chairmen come and go, I stay. It’s hard to describe to those who don’t worship at the altar of football, but it’s never just about those 90 minutes regardless of the result, it’s the whole package that comes with it including all the interesting characters you meet along the way, which is why this book exists.

I first met Zak when he was sent to photograph me whilst on set, but his clicking whirring camera annoyed the producer who told him to take pics after the show. The problem was, within seconds of coming off air I was heading off to Bury to watch Torquay play. I looked at Zak, he looked at me, I weighed up how much of a weirdo he was likely to be, versus how much I’d gain a reputation of being ‘difficult’ if I told him after 4 hours of hanging about that I couldn’t even spare him 5 minutes (have you ever tried to get from London to Bury, get parked, get to the ground and in your seat in 3 hours?). So I said “Come on then, come with me.”

By the end of the day we were mates, proper mates, we hung out places and worked together on Total Football magazine too, we took Danny Dichio to a wildlife park to play with baby tigers while Zak took pictures and I asked him a series of really stupid questions like ‘can you bake a Victoria sponge?’ - answer - no.

Zak is a people person and would always get animated when hearing of the absolute mad shit that football fans were doing whilst following their teams, not just fans either, one of Zak’s favourite stories is about Mike Bateson, the then Torquay United chairman, who had a ventriloquist’s dummy called Algenon. He wasn’t by any means a ventriloquist, but Algenon was a regular around Plainmoor and once head-butted a supporter who had vocalised his displeasure straight to the chairman’s face. Algenon conducted all transfer deals too, even as far up to 2006 when Lee Mansell’s agent sat in disbelief as he had to set out his list of demands to a ‘puppet’ in a Torquay blazer and club tie.

Zak’s photography is superb. You don’t need me to tell you that, you’ll see it for yourself throughout this book, and it was an honour to be asked to write a few words for it.

HELEN CHAMBERLAIN
TORQUAY UNITED
FOOTBALL CLUB



FIRST

HALF

INTRODUCTION

Ah, the nineties. If you remember them, you probably weren't there. Or is that the sixties? I can't remember. Anyway, at some point in the Nineties, I found myself writing fairly regularly for the now sadly defunct, Total Football magazine. Having fallen in love with football at an early age, it was a dream job, but for some reason, despite the fact that I painted vivid pictures with my words, the magazine felt that a visual element would enhance my articles. Ludicrous, I know, but that is how I was introduced to photographer Zak Waters.

The first thing I noticed about Zak was that his nose was bent out of shape, a product, I believe, of being punched repeatedly. This was odd, because punching Zak was not the first thing I wanted to do when I met him, I think it was about the third. As my eyes readjusted though I also noticed other things. An unruly mop of straw hair and a North-East accent, though I noticed that more with my ears than my eyes. There was also an earnest boyishness to him, a playfulness that concealed a determination to do great things.

We became something of a team, partners in literary and illustrative crime. Thankfully, we never got caught and even, on occasion, reached the heights of mediocrity, but then, as is often the case with people from the North-East with wonky noses, Zak had a moment of inspiration.

Yes, I'm not going to make beef, as the young people and butchers say. Life's A Ball, a feature on the more extreme and quirky end of football fandom, was his idea and he'd already enjoyed considerable success with it in the

magazine, and even on the telly. So when I was asked (well, begged) to get involved I of course said, how much do I get, followed, shortly after by, yes.

It was, in some respects, astonishing. I mean, we had a book deal. A book deal! At the time I thought that was a thing of myth. Oh I'd heard talk of it, I think I'd even met someone who knew someone who'd been in the same room as someone who'd once nearly had one themselves, but now we actually did have one. Armed with it, we were both emboldened and contractually obliged, to go out and keep our part of the deal. After sourcing our subjects, we set off around the country, ready to meet and immortalize them in the pages of our book.

Let me tell you, it was a time. Away from our families and confined in a small space for hours on end, we did what men in that situation do; get on each other's nerves. I mean, how we didn't kill each other is a mystery to me, but somehow we didn't. We remained cordial and, when we arrived at our destinations, we also somehow managed to appear professional. Well, maybe semi-professional, but that was okay when dealing with fans of lower league clubs.

And what of those fans, the people we met who, as you'll discover, had changed their name to include all the players in their club? Or had painted their entire house in their club's colours. Or collected the dregs from the washing machine that washed their team's kit. And many more. These were the stars of our show and, as I recall, they couldn't have been more welcoming.

Of course they all have something in common, a love of football, but, there's also something else. They have a unique foible, a passion, that they hold very dear. It is a part of them, a part of who they are. It defines them to a large extent, and for them to share it with us means an awful lot. We are privileged and owe it to them to treat their gift with love and care, which I hope we have done in the pages of this book.

Ultimately though, they are just fans, but they are fans who live up to the full, unexpurgated word, which is of course, fanatics. It comes from the Latin word, fanaticus, (thank you Google) which means, 'insanely, but divinely inspired.' Well, they're definitely insanely inspired, but when Diane Anderson decided to live with a life-size cardboard cut-out of Stuart Pearce, was there a spark of divinity in there as well? Hell yeah, definitely.

So we schlepped up and down the country meeting these lovely extremists and recording their lives and loves for what we'd hoped was posterity. In fact, in the words of the great Aristotle, it all went tits up. I don't really know what happened, but somewhere along the line, the plug was pulled and the project was canned, shelved, dumped and given the old heave ho.

It was a blow, but on the plus side, I would never have to see Zak again. Or so I thought. Twenty-five years later, up he pops telling me he's getting the Life's A Ball gang back together. Now the first thought on my mind was to punch him, but I'm a soft Southern lad, so I didn't act on it, and instead went with, 'great, I'm in.'



Scottish fans on Orkney during Euro 96



Scottish fans with Ivor Baddiel on Orkney during Euro 96

And it felt good. Football's changed a lot over the years and today it has morphed in to a game that, whilst it might not be entirely unrecognisable to the pre-nineties' fan, it would definitely cause them to raise an eyebrow or three. But the nexus, the epicentre of that change was the nineties. English clubs allowed back in to Europe, The Premier League, games on TV, the money, the branding, the corporate boxes, the ridiculously expensive kits and more. It was pretty seismic, but in amongst it all, one thing stayed the same. The passion, loyalty and devotion of the fans, that, I hope, will always be there. So, whether Zak likes it or not, I'm dedicating this book to them and all their insane, divinely inspired lunacy.

IVOR BADDIEL **CHELSEA FOOTBALL CLUB**



Ivor being given a tactics lesson by Ray Hall at Everton Football Club



DAVE BURNLEY

Despite the fact that Dave Burnley has lived in Stoke all his life and thinks that, as a place, Burnley has nothing going for it, he is, and always has been, a Burnley fan whose passion for the team is second to none.

Dave chose to support Burnley at quite a young age. He was going to support Liverpool, but his mate chose them first. He considered following Stoke, but was put off after seeing their team booed off by its own fans one day. Burnley were in the news at the time, so Burnley it was.

That was in 1969. Since then David has missed all of one Burnley match and that was only because he was unable to get a helicopter to take him to the ground. He was expelled from school because he took so much time off to watch Burnley. He has had 46 different jobs and once returned five days early from a trip to Tahiti because a Lancashire cup game was brought forward. He's been to a game suffering from cholera and has a

hitch-hiking sign for every ground in the country just in case he can't get there any other way. He has cycled the 75 miles to Burnley on Christmas Day and he's also changed his name.

"My name was Beeston," Dave explains. "But it's my destiny to follow Burnley. Everybody on the Earth has some reason and this is mine. So I changed my name when Burnley were relegated from the First Division in '76. It was a show of allegiance to the club in a way that committed me totally. Even more so than somebody getting married because people who get married can split up. That's not total commitment."

Being so involved with the club it comes as no surprise to discover that Dave himself is single. This has not always been the case though, but as an ex-girlfriend found out, nothing comes between Dave and Burnley.

"Before going out with her, I made her sign an agreement which had about 150 terms and conditions to do with Burnley," says Dave. "Things like letting me go to all the games and getting married in the team strip. It also stated that if we had a daughter she would be called Clarette after the Burnley colours. I actually wanted to call her Clarette Ann Balou, like claret and blue, but she said she didn't want a daughter of hers named after a Jungle Book character. A boy would have been called Ralphie, after Ralph Coates."

A new daughter did indeed come along and, as agreed, was named Clarette. She doesn't particularly like football, but likes her name because it's unique and has a feminine edge to it. Sadly, Dave and her mother are no longer together, but Dave and Burnley? They're well on the way to their Golden wedding anniversary.

BURNLEY FOOTBALL CLUB

GORDON RAE

EAST FIFE FOOTBALL CLUB

Gordon Rae is a musician. He's been playing the bagpipes for over 40 years now, but even though he is the handyman, groundsman and St Andrew's ambulance man at East Fife football club, and washes the kit, he doesn't get to play that most Scottish of instruments for the team. That's for sound musical reasons though according to Gordon.

"The people wouldn't hear one bagpipe, you'd have to have about eight pipers and six drummers before everybody could really hear."

The confines of the away supporters' bus is a different story though and four years ago when Gordon was asked to bring his pipes along he had no objections.

"It's not so bad on a bus because it's enclosed and it sounds better. I don't play every time we go to an away game, but I take them with me and if somebody's wanting to hear a tune, I do it. It stops everyone going to sleep."

Apart from one occasion when Gordon's bus actually continued into the terraces at Berwick, once they've got there, away matches are as devoid of his musical talents as home games.

However, it might be time to find seven other pipers and six drummers so that today's youngsters have something decent to listen to at a match.

"They never even play Scotch music now at games." complains Gordon. "They play pop music at half time. I

prefer bagpipe music but I'll listen to pop music if I have to. Petula Clark and all them."





Some folks don't like to be accused of doing things by halves. Barry Hatch, or 'Bazzo', is not one of them. An Arsenal fan since the age of four, Barry chose to support them because he found their strip the easiest to recognise.

Once he was old enough to attend games, Barry and his friends used to hold competitions to see who could stand out from the crowd the most. This usually took the form of attending matches in decorated Christmas hats and loud Bermuda shorts, clothing that, whilst it doubtless ensures a certain separation from the crowd, probably falls at the conservative end of the loudness spectrum.

During the 89/90 season Barry noticed that Arsenal's away strip, though different in colour, was the same

pattern as the first choice strip. In a moment of inspiration he took the two shirts, chopped them in half and sewed the two differently coloured halves together. Pleased with his efforts, he progressed onto the shorts. The finished effect was then enhanced by wearing one home and one away sock.

An interesting experiment, but probably best kept to within the confines of his home. Well, Barry wouldn't agree, partly because he didn't keep it within the confines of home, but also because he went on to win that season's 'standing out from the crowd' competition amongst his friends. In subsequent seasons, Barry has spliced and re-joined every new home and away kit and now proudly attends every game, come rain, shine or snow, in his two for the price of one gear.

"I don't really know why I do it. I think that first season I did it, it looked good, but two or three other people had also done it, so me being me, I had to go one step further and did the shorts as well. It became a bit of a trademark especially wearing shorts in the winter. The coldest I've been is when it was minus 4 at Leeds one January."

"You get comments like, 'oh that's smart,' or 'can I get that done with mine?'" reveals Barry. "You also get the, 'nutter,' and, 'he must be on drugs,' sort of comments as well though, but I couldn't change. The first game of the season now, people are going to be looking out to see what I've done. I'd get some right stick if I turned up in jeans and a T-shirt."

BAZZO

ARSENAL FOOTBALL CLUB

FRANK SIDEBOTTOM

ALTRINCHAM FOOTBALL CLUB

One of the golden rules of football fandom is that you support your team through thick and thin without the thought of switching allegiances to anyone else ever entering your consciousness. There might be a second team you vaguely like, but basically it's one club for life, end of story. Chris Sievey has broken this rule. Sort of.

As a ten year old back in 1966 Chris started going to watch Manchester city. It was the start of a glorious period for them and he loved it. Before long he was going home and away, as he does to this day, as well as taking in some reserve games.

In all that time though, City had never had a proper mascot, so, because the fans sing, 'Blue Moon,' they came up with the idea of the alien from the blue moon and named him Moonchester. The man who'd built Yoda from Star Wars was called in to make a costume and, because the Yoda maker doesn't come cheap, it was suggested that it would be as well to get someone who knows about wearing a mask to inhabit it. That was when Chris was called in. Chris knows about wearing a mask as that is what he does for a living. As a comedian, back in 1984 he invented the character Frank Sidebottom. Naturally, Frank had to be a football fan and, even more naturally, he had to support his local side. So Frank, being from Timperley, is an Altrincham fan, or Alty as he calls them. In fact, he is more than just a fan. "When Alty found out that I did Frank they asked him to be the mascot," explains Chris. "I used to do the

pre-match entertainment. The best one was when local businessman Johns Maunder bought Alty and he flew in by helicopter, so Frank played football against the helicopter. It was brilliant because the helicopter was on one side of the pitch which meant it was really hard for Frank to get past it because of the rotor blades, but once he did the wind carried the ball forward. The final score was Frank 2, Helicopter 0."

Of course, being a fan, when Frank's finished his work as a mascot he stays to see how the lads get on. On Boxing Day six years ago, Altrincham found themselves four down to local rivals Macclesfield within 20 minutes, so Frank decided he'd try and help.

"I climbed over and started chatting to their goalie saying, surely you can let just one or two in. Suddenly I heard this roar and saw the ref running towards me. He said I was confusing the linesman because I had the kit on, so he showed me the red. I was officially sent off."

Surprisingly there is no animosity between Frank and Moonchester, mainly because the two of them haven't met, but if they were to meet that might be something of a problem for Chris.

"No, there's no question. If City played Alty in the cup I would want City to win because I'm more City than Altrincham and also because it would be bloody bad for City if they lost."

True enough, but not half as bad as it would look if they lost to some Sunday League team, say Timperley Bigshorts for instance.

Timperley Bigshorts are Frank's very own team. Chris plays for them occasionally, but unfortunately that's something that Frank himself will never be able to do. Again.

Some time ago whilst playing against The White Swan, Chris was running the line when an injury meant he had to come on. The team convinced him to appear as Frank so for the last twelve minutes Sidebottom took up a front position and very nearly scored.

Three weeks later a letter arrived for Chris from the Manchester County FA telling him that he had to go for a hearing. Arriving as Frank, he faced a grim looking panel who informed him that The White Swan had complained about him being dangerous in the box.

"Well that's what they pay Lineker for, being dangerous in the box," said Frank. The panel chuckled a little, but said, "thank you for bringing a bit of humour to Sunday League football, but keep your antics to the sidelines. Life ban, £15 fine."

They wouldn't dare do that to Moonchester.





Torquay United fan Helen Randall (and Ruud Gullit) with her car in Torquay's colours



Newcastle United fan John Padden's Toon Army Fire Engine

“Enthusiasm can manifest itself in many different ways. I mean where would I be without enthusiasm?”

Dave Downs makes a very fair point there, but the way he has chosen to show his particular brand of enthusiasm, falls firmly into the ‘different’ camp.

A devoted Reading fan of over 50 years, when they reached Wembley for the first time in the 1988 Simod cup final, Dave was naturally excited. After beating Luton 4–1, he was keen to try and get one of the player’s shirts

labelled, it instantly gained pride of place on the living room mantelpiece. Dave’s joy was unbridled. “If you look at the water that’s in the bottle, at the bottom you can see where the sediment has collected. It’s mostly washing powder, but there are traces of sweat, blood and mud. I think it’s very artistic actually.”

Having started a collection, it only needed another Wembley appearance from Reading to build it up. The team duly supplied that when, in 1994 they played Bolton in the Division 1 play-off final. Even though they lost, Dave

When I peg out I shall pass them on to the family who’ll maybe put them in the local museum of Reading. There’s a showcase for Reading FC memorabilia and I’m hopeful that they will go in there.” If Dave’s hopes are dashed though, he may go down in history for another reason.

“I have this theory. I’ve been plotting all the passes that lead to Reading goals and have superimposed this on a map of the solar system with the sun as the centre circle. I reckon that by extending the passes that lead to goals

as a souvenir. Unfortunately, the players were equally keen to retain a memento of the occasion, and having first dibs on their own shirts, chose to keep them. Undeterred, Dave decided on the next best thing. A word in the ear of the groundsman’s wife, who had washed the kit, and Dave had his souvenir – a bottle of the washing machine dregs from that very wash. Bottled and neatly

got his dregs.

That means there are two bottles on his mantelpiece now, which means double the danger.

“I’d be devastated if one was smashed. I’d have to get some blotting paper and trying to soak some of it up.

beyond the limits of the solar system they might lead us to new civilisations and life forms that exist out there. It’s a very difficult theory to prove, but nobody has found any other way to prove it so I think this might be just as accurate as any other.”

DAVE DOWNS

READING FOOTBALL CLUB





John Westwood is a man who has pulled the odd surprise on his wife, but naming their children after his footballing heroes is not one of them. In fact that's one matter about which he feels quite strongly. "I might not do that because they might not even like football when they are older. I just don't think it should be foisted on them. It's up to them what they do with their lives and I don't think parents should interfere. I wouldn't even force my kids to support Pompey."

Now this is very considerate of John as in 17 years he has only missed 5 Portsmouth matches.

He is also covered in tattoos reflecting his support and he takes a bugle and a bell to every game to get the crowd going.

Oh, and his full name is John Anthony Portsmouth Football Club Westwood.

"Pompey is my life. It is everything I've ever wanted to do, I just thought, 'Why not make it official?' I'd been thinking about it for a while, but what made me finally go and do it was when I realised how easy it was to do. I thought it would be a long process and cost lots of money.

When I went to the solicitors and asked, it only cost £36 and it took about 10 minutes." A bargain, though his wife at the time didn't quite see it that way as she only found out about it once he'd had it done. Maybe she might not have been quite so peeved if, like David Burnley, he'd kept it simple and just added Portsmouth.

"I wanted Portsmouth Football Club because Portsmouth on its own could be at basketball team or whatever. I wanted people to know that was the actual football club."

PORTSMOUTH FOOTBALL CLUB

JOHN WESTWOOD

MIKE SALINGER

MANCHESTER UNITED FOOTBALL CLUB

Mike Salinger's club loyalty runs deep. He started following Manchester United after being taken to the 1963 FA Cup final, and from the late sixties began regularly going himself.

From the very beginning he would attend each game in red socks and red underpants, in those days more because it was a little more dangerous to display your team colours than it is today, but every season he buys a new pair of each and wears them faithfully to all the games.

By his own admission, he's mad about United. He has a Ryan Giggs gnome in his garden; his office is full of Cantona memorabilia, ('because I think that guy is God, and he is,') and his car proudly displays every United mini kit there has ever been, and there have been an awful lot of them. And when it comes to match days, Mike, and the friends he travels with are somewhat particular about their rituals.

Year in year out, as they follow United all over the country, they always park the car in the same spot as they did the previous year. They then go to the same restaurant, order the same food, and sit in the same position at the same table as they had done twelve months ago. In fact, one year in Coventry they discovered that 'their' restaurant had changed hands since the last visit and, because it was felt to have been particularly lucky, they had the table put back to where it had been, and Mike even got the owners to make the sauce to go with the pasta he'd had the year before even though it wasn't on the menu.

Then, a couple of seasons ago, the rituals extended to the journey.

"We were going to a cup game at Villa, and we started looking for Eddie Stobart vans on the motorway. When we passed one, we'd cheer, and if it was coming in the opposite direction we'd boo. Then, on the way to Ipswich,

we passed a lot of vans on the way up and we won 9-0 that day. We thought it was a good sign so ever since then we've been counting Stobart vans. If we pass two on the way up and see one coming down the other way, that's 2-1 to us. God knows if it works. I've normally forgotten how many we've passed by the time we get there."

Mike admits to feeling a little depressed if they see more vans coming the opposite way but reckons that United always have a little bit of their own magic to overcome the vans' power. At the end of the day, though, he thinks the rituals are more a bit of fun more than anything else, but he's not entirely convinced.

"We've had situations where we've parked in a different place and actually haven't had a good result and we do put that down to that. So, who knows, there might be something in it."



KEITH BENJAMIN

HEREFORD UNITED FOOTBALL CLUB

When discussion amongst football fans turns to Hereford, it's a fair bet that a certain goal by Ronnie Radford will get an honourable mention. Now, much as that goal put them on the map, since then they haven't exactly done a 'Wimbledon,' and have spent most of their time bobbing about the lower reaches of the league doing all they can not to fade in to obscurity. Keith Benjamin, however, is doing his best to ensure that at least some people sit up and take notice of them, and not for reasons connected to any football success.

Keith has lived in Herefordshire all his life and remembers going to the historic game against Newcastle back in 1972. He's been a regular ever since and is now the supporters representative on the club board and thus an associate director. He splits his time between the directors' box and the terraces where, after the more sophisticated chat of the Chairman and other directors, Keith feels he can really chew the fat with other fans. Or should that be the cud?

"For big cup games a prize Hereford bull is always paraded around the edge of the pitch" informs Keith. "A

while ago we'd been drawn at home to Spurs and I asked them if we could take a bull down for the replay. They declined, so for a laugh I rang the local radio station and put a call out for an inflatable bull. They were inundated with phone calls and this big one materialised from the Hereford Young Farmers. Tottenham still wouldn't let me bring that in, but fortunately Hereford were more hospitable and since then I have spent many a match on the terraces talking a load of bull."

The bull, which is about the size of a minibus, has its own special place on the terraces. Not because it's fussy about that sort of thing, but more to do with it having to be near a plug socket so it can be constantly pumped up by an industrial fan during the game. This involves Keith putting a pipe into the bull via its more sensitive areas and has led to the sort of lewd jokes that are definitely not for the directors' box.

"I can't take it into the directors' box, not because it hasn't got a shirt and tie, but simply because it wouldn't fit in."

Apart from the bull, the other thing that those in Hereford hold in high regard is swede. In fact, so high is the regard, that for cup games, the largest swede that can be found is placed on the centre spot before kick-off and six local lads proceed to worship before it. This part of the ceremony completed, one of the six will then attempt to dribble the root vegetable goalwards and put it into the back of the net. A goal scored means that Hereford will either win or draw the game. A miss means certain defeat and the person responsible is not allowed to have a drink for the rest of the season. Incredibly, according to Keith, the success rate from this swede worshipping is very high, but unfortunately not being able to perform the ritual at away games has prevented Hereford from winning the cup.

"Before the same Tottenham game I also put out a call on local radio for the biggest swede in the area to take down. Within 24 hours 30 swedes had been left at Hereford's ground, but Tottenham wouldn't allow the ceremony to take place."



DUNDEE ARABS

DUNDEE UNITED FOOTBALL CLUB

When Dundee United are playing away, it's not unknown for home fans to look on in bemusement and wonder why United are so popular in the Middle East. This is not, to anyone's knowledge, true, though doubtless they have their fans in that part of the world. The reason the home supporters are making this error is because a contingent of United fans will be sporting headdress more often seen in the desert, and, if the occasion is big enough, flowing robes and sandals similarly befitting that particular geographical feature.

Dundee United fans have been known as Arabs for nigh on 50 years. The origins of the nickname are shrouded in mystery, but currently three theories are in vogue.

One states that Dundee fans originally started calling United fans Arabs as a term of abuse after the North African campaign in World War II. A second theory has it that the white stripe with two black bands across it worn by the team that won promotion in 1960 reminded people of the traditional Arabic Kaffir, and the final hypothesis links it to some weather that was far

from Middle Eastern. According to the Arabs unofficial spokesperson Sheikh Steve Malone, "in the early sixties there was a really bad winter and United's backlog of games was atrocious. For one cup game against Albion Rovers they set about trying to do everything they could to get the game played and brought in a tar burner on the Friday afternoon. It had the desired effect, but burnt the grass so badly they had to heavily sand it, and continue to do so for two months after, until the thaw came."

Whatever the truth, in the mid 80s, United fans became Arabs in more than just name when Steve and a group of friends started wearing the robes to a number of cup finals. Since then the tribe has grown considerably in number.

The headdresses themselves are in fact genuine Arabic Kaffirs dyed tangerine, but the robes are more likely to be bed sheets or curtains than the real thing. To opposing fans they may look a little odd, but Steve reckons the Arabs do their bit to help the renaissance of the game in the 90s.

"Anything that brightens, enlightens and gives a bit of fun to the game is bound to help. It takes away the serious edge that was there in the 70s and 80s. If you walked into Motherwell or Aberdeen wearing Arab headdress it would get folk to laugh. It wouldn't be seen as provocative in any way."

Not to opposing fans maybe, but as one unfortunate Arab found out, there are those who might not see the funny side at first.

"Our fanzine 'The Final Hurdle' produced car stickers with the catchphrase 'Proud to be an Arab. A United fan had one on his car during the Gulf crisis and was driving past RAF Lossiemouth when he was chased and stopped by the forces police wondering why he had this sticker. After a lengthy explanation and a lengthy spell in custody the guy was allowed to go, but not before he was interrogated as a potential terrorist."



JESUS OR THE YETI

RANGERS FOOTBALL CLUB

For some folk standing out in a football stadium need not involve hiring an expensive fancy dress costume or indeed turning up to a game in no costume at all. In fact sometimes, simply letting your hair down (and out) is all it takes for certain people to be noticed.

After Glasgow Rangers, Dave Williamson's next love is rock music. Naturally enough therefore, he grew his hair long and began sporting a lengthy beard to match. Now, as is sometimes the way with hair, it keeps growing, and by his late 30s, Dave had enough hair on his face to stuff a large double duvet. However, as is also the way with hair, its original colour tends to fade and he's now unmissable at Ibrox and, has acquired a new name into the bargain.

"When my hair first started going white, a few of my mates on the supporters bus started calling me various different things. Then the Rangers News had a picture of me and now I'm well known at Ibrox as either Jesus, Santa or the Yeti."

Fortunately being a good-natured fellow Dave doesn't mind his new found celebrity, which is lucky really as has no intention of changing the way he looks.

"I definitely wouldn't think about getting it cut. My mates on the bus have threatened to cut it off if I get too drunk, but there is no way I would let that happen. I won't shave it off for anything, not even if Rangers won the European Cup."



DIANE ANDERSON

NOTTINGHAM FOREST FOOTBALL CLUB

As accolades go, being voted the saddest person in the world by a Derby County fanzine is probably one to leave off the CV. Unless you're a Nottingham Forest fan with a life-size cardboard cut out of Stuart Pearce in your living room that is, in which case you'd not only tell all your friends about it, you'd also have a quiet word with Stuart about it. The cardboard Stuart of course. Diane Anderson doesn't talk to any other inanimate objects because, she feels, they just wouldn't understand.

"Yes, I do talk to him. We have a team talk every morning before a match, as then if anything has gone wrong I can come and say 'you played rotten,' or 'what do you think of Ian Woan, isn't he a lazy so-and-so?' Naturally I tell him my probs, if the kids are getting on me nerves, or the cats. He's a very good listener."

A Forest fan for over 36 years, Diane felt that there was something special about Stuart from the moment he joined the club. She start collecting cuttings and photos of him and then, at a game six years ago, she heard that he'd be signing life-size cut outs at the ground the following morning. She didn't go home that night, preferring to stay at her parents near the ground. The next day she was not disappointed. Returning home, Stuart was given pride of place in the living room. Six years on, he doesn't seem to have aged at all.

"I dust him down every day, and wash him once a week in Dettol," explains Diana. "If he's got an injury I rub Tiger Balm into it because it makes his muscles nice and warm. When Basil Boli hit him, I had to put a plaster on him."

Diane has now met the real Stuart a number of times and knows that he knows about her Stuart, and she knows that he knows, but she says she'd never embarrass him about it because he's a very shy and private person off the field.

When she watches the team she doesn't spend the whole 90 minutes looking at him, but she always knows where he is, even if he's injured and sitting in the stands. And of course, she never forgets his special day. "His birthday's on April 24. I always send him a card and sing happy birthday to him."

Harry Palmer's musical talents are not generally heard inside Newcastle's football ground. As an acoustic guitar player he would certainly be drowned out by the crowd unless of course he was miked up, but there are other ways to get his music out there.

"I sent a demo tape along to Barry Wallace the match day presenter and he actually played it at half-time in a mid week game against Luton," Harry recounts. "We were 2-0

Unsurprisingly Harry cites that episode as the high point of his musical career, which started in 1981. It was then he decided he wanted to become known as a guitar player and, as he'd always supported Newcastle, he started touring the pubs before and after a game playing football songs. Initially a lot of places wouldn't let him in, but now a lot of people know him and he gets a good response.

For that number Harry might hark back to his experience of entertaining England fans during the 1992 European championships in Sweden. He went over there with his guitar and played in the pubs and clubs around Malmo. Maybe that valuable experience will help him finally conquer the hit parade.

"I made a video over there called 'We Like Patsy Kensit', with lots of songs about Patsy Kensit because I used

HARRY PALMER

NEWCASTLE UNITED FOOTBALL CLUB

up so the crowd were in a good mood and they heard the song and liked it. After that the media got a hold of me and I got invited to play on the pitch. It was 1992 when Newcastle were flying high in division one and even though I was on at 2.30 there were 30,000 people there. I played a song called 'Geordie Medley,' which was a cross between the Blaydon Races, Terry Hibbit on the Wing, Kevin Keegan on the Bench, Geordie Boys We Are Here and some other songs."

Unfortunately, national fame has eluded him for the time being, though the Geordie Medley was released as a single and reached the heady heights of number 103 in the charts. His other three singles didn't do quite as well but that hasn't put him off and plans are afoot for singles about Lee Clark, Alan Shearer and Kenny Dalglish, as well as an England song which he hopes to release for the World Cup in France.

to fancy her. One of the songs was called 'Whip Patsy Kensit.' It went down very well indeed with the England fans."

Definitely destined for number one then.





Torquay United fan George, in his back garden



Bradford City fan Nina McKenna, photographing her Team Teddy Bears



BIG PIE

MOTHERWELL FOOTBALL CLUB

Finding clothes that fit is one of those things in life that you either love or hate. Some people can happily spend hours trying on every garment in the shop, whilst others will buy the first thing that feels vaguely comfortable. If you're a slightly larger breed of person the associated problems are often greatly increased. If you're also a pie things can become impossible.

Fortunately for Motherwell fan Big Pie, though he is big, he is not actually a pie. The latter half of his nickname derives from the fact that his surname is Lyons and they make pies, hence, Big Pie. He is, however, well acquainted with the above mentioned clothes problems.

"I wanted to wear something in Motherwell colours to the game, but I couldn't get anything in the shops because I'm so big," explains Pie. "I used to buy the football strip even though it was too small for me, but as I felt it was getting colder I got a scarf and jumper specially made. The scarf is over 12 feet long and I've written to the Guinness Book of Records to see if it's the longest in the world. My friend who's 5'10" borrowed it and he wrapped it five times round his neck and it still trailed

along the ground. It takes eight people to hold it up."

As well as being innovative in the clothes department, from the age of 15, when he started travelling to away games on the supporters' bus, Pie can lay claim to a number of other, original contributions to the overall atmosphere.

"I used to try and get a wee bit of community spirit going on the bus so I'd make up songs. I would give out song sheets with the words on and give a wee rendition beforehand and encourage everyone to sing up when the game started. I wrote the lyrics in my bedroom. My parents believed I was in my room studying, but all the time I was either drawing my ideal football ground or writing wee scribbles for songs."

This was all in the days before word processors and Pie used to write the lyrics out 30 times to pass round the bus. Amongst a vast back catalogue, his personal favourite is about Motherwell hero Willie Pettigrew and is entitled, "Willie P you're Magic."

Willie P you're magic, Willie P you're swell,
Willie P you're magic and you took your chances well, oh
yeah, you took your chances well.

Unfortunately, Pie hasn't gone on to the giddy heights of the Lloyd Webbers of this world, which is a sad loss and one no doubt deeply felt by a man who burst into tears on seeing his beloved Motherwell in Europe some years ago. In fact, though by no means one of those, 'new men', Pie is someone very in tune with his inner self.

"When I went to the toilet before the game I used to feel the score in my water. I would just concentrate and it would come to me, 'we're going to win today, 2-1.' It was a funny feeling, but I would say three quarters of the time I was right. I remember a cup tie against Celtic about three years ago, I was just coming back from the toilet when I said, 'I can feel a goal and it's just going to roll over the line. It's not going to hit the back of the net.' A minute later we got a free kick and Tommy Coyne came in, flicked it with his head over the keeper, and it rolled over the line without hitting the net." Now there is a penny well spent.

VINNIE THE PARROT

CELTIC FOOTBALL CLUB

Most of the time Celtic fan Vincent Stephenson is happy to be part of the crowd, but under certain circumstances that can all change.

Celtic's Jungle stand was well known for being home to the most vociferous and diehard fans, so when the time came to convert it to an all seater stand, the club decided to commemorate the last days of the old stand by having a fancy dress competition. On his wife's suggestion Vinnie went along as a parrot.

Unfortunately on his way into the ground, he didn't pick up an entry ticket for the competition, so come half time, when the pitch was awash with lions, tigers and the odd monkey, Vinny was still in his seat.

Incensed, the Jungle faithful started chanting, "We want the parrot," and before long a kindly policeman suggested Vinny go down and join the competition. However, as he was leaving the stand, another not so kindly policeman, informed him that he couldn't join in and would have to go back to his seat. Mayhem broke out, but to no avail, and the parrot returned to his perch.

The following day the parrot was all over the Sunday papers and it wasn't long before Vinny was invited to the club for a photo shoot and given a season ticket for the following season, which had been the prize for the competition. Then, the chairman Michael Kelly, got on the blower.

"He said the parrot had been such a hit with the fans that they wanted it to be the mascot next season" Vinny recalls. "I said, come on, I'm in my 30s now and married, you can't be serious. But he said that it was for the kids, so I agreed."

Being new to showbiz, Vinny was a bit concerned about what he was actually going to do, but the club had said they would work everything out, so when he turned up for the first game of the season he had hoped they'd been true to their word.

"It wasn't the original costume. The one they got me was different. I couldn't see where I was going because the head was too big and kept flopping about. I went out and walked around totally aimlessly. It was pointless."

Vinny then suggested giving out lollipops to the kids, but the club were somewhat reluctant to lay out for them.

"This is a club that's won the European Cup, they're getting 30,000 punters a week and buying players for millions of pounds, but trying to get £10 off them for a few lollipops was like trying to get blood out of a stone."

They did eventually cough up, but the small amount of lollipops they laid out for lasted about 30 seconds, so Vinny then suggested picking someone out of the crowd and giving them a hat. Of course that meant buying a hat.

"I went to Michael Kelly's office where I was given an envelope containing 3 pound coins and a note saying, 'Vincent, buy a baseball cap with this money. Get a receipt.' I couldn't believe it. Can you imagine Berlusconi at AC Milan doing something like that? I was that disgusted. I did it for another couple of weeks and then Celtic played an away game in Switzerland where they allegedly lost the outfit and that was the end of it. I never even got a phone call to say they'd lost it, or a thank you or anything."



Jim Mackintosh's wife doesn't like football and only grudgingly allows him one wall inside the house to display his artefacts. The front garden, though, is unquestionably Jim's domain.

Jim's been a Raith Rovers fan since 1956 and admits to sleeping and eating Rovers. 10 years ago he bought a garden tile and decided to paint a Raith badge on it. From then on, he has been immersed in his very own, private gardeners' world.

"It wasn't really a conscious decision," explains Jim. "It just started to build up and up. Anything I bought just had to be painted blue and white. I try to get blue and white flowers as well. People ask why do I do it, but I don't care, I just do it. It's merely for my benefit nobody else's. If we've been beaten I sit out there with a pint of beer wondering what went wrong. If they've won I sit there

thinking, 'great'."

Jim only ever wears Rovers colours and has named the family cat Raith. He spends many long hours in his Raith allotment, touching up the rain ravaged paintwork and clipping those blue and white flowers with a love and devotion that is second to none. In fact, it's frightening to think what Jim might do if any nasty moles or woodpeckers were to come along and ruin his handy work. Or if there was a Beadle about.

"The guy next door is a Rangers fan and we do play jokes on each other," says Jim. "One Friday I came home from work and all my stuff had been loaded into this van. When I pulled up in the car I thought there must be something wrong, and my stomach started to go. The people who'd done it said they were from the council and that there'd been complaints in the neighbourhood. I

tried to find out who was complaining."

As is the way with these things, a whole succession of odd people then turned up, culminating in a bearded Mr Beadle to let the cat out of the bag. Fortunately for Jim, who can be seen on the video nervously laughing his way through the experience using incredibly few expletives, he saw the funny side of it and was his normal, placid self once the garden had been returned to its former glory.

Apart from that one scare though, Jim's haven has brought him nothing but comfort and has been admired by many. His favourite possession is a lion given to him by his wife for their 25th wedding anniversary. Unfortunately, on that wonderful occasion, Jim can't actually remember what he gave her, but having seen another lion he wants, he knows what he'll be getting for their golden wedding.

JIM MACKINTOSH

RAITH ROVERS FOOTBALL CLUB





MICK NORTON

LINCOLN CITY FOOTBALL CLUB

Football fans like a singsong. Be it the heartfelt tones of “You’ll never walk alone” or the less moving but nonetheless uplifting “We’re gonna win the cup”, come match day most fans will be oiling their tonsils in preparation for a number of rousing renditions of the current faves. And there can be no doubt that whatever the musical ability of the fans, the atmosphere created by their efforts is part and parcel of the football experience and must surely aid the teams.

For some people though, it is not enough to be one of the massed ranks of the football choirs, to be a single voice amongst many. They want to stand out in the crowd aurally, and make their presence heard, as it were.

Mick Norton is one of those people, albeit slightly reluctantly. Wandering around his native Lincolnshire there is a fair chance that, on passing fellow locals, he will be hailed as ‘Ringo.’ Not because he wears a lot of rings, but because he plays the drums for Lincoln City football club.

A fan since he found himself one of the 23,000 who turned up to see Lincoln play Derby in the league cup of 1967, on that day it is likely, even had he shouted at the top of his voice, he would’ve remained anonymous. Today it’s impossible to miss him.

On taking over at Lincoln in 1995, John Beck advertised

for a drummer. There’d been one at John’s previous club, Preston, and clearly it had been successful enough for him to want to introduce it at his new club.

Having drummed for many years, Mick was the obvious choice, but at first he didn’t want to get involved. It wasn’t until a work colleague who knew the directors at the club assured them that he’d be delighted to help out, that he got roped in. Initially, Mick played sitting down and kept it all very low-key, but when Doncaster came to play at Sincil Bank that all changed.

“By then a lot of people were interested,” recalled Mick, “They’d nicknamed me Ringo and I thought, right I’m going to stand up and do it, really have a go, and we thrashed them 4-0. After that it’s stuck.”

Since then things have developed. They are now a sextet with different recognisable rhythms for a throw in, corner, free kick, near miss and a goal, and 20 other motivational rhythms. Fans and players alike love it.

“It creates an atmosphere. The whole idea was to get the fans clapping because we found that although there’s some singing, when you start drumming people will join in and clap along, and there’s a lot more noise. People who wouldn’t be willing to sing are willing to clap, and it’s made the atmosphere. It gets the players going too. I’ve seen some of them come on to the pitch dancing.”

Starting from the kick off, the drumming continues throughout the game. It’s loud – Mick’s cousin, who lives 3 miles away, can hear it in her living room – but apart from the odd traditionalist who’s of the opinion that they’ve never needed drums before so why should they start now, complaints are few and far between.

Away games are different. Mick was stopped for being too noisy at Cardiff, and at Rochdale he was told his drums were offensive weapons, but away fans coming to Lincoln love it and try to join in, which is not as easy as one might think according to Mick.

“We built it up from only a few rhythms so that the fans could get used to them. It wouldn’t work if I did it at England games, because the fans know what we do, they know how to clap. Everybody knows the throw in rhythm, so when the ball goes out they’re ready.”

With so many rhythms, it is surprising to learn that there are no rehearsals, but with talk of a brass section in the future that will change. As for Mick apart from ruining his life as a recluse, other things have changed within him to.

“As a lad John Bonham from Led Zeppelin was my favourite drummer, but now I’m more influenced by Cozy Powell because, though he doesn’t have as much technique he’s got an awful lot of power.”

THE CHARLESWORTHS

ASTON VILLA FOOTBALL CLUB

In this day and age, with the likes of Manchester United making as much money from sales of merchandise as they do from tickets, it's not surprising to find the odd club souvenir perched on the mantelpiece, or rocking to and fro against a car window. In fact, now that it's possible to get anything from a garden gnome to a bath towel in club colours, every item you own could announce your support to anyone who might be in some doubt. What's more, by utilising your own creativity, anything that has passed those merchandising folks by, like a garage door or lawn for instance, can be similarly adorned in your team's colours.

Of course, most people find it isn't really necessary to buy the whole shop and set up their own DIY company, being quite content with a few posters, the odd mug and maybe a duvet cover. Others, however, think somewhat differently. The moment you walk into David and Christina Charlesworth's house, you can be left in no doubt that they are Aston Villa fans. In fact, if you came into the backdoor, the garden furniture would give that away. If you happened to stop and chop an onion on your way in, the kitchen utensils would lead you to the same conclusion, and if you needed to make a phone call, any uncertainty that you might still be harbouring would be vanquished.

David Charlesworth has been a Villa fan for over 35 years. Christina used to like George Best because he was good-looking, but had no real interest in football. When they decided to spend the rest of their lives together though, David set out his stall.

"When we got married I warned her that she would never persuade me to give up football. She had to take me on those terms."

Take him on those terms she most certainly did. In fact, it would probably be fair to say that Christina not only agreed to those terms, but added a few extra clauses herself. She started going to games with David, and gradually the atmosphere of Villa's famous Holt End got to her. But it was seeing their son Jason's love of the game that finally cemented Christina's passion for Aston Villa. Then she started buying things.

The first acquisitions were a teddy bear for Jason and some cushions. After that, it just went on. "It's gone on since the kids were little," says Christina. "You don't set out to do it, you don't know what is happening. To be honest we couldn't see it and other people could, but if we're at a car boot sale or on holiday and I see something that's claret, or claret and blue or has a connection with

Villa, I just have to have it. It's just a love of the Villa. You don't require so many things with that connection unless you've got a love affair with them."

As well as the utensils, the phone and the garden furniture, a quick inventory reveals bath and hand towels, bedspreads, light shades, videos, cupboard doors, the garage door, more ornaments than most well-stocked junk shops, Wellington boots, mirrors, pictures, soap dishes, toothbrushes, clocks and a bottle of white wine, as further evidence of the love affair.

Incredibly, David shows no signs of jealousy and is more than happy to let his wife continue the affair. In fact, with Jason having recently held his wedding at Aston Villa, the effects of growing up in such an environment are clear.

With the number of artefacts on the market ever increasing, Christina doesn't know where it will all end and claims in the event of a fire there isn't a particular item she values most and would go back for. There is one point she is quite clear about though. "I like the colours I really do like them."



For most people, looking their best is probably not a major concern when attending a football match. They wouldn't want to look a mess, but neither would they go out of their way to, say, shave if they didn't have to. Billy Bluebeat feels somewhat differently. He's a Chelsea fan whose passion for the club is heartfelt.

"I love that football team. If I could, I would marry them," he yearns. An unlikely dream, but by ironing and pressing his clothes, and neatly hanging them up the night before the game, Billy's probably got more chance than most.

The evening before Chelsea's FA Cup third round tie in the 1993/94 season, having laid out what he intended to wear, Billy happened to glance in the mirror. The sight before him was one that just didn't go with that smart

match day image. Protruding from his nose, was a long, unsightly hair. Fortunately, his girlfriend was on hand with a pair of tweezers, and the nasty blemish was duly removed.

The following day, though Chelsea only drew, Billy felt that he'd hit upon that extra something, that final piece of the jigsaw, which had previously been lacking. Subsequent rounds of the cup, were always preceded by an evening lying on the settee whilst his girlfriend proceeded to operate.

"There's a lot in it," Billy reckons. "It's a strange phenomenon, but if everybody turns up to matches with the right positive frame of mind, and the karma is right, we can will them on to win. These things feed through

from the terraces to the players. If I hadn't done it we would have been knocked out earlier."

He may be right. That season Chelsea had their best cup run for 24 years, only losing to Manchester United in the final. Billy's nose had been thoroughly plucked the night before, but he thinks the fact that he went with the wrong people, and was having an argument with a steward when Chelsea hit the bar, overrode the power emitting from his depilated nasal passage. His girlfriend has a different theory. "I don't know what went wrong for the final. Perhaps I left one in."

Who nose?

BILLY BLUEBEAT

CHELSEA FOOTBALL CLUB





Getting a tattoo is a real sign of your commitment to someone or something. It involves pain, it becomes part of you and, for all intents and purposes it is permanent. In a very real sense, and in the nicest possible way, it says that its object has really got under your skin. However, our world is not static. Things change, they develop, they progress, call it what you will, but for those with the tattoo, that can be a real bummer.

labouriously spending a couple of hours each day with a needle and some Indian ink, but the end product was very pleasing. A shield with two seals at the top, because Chester's nickname was 'The Seals', and 'Chester Football Club' written below.

Being summer, Karl went topless at the next few games, showing off his newly adorned body like a strutting peacock. Many folk were envious and talked of having the

Football Club's badge, might be somewhat irritated by the change. Not least because along with the change of name, a new badge was adopted without a seal in sight.

"Well, I was a bit peeved at the time, but there was not a lot I could do about it," explains Karl philosophically. "I was annoyed for about a week, but I'm not a vindictive person. It wasn't the players fault, it was the management and the board of directors, which has all

KARL FENNEY

CHESTER CITY FOOTBALL CLUB

Karl Fenney used to support Chester. He followed them for years, home and away. He was devoted to the club and, in the city where too many people opted to support Manchester United and Liverpool, he was proud of that fact. So that's why, at the age of 17, he had a club badge tattooed onto his back, the whole of his back.

The process took three weeks to complete, his brother

same done, but none were brave enough. Their cowardice was to prove fortuitous.

Today Carl is no longer a supporter of Chester Football Club because he supports someone else, Chester City Football Club. Not a huge difference and fundamentally the same club, but someone who, six months earlier had covered most of the top half of their body with Chester

changed now anyway."

Carl, who has never considered getting rid of the tattoo, found himself the butt of many jokes for some time after, but he takes solace from the fact that his tattoo is unique, which is one state of affairs that will never change.



Manchester United potty



Rock from the Kop - Liverpool



DAVE NICHOLSON

CARLISLE UNITED FOOTBALL CLUB

Dave Nicholson wears a suit when he goes to football matches. He doesn't wear the suit because he's a club director or because he's had to rush from work to get to the games. He wears the suit because there really isn't anywhere else where it would be appropriate to wear it.

"One year for my birthday my wife Chris thought, 'What am I going to give the old bugger?'" Dave explains. "Well, when that day came she said, 'come upstairs to the bedroom I've got something special for you,' I thought, 'Yes, this is it' but when I got to the bedroom there was this suit hanging up. It had alternate blue and white panels and she'd done it on her own without any sort of design. She said she wasn't sure if I'd like it, but I loved it. We were going out for dinner that night and she had trouble stopping me putting the bloody thing on. I've worn it at every game I've been to since."

Now the reason Dave was so enthralled with the suit is because he's a Carlisle United fan and as every

knowledgeable football enthusiast will know, they play in blue and white.

Dave's been a Carlisle supporter since 1951. He was born and bred there and loves the place. Strangely though he doesn't live there. In fact he doesn't live anywhere near there.

"I live in Basingstoke in Hampshire. Each home game is a 610 mile round trip. That involves getting up at six, leaving at seven, and returning at midnight. I do it because it's my home team. Essentially I'm a Carlisle lad. I've seen the team go from 3rd Division North cloggers to the 1st Division, and it's in me blood. I can't help it."

Dave doesn't wear the suit on the long journey, preferring to change in the car park when he arrives, which is probably just as well, as to complete the outfit he also sports a red, white and blue wig. The suits gone down well at Carlisle and a number of fans have inquired

as to whether Chris could make them one, but she's insistent that it was a labour of love and she's not about to start a clothes factory. She has made more than one outfit though.

"I came home one day and was taken to the bedroom again," says Dave. "I didn't know what to expect this time, but hanging up was a dress in exactly the same pattern as my suit. I loved it, but even though Chris has come to a couple of games wearing it, she hasn't started coming regularly."

That probably has something to do with not wanting to give up her restful weekends, though maybe she's also slightly concerned about wearing the outfits in public. Dave on the other hand is somewhat less concerned.

"I never used to dress up or anything. I think, as I've got older the inhibitions have gone. I think sod it. I'm not really bothered what anyone thinks."

The chances of Thomas Leleux going to any game in England and not being able to show allegiance to one side or the other are zero. In fact, if he wished to he could show allegiance to both sides whilst also ensuring that, even if the game took place in the depths of winter, he wouldn't catch a chill. That's because Thomas is the proud owner of 92 scarves, one for every League club in England.

A Derby fan because he lives in Derby, in 1989 Thomas decided he wanted to visit all the League grounds in England. He started his crusade at Swindon and, though he hadn't intended to and wasn't particularly cold, bought a scarf. From then on it could be said he was scarfed for life.

Seven years later at York City, Thomas successfully completed his ground visiting mission, not forgetting, of course, to make a purchase whilst there. "I was well

chuffed when I got the last scarf," he recalls. "There was a real sense of achievement that I had done something. I also felt relieved when I'd been there, but then I realised that what with teams changing grounds, I have to keep up, so I'll keep going. As long as I'm single that is." Depending on how long that state of affairs continues, Thomas intends to add the 38 Scottish club scarves to his collection, followed swiftly by those bearing the colours of Vauxhall Conference clubs.

At home, due to lack of wall space, the prized possessions are kept neatly folded away in a cardboard box in a wardrobe, though they are occasionally taken out and mooned over. What's more, if it's particularly chilly, one lucky scarf will actually get to be worn on the cycle to work. Thomas is also keen on foreign scarves and, aside from friends bringing him one back from holiday, he's found there are other ways of building up this side of the collection.

"Every time I go to an England match at Wembley, I buy a new Derby scarf and try to swap it for a scarf of the foreign team who England are playing. It has caused problems though. When England played Croatia, I asked this lad if I could have his scarf and he said no but his big brother said yes. They started having a fight until their mother intervened and dragged the older one halfway around Wembley by his ear. I got the scarf though."

Thomas' passion prevents him from going out much and he needs two jobs to finance things. His friends think he's stark raving mad, but then in the scarf collecting community he must be hailed as something of a hero.

"I don't know of any other scarf collector in the country," admits Thomas. "But there might be one lurking about somewhere." He might have more luck seeking out a woolly hat collector.

THOMAS LELEUX

DERBY COUNTY FOOTBALL CLUB



SIMON COOPER

BRIGHTON & HOVE ALBION FOOTBALL CLUB

Half time at a football match can sometimes be a bit tricky. Dare you risk getting in the queue for the toilet and possibly missing the start of the second half? Do you sit quietly and read the programme or do you converse with all and sundry about the first half? It's a difficult decision, but for eight year old Simon Cooper attending his first game, it probably wasn't that tough. After all, at that age, there must have been plenty to entertain his young mind.

"I was on the terrace, looking around for something to amuse me during the break," recalls Simon. "My mate Alan said that he reckoned every time a seagull went over, that was when Brighton scored a goal. I said, 'what about the pigeons?' and he said, 'well if you take away

the number of pigeons that'll give us the score." Absurd, but understandable coming from an eight year old. A thirty year old, fully-grown mature adult would never do such a thing now, would he?

"It just seems to have stuck all these years," says the chronologically thirty year old Simon. "For the five minutes before kick off I count the seagulls and Alan counts the pigeons. The birds don't have to be flying in a particular direction as long as they cross the pitch. It's no good if they go and sit on the stand and fly off, that doesn't count. If 5 seagulls and 4 pigeons fly past, the score will be 1-0 to Brighton.

Incredibly, the fact that the birds have virtually never correctly predicted the score has not deterred Simon and Alan. They even claim that doing it inspires them to keep going and lifts them morally in times of gloom. Maybe that has something to do with Brighton's seaside location and the preponderance of seagulls. "Strange as it might seem living on the coast, there's not that many seagulls down here. At least there doesn't appear to be at three o'clock. This season especially there seems to be a large number of pigeons."

That doesn't bode well for Brighton, but either way, it seems that Simon and Alan will always have a bird's eye view of proceedings.





One of the great things about going to a football match is the atmosphere. There can be no doubt that 50,000 voices raising the roof uplifts the team, inspiring them to victory.

By the same token, the times when it is possible to hear a pin drop amongst such a crowd, must be deflating to the players. Especially if the silence is broken by the odd whistle of derision or an angry dejected shout. To the

sing. Then at the Hibs game I went a wee bit further than usual. I didn't go up and down the stairs, but down in between the seats until I got to the bottom where I stood on the wall, faced the Copland Road and conducted the choir, so to speak."

From then on, whenever things got a little quiet during a game, the East Enclosure would chant, 'Nutter, Nutter give us a song,' or 'There's only one Copland Nutter,' at

too happy with Mr. Nutter, and after three 'meetings' with them, his conducting came to an end. However, since then people have been asking where he is, and even the Rangers News posed the question, so it's just possible that Ibrox has not seen the last of the insane one. And if he does come back, he might well have a sharp new image.

"I like the suit Gazza wore at the Scottish Player of the

COPLAND NUTTER

RANGERS FOOTBALL CLUB

Copland Nutter, the latter of these two situations was his cue to do something about it.

"It was a night game against Airdrie in 1992. Very little was happening. No singing, no atmosphere, so I started walking up and down the stairs on the Copland Road stand, trying to get people singing. Everybody just looked at me, and then the East Enclosure started singing, and so I started singing trying to get the Copland Road to

which point he'd charge up and down the stairs getting the crowd going.

The Nutter became something of a celebrity for his antics, so much so that after Rangers won the League Cup recently, Walter Smith's wife meekly asked if she could have her photo taken with him.

Unfortunately, the security staff at Rangers were none

Year awards and I thought to myself 'I'm going to get one of them.' I found out who made it and got him to make me one, only in the Rangers tartan. Gazza's was the Mussleborough tartan. It cost £275 and so far I've never worn it to a match in case I get drunk and fall over, but I am thinking of wearing it to a game. Maybe if I go down the stairs, Gascoigne can look up, and spot me. Hopefully I'll wear it when we have won our ninth title."

BAMBER BRIDGE PNE FANS

PRESTON NORTH END FOOTBALL CLUB

What goes up must come down.

Bamber Bridge, just outside Preston, is a village deeply divided. Physically that's because a railway line runs through the middle of it. In footballing terms, it is because half the village support Preston North End and half support Blackburn Rovers. Strange then to discover that should either side be promoted or relegated the village comes together in a most commendable display of unity. Most commendable and maybe just a little odd.

It all started at the end of the 1947/48 season when Blackburn were relegated from the first division. To help them come to terms with this disaster, four lads put a flag and a wreath over an orange box and took it from the White Bull pub to the Trades Hall. There they gave a sermon before taking it down to the cellar to bury it. The following season, when Preston went down, a similar ceremony was performed. The two 'coffins' remained buried until 1951 when Preston won promotion. This was the cue for a resurrection and so the Preston coffin was brought up from the cellar and proudly taken back to the White Bull.

This tradition has continued in Bamber Bridge, growing

in stature such that any resurrection or burial has turned into a huge parade with floats, marching bands, Morris dancers and anything else that the organising committee can organise. Of course the festivities are still centred around the journey of a coffin, something which needs to be carefully overseen by a Bishop and two undertakers.

Currently the undertakers are 80-year-old George Rimmer and 79 year old Jack Woods. They are the only two remaining members of the original synod, as it were, and have presided at a fair few services over the years. They inform that in the event of one team going up and one going down, a double ceremony takes place, with one coffin going one way being followed by a more sombre crowd, and the other having an altogether more jubilant journey, going in the other direction.

The Bishop at the moment is Dave Tuson. Dave's only held the position for a short time as the original Bish had recently died. He was chosen because he has the gift of the gab and also because he had a childhood that stood him in good stead.

"My dad was a big North End fan," says Dave. "All I ever heard in the house was Tom Finney this and Tom Finney

that. I thought he was my eldest brother who I'd never met."

His first job was to resurrect Preston in 1996. Taking inspiration from the Littlewoods catalogue, he began the sermon. "Oh Finney, Oh Finney, forgive us for our actions today. We mean not to offend, just to have fun," and ended with "In the name of the bitter, and of the lager, and of the mild, I forbid you ever to go down again. Arise PNE," a cue for everyone to hot foot it to the pub and drown their sorrows or revive their joy.

That day was a great success and, as has become the habit, a lot of money was raised for charity, but with all the time and effort put into a ceremony these days, one can't help but cast one's mind back to Blackburn's Premiership winning year. That must have been one hell of a party.

"It wasn't a burial obviously, and we couldn't do a resurrection because the coffin was already up," reports Jack Woods. "So we didn't do anything." If only Preston had had the decency to go down that year.





Chris Sievey's (Frank Sidebottom) Manchester City slippers



Bradford City fans Doris and Norman Binns

TANGO

SHEFFIELD WEDNESDAY FOOTBALL CLUB

Most football fans might go to games with a few friends, to whom they are well known. The more outlandish or eccentric supporters may be notorious within one club and have a certain infamy therein, but outside of those confines they are hardly celebrities.

Paul Mark Gregory is the exception. He is a Sheffield Wednesday supporter who, at a recent game away to Chelsea, found youngsters shouting his name and thrusting autograph books his way.

Paul is probably Britain's best-known football fan. He is affectionately known as Tango and tends to stand out from the crowd somewhat as, come rain or shine or sub-zero temperatures he is always topless.

Originally from Wolverhampton, visits to the local club at Molineux didn't really inspire him, and his early years were spent in the football wilderness.

And then, in 1979, he noticed that Carlisle were playing

Sheffield Wednesday and, entirely on a whim as he puts it, he travelled up to the game. From that moment on, though he still lives in Wolverhampton, he hasn't missed a Wednesday game.

Paul can't really explain what it is about Wednesday that grabbed him, but he can recall the first time he got this kit off.

"About seven years ago I was at Derby with my father-in-law and the temperature was -9. He kept going on about how cold it was and eventually I got so pissed off with him that I took off my jacket and shirt and gave it to him."

Seeds were obviously sown in Paul's mind as a couple of years later, Tango was born.

"We were at Crystal Palace and there was a lad in the crowd who was about twice as big as me. The Palace fans were singing 'you fat bastard' at him, but he tried to claim that they were singing at me, so I took my shirt off

and started strutting around. Before I knew it everyone was singing 'tango,' at me because it was around the time of that Tango advert, and it's just stuck. I was on telly and in the papers a few times and now people expect me to be topless so I have to do it."

Quite a responsibility and one that a lesser mortal might not feel up to, particularly when the thermometer plunges to below freezing. Not Paul though.

"I've never thought it was too cold. The colder the better. I think my body has hardened to it now and anyway my seven-year-old son Dean has started coming to games so I've got to start training him to uphold the family tradition. He's already had his top off at Liverpool and the fans were singing 'there's only one baby Tango'. We're going to buy him a freezer for Christmas so we can put him in to practise." Surely it would be better to start off on a fridge?



Bryan Hall had been a Plymouth fan for many years, but it wasn't until Argyle's promotion run in the 1985/86 season that, after one particular defeat, he changed his usual parking space. A string of victories followed and suddenly, things he'd taken for granted became very important. The route, the time, the walk to the ground and in particular the hole in the hedge he went through, the turnstile he went in and of course, the clothes he wore, all took on a new significance.

However, Bryan is on a quest. Unlike other superstitious folk, he is not content to continue with the same routines if they prove ineffective. If Plymouth lose, he will change things.

"It is a composite of things which I am trying to fine tune," says Bryan. "It is almost like running an economy, there are infinite variables, and you'll change one or two to try and reduce possibilities of the team losing. If I go through turnstile three and we lose I might try turnstile

four next week. Or it could be a badge in a different place on my jacket, or a different jacket altogether. It's almost making it scientific. I'm trying to reduce the number of bad omens."

In all the years of tinkering though, Bryan has yet to come up with the finished article. He thought he'd come close with a particular denim jacket which saw Plymouth all the way to winning the play offs at Wembley in 1986, but even though he began the following season with it on, still unwashed, by September it wasn't working and finally saw the inside of a washing machine.

Not to be discouraged Bryan still soldiers on. In fact lately, he has even taken to introducing new factors during the match itself.

"I always take a bag along which contains the full Argyle kit, scarves, hats, knickers, a green and white umbrella and other odds and sods. When I get into the ground, I

select the bits that I'm going to use that day.

Against Crewe the other week it was 0-0 and in the 86th minute I took the hat I'd been wearing off and put a woolly one on and they scored. Unfortunately, I didn't do it next time, but it was exactly the same situation. Last five minutes, 0-0, only this time we had a shot kicked off the line so maybe I should have done it. The trouble is it's getting so complicated that I'm going to have to write it all down to remember what I've done."

Surely it might be easier to just forget the whole thing, after all that could be the answer.

"I might do because that would be like a great burden being lifted, but if they lost 3-0 I'd think I might have been able to prevent that happening. I know there's nothing rational about it whatsoever, but it's like political parties, they daren't not do something the other side's going to do. So you take a chance and cover all the possibilities."

BRYAN HALL

PLYMOUTH ARGYLE FOOTBALL CLUB





TED PIT

WEST HAM UNITED FOOTBALL CLUB

Ted Pit is a man with a van. There is nothing unusual about that. A lot of men have vans. But Ted's van is unlike other men's vans. It has been converted into a mobile shrine to West Ham United.

The basic paintwork is, of course, claret and blue, but on top of that there are players' names that go back as far as the fifties, and signatures from the current squad. There are team lists of the cup winning sides of 1964, '75 and '80, as well as the triumphant Cup Winners Cup team of 1965. For those who fancy a slightly longer read, maybe when the van is at some traffic lights, 'I'm forever blowing bubbles,' and 'Harry Redknapp's claret and blue army,' can also be found on the outside, as well as Bobby Moore's shirt and, Ted's pride and joy, two hammers on the front bumper.

Naturally enough, the interior needed to complement the exterior, and, though it's an on-going process, there are currently 11 teddy bears, 15 scarves, 3 flags, a couple of cushions and a duvet, 4 testimonial footballs and a couple of pairs of boots inside, as well as 500 photographs, just in case anyone isn't totally convinced of Ted's devotion from the outside.

It all started a few years ago when Ted was at West Ham having just had the van resprayed. Julian Dicks offered

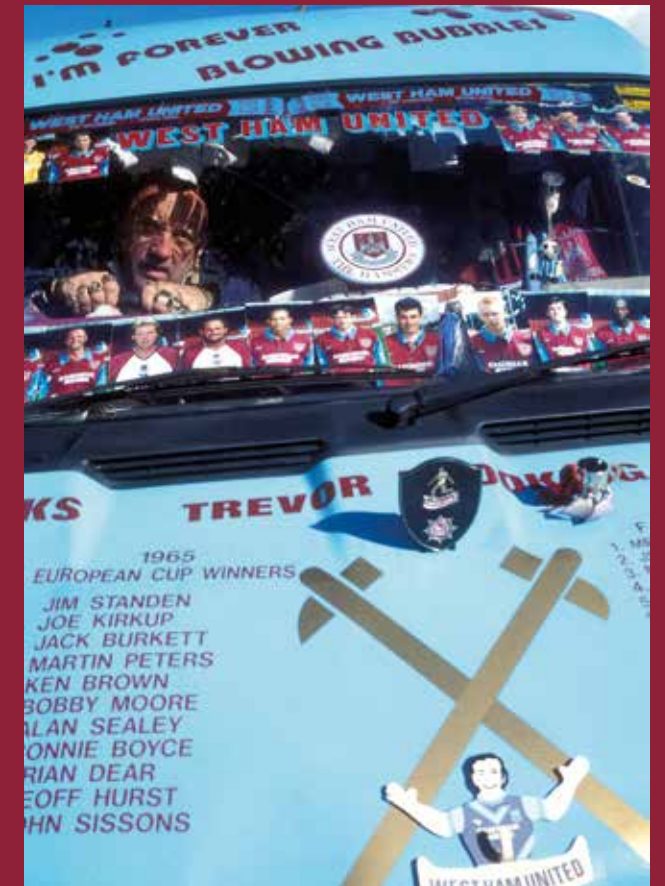
to sign it for him. Other players followed suit, as did the manager, and it took off from there. Now, Ted and his van are well-known, local celebrities.

"The players love it, they all give me a toot on their hooters if they see me driving around," beams Ted." You do get called a few names, but the genuine fans admire it because they say, 'I wouldn't have the guts to do that.' We went to Norwich once and so many people pulled me over and wanted to take a photograph of it.

One time we pulled into a service station and people driving the opposite way had seen the van and turned around and come back to have their photo taken with it. I've being stopped by the police and of course thought, 'Oh God here we go,' but they say, 'we've seen your van going around and we think it's brilliant.'

Sadly, nothing lasts forever, as Ted knows that one day the MOT will prove a little too much for his beloved van. So then what will become of it?

"I'd never sell it. There's talk of a West Ham museum so when it's had its day, I'm hoping to give it to the club so they can put it in there." Where, no doubt it will continue to make an exhibition of itself.



WHAT IS A FOOTBALL FAN?

“A fan is somebody who goes. You have to support the club. It’s no good sitting in your lounge and supporting them. You have to go down and contribute.”

Dave Nicholson - Carlisle United

“A fan is somebody who is absolutely besotted by their team and usually one or two players in it, and once they go through the turnstiles on a Saturday all reason goes out of the window. They’re an entirely different person to what they are the rest of the week.”

Diane Anderson - Nottingham Forest

“I’m not a football fan, I’m a Leeds fan. There’s a big difference. I don’t think many football fans go to football. The football fans are the ones who pay for Sky and things like that. You don’t get many neutrals at football matches.”

Gary Edwards - Leeds United

“A football fan is one who enjoys male bonding. Not just the game, the ninety minutes, but the whole Saturday. Go to the pub, a few pints with the boys, a laugh, a joke, go to the game, then a few pints and jokes afterwards. A football fan is a Saturday man.”

Big Pie - Motherwell

“At our level you have got to be a bit of a nutter to be a fan. It’s alright if you’re watching Manchester United, you know they’re going to win 9 times out of 10. We’ve no idea. Even at home we can get thrashed. Last year we lost 8-1 at Bury, but Lincoln fans were still singing.”

Mick Norton - Lincoln City

“They’ve got to be passionately involved with their club, or the game.”

Steve Malone - Dundee United

“A football fan goes and supports his team week in, week out. Okay, they might be going through a bad patch, but football fans should go and support, not criticize the players on the park.”

Copland Nutter - Rangers

“A football fan is somebody who’s got an addiction. You can’t kick it. I’m useless to anybody between three and five if I’m not at the game.”

Vinnie the Parrot - Celtic

“Somebody who enjoys football at every level, from non-league to international, they are true fans.”

Thomas Leleux - Derby County

GARY EDWARDS

LEEDS UNITED FOOTBALL CLUB

Painter and decorator and Leeds United supporter Gary Edwards (right) refuses to use the colour red because of his hatred towards Manchester United, he doesn’t even like saying the word red. He’s even turned down jobs if he is asked to tarnish his brush with red paint. “The council asked me to paint a wall that colour once and I refused.”
Loyalty to Leeds United must come first.



SECOND HALF



GROUNDHOPPERS

Football's first groundhoppers' weekend was held in North-East England over Easter 1992 and I, alas, was to blame.

Back then – and for many years thereafter – I edited the Northern League magazine. Familiarly struggling to fill the letters page, I asked Pete Sixsmith – history teacher, football traveller, imaginative writer, Shildon and Sunderland fan – if he'd contribute a few thought provoking lines.

Pete not only wrote about groundhoppers, people who want to visit as many football grounds as possible, with whom collectively I was barely familiar, but proposed that the league organise a great groundhopper gathering so that the boys might fill their boots. What he didn't do was offer to organise the damn thing.

Not for the last time I became a sort of soccer surrogate – anyone remember Secret Shopper? – left holding someone else's baby.

However inaccurately, the resultant logo (see overleaf) may have summed up the image. The caricature, whom we named Harry Hopper, was a rotund and slightly dishevelled gentleman with a large pie in one hand, a foaming pint of beer in the other and, on his back, a rucksack from which protruded a copy of The Guardian.

That was perhaps the one thing that suggested that the artist, in turn, didn't have a leg to stand on. I never had

the typical hopper down as a Guardian reader, or indeed of much else save for the match day programme for which he'd have exchanged his grandmother in the event of limited availability. Come to think of it, they proved – most of them – not to be big drinkers either, though the pies were par for the course.

The internet and all its works had probably been invented by then but had yet to penetrate the Neanderthal North. We marketed and organised the thing by post, through magazines like Non League Traveller and by occasional use of the telephone.

Spectators were, of course, free to attend any matches they wished but the Northern League offered an Easter package – a seven-game ticket, three nights B&B at Collingwood College – between terms at Durham University – evening entertainment and group travel between all fixtures with a bus company called OK.

Well, OK-ish. The vehicles in question were arthritic double deckers, lacking in both comfort and reliability and normally used to transport school children, as reluctant as they were recalcitrant, daily to their desks. On one occasion, after an Easter Saturday afternoon match at Ferryhill Athletic, one of the dinosaur double deckers broke down completely – conked out, as they say in these parts.

The next game, 20-odd miles away at Seaham Red Star, was due to kick off in 90 minutes. Hoppers demanded

that I delay it, though such authority was wholly beyond my powers. A more unexpected problem was that one of the lads, a good Roman Catholic, had found a Saturday evening Vigil Mass in the church just over the road from Seaham's ground but seemed certain to miss it. Mea culpa once again. I was seeing the less happy side of the hoppers, the side that sought to be spoon fed. In the event he swapped buses and still made Mass.

We'd also plugged the ground breaking idea locally by persuading regional press and television to come to an Easter week hopping race at Peterlee Newtown, venue of the first fixture. All that memory suggests of that one is that I was last, disqualified even, though in promotional terms it got things off to a flyer.

The Journal newspaper, Tyneside-based, called the hoppers "the train spotters of British football", adding – lest the meaning be uncertain – that they were an "oddball bunch." It seemed a bit unfair.

Oddball or otherwise, getting on for 150 travellers from all over the country booked all or part of the package – by year five numbers had more than doubled – while each of the pioneering clubs that Easter weekend recorded by far their best gate of the season.

If it were all a groundhoppers' dream, the dream was rudely interrupted one night at Collingwood when someone set off the fire alarm. It wasn't a hopper, apparently, but a student with no home to go to.

Clubs also gained a reputation for hospitality and innovation. At Horden every Easter morning visitor was given a cream egg as he entered, while at Shotton Comrades – lovely name, club now sadly defunct – a parachutist from the neighbouring airfield dropped in with the match ball right on target into the centre circle.

By the second year we were joined by Johannes de Boer and Henk van der Sluis, hoppers from Holland, and were reminded of something over which we had no control – the infernal North-East weather.

True to their colours, Henk and Johannes wore clogs. By Good Friday evening at Esh Winning, in the west Durham hills, not only was the pitch totally waterlogged but so was their footwear, which duly dissolved. Arthur Clark, the league chairman, was able to persuade the referee to let the match go ahead but could do nothing to save their soles.

Two days later, suitably re-shod, the Dutchmen were among a 1,355 Easter morning crowd – huge for the Northern League – which saw Guisborough play Whitby Town. The following year Whitby were themselves among the hosts – very good hosts – though it proved another difficult week for poor old Henk.

Henk, who was diabetic and suffered greatly with his feet, had on the Saturday night been admitted to hospital in Durham and found himself in a bed next to an old County Durham pitman. When I visited after the last match on Easter Day, I found Henk in a state of unaccustomed agitation.

The aged miner, solicitously, had told Henk that he was sorry to see that he was bad – meaning, of course, unwell. Henk, whose command of the Queen’s English was impeccable, was a little less sure footed with the North-East variation. “Mike,” he implored, “will you

please tell this gentleman that I am not a bad person...”.

So Easters came and went, numbers rising exponentially – as I believe they say in places where the Queen’s English is spoken – and by 1996 we were even exchanging a few emails. The buses were no better, mind, not least after a



match at Whickham where the travellers discovered that the blinking bus had been burgled. Save for a copy of The Guardian, and perhaps half a pork pie, what on earth might they expect to steal from the groundhoppers?

Almost all groundhoppers were male – I only recall one woman – none would have won a best-dressed award and one or two seemed unlikely to have availed themselves of the university showers. At least one was a university lecturer, another – a lovely chap called Derek Harrison – had been a successful PR man in London. Derek lived in Bakewell, Derbyshire, and would annually show his gratitude by bringing a large Bakewell pudding

– so much better, he insisted, than Bakewell tart. Others were less obviously grateful, a few clearly believed that for the ridiculously small cost of the package they should not just have had a five star hotel but a personal valet as well.

We made mistakes, too. Perhaps the biggest was to organise the post-match entertainment on the Saturday evening – and had something to do with the fact that the North-East club culture, and liking for a good Saturday night drink, were alien to many of our visitors.

On the second hop I’d booked Eddie Gratton, a good singer (and very good cricketer), with the remit to provide a programme of North-East songs and humour. They just didn’t want to listen, which seemed to me a bit ungrateful. Eddie cut short his act. The guys made their own entertainment after that.

Still they kept coming with their pens and notebooks, particularly excited if they’d not previously been to any of the grounds. They had nicknames like Veggieburger, Three Pies – much more plausible – and the Blackpool Tram. They had idiosyncrasies like having to touch all four corner flags or touching the match ball or not counting the match at all if it were a goalless draw.

One gentleman insisted on swinging from the crossbar but was almost swung from a floodlight pylon at Prudhoe when his monkey act broke the wooden bar 20 minutes before Good Friday kick-off. Happily, mercifully, the club had a spare.

Mostly they were much less extrovert, quietly grateful for all the effort that went into organising that Easter extravaganza. An exception was a gentleman from Manchester – ever adorned in 92 Club scarf, cap and badges – who always found something about which to complain.

The Northern League hops lasted five years; he wouldn’t have been welcome on the sixth.

One of the last games of all, on the morning of Easter Sunday 1996, had been at Stanley United, a gloriously quaint little ground in Co Durham, with changing rooms cum canteen known thereabouts as The Little House on the Prairie. United had long been Northern League members, champions in 1961 and 1963, but, facing an increasingly desperate battle for survival, had dropped into the Wearside League – of the 42 venues over those five years the only one not in the Northern League.

When we conducted a ballot for the fans’ favourite, Stanley won by a mile. I didn’t blame them. It was mine, too.

The hops had undoubtedly been greatly successful both in raising the profile of the Northern League and its clubs and in providing a football fantasia for those who like that sort of thing. We organised another weekend in 2014, to mark the league’s 125th anniversary, but by then I’d long been league chairman and was able to persuade Harvey Harris, a retired senior police officer, to take on the role. He did a great job.

Several times a season they are now organised commercially with much the same format, leagues almost forming a queue to participate. Without intending to offend anyone, I don’t go.

These days both feet remain firmly on the ground.

MIKE AMOS
SHILDON ASSOCIATION
FOOTBALL CLUB



GROUNDHOPPERS' 96
Application form

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

.....

.....

TELEPHONE.....

Please send me ticket(s) for Groundhoppers '96 at £15 per ticket. (£8 children.)

I enclose £2 (total) to cover printing, administration and this and that.

I do/do not require accommodation at Collingwood College. (£15.50 per person, per night.)

I will/will not require coach transport between all venues (£12 per person.)

I will/will not be attending the social evenings at South Shields (Friday) and Whitby (Saturday). (£2 per person per evening, including buffet.)

I enclose a cheque for £..... made payable to the Federation Brewery Northern League (NOT, please, to Mike Amos).

Tickets, a fuller itinerary and other up dated information will be sent out before the end of February 1996. Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any queries.



GROUNDHOPPERS IV: ITINERARY

FRIDAY APRIL 14: Prudhoe Town v Peterlee Newtown (11am). Coaches depart Collingwood at 9 45am, picking up at bus and railway stations. Sadly for both clubs, this could be a first division relegation battle (I write, without foresight, on January 8). Prudhoe were formed in 1959 and have been NL members since 1988-89, winning promotion last season. Kimberly Park is recently much improved though they reckon there are still traces of methane from its previous incarnation as a municipal tip. Gas masks not considered necessary. The clubhouse may be a shoehorn job..... Depart 1 45pm.

Whickham v Langley Park (3pm). Whickham are strong favourites for second division promotion; Langley Park, alas, are struggling on and off the field and have had to ground share (with Brandon) this season. Formed in 1944 and known locally as the Home Guard team, Whickham won the 1981 FA Vase, as a Wearside League club, with a 3-2 extra time win over Willenhall Town. They joined the NL in 1988-89. Ask someone about "Lang Jack", who appears on the club coat of arms. Depart 5 15pm.

Ashington v Morpeth (6 30pm). Ashington - home of Jackie Milburn, and of the Charlton brothers - were Third Division (North) members from 1924-29 and still play at Portland Park. (The old square goalposts from those days were only replaced this season.) Everything about the club has undergone an astonishing revitalisation over the past 12 months - from an impressively restored clubhouse to a great fanzine, Pit Pony Express. The PPE lads have lots of Ashington gear, too. Morpeth, just a few miles away, are in their first NL season - perhaps the first ever league derby between the two. Coaches depart 10 30pm, for Collingwood.

SATURDAY APRIL 15. Alnwick Town v Horden CW (11am). Coaches depart Collingwood 9 15am. Alnwick play at the North-East's other St James Park, though it's hard to spot the difference. The town and castle have much to offer too. The club is the most northerly team in both FA Cup and Vase. NL members since 1982, they look like being engaged in a battle against relegation from the second division - as are Horden, great lads as many will remember. Uniquely in the Northern League, and perhaps far beyond, Alnwick insist that all players must live in the immediate neighbourhood. Equally unique, club chairman Judith Draycott is the League's only female club official. The clubhouse may again be a squash; lose weight. Coaches depart 1 30pm.



Bedlington Terriers v RTM Newcastle (3pm). Worth it just for the hosts' name, but could be the match that decides the first division title. (How does this bloke pick 'em?) RTM were formerly Newcastle Blue Star; both teams have a chance of the championship. Formed in 1949, Bedlington joined the inaugural NL second division in 1982-83, were first division runners up three years later (to Bishop Auckland) and have surprised many this season. You know what they say about every dog having its day....In estate agent-speak, the clubhouse may again be described as compact. Depart 5 15, with compass, radar and other navigational aids.

Washington v Crook Town, 6 30pm. Washington are worth finding, a wonderful example of resilience. After arsonists destroyed their clubhouse, the club overcame horrendous legal and administrative difficulties to build a magnificent replacement - venue, happily, for our second social. Formed in 1947 as Washington Colliery Mechanics, when the new town was but a gleam in some manic town planner's eye. Crook, five times FA Amateur Cup winners, are resurgent too. This could be the game in which they clinch second division promotion. Depart 10 30pm, for Collingwood.

SUNDAY APRIL 16. Shotton Comrades v Easington CW (10 45pm). Small but perfectly formed, the Comrades are renowned for the warmth of their welcome and (though it's daylight, even in Co Durham) will be keen to show off their new floodlights. Formed as a Sunday side in 1973, they've been NL members since 1983-84, always in the second division. Easington are just a couple of miles along the road, and will host a game next season. The post-match drink and Easter extravaganza is at Shotton Comrades club, no official connection, half a mile away. Depart 1 45pm.

Tow Law v Shildon (3pm). Don't believe all you hear about Tow Law being the coldest place on earth. Anchorage, Alaska, is believed to be slightly colder. The club, aka the Lawyers, even have a solicitor as programme editor and general errand boy. Ask for John Flynn: wills witnessed while you freeze to death. Best remembered for a 5-1 FA Cup thumping of Mansfield Town in 1967 - they lost a second round replay to Shrewsbury, having drawn Arsenal at the Ironworks Ground in the third - Tow Law are long standing first division members, and going well. Shildon need no introduction, except to say that they're by far the greatest team the world has ever seen. Huddle together for warmth in the clubhouse afterwards, and don't forget the ballot forms. Depart 5 15pm for Collingwood, home of drying out ward. Happy Easter.





Durham City, whose programme someone's buying (right), were the only club to host two Hop matches – the first in 1994 at their “old” ground near the River Wear and the second in 1996 at New Ferens Park, on an industrial estate east of the city. Having irrevocably fallen out with their landlords, City now ground share at Willington.









Right: The blackboard confirms it's Bedlington – what, no PA system? Jimmy Harmison, the No 15, is one of a Northumberland clan which includes former England fast bowler Steve Harmison, his uncle, who also played football for both Bedlington and Ashington. RTM Newcastle, their opponents, became Newcastle Blue Star but folded. A new club now operates under the same name.





FEDERATION BREWERY



NORTHERN LEAGUE



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THE FEDERATION BREWERY NORTHERN LEAGUE



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February 1995

Dear Zak

Herewith, please find ticket(s) for Groundhoppers IV, Easter 1995. Old hands will find the arrangements familiar - only the venues have changed, a tour of Northumberland this year.

As usual, residential accommodation is at Collingwood College in Durham, now no longer a glorified building site and recently re-opened by the Princess Royal. (Sadly, it's not believed that she slept there.) Those still requiring extra nights at Collingwood should contact Mrs Sylvia Hall on 091-374-4565.

We still recommend that from the south, the college is most easily accessed by leaving the A1(M) at the A167 junction (signed Newton Aycliffe/Spennymoor) then heading north up the A167 for approx 11-12 miles to the Cock of the North Hotel. Bear right onto the A168, Collingwood is approx half a mile on the right. From the north, leave the A1(M) at the A690, signed Durham, and after nearing Durham city centre follow the signs for Darlington (A168). The college is approx a mile to the north of the city centre, on the left.

Coach travel remains in the hands of OK Travel, though it's to be hoped that the dinosaur double decker (remember Ferryhill?) is now extinct. The coaches will pick up at Durham railway and bus stations (south bound entrance) at 9.50am on Good Friday, and return to Collingwood (via transport depots) after the last match.

-2-

In addition, there will also be a short final get together - Auld Lang Syne, and all that - after the last Groundhoppers match of all, at Willington. Though food is not included, we hope to re-engage Riff-Raff - who played so unforgettably at Washington last year - to play us out for a nominal charge of around £1 a head.

The Willington game kicks off at 5pm. Coaches will leave the local workmen's club (the clubhouse is too small) in time to catch the 8.51pm train from Durham to London. Willington is eight miles from Durham.

With the usual £2 administration charge, compulsory please because you know how much the organiser needs his beer money, the cost to adults taking the total package will be £79.50.

The games are: Friday April 5 - Morpeth v Ashington (11am), Ryhope v Washington (3pm), South Shields v Prudhoe (6.30pm). Saturday April 6 - Easington v Norton and Stockton Ancients (10.45am), Stockton v Seaham Red Star (2.45pm), Whitby Town v Billingham Synthonia (6.30pm).

Sunday April 7 - Stanley United v South Bank (Vaux Wearside League) 11am, Durham City v Chester-le-Street (3pm). SUNDAY EVENING FREE. Monday April 8. Northallerton v Brandon (10am), Eppleton v Murton (1.45pm), Willington v Shotton Comrades (5pm).

This initial information is being sent only to those who attended Groundhoppers '95, with a booking form attached. We very much hope, however, that after the marvellous atmosphere and success of that event that you will want to interest family and friends, too.

The Groundhoppers weekends have become an institution throughout non-league football and we are convinced this one will be the best yet. While I very much look forward to again saying "Hello" to very many friends, I'm sure that in most cases it won't be goodbye....

Thanks as ever for your interest. Here's to next Easter

Cheers

Mike Amos





We were introduced to a Hopper who answered to Veggieburger, presumably because of his liking for such exotic delights, though it's unlikely he found many around the distinctly carnivorous Northern League. Mind, there were grounds where he'd have struggled to tell the difference.

Willington's tea hut (above). The Hall Lane ground is another favourite, which might rate yet higher on the hoppers' scale if they'd had access to the lovely little board room-cum-hospitality room, little changed since the Co Durham side won the Amateur Cup in 1950, beating the mighty Bishop Auckland 4-0 at Wembley. It's now the only Northern League ground with cover on all four sides.







DAVE ROXBOROUGH

GROUNDHOPPER

“There are three types of football fans. The armchair fans, who loyally support a club, and only watch them on television. The team fanatical fans who go and watch all their team’s games, including reserve matches if they can, and then there’s the groundhoppers who will just watch anything, anywhere.” Thus speaks Dave Roxborough (right), someone whose feet are firmly in the latter camp, if a groundhopper’s feet can be firmly anywhere that is. Dave’s interest in the game grew out of collecting football stickers and when Watford reached the semi-final of the FA Cup in 1970, he started to support them as they were relatively local to him at the time. Initially, he was more of a team fanatical fan, but a visit to watch the local village side, Bedmond Sports and Social Club, in the Herts County League, followed by a trip to see his cousin playing for Foxton United in Leicestershire, kindled a slightly different passion.

Gradually, Dave fell into the third category of football fan. He would pick a game he liked the look of from the

first qualifying round of the FA Cup, or the FA Vase, and then follow the winning team on their travels as they progressed through the rounds. And, in common with other like-minded folk, and there are lots of a similar ilk, it wasn’t enough just to turn up and watch the game. There were, and still are, explains Dave, the rituals.

“About 10 years ago the ball hit me four games in row. Every game away the ball seemed to come to me, so I thought if it’s not going to come to me, I’m going to go to it.” Consequently, at every game he now goes to, Dave surveys the ground very carefully, walking around it if possible, and positions himself in the spot which he reckons is the most likely to allow him to touch the match ball. He’s successful 95% of the time at non-league grounds, though admits to a slightly lower hit rate at the league grounds.

Having been to some 260 different grounds to date, Dave reckons he can read the game well enough to have

a fair idea as to where ball is going to go out, though sometimes, touching it can be somewhat traumatic. “I went to see a team called Rolls-Royce Engines and one of their goals backs onto an airfield. When the ball went out there, I jumped over the fence, made sure a plane wasn’t landing or taking off, ran over the runway, grabbed the ball, check for planes again and ran back through the fence with the ball.”

All that effort just to get a feel of the ball. It must be particularly exhilarating to succeed.

“After I’ve done it, I just think great I touched the ‘ball,’ which is more than some of the players have done if you think about substitutes.”

Makes it all so worthwhile.







If ever a day were misnamed it was Good Friday 1995. It was the first day of the fourth hop and, 20 minutes before kick-off between Prudhoe and Peterlee, some visiting halfwit indulged his customary pre-match practice of swinging on the crossbar, snapping it clean in two. It was one of the visitors who had a nickname – I forget it, but whatever it was it was naught compared to what I called him. Cross? I was bloody livid. Happily, almost miraculously, Prudhoe had a spare. The chap atop the dugout (right) is unlikely to have done it much good, either. Stick to the technical area, mate.















Left: Gentlemen's relish! Perhaps it goes without saying that this is also Stanley United's humble home. It recalls Sir Bobby Robson's favourite story, the time that he was upbraided by one or other of the Cobbold brothers – Ipswich Town owners – for allegedly insanitary practices. "Where I come from we wash our hands after using the toilet," said the patrician Cobbold. "Where I come from," said Bob, good Co Durham lad, "we don't pee on them in the first place." No matter how sanitary the 21st century toilet provision, there are still players who pee behind the dugouts.







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ALL THE BIG NAMES...

