



The Story of the Bradford Fire

Martin Fletcher

B L O O M S B U R Y

Fifty-Six

The Story of the Bradford Fire

Martin Fletcher

B L O O M S B U R Y
LONDON • NEW DELHI • NEW YORK • SYDNEY

To my mum – For showing me the light and making me fight – Still smiling x

Contents

Prologue

Part One

- 1 The Fletchers
- 2 Football
- 3 1984–85 – Our Final Season
- 4 11 May 1985
- 5 Survivor
- 6 Mourner
- 7 ‘Moving On’

Part Two

- 8 Rebuilt
- 9 Reclaimed/Central Failure
- 10 Reclaimed/Local Failure
- 11 The Popplewell Inquiry
- 12 City Till . . .
- 13 Locked Doors
- 14 ‘I have just been unlucky’
- 15 The Popplewell Inquiry Revisited
- 16 Fletcher 56

Acknowledgements

Author’s Note

Prologue

It was August 2011 and the opening home match of the 20th season of the English Premier League. Sitting back in my comfortable red padded seat, with legroom aplenty, I was one block off the halfway line at Arsenal's resplendent Emirates Stadium. Two teams full of adored multimillionaires marched out for a once unheard of but now simply untraditional 12.45 Saturday lunchtime kick-off.

The players lined up, but my attention was immediately captured by the banner a few Liverpool fans furled out, before the away end started to demand 'Justice for the 96!' It so struck me that I immediately texted my Tory mum in rural, middle-class middle England: "'Expose the lies, before Thatcher dies" says the banner in the Liverpool end – Indeed.' A few minutes later came her reply: 'I agree!'

Arsenal lost 2–0 that afternoon, undone by the trickery of Liverpool's elusive second-half substitute, Luis Suárez. Afterwards I met two old Warwick University friends and their dads for beers-and-football chat in the affluent north London streets of Highbury. The night ended, as it so often did, with the last train out of London. As my friends headed back to their families in the Home Counties, I went home to an empty flat on a moonlit Wandsworth Common. Our odd bout of early season pessimism would be borne out the following week when Arsenal lost 8–2 at Old Trafford, their heaviest defeat in a century. Yet though it was a crisis, some of us who'd watched football since before the English Premier League party kicked into gear knew much better than to ever use the word 'disaster'.

Walking home that evening it struck me that it was thirty years since my own dad had started taking me to watch football. I was unsure what such a proud Yorkshireman would have made of his son supporting Arsenal, but I knew he'd always told me, 'Son, you've got to play whatever cards you're dealt in life as best you can.'

At the Arsenal I'd reforged a bond that I'd been robbed of: there had never been a chance of beer and football with my own dad. As I looked up at the stars on that clear night, I smiled wryly. The moon cast its dark shadow: as with those Liverpool fans earlier, I was also in the shadow of English football's unresolved past – a whole generation on.

Part One

'The blue days of summer when Valley Parade almost became the valley of death are gone for good'

Jim Greenhalf, Bradford *Telegraph & Argus*, 24 December 1984

The Fletchers

‘What about this one, son?’ Dad asked, as I opened the turf-green changing-room curtains in the dimly lit sports-shop basement. Standing there, excited and smiling, he held up a tatty looking white polyester shirt. It had an ugly claret collar and an odd claret-and-amber stripe across its shoulder. There was no badge on this orphan of a shirt. It was no great surprise it lay unclaimed.

I was confused as to why my fashionably rugged, prosperous 30-year-old dad might ever suggest such a shirt. Being just eight it hadn’t occurred to me there was anything odd in his insistence on visiting his home city of Bradford that Saturday afternoon to pick out my first football shirt for school PE lessons – and not Mum’s home city of Leeds, where we usually shopped and where nobody would have stocked such a shirt. Dad must have cajoled the owner to rescue it from a store cupboard. I laughed when the owner brought it out, wondering what it was. I thought it was a wind-up. I was just waiting for the punchline to some joke.

‘That’s Bradford City, son,’ Dad said, nodding proudly at the shirt. The shirt was actually new stock, delivered from Valley Parade on that morning, the opening day of the 1981–82 season.

‘Bradford City? No way. They’re rubbish!’ I shot back.

Bradford had been trapped in English football’s basement fourth division for all but one of the past ten seasons and marooned in its bottom two divisions for 44 years. Their best finishes in that time had been seventh and tenth in Division 3, or 51st and 54th in the Football League. They were shit and they knew they were.

Dad surprised me as, rather than smile, he seemed a little hurt. Mum said later she felt sorry for him as he pointed out to me that they were his team. ‘Yeah, well, they’re not mine!’ I’d replied with the callowness of youth. But he persisted, hoping, no doubt, I’d copy him as I so often did. The thing was, I copied my dad because he was cool – he had the movie-star looks of a young Burt Reynolds coupled with a Tom Selleck moustache – and this shirt, this club, was anything but cool. ‘C’mon,’ I thought. ‘He must be joking. Not a chance.’ I drew the curtain closed, my mind firmly made up.

But people often told me, ‘Your dad could sell ice to the Eskimos.’ So little did I know my first ‘no’ was simply his opening gambit, an intelligence-gathering raid to ascertain my objections and protests, before finding a way to overcome them. He was an out and out salesman at heart. Never accept that first ‘no’ – nor the second, nor the third. Keep on till that ‘no’ becomes a ‘yes’.

I should have known better. On our way to Corinth Canal, a key Second World War battleground on holiday in Greece that summer, I’d told him, ‘I hate the Germans.’ Taken aback, he explained that war was over and Germany, indeed Europe, was a very different place now, but I was not for shifting and it seemed Dad had given up trying to talk me round when, the next night, a tall, leggy, beautiful Teutonic blonde came to the table at our beachside hotel to ask me to dance in order to help improve Anglo-German relations. As we danced I fell under her beguiling spell, and after a few songs she walked me back to my table, hand in hand, wondering, ‘Did you have a good time?’ I nodded enthusiastically. She confided that my dad had told her I didn’t like Germans, adding, ‘Is this true? I am German.’ Smiling, I shook my head, assuring her it was all some misunderstanding. After she kissed me goodnight and went back to her table, my dad broke into a broad grin and asked, ‘So, you

like Germans now, son?' I've never had a problem with Germans since.

Weeks later, I drew the Bradford sports-shop curtain back open, and Dad was smiling again. 'So you made your mind up, son?' he asked.

'Yeah, this one, Dad,' I told him, as I held up a nifty white cotton shirt, complete with black individual triangular Umbro logos trailing all down the sleeves, a red-and-black stripe running diagonally down the front – like on an Embassy cigarette packet – and a beautiful badge depicting a galleon that had set sail to an unknown destination beneath an azure sky. Below that a red rose lay on a white background, around which bold, black lettering proudly proclaimed: MANCHESTER CITY F.C.

'You're the wrong side of the Pennines for that, you know,' Dad told me.

But he agreed to get it, before picking up the Bradford shirt again. 'OK, but are you sure you won't try this on?' he asked. 'It's the right City shirt for you, it's just you haven't realised it yet . . . and if you like it, I'll get you both. Go on.' He winked at me.

It was a nice try, but he was up against his own son here.

Still, he must have been reasonably happy at my choice. Manchester City had played Tottenham Hotspur in that year's centenary FA Cup final. In an era where the FA Cup final was the only English club match televised live, the afternoon saw red-blooded Englishmen glued to their TV sets across the land. That May Dad had invited friends round and told me I could watch it with them, but only if I supported 'the northern team'.

As the brass band had played the traditional FA Cup final hymn, 'Abide With Me', on the Wembley pitch, Mum brought in some chilled cans of beer. There were several spare, clearly enough to last the half. As they stood on the carpet, by the couch, I adopted Dad's favourite adage: 'If you don't ask, you don't get.' So, pointing at the cans, a cheeky smile on my face, I asked, 'Dad, can I have one?' He almost spat his beer out, and told me, 'No, son, you can't!'

But the laughter that filled the room simply encouraged me further: 'Why not, Dad? Everyone else is having one and it's Cup final day.'

'Your mother wouldn't like it,' was the best he could come up with.

I persisted. 'But if you don't tell her, well, I won't!' I winked.

The young, appreciative crowd were now beside themselves in hysterics, urging Dad to let me have a sip. Playing to the room, I made some comment about him saying he always wanted me to be 'one of the boys'.

So Dad gingerly passed me my first ever beer, and after I'd opened the can and taken my first sip of this mysteriously pungent and overpowering concoction, he asked me what I thought.

It was strong, for sure, but I was not going to lose face now. I told him, 'It's great, Dad, can I keep it?' 'It?' 'Yes, it's great, Dad, can I keep it?'

'OK, son,' he said, but told me to keep it hidden from view in case Mum came in.

I hid it by the blindside of my chair, taking little sips during a first half that saw Manchester City take the lead with a flying Tommy Hutchison header.

The second half started. I wondered if I could have another beer.

'Are you being serious!' Dad asked in his best John McEnroe voice. 'Are you sure you're feeling OK?' Laughter once more filled the room. Then, incredibly, he handed me a second can. 'Don't drink it too quickly,' he told me, and, thinking back, I'm sure he was weighing up me puking over the carpet (hence trouble with Mum) with a bit of father-son bonding, working up the double act we'd become.

It was certainly a liberal attitude to alcohol, but our young parents must have decided that when we drank for the first time they'd rather we did it safely at home, than with friends on some wasteland. My sips slowed, and though I remember Glenn Hoddle's free-kick with 11 minutes left – which

Manchester City goalkeeper Joe Corrigan had covered, till it cruelly deflected off Tommy Hutchison's head into the opposite corner – I fell asleep and woke disappointed to find the Cup final over and Dad's mates gone.

Little did I know that my first beers watching football with my dad would be my last.

Once I'd chosen the shirt of the team he'd told me to support, Dad must have known he'd soon have me cheering on the right City, his City. So was it any wonder he was grinning as he paid? He knew I was under his, and football's, laddish spell.

Dad had fallen under the spell of Bradford City at Hanson Grammar School where, in the appropriately named Bank Top district, his classrooms offered a fine vista over the bowl of a city which he'd grown up, enclosed by three, all-encompassing valley slopes. Two miles away, where the opposite valley began to rise, was an odd little three-sided football ground, over which four floodlight pylons towered. It was not long before his own curiosity struck, and Dad visited Valley Parade with some school friends, who included future Yorkshire cricketer David Bairstow, and Dad's younger brother Peter, who'd pestered their mum to go along too.

Dad adored the valley where he was born. Christened in Bradford Cathedral, he saw beyond its imposing post-war planning monstrosities and championed its hidden rugged Victorian sandstone beauty. Today, those monstrosities mostly levelled and its original sightlines restored, Bradford, with 5,000 listed buildings and 59 conservation areas, is an undiscovered gem. It expanded rapidly as the Industrial Revolution took hold and, as such, is perhaps Britain's best monument to Victorian architecture. No expense was spared – in the grandeur of the Wool Exchange, and the ornate Venetian gothic of City Hall, it's possible to see that, like mercantile centres the world over, Bradford was briefly one of the world's wealthiest cities.

Yet its wealth was one of the most unevenly distributed the Western world had ever seen. It belonged to merchants, whose Yorkstone warehouses filled the skyline, and a handful of monopolistic mill owners who made spectacular fortunes from beautiful, gargantuan factories on the sweat, toil and bodily health of the rest of the townsfolk trapped in narrow back-to-back unplumbed slums at the bottom of the valley – into which countless factory chimneys belched poisonous black smoke. Those that could afford to headed to the upper slopes in order to leave the squalor of the spoiled valley behind.

Bradford spawned characters not even Charles Dickens dared dream up. Samuel Lister had built the world's largest factory from the ashes of an 1871 fire – it spanned 109,000 square metres, had a colossal chimney (still in place) and once employed 11,000 workers. Until recent times the huge mill resembled some ornate structure from Detroit, but today Lister's Manningham Mills have been converted into luxury apartments, whose fine, sandstone exterior conceals a darkness at the heart of the mammoth structure. Back in December 1890 Lister told his workforce to accept a 25 per cent pay cut from Christmas Eve, or face a post-Christmas lock-out. A strike followed and the workers organised themselves into the Bradford Labour Union. Although this Scrooge of a man would defeat his workers after five long, bitter months, the members of the Labour Union would go on to form the Independent Labour Party, which, in turn, eventually gave birth to the Labour Party that would do so much to defeat the Samuel Listers of this world.

Today, Bradford's skyline is dominated not only by the nineteenth-century Italianate architecture of Lister's Mill but also a neighbouring monument to Sky's twenty-first-century Premier League riches: the rebuilt Valley Parade.

As for Lister, he is now portrayed as a paternalistic benefactor to the city, immortalised in Sicilia

marble in a statue that stands in Lister Park – on land he donated to the townsfolk, for which they a no doubt expected to be grateful, and which for me best explains Bradford. On the one hand Bradford is a city that has a history of organised resistance; but on the other it's a place of doffed flat caps and stiff upper lips, where its pragmatic people would do whatever they could for their fellow man, while simultaneously accepting the injustices that were administered by the few with a resignation that the boat best not be rocked as there's 'now't you can do, lad' or 'past is past, you can't change it'. If you were born there, chances are you'd stay there – 'Tha' were a good mill, son. Good prospects.'

The Fletcher family had been in Bradford since the turn of the twentieth century. My usual guarded granddad, Eddie, told me that we had descended from the great nineteenth-century Birmingham inventor Sir Alfred Bird, son of Eton school astronomy lecturer John Bird who, as a chemist, was the Heston Blumenthal of his day, inventing Bird's Custard Powder to cope with his wife's food allergy, then baking powder, blancmange and jelly powder, which his children commercialised into some of Britain's best known food products.

'So, Granddad,' I asked, 'does that mean we're rich, then?'

'No, son,' he told me with a rueful smile. 'It just means that my granddad was rich.'

His Granddad Bird was a major shareholder in his father's company, Alfred Bird & Sons, but had sold out. So, as one son and grandson of the great inventor went on to become a Conservative MP and Baron of Solihull in the County of Warwick, another son and granddaughter, Nora, my great grandma, born with servants at hand, died, after a life of struggle, in a Bradford council flat in the 1970s. When I asked what had happened to the money, Granddad told me it had simply gone. I was left stunned at how such a world of privilege could simply disappear. Granddad, himself a man of few words, never really elaborated on what had happened to the money. He was someone who refused to have a bank account, thinking his money was safer in an empty house. 'Never trust a banker, son,' I remember him telling me.

My granddad had been left to rebuild his life from the ground up. But then he lost his youth, being just 17 when the Second World War broke out. Like most of his generation, he rarely mentioned the war. My grandma once told me he'd gone missing in the Pacific and was presumed dead. But he miraculously reappeared and they were quickly wed in Grandma's home town of Barnsley in 1945. Not that he ever told her about the war either – but, as with so many Pacific troops, his life was less blighted by illness, his experiences never really leaving him, either physically or mentally.

Growing up with an ill father, my dad was a firm believer in living for the moment, and in the moment, as you never knew when such moments might end. He believed it best to be positive, to take in your stride whatever life threw at you and never allow yourself to be bitter about what you did not have. It was why he'd told me you had to play your hand in life as best you could, as the dealer will never give you another, so you had best find a way to stay in the game and hope your hand improved.

Dad had left Bradford for Leeds in his mid-teens when his parents took on the British Queen pub in Hunslet, a rough, working-class area of the inner city, within walking distance of Tetley's Brewery and Elland Road. Although he stayed on at Hanson Grammar School, Dad was nothing but a charming underachiever and left at 16 with two O levels and an uncertain future. However, the mid-sixties was a time of plentiful employment, and he quickly found work as an 'office boy' at the Gelderd Road head offices of Leeds-based coach company Wallace Arnold. One afternoon Dad took a call intended for his colleague, Anne. Ever the charmer Dad took the chance to chat to the girl whose voice had immediately smitten him. Once the forwarded call was over, Dad asked Anne who the lovely sounding girl was, to which Anne told him it was her friend, Sue, who she was meeting later.

Ever the opportunist, my dad enquired, 'Do you mind if I come along?'

‘Yes, I do,’ Anne replied – her plans for a girls’ night out did not include having 16-year-old officious juniors in tow. ‘Forget her, John. She’s out of your league.’

So then he suggested meeting Sue first, because he ‘only needed half an hour’!

‘You’re full of it, John Fletcher,’ Anne declared. ‘I bet you’d never turn up anyway.’

‘I bet I would.’ And with that, Dad got his half hour (and won the bet).

He spotted the small, pretty 16-year-old brunette outside the Corn Exchange in Leeds city centre and explained he was the John she’d spoken to on the phone earlier: ‘I’ve just come to let you know Anne’s running half an hour behind at work. Do you fancy getting a coffee while you wait?’ She agreed, and Dad had his window of opportunity. Mum can’t remember what they’d talked about, but he’d had an easy manner, and it was pretty much love at first sight. They agreed to meet again.

Sue Reed had had a rough few years, losing her dad, whom she idolised, to an unexpected heart attack a month after her twelfth birthday. With no siblings, she was left with a mother who’d always resented her very presence. With her dad around, tensions were ever present, simmering in the background; in his absence Sue was regularly beaten and browbeaten. She coped by seeking sanctuary from her troubled Harehills home at her grandparents’, a mile away, and with friends at the local coffee bar. At weekends she taught Sunday School and got herself a Saturday job on the Boots make-up counter in the city centre. She’d often visit her dad’s old print colleagues at the *Yorkshire Post* and watch the papers fly off their giant rollers. She retained a heart of gold and a belief that, one day, she’d find a happy life.

Her dad had called her his ‘little scrum-half’ but, in the end, like all good scrum-halves, she rebelled. Attractive, though never growing beyond her pre-teen five feet, she was an early developer nicknamed ‘Topsy’ by her friends – and, thanks to her Saturday job, was always immaculate. She’d always been a sports fan, having earned the ‘scrum-half’ sobriquet after giving up on an argument with a bunch of boys who’d not let her join their game of street football, picking up their ball and running – like a good scrum-half. Her dad was a Leeds United fan, though he died a year before they were promoted to the top flight under Don Revie – and a year later Mum walked home from her grandparents’ in tears after Leeds lost the 1965 FA Cup final to Liverpool, 2–1 after extra-time. A male admirer once took her to Elland Road where, unable to see from the terraces, she climbed a floodlight pylon, and on being asked by a police officer to come down, she replied, ‘No, I can’t see from down there!’

Where Anne at Wallace Arnold was sceptical, Mum could see ‘potential’ in my charming and impudent dad – as well as a fellow kind soul whom she could ‘mould’. She soon became part of Dad’s large family, centred largely around the British Queen, his mum, Edna, ‘more of a mother to me than mine ever was’. Ever the entrepreneur, my grandma found a novel way of clearing slow-moving and out-of-date stock from the pub by placing it on the bottom shelf – all of her customers suddenly keen for the pretty, young barmaid to bend down in her miniskirt and retrieve another bag of Golden Wonder crisps.

John and Sue were engaged after a year. To save the deposit for their first home – a new three-bedroom semi with a long rolling garden in Birstall – they never went out, taking pub shifts in addition to their day jobs. Dad had now started to deploy his persuasive charms in a series of sales roles, ending up with metals stockholders Aalco, while Mum, who’d topped her secretarial college class, worked as a PA. They were so clearly in love that whenever they tried to cuddle on the couch the pub dog, Rif, previously the apple of my dad’s eye, would jump jealously in between them.

It took them three years to save their deposit, and once they had they were wed – both aged 20 – on 18 September 1971, on what should have been the bride’s father’s seventieth birthday. There was no

extravagant wedding nor a honeymoon – all that was much less a priority than the house John and Susan hoped would be the foundation of their new happiness – and within six months family life beckoned. They'd never planned to have a family so quickly, but, for Mum's twenty-first birthday, 15 March 1972, Dad bought her a fashionable fur coat and, in the throes of a passionate thank-you, an accident happened and I arrived nine months later, on 12 December. I know there was a time before my brother Andrew was around, it's just I can't remember it, as he arrived when I was 16 months old. Whatever Mum did with him, I wanted to help. Andrew was walking at nine months then climbing my slide at 12 months. We were so close we were often mistaken for twins.

At the age of 27 our parents moved to a brand-new four-bedroom executive detached house. On the upper slopes of the suburban Spenn Valley, in Upper Batley, we could now see our old house at the bottom of the cut, a mile away; and beyond that to the Emley Moor TV mast at the top of the opposite valley. Dad had started out renting a tiny office space in Hull for Aalco, selling steel and other metals to firms along the east coast during the 1970s North Sea oil and gas boom. In no time he was managing director of a successful metals stockholding company with a large warehouse and a seven-figure turnover. A contemporary of David Murray – the former Rangers chairman started at Aalco at the same time as Dad before setting up Murray Steel – Dad also had the former Blackburn Rovers chairman, Jack Walker of Walker Steel, as a customer. Future managing director of the FTSE-listed Amari Plastics, Alex Millar – a former footballer who'd played for Partick Thistle – had backed Dad on his venture in Hull and earmarked him as his long-term successor. Dad also knew the son of the Leeds United chairman who'd appointed Don Revie – and for my ninth birthday I received a signed Mitre 25 Max match ball from that season's Leeds United v Manchester United fixture. At 26, Dad was sporting a moustache (to add a dash of man-of-the-world gravitas), wearing nice suits and smoking King Edward cigars. He was popular with his customers; he'd come a long way from selling coach trips to Mablethorpe. Dad being Dad, he blagged it all like a dream.

We had such active childhoods. Wilton Park was at the bottom of Merlin Court, which was a wooded area that led down to Batley Park a mile away. The park and the Woodlands estate, full of cul-de-sacs and spacious four-bedroom homes, became our childhood playgrounds, me riding about on my gold Raleigh Grifter, Andrew on his blue Raleigh Boxer. At first we shared a bedroom, but I loved life so much I'd wake at dawn then wake my playmate – it wasn't long before Andrew grew tired, and we were given separate rooms. The fourth bedroom was turned into a games room, in which we had a dartboard and pool table, often customised for snooker and Subbuteo. We'd also play Yahtzee, board games like BP Offshore Oil Strike and Monopoly, or on our Atari and Ingersoll games consoles in the lounge. Dad would spend his weekends playing with us, and we never wanted for hugs. We were all so happy.

Meanwhile, Grandma had left the pub trade. She helped her youngest son, Peter, and son-in-law Mike Moss, build F&M Vendors, an Armley-based business that supplied cigarette vending machines to the Leeds pub trade she knew so well. In school holidays Andrew and I would pack cigarette packets into boxes for customers, and we'd use the giant, noisy coin-counter to bag up money from the machines. F&M Vendors' success led to Uncle Peter buying a furnished holiday caravan let, a house in Pudsey, and a second home in Gildersome. Then he opened a newsagent's famed for its cut-price cigarettes – all by the age of 30.

We should have been poster children for Thatcherism – only we were football fans.

Football

I can't pinpoint the precise moment football entered my life. That would be like asking someone who has gone to church every Sunday since they were born when they first became aware of God.

My first memory of football was a scene from my grandparents' house: a lounge door opened, and I saw football lit up on the TV in the corner of a crowded, darkened room. Excited, I ran towards it. My earliest memory of Bradford City had been of Dad leaving me. Standing on Foster Square, in the shadow of Bradford Cathedral, he'd told me he had to go now. When I asked where he was going, he said, 'I'm going to the football.' I demanded that he take me, but he pointed out I'd be too small to see. As Dad walked towards Valley Parade, Mum hugged me. I was inconsolable, somehow convinced I'd never see him again. Bradford City lost an FA Cup quarter-final to Southampton that afternoon. It was 1976, Southampton went on to win it; I was three.

That summer I'd wake to news of a fire. All along Smithies Moor Lane, people stood in their front gardens while smoke billowed hundreds of feet into a clear sky from the textiles factory at the top of our street. As the building became totally consumed in fire I could feel the heat on my face. Some who worked there started to cry – they knew it would never be rebuilt.

It was in the back garden of that house on Smithies Moor Lane that I first played football. I have a distant memory of Dad firing a high shot at me in goal. I was too short to reach it, and as the ball smashed against the kitchen window we both apologised to Mum, who was glaring through the other side. We moved from there when I was five.

At our school, Birstall County, Topps Trading Cards were big. We'd line stake cards up against the bottom of a wall and take turns to skim more cards at them, like Frisbees – whoever knocked down the last card would not only win all the stake cards, but all the thrown cards too. They came five to a pack with Bazooka Joe chewing gum – but one sunny day, as Mum made lunch, I decided her spotless shiny green Renault 12, parked on the drive, would look better with a touch of *Starsky & Hutch* about it. So I took the gum out of my mouth and ran a long, white stripe down the driver's door. As we had lunch I baked on in the heat and wouldn't come off without marking Mum's pride and joy, so she banned me from buying gum until Hubba Bubba invented a non-stick variety. This left me having to hand-pick my opponents like a boxing promoter to ensure that I never ran out of cards; cards now so precious I'd lie in bed memorising local lad Frank Worthington's goal-scoring stats, how Bryan Robson had somehow played 23 games and scored 8 goals for West Brom despite breaking his leg three times in a season, and even the height and weight of Jimmy Rimmer – just in case I lost them for ever.

It would have been August 1980, and I remember talking with Andrew in our bunk beds at Uncle Peter's two-bedroom caravan in Primrose Valley, on Yorkshire's east coast, when we heard a loud cheer come from Dad in the lounge. The *News at Ten* headlines had declared Bradford City had beaten league champions Liverpool, 1–0, in the League Cup. The next day Dad walked around the caravan park and its amusement arcade, proud, for once, to tell everyone about his team. Although it was only the first leg, so he knew they'd lose overall (as they did, 4–0, at Anfield), nothing could dim his obvious pride and happiness that day. That was the first Bradford City score I remember.

It was later that season, as I watched Big Daddy wrestle on ITV's *World of Sport* on the TV

Grandma's lounge, that places, followed by numbers, kept appearing under the word 'latest' on the screen. With the men of the family out, my cousin Chris asked what they were, and I suggested results from other bouts, only for Grandma to reveal they were football scores. This inspired me to pick up one of Uncle Peter's blue football bibles, his *Rothmans Football Yearbooks*. I started to thumb through the thousand pages – and I'd never really stop, as I learnt about each English and Scottish club, their records, scores, players and their season by season league and Cup performances. Before long I was doing the same for clubs and countries in international competitions. Pretty quickly I became a walking football encyclopaedia, solving playground disputes with my (not so little) blue book.

This absorption of facts and figures led to a new understanding of what Bradford City meant to the world of football – in truth, not a great deal. They'd been the first team to win the newly designed Football Cup in 1911, in the first year it was contested . . . and they'd been West Yorkshire's first Football League side . . . and that was about it.

One Wednesday evening my dad asked me, 'Do you want to go to the football on Saturday?'

Somehow immediately sensing the question was loaded, I replied, 'It depends . . . where?'

Grinning, he said, 'Bradford City, son.'

Full of my new-found love of stats, I told him they'd just drawn their lowest ever crowd in 77 years – 1,249 – to their final home match at the end of the previous season, and that I wasn't up for such rubbish.

'Aha, that might have been so, but it's not the case any more,' he fired back. 'What if I told you they won their last home match 6–2 and won 1–5 away last night? They have a new manager who used to play for England, but who now plays for Bradford.'

This tall tale was getting taller by the second.

'Someone I know you've heard of – Roy McFarland – Derby's old captain.'

I wondered how a man who'd twice won the Football League could ever wash up in a backwater like Bradford.

The answer was that Bradford were apparently 'finally going places'.

Which was odd, because this was a club that had never gone places before. My dad then changed tack, and talked of how going to Valley Parade had been something he'd done with my uncle Peter when they were kids – but it was something they hadn't done with their dad, and so were more than keen to take their own kids.

I agreed to go but remained unconvinced, somehow resisting the lure of having Bradford as my team.

'Look, I'm not asking that you support only one team. You can support whatever other club you like,' was Dad's deal clincher. 'But your local side, you should always support your local side.'

Dad's saving grace was that back then supporting your local team really did mean everything. In 1981 the Football League was still two years from televising its first ever live match, so if you wanted to watch football live, and have a real affinity with a team, you really did have to look on your own doorstep.

To non Sky Sports subscribers it would have been an instantly recognisable world. Saturday lunchtimes kicked off with *Football Focus*, with the added bonus of ITV's *On the Ball* once they finished. Then, on the way to the ground the car radio would be tuned to local stations for news of your team. After the match you'd listen to the local radio reports before tuning into *Sports Report* which began, as it does today, at 5 p.m., with same theme tune, headlines, classified results (sadly no longer with James Alexander Gordon), reports, news and interviews. Saturday night meant *Match of the Day*, with extended highlights from just two or three pre-selected games, as BBC produced

gambled on where the day's best action might be; Sunday afternoon brought a regional ITV highlight show, just after lunch.

This was a world where 92 professional football clubs were divided into four divisions, simply called Divisions 1, 2, 3 and 4, as they had been for nearly a century.

Mum, despite her allegiance to Leeds United, was happy for us to go to Valley Parade. Racism and hooliganism had blighted Leeds' seven-year descent from a European Cup final in 1975 to the eventual relegation in the spring of 1982. School friends had tales of coins, darts, pool balls and sea being thrown by supporters around them. So if we were to watch our football locally, she thought we at least be safe doing so at Valley Parade.

Dad, however, was clearly embarrassed by Valley Parade: as the big day dawned, having championed his club's cause, he warned me, 'Don't expect too much tomorrow, son. The football is one thing, but the ground . . . just don't expect it to be like those on TV.'

I wouldn't, I assured him, shutting my eyes to imagine a sparse crowd in the smallest most run-down stadium, something that belonged in the basement of English football's pyramid not in the professional Football League.

So Dad's warning meant that, as we parked up on Thorncliffe Road the next day, I was not disappointed by what met us. We climbed on to a large sloping grass bank, where the thousands who passed over it each home match had worn out mud pathways that branched off in three separate directions towards the ground. Trees stood behind the Kop, and to reach the Main Stand you passed down a waterlogged dirt track that, with its loose uneven mix of mud and stones, was more like a builder's yard. It was narrow too, no more than a car's width, and bordered on one side by a mesh wire-topped fence that ran opposite the Kop wall and which seemed to guard nothing but yet more grass. This dirt track led out on to South Parade, a dead-end cobbled Victorian street that ran behind the Main Stand. A programme seller standing in front of a wooden block of turnstiles sold Dad a match programme for 30p, which he then handed to me with its flame-orange cover, a smoky black industrial haze superimposed over the outline of the back of a stand.

We then walked down South Parade, avoiding the puddles between its cobbles. A third of the way down we passed some brick huts, built back from the perimeter wall, which housed four waist-high turnstiles, over which lay loose, rusty sheets of corrugated iron. A little further along South Parade we stopped by a larger set of four brick huts, all with the same loose, rusted corrugated iron roofing. These housed some pretty grim toilets, the club shop, a storeroom and more turnstiles.

The stand had been built into a steep valley slope, so the brick huts sort of squatted on South Parade's pavement, the first one on the corner overlooking the open terrace, the Kop and the pitch below. The others were built into the back of the stand. In the middle of those huts, about opposite the halfway line was a recessed gap where some claret-painted, wooden double doors opened at full time allowing fans to flood out on to the pavement after the match. There was a similar exit a bit further along, and another right at the end, by the clubhouse. Down the full length of the stand were a bunch of single doors, no longer in use, all boarded up like those you saw in the old Wild West comics. The stand was a bit odd in that you had to sort of climb *down* into it.

Once through the turnstiles of the Main Stand you found yourself in a low, dark concrete corridor. It was as narrow as a pavement, running the length of the stand. It can't have been more than four feet across, bordered on the far side by a claret wooden wall, too high for a kid to see over – which made all the more exciting when you passed one of the stand's narrow stairwells and caught a flash of the drop and the bright green pitch deep below, beyond the gloomy corridor.

Suspended in coiled steel by each stairwell were large, claret wooden boards with huge amb

letters painted over them – ‘A’ through to ‘G’ – alphabetically marking out each seating block as you walked down the corridor. G Block was at the top end, near the Kop; A Block down by the clubhouse. We had tickets for C Block, not far from the halfway line. Each block’s stairwell cut a path down through the seats into what were effectively partitioned-off boxes. There were only two small gaps allowing you access further down into the stand; so, unless you were at the bottom of the stairwell between blocks E and F, or blocks B and C, you’d have to come back up each stairwell to get on again. The seats themselves were effectively claret-painted planks of wood, suspended and supported by blocks of wood at either end and divided up by steel markers into individual bench seats. The markers and the end blocks were nailed to some sturdy-looking wooden floorboards that had been laid over wooden sleepers set into the valley. The numbers on the benches were painted in a strangely stylish art deco white Bauhaus script, marking out each of the ten seats on each row – that may have been decorous by 1908 standards, but seventy years later it wasn’t what you’d call luxury. It was neat and orderly, though, in an old world kind of a way; but the problem was every seat offered the same severely restricted view, with black metal supports shooting up every five metres or so at the front of the stand, like upturned lines on a NFL field, to support a double-gabled roof – covered piecemeal over the years by several layers of bitumen felt, and sporting a jagged wooden fascia that merely added to the impression of sitting in a rickety old showground stand. Walking along the narrow corridor at the back of the stand was not dissimilar to walking along a non-moving old-fashioned canal walk, albeit one in a high-sided fairground, wood panels painted in a thick amber and claret glow everywhere – and with a forty-foot drop through the seating down to the paddock and pitch below. The football grounds writer Simon Inglis, writing before the fire, said it was ‘like watching football from the cockpit of a Sopwith Camel’, and he was right, it was like watching a match sitting in a bi-plane. The Main Stand was truly a museum piece in every way.

You could always pick up the lingering scent of pipe smoke and fags in there too. People had smoked in that stand since it was first built, in 1908. Apart from the 1950s-looking council house (the ‘new’ clubhouse) that had truncated the far end of the structure, the Main Stand had remained pretty much unchanged for more than 70 years. Certainly this was the case in those elevated boxed-off sections – fans sitting either side of the directors’ box and press box, which sat high above the halfway line, surrounded by wooden panels, wooden benches, and timbers supporting a wooden roof. The Main Stand wasn’t short of combustible materials, especially to the rear, where the sectioned-off bench seats ran the length of the stand and were separated off from the strip of 1960s plastic seats below by a high, amber-painted wooden wall that had only a couple of gaps, either side of the halfway line. The plastic seats had in turn eaten into the paddock terrace of concrete steps which formed the bottom strip, or layer, as it were, and surrounded the dug-outs before curving back up by G Block, right to the top of the slope. The hard nuts tended to stand at the top of this terrace, but they were divided off from the G Block seats by another painted wooden wall with spiked metal railings on top. It wasn’t that easy to get in these rear seats; and it wasn’t that easy to get out.

It will be hard for kids growing up today, used to modern, all-seater stadiums, to visualise the ramshackle, hotchpotch nature of a ground like Valley Parade. There we were in its Main Stand perched precariously on the valley slope, opposite which sat the Midland Road terrace – essentially a long elongated bus shelter with a sheer 30-foot drop behind it, over which balls would fly so often that the club employed people to collect them from the scrubland below. The vast, unroofed, crumbling terrace of the Kop sat to our left, and the small cattle shed of the Bradford End was to our right – all of which left the pitch exposed to harsh unpredictable swirling valley winds that caused the rain to bash down so hard that the stand roof sprang leaks all along it.

‘C’mon, Colchester,’ I sporadically hollered in the first half, and as Colchester went 1–0 up cheered, before applauding them off at half-time.

During the break a middle-aged man on the row in front of us turned and asked Dad, ‘First game with them?’

‘Aye, sorry, maybe he’ll actually start supporting the right team in the second half.’

‘You know what? I think you’ve got the right idea, son,’ the man told me. ‘Wish I wasn’t a City fan – would have saved me a lot of misery.’

‘Aye, maybe, but as I keep telling ’em: you’ve got to support your local side,’ Dad insisted.

‘Aye, but have you never considered moving?’ he joked.

We laughed, then Dad asked, ‘So, who will you be supporting at your next match, son?’

‘Not sure, Dad. Who will Bradford be playing?’ which prompted more laughter all round.

I must have cottoned on early to the fact that it was the banter that made the football: as the team came back out for the second half I supported the same team as all those around me, cheering Bradford fought back to win 2–1. A fortnight later we were back, as Bradford overturned another half-time deficit to beat Aldershot 4–1, a victory that put us top. Dad had suggested I try supporting Bradford, and I loved it – the camaraderie, the banter, the noise, the abrasive language, the adult humour – it was the epitome of a secret little boys’ club, something confirmed by Mum proclaiming over roast dinner that night, ‘What you hear at the football, stays at the football.’

So, weeks later, I was surprised to find a match programme at my grandparents’ from the Port Vale match the previous Wednesday. Grandma told me Dad had gone with Granddad and Uncle Peter, but he’d not mentioned it. Feeling snubbed, as we headed to Valley Parade the next day I asked him why he hadn’t take us on Wednesday.

‘It was a school-night, Martin. I didn’t get home till past your bedtimes – anyway, I didn’t think you’d mind.’

‘*What!?*’ I protested.

So, in little more than a month, Dad had turned me from not wanting to go anywhere near Valley Parade, to having me plead to go to every match with him. His timing couldn’t have been better. Bradford were about to make the long trip to Suffolk, for a third-round League Cup tie against UEFA Cup holders Ipswich Town, who’d just finished runners-up in the league and were managed by Bobby Robson. Against the odds, we drew 1–1. This allowed Dad to pitch to Mum an idea first aired after my Port Vale protest: maybe he’d be best picking up season tickets, as not only would it guarantee us seats for the replay, but in getting regular seats on the back row we could get a better view by standing on the wooden bench. Mum agreed, so we got four season tickets on the back row of C Block. On our first night there, the night of the Ipswich replay, Bradford took a 1–0 lead, before falling behind 1–2 then equalising in the final minutes to take the thrilling tie to extra-time, which we lost 2–3, but left Bobby Robson declaring it to have been as tough as any European match.

In the Main Stand we had our own way of creating a hostile European atmosphere. We’d slap our palms on our wooden bench seats, and stamp our feet on the angled wooden boards beneath us designed to rest your feet on. This was a practised art, which required slapping those foot boards with just enough force to create an echo but not so much as to kick them in. Dad told me to be careful, but one Saturday, in the excitement I smacked my heel down with such force that the board broke, leaving me with just the wooden banister beside me to slap. Although my board was never replaced, it was the only missing board I can remember on that row. If people took care not to kick them in, they also took more care generally back then. As I discovered one half-time when I screwed up a Kit-Kat wrapper then dropped it through the hole under my seat.

'You idiot. What did you do that for?' Dad scolded me.

Taken aback by Dad's ferocity, I asked, 'What?'

'Dropping litter under a stand like this. Can't you see it's made out of wood?'

'Yeah, so?' I asked.

'So . . . !' I was told, 'It's a fire risk!'

As I looked around for support from those I usually bantered with, it was clear I had none. They all silently nodded their heads in agreement. I was so embarrassed I ended up on my stomach, putting my arm through the void, trying to fish out my Kit-Kat wrapper, but all I could feel were cobwebs. There was nothing to drag out. Dad said, 'Forget it, but make sure you never do that again – OK?' I agreed and sheepishly dragged my cobweb-covered arm out, got back to my feet and padded down my blue parka.

I usually sat on the end of our row, with Andrew on my left, Dad to his left, next to his own brother Uncle Peter. Most games I'd stand on the bench to leap over the waist-high gated claret wooden banister to my right that separated B and C blocks – the speediest route to the wooden tea hut built over what would have been the three rear rows of B Block. Like the banister, the tea hut was daubed in claret gloss paint; in winter its glass windows misted over as the giant metal urns and pie ovens gave off steam, the smell of pies and Bovril wafting easily as far as my seat on the other side of the stairwell. I'd leap over five or ten minutes before half-time to beat the rush. Sometimes I'd make it back, and be standing on my bench listening to the half-time scores, looking back over the wooden partition while munching on a paper bag full of Sports Mixture (2p each) and drinking from a 15p can of Lockwoods cola, as people jostled down a corridor so narrow only two could pass down it at a time. That always made for entertaining half-time scrums around the snack bar.

During the course of my first season, 1981–82, Bradford City certainly dispelled any notion that they were rubbish. OK, it may have been the old fourth division, but Bradford won the first five league games I saw at Valley Parade and, out of my first twenty league matches there, lost just once, in the final minute of a 3–4 thriller to Mansfield Town on a windswept, waterlogged pitch on a stormy January night. An even wilder, wetter March night saw a gusty wind carry the Stockport County goalkeeper's kick to the opposing penalty area, where Bradford's reliable veteran goalkeeper, Neil Ramsbottom, slipped on coming out to collect the ball and let it bounce over his prone body into an empty net. It was the only goal of the game, until the final fifteen minutes, when Bradford promptly scored five. In my first local derby we beat Halifax Town 5–2, centre-forward Bobby Campbell scoring a hat-trick. His support striker David McNiven then scored four first-half goals in the penultimate home match of the season as we beat Crewe 4–1. In the final home match of that year against Bournemouth, needing a point to go up, Bobby Campbell gave us a 1–0 lead, before Bournemouth, also seeking promotion, went 1–2 up when, in the final minute, Campbell, midway in his own half, let fly with a stunning shot that rocketed into the bottom right-hand corner. Hundreds swarmed on to the pitch in celebration.

Thousands more followed at full time to celebrate our second promotion in fourteen years. The half of the pitch nearest the clubhouse was packed full of cheering fans as the semi-naked players, many in just their underwear, having been stripped of their kits, came out on to the clubhouse balcony. A right-back, Ces Podd, our all-time-record appearance holder, was too composed a player to ever spend a career in the lower divisions, but a St Kitts-born Leeds lad, he loved a club where there was never any racism. Another denied his chance was powerfully built Dominican-born Joe Cooke, his trademark throw-ins as long and accurate as a corner kick. In midfield, Barry Gallagher averaged a goal every three games with his pile-driving free-kicks. Up front was our leader, Bobby Campbell,

tank of a man who played as if ploughing through the trenches, putting his neck where most feared to put their feet, ably supported by ‘Daisy’ David McNiven, a silky provider who averaged a goal every three games but struggled with accusations of being too physically lightweight for the fourth division. At centre-back Roy McFarland reminded us why he’d graced the highest level, with his centre-back partner, 20-year-old Bradford-born Peter Jackson, absorbing it all like a sponge. These were my first footballing heroes.

That summer Mum made her first trip to Valley Parade, for a Junior Bantams open day. As we watched a training session from our usual seats, Andrew showed Mum the nail that protruded out of the wooden partition wall that had ripped his coat; and I showed her the hole beneath my seat. Nodding silently, she kept looking around, tutting and shaking her head. Years later she’d tell me the state of the place ‘chilled her blood’.

After the training session there were autographs to be had on the pitch. Mum refused to vault over the banister, so we headed down the stairwell to search for another way to the front seating section. But there was none; just the two waist-high banisters which separated the various upper seating blocks. Rather than head back out of the stand, Dad urged us over the amber-painted wooden wall, down onto the plastic seats below, but that involved a two-foot climb on one side followed by a surprising four or five-foot drop down the other. And the only way out of the front seating section was to jump over the claret wooden wall, this one with an eight-foot drop on to the concrete paddock terrace below. The jump scared me so much I wanted to call it off, but Dad went over, then grabbed my legs as I sat on the wall and slid me down. Once on to the paddock terrace, with its bottom step below pitch level, a five-foot white brick wall, taller than me, had to be scaled, and once again with Dad’s help I completed this veritable assault course. It had shaken me so much, though, that I had little appetite for any autograph hunting.

Once the players had left the pitch we went to the clubhouse at the corner of the Bradford End and the Main Stand. On the walls in there, we looked at faded sepia photographs of a series of failed teams. An old man pointed out the photograph of the 1929 team, which he told us scored a record 128 goals to win Division 3 (North). He spoke fondly of the games and players he’d seen half a century earlier and that championship remained the only piece of silverware the club had won over the previous seven years. Dad promised us we’d just embarked on a journey that would one day see me speak of our team in the same hushed tones – we were so close to matching the best of what had gone before. I believed him . . .

On the way home Mum challenged Dad about the state of the ground, asking what would happen if it ever caught fire. We laughed – although wooden it had stood the test of time for some 74 years.

Despite promotion to Division 3 our successes continued at Valley Parade. In the season’s opener, a 3–2 win over Reading, an energetic, squat 18-year-old ginger terrier called Stuart McCall raced around on his debut at right-back. Valley Parade so unsettled teams that we’d capture 19 points from our first seven home matches there that season. But after winning our first away match of the season at Orient in the late-August sunshine, it would be November before we picked up anything more than a single point on the road (again in London, beating Brentford 0–2). Having climbed to second by beating Plymouth Argyle 4–0 the day after Dad’s 32nd birthday in October – which we all celebrated with a game of football on the school playing fields opposite Grandma’s house in Pudsey – the following weekend we all went to Chesterfield, who’d go on to finish bottom that season, only to lose 3–0, and not go top, rather drop to seventh.

A fortnight later came the news Manchester United would visit Valley Parade in the League Cup

We feared nobody at home and that included the mighty United (who'd reach Wembley, win the FA Cup and finish third that season), but on a cold November night United would concede an early goal that was dubiously disallowed, before escaping with a goalless draw. The impact our 34-year-old manager Roy McFarland was having was now being noted elsewhere. Almost immediately rumour started that Derby County wanted him as assistant to Brian Cough's former right-hand man, Peter Taylor. Aside from his happy 14-year stint playing at the Baseball Ground, we felt there was nothing to worry about – what could attract him to a club who, seven years after being English champions were now fighting relegation to Division 3? We knew we'd lose McFarland to a big club one day, but didn't believe it would be to a struggling one looking for an assistant manager.

But the night before our Old Trafford replay Mum was waiting for me after school. On getting into her silver MG Metro she handed me the afternoon edition of the local paper, the Bradford *Telegraph & Argus*, saying, 'I'm sorry, Martin, but I think you'd better see this.' It declared Roy McFarland and his assistant Mick Jones had resigned with immediate effect. We crossed the Pennines the next night to sit in the Scoreboard End. Trailing 4–0, Bobby Campbell fired a flying header past Gary Bailey in the top corner in the final minute, which was so spectacular it even raised applause from the United hardcore on the Stretford End. Leaderless, we'd not capitulated, and on getting home I took a black pen, opened my programme on the page of our team photo, and scribbled out both McFarland and Jones.

Although we appointed Leeds United's former England international defender Trevor Cherry as our new player-manager, it seemed our upward march was over. We failed to win in the three matches before Cherry took charge, and then he'd have to wait nine more matches before his first league victory. At best, inconsistency reigned, and during this run the club stopped printing match programmes and started handing out A4 folded white sheets: done nicely in a claret typeface, they were, nevertheless, little more than glorified team sheets. It was a joke of a programme to match our pitch which, permanently waterlogged, was covered in sand and came to resemble an inland beach. The season ended on a high with two derby wins allowing us to finish 12th, but just eight points above relegation, and we knew that only the early-season home form (now a distant memory) had kept us safe.

After the final match of the season, against Huddersfield Town, Dad led us up past decaying metal crush barriers to the top right-hand corner of a weed-covered terrace. The steps of the Kop were crumbling underfoot. When I asked why we were there, he said, 'This is where I used to stand as a boy. I just wanted one last look. Let's be quiet and take it all in, boys.' My emotional Dad stood there for a couple of minutes, as if it might be his last chance. Weeks later *Grandstand* announced Leeds United had issued a winding-up order against Bradford City over an outstanding transfer fee. They were due in the High Court on Monday, and to soften the blow Dad had arranged to take us to Alton Towers, where he warned us as we returned to the car to prepare for the worst.

Only on tuning into the 7 p.m. BBC Radio 2 *Sports Show* the following Friday we learnt of last-minute arrangements that had seen a receiver from Thornton Baker, Peter Flesher, buy time by transferring the assets and liabilities of the old company into a new company. I didn't follow the intricacies of all this that closely back then, but with creditors owed £374,000, it seemed, as Flesher later admitted it had been, 'hard to see a way to save football in Bradford'. Although the original 1908 club had won promotion the year before and seen its crowds increase 65 per cent in just two years, it was wound up that day by an Official Receiver, who later insisted, 'I can't say why the club ran for so long. For a number of years its accounts have shown it to be insolvent.'

Bradford rallied: an appeal raised £55,000, Bobby Campbell was sold for £70,000, and Bradford

City Council purchased Valley Parade from the Receiver for £220,000. It was then, on the day the club was due to be closed down, that two local businessmen 'rescued' Bradford. Stafford Heginbotham joined forces with rival bidder Jack Tordoff, who had appointed Flesher weeks earlier, and agreed a deal which saw them each purchase 75,006 £1 shares for just 26.6p a share – meaning that for £40,000 or 10 per cent of the rescue package, they secured 87 per cent of the club's equity, with Flesher subsequently appointed a director. They then raised £40,000 by hiking admission prices up 50p, which doesn't sound a lot today, but was worth £50,000 a season back then. Ultimately terrace prices rose by 66 per cent over a couple of seasons, the price of seats doubling just a year later. Crowds initially fell by a third, yet fans heralded the pair heroes.

The following season, 1983–84, we were so grateful to still have a football club that, shorn of our best player, we weren't too troubled to have won just one of our first fifteen matches. In fact we took meagre eight points in the first third of the season – relegation form, for sure. Things began to look up as Bobby Campbell, whose move to Derby had not worked out, returned on a month's loan. However initially it seemed to have little effect, as we collected just a single point from his first handful of games. Then, in the final match of his loan spell, when Millwall took a three-goal lead at Valley Parade and we all began to accept our inevitable relegation back into Division 4, our talisman shook the team by the neck – something clicked, and we stormed back in the final half hour to draw 3–3 and almost win.

The next weekend, Andrew ran in a school cross-country competition, so Dad's friend Colin Butterworth took me to watch Wigan in the FA Cup. Colin was good friends with Trevor Cherry, having been on his testimonial committee at Leeds United, so we were in possession of some posh match players' lounge tickets. After I'd scurried round collecting autographs on my programme, Trevor Cherry popped out of his office and apologised to Colin for not spending time with us.

'Bobby?' Colin asked, aware it was the last weekend of his loan spell.

'Yeah,' said Trevor, a grimace on his face.

'Are we going to sign him?' I asked excitedly.

'I'm afraid it doesn't look like it.'

It was a blow – he'd have made all the difference. Trevor Cherry agreed with me, and said something like, 'Let's just hope and see what happens.'

Bobby Campbell returned. We won our next match 1–4 at Brentford, before we beat Plymouth Argyle 2–0 – which was our first home win of the season, not coming until December. Suddenly a team that had won just once in 15 games couldn't stop winning, as we beat Bournemouth 5–2 a fortnight later, climbed out of the bottom four on Boxing Day with a 1–2 win at Burnley, thrashed Wigan Athletic 6–2 at Valley Parade the next day and ended 1983 with a 2–3 win at Lincoln City on New Year's Eve. 1984 continued in a similar vein: we collected 27 points from 27 and scored 34 goals in nine games to move up to 11th in just seven weeks, victory at Exeter securing a club-record tenth successive win.

The morning after that Friday night match I sat an entrance exam for Batley Grammar School. The hour-long logic exam threw me with questions I'd not seen before; I breezed through the maths exam before opening the English paper and reading the question, 'Describe a situation where you get lost in a crowd.' I imagined a scenario at Valley Parade where I somehow got separated from my family on exiting the ground, only to stumble, lost, across Manchester United manager Ron Atkinson, who was walking down the rear corridor, took pity on me and escorted me to the players' lounge for a Coke where we talked about life at Old Trafford. Eventually I was reunited with my family by the clubhouse door.

On leaving the exam hall Dad's car was ticking over in the school car park. I jumped into the back seat and immediately asked, 'We win last night, Dad?'

'Hang on a minute,' Mum protested. 'How'd your exam go?'

'Yes, 2-0,' Dad laughed. 'Now answer your mother!'

We went another six games unbeaten, but the wins stopped, four draws halting progress up the league. By then an offer letter arrived from Batley Grammar School and Dad rang the school and was told my maths paper was 'excellent', the essay showed 'great imagination' and I'd be put in the second set with a view to moving me to the top set, which only my ropey logic paper had prevented. My future seemed set.

But one Saturday morning a few weeks later, as Andrew and I started to play snooker after breakfast, Mum popped in and said, 'Don't get too comfortable, boys.' Thinking we had a free morning, she told us, as she rushed out, 'We're going to Nottingham – in half an hour.' We continued to play as we speculated why. Perplexed, we could see no reason for a mad dash south, not least as we'd need to be back for the three o'clock kick-off at Valley Parade.

Dad had been commuting to Nottingham daily for the past six months and, although his 70-mile journey to work seemed, on the surface, little different to the 60-mile one he'd been making to Hull for years, he was now frequently late, stuck on the congested, urban M1 rather than speeding across the rural, sleepy M62. The miners' strike had started barely a month before, but the movement of flying pickets was already causing the police to routinely stop and search cars heading from Yorkshire to Nottinghamshire. This was the final straw for Dad. As we headed south Mum told us we were going house-hunting as we'd be moving – we might not be happy, she said, but the decision was final and our pay-off would be a bigger house, better bedrooms and, without his three-hour commute, more time with Dad.

It was only after we'd dropped Mum off and we made our way to Valley Parade that I dared raise the matter with Dad, who assured me I'd be found as good a school in the Midlands and that, although we would return to watch Bradford, we'd go less often and probably have to give up our C Block season tickets but he'd compensate for that by taking us to see Brian Clough's Nottingham Forest.

That afternoon we beat Sheffield United 2-1 and then won five games in 18 days, moving us up to seventh. We should have been nailed-on for a play-off place, but in 1984 there were no play-offs, just the top three gaining automatic promotion. A ludicrous refereeing performance against Brentford with five goals disallowed – put paid to our promotion hopes. Wild accusations flew around a normally good-natured crowd, with the referee needing a police escort off the pitch, surrounded by half a dozen riot shields.

But we held on to seventh for the remaining few games of the season. It was our best finish in 20 years. Things looked good for 1984-85.

It took us until the final weekend in June to find a house that we all fell in love with – in the Nottinghamshire village of East Bridgford. Our six-week summer holiday began a fortnight later. To help prepare us for our new rural life we spent a day in Askham Bryan, outside York, visiting a friend of Mum's and spending the day playing with her kids. All of us ended up sitting in a tree watching the sun set. Little did I know that, before long, this was a peace I'd never know again.

1984–85 – Our Final Season

It was gloriously sunny the day we left Yorkshire; it was also the opening Saturday of the football season. As Dad's white BMW 323i pulled us up the hill of our cul-de-sac one final time, Mum turned and asked, 'Any regrets?'

'Just that we'll not have our season tickets at Bradford this year,' Dad replied. For once, he thought that we might have a very special season.

As Dad and the removal men put boxes in our new rooms in East Bridgford, I sat on the wide, sand-coloured steps that led up from the fancy driveway – wide enough to fit three cars on – and turned on my small, grey portable radio. I kept everyone updated with scores (Bradford beat Cambridge 2–0). I basked in the baking August bank holiday sun and took in our new surroundings. A large lawn was fronted by half a dozen apple trees, beyond which sat a mixed array of colourful, imposing plants and flowers that reached up ten feet from the rockery. A conifer hedge, nearly as tall as the house, ran the length of the garden to mark the boundary with our neighbours, and there was a lawn the size of a football field. There were trees everywhere, and a white, single-storey nineteenth-century coach house, which had once served the manor house opposite, was set back and hidden by more mature trees opposite. It was a glorious backdrop to our new lives.

However, our promise of more time with Dad was postponed until he'd made the interior of the house equally glorious. So I spent sunny days with Andrew exploring the village on our Stormer BMXs. Andrew, with his affinity for nature, was enthralled by the wildlife in the fields, the never-ending bird chatter, the nearby riverbank that attracted fishermen from miles around and, most of all, by 'Sam', a squirrel so tame he'd tap on the lounge patio window and wait to be fed nuts by hand.

I was soon bored by all of this, though; by how quiet it all seemed. We were isolated by the fast roads that encircled the village, and which we were told not to cross. There were few children about. This was not my world.

Dad had decided I should go to our local state school, Toot Hill. He claimed its results would allow me to go to a top university, if I was motivated – and if not, well, that would be the same wherever I went. So a sixteenth-century grammar school where I had several friends was to be replaced by a 1960s low-rise, concrete maze of a comprehensive, where I had none. Worse still, this was a rough school which, despite a dozen playing fields, banned football from PE for its first and second years.

So, unsurprisingly, when my first day at school arrived, I couldn't even force a smile as my parents, who insisted on taking photos, put it down to first-day nerves. Without my best friend Andrew by my side, my new world so confused me that when I arrived at the school bus stop I was overcome by an uncharacteristic shyness and was practically mute while everyone else, so familiar with one another, caught up on their summers.

An outsider, I soon felt like an intruder. Having missed Toot Hill's induction days, the deputy headmistress took me to my new house, Thoroton, where, in full sight of everybody, I was introduced to my new housemaster, Mr Morgan. Such personal attention got tongues wagging. I looked for somewhere to sit in the packed houseroom, but it was clear I had nowhere to go. Smartly dressed, I also sensed hostility. This was clearly not the like-for-like exchange Dad had promised. I perched on

- [*download online Istanbul: The Collected Traveler: An Inspired Companion Guide*](#)
- [click Homes of the Native Americans \(Native American Life\)](#)
- **read Ordeal by Innocence**
- [click Brownies, Bodies and Bad Guys \(Lexy Baker Bakery Mystery, Book 5\) for free](#)

- <http://hasanetmekci.com/ebooks/To-Hell-and-Back--The-Last-Train-from-Hiroshima--Asia-Pacific-Perspectives-.pdf>
- <http://unpluggedtv.com/lib/Homes-of-the-Native-Americans--Native-American-Life-.pdf>
- <http://crackingscience.org/?library/The-Italian-Girl--Vintage-Classics-.pdf>
- <http://www.rap-wallpapers.com/?library/Brownies--Bodies-and-Bad-Guys---Lexy-Baker-Bakery-Mystery--Book-5-.pdf>