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by Roger Wash, the Luton Town Football Club historian

WHEN the Town were forced to leave their Dunstable Road ground in 1905, the club's Board decided to buy a plot of land only a goal kick away.

The site, at the end of the newly developed Ivy Road, was smaller than their previous home, had a part sliced off by the Luton to Dunstable railway line and sloped from one corner to the other. Little did anyone know at the time that this site, not ideal then, would be the club's home for more than a century.

The old main stand which had seen service at both Dallow Lane and Dunstable Road, the club's previous grounds, was moved to the new enclosure and a cinder bank was built up behind the town (Kenilworth Road) end. The other two sides of the ground consisted of wooden planking.

The first major change to the ground came in 1922 following a mysterious fire which completely destroyed the main stand. With the insurance money, the club erected the present stand, although this only stretched as far as the present day tunnel.

Money raised by the Supporters Club in 1933 enabled the Beech Hill Path side of the ground to be roofed and the terracing underneath concreted. This was christened the 'Bob Stand' later changed to 'Bobbars' as it cost a bob (one shilling - 5p) to stand there.

When the Hatters were promoted to the old Division Two in 1937 some £30,000, which was a huge sum in those days, was spent on ground improvements.

Houses were bought up in Kenil-

## Hatters special: Celebrating 100 years at Kenilworth Road

# Building a proud history



**MEN AT WORK:** Proud builders in front of Luton Town's newly-erected Main Stand in 1922

worth Road in order that part of their gardens could be utilised in extending the terrace behind the goal.

The new Kenilworth Road terrace was regarded locally as one of the wonders of the modern world as it was higher than the Clock End at Arsenal's Highbury Stadium. Also at this time the main stand was extended to the Maple Road corner to

leave the structure essentially as it is today.

In the following close season more Supporters Club money was raised to roof and concrete the terraces of the Oak Road end.

Although during the next 40 years various plans were put forward to make drastic alterations to the Kenilworth Road ground, including erecting a double-decker stand over the Kenilworth Road terrace and replacing the main stand, there were only two modifications, with the Oak Road end

and, most controversially, the laying of an artificial surface. Seats were placed in the lower section of the Kenilworth Road end in 1991 and, at the same time, the New Stand was built on the Maple triangle and the artificial surface rolled up.

The ground became completely all-seater at the end of the 1993-94 campaign. With the placing of seats at the very rear of the Kenilworth Road end during the past close season the capacity of the ground is now around 10,700, which is a far cry from the 30,069 who were shoe-horned in for the F.A.Cup quarter-final clash against Blackpool in 1959.

Further great changes were made in the mid-1980s with the Bobbers Stand converted to executive boxes, the covering of the Kenilworth Road end, seats installed in the main stand enclosure and in the Oak Road end



**THEN AND NOW:** An aerial view of Kenilworth Road as it looked in 1922 (above) and (right) how the stadium looks now



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## Hatters special: Celebrating 100 years at Kenilworth Road

# Green light for new stadium

by STEVE SIMS

LUTON'S first game at Kenilworth Road was a scoreless draw against Plymouth Argyle on September 4, 1905.

The opening match in their new home was billed as the "Green" game against and despite the 0-0 scoreline the Luton News reported at the time that it was a hugely entertaining match.

The "Green" game got its name because the visitors played in green, the pitch was in perfect green condition, kick off was performed by J.W. Green of brewers J.W. Green Ltd, the Luton secretary was Charles Green and the referee's name was also Green.

Luton's line-up for the Southern League match was Platt, Blackett, McCurdy, F Hawkes, White, R Hawkes, Gallacher, Warner, Brown, Pickering and Barnes.

The Luton News report said: "The Luton directors could scarcely have had a better opening for the new ground on Monday. The weather was perfect, the crowd was good and the spectators had the pleasure of seeing a magnificent struggle between two equally good teams."

"There were probably some 6,000 people present and it is safe to say not one of them begrudged the sixpence paid for admission. Not often will they have witnesses a finer, faster or more exciting game."

The first chance fell to Luton's



**KICK OFF:** The opening of Kenilworth Road before the 1905 Plymouth match

Brown who had a shot saved for a corner then Corrin of Plymouth hit a post.

Brown then burst through only to be tripped from behind by a Plymouth defender. There were loud penalty appeals to no avail. Then the ball hit a defender's hand and the referee consulted the linesmen but again Plymouth got away with it.

Argyle's Corrin netted just before half-time but it was ruled out for off-side.

In the second half Plymouth keeper Sutcliffe ran out to clear but fell over and landed on top of the ball. Brown ran it to get a kick of it and angry Ply-

mouth defender Clark pushed him over.

The Luton News report said: "This led to a bit of an uproar on the part of the spectators behind the goal and there appeared to be some very pointed remarks among the players but the referee talked gently but firmly to the men principally concerned and the game then proceeded."

Buchanan and Clark fired in shots for Plymouth before the referee drew proceedings to a close.

Our reporter said: "It was a fitting result to a memorable struggle. A victory for either team would have been

hard lines on the losing team.

"The latter part of the game was not quite of the same high class a nature as the first owing to the kicking out tactics, adopted principally by the visitors but the pace was tremendous all the way through."

The report added: "Plymouth are a very fine lot of men and on Monday's form it will take a good team to beat them wherever they may go."

While nowadays you can hear some vociferous chanting at the football grounds across the country, in those days it was a lot different.

Our reporter wrote: "I was sorry to hear the people behind the goal at the town's end keeping their tongues wagging so vociferously at various times within the game and the directors will be well advised to give attention to this because shouting and slanging often lead to trouble."

"There was one particularly loud-mouthed fellow who was not too bothered about his choice of language and if he should unfortunately be there another time it would be well if he could be caught and made an example of."

After the game, which had gate receipts of £120, the club admitted arrangements for leaving the ground needed to be refined.

People living in the Dallow Road neighbourhood were told to use the entrance at that end of the ground. Only a couple of hundred of the 6,000 crowd had come into the stadium from Oak Road end.

Celebration planned for next match against Wolves

**HATTERS' match against Wolves on September 10** has been chosen as the celebration game to commemorate 100 years at Kenilworth Road.

Fans are being urged to create a party atmosphere by wearing their colours, donning a hat and being in the ground early.

Former players, coaches and managers have been invited to the game. They will parade around the pitch to meet the fans at 2.20pm.

Luton Town Supporters Club are sponsoring the match and have worked with the football club to organise the day.

Historian Roger Wash will also launch his new publication 100 Years Of Luton Town At Kenilworth Road on the day with a book signing at the club shop.

Hatters have organised special souvenirs for sale on the day, including a special match programme priced £3.



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**DANNY WILSON:** Former Luton Town captain who scored in the Littlewoods Cup Final in 1988.

"The best time I can remember is when we qualified for the Littlewoods Cup Final in 1988 over two legs. The second leg of the semi final against Oxford was at Kenilworth Road.

"That was a fantastically exciting time to know we were so close to going to our first major cup final.

"It was great credit to the team, the staff and the manager Ray Harford, God rest his soul.

"They were great times to treasure and very successful times in Luton's history. We had a good side and terrific players with a lot of internationals. We were holding our own in the old First Division. Kenilworth Road was quite intimidating for our opponents.

"The crowd is quite close to the pitch and the fans were really vociferous. It was a major lift for the players."

WITH thousands of matches to choose between, there are so many memorable matches and moments from watching the Hatters at Kenilworth Road.

We spoke to a variety of players, managers and coaches (both past and present), plus Town supporters as well, to see what was their personal highlights were.

We kick off current Hatters manager Mike Newell and captain Kevin Nicholls.

**MIKE NEWELL:** "For me it would have to be my hat-trick against Liverpool (in the 4-1 win on 25-10-86).

"I remember all the goals clearly and scoring against the team I had supported since a boy was very special.

"They had a decent side out as well with Hansen, Lawrenson, Molby and Rush – it was a proper team.

"Being presented with the League One trophy was another special one, but I was also going to say the home game against Hull.

"After the final whistle when we got that late winner, it was absolutely fantastic and I don't think I've heard it like that before. It was similar for the Brentford game at the end of the season, but the Hull game meant so much more because we hadn't won the league then."

**KEVIN NICHOLLS:** "My best moment at Kenilworth Road has to be lifting the championship trophy in front of all our fans and helping to lead the club back to the good old days.



**BOSS BAGS HAT-TRICK:** Current Hatters manager Mike Newell is pictured, left, scoring one of three goals against Liverpool in 1986

**CHAMPIONS!** Current Luton captain Kevin Nicholls, pictured right, says he will always remember lifting the League One champions trophy aloft before the home fans



"Although the club's been at this stadium for 100 years, it's time we moved on and hopefully we can get permission from the council, or whoever it is we need to get permission from, to move to a new and bigger stadium.

"The team, the fans and everyone at the club deserves that."

**BRIAN SWAIN:** (former Luton News sports editor):

"Born to be a Luton Town supporter, and lucky enough to have spent more than half of my working life as a reporter covering the Hatters, I learned a bit about football grounds over the course of nearly 60 years. When I retired I had seen the Town play all the other 91 league clubs, so I have a fair idea of which are the best and worst stadiums in this country.

"Kenilworth Road may not be top of

the table, but what a marvellous place it has been for generations of Hatters fans. You can have your Theatre of Dreams and the Marble Halls, and I know a lot of visitors think Kenilworth Road is ramshackle and decrepit, but for me and thousands of others it is still our home sweet home.

"Could any other clubs' supporters have enjoyed their football more than we did? The 1955 promotion to take Luton to the old First Division for the first time – what a team!

"The misery of the tumble down the divisions in the 1960s – what heartaches and patient optimism we suffered. The Harry Haslam years, when Luton football had a broad smile on its face.

"We laughed all the way back to another season in the top flight while Manchester United languished in Division Two, even though we were

crying again by the end of the season. (So were Chelsea – they were relegated with us!)

"Then the David Pleat team that gave so much pleasure as it stormed to promotion and lived comfortably for a whole decade with Arsenal, Liverpool, Man Utd and the rest.

"Those clubs all played in better arenas than Kenilworth Road, but for me football is like whisky, and I judge that by the taste and the enjoyment, not by the look of the bottle.

"Now, with Mike Newell having worked wonders to get the Town moving again, it's time to offer congratulations to everyone over the years who has made Kenilworth Road such a very special place for so many people.

"I have lost count of the number of new grounds that were alleged to be on the near horizon. It started in about 1949, when even I was young,

# So what were their favourite memories?

and was looking forward to seeing the new arena built at Skimpot. Surprise, surprise, it didn't happen, and Tesco eventually covered the grass that used to be the Laporte sports ground.

"I hope the new ground is built before I hear my final whistle, but in the meantime, congratulations Kenilworth Road on a century of genuine service to Luton – you have done us proud."

**NICK OWEN** (celebrity supporter):

"One of my greatest memories has to be my first ever game. It was September 1958 against Leeds and it ended 1-1. Allan Brown scored and that was the first goal I ever saw in professional football. I sat next to him at a dinner recently and that was a great moment.

"There was also the fantastic victory over Mansfield. We won 4-2 after Bruce Rioch got sent off very early. It was climaxed by a sensational goal by Graham French. That was ever so exciting and it started our recovery back up the divisions.

"I also remember some wonderful moments with Bruce Rioch, Malcolm MacDonald, Brian Stein and Mick Harford. One game on New Year's Day Mick scored a hat-trick against Leicester, then there was Mike Newell when he got that great hat-trick against Liverpool.

"And last season at the Hull game, what a great finish. I had to leave early so I was standing on the gangway ready to leave when suddenly Brkovic scored that goal.

"Another highlight was taking my kids to the games.

"Overall, Kenilworth Road has been like a second home to me for approaching 50 years. I know we have to leave but there's something special about the place."



**SUPERMAC MEMORIES:** Malcolm MacDonald meets his adoring Luton fans

**GEOFF COX** (editor, The Luton News & Dunstable Gazette):

"I'm a little ashamed to admit it, but my first visit to Kenilworth Road reduced me to tears – even though Luton won.

"I was nine years old when my father took me to see the first game of the 1961-62 season, against Preston North End, on August 19, 1961.

"We decided to watch the game from the old Bobbers Stand, where there were entrances marked 'Men' and 'Boys' (those were the days).

"We entered the ground through our respective turnstiles after Dad said he would meet me inside.

"With kick-off fast approaching and the crowd pushing past me, I waited, and waited, but there was no sign of Dad.

"After what seemed like an eternity, the sobbing schoolboy spotted his father in the distance and we were reunited. Apparently he had been unable to reach me because of a locked

gate separating two sections of the stand, and he had to persuade the turnstile operator to open it.

"But at least the day ended happily with the Town winning 4-1 (Ashworth 2, Turner, Groves) and I was hooked on the Hatters.

"My many memorable Kenilworth Road moments include Graham French's wonder goal against Mansfield, Bruce Rioch's net-busting long-range goals before his big money move to Aston Villa and the title-winning seasons of 1967/68, 1981/82 and 2004/05.

"And who can forget the two big matches against Oxford United on the plastic pitch in February 1988 – the 7-4 thriller in Division One, quickly followed by the 2-0 Littlewoods Cup semi-final victory which made that wonderful Wembley day possible."

**IAN PEARCE** (Three Counties Radio):

"My earliest recollections are not of being in the ground, but of the roar that went up when Luton scored goals in the late 1950s.

"There were 20,000 people in Kenilworth Road in those days and I used to hear the cheers from my Grandad's house in Milton Road.

"I first saw the Hatters play in 1967. It was Barry Butlin's first game against Southend. Although I now go to every game and have done for the last eight years, my visits to Kenilworth Road were sporadic in between.

"I had a standing season ticket for the 1982/3 season when Luton were back in the top flight.

"Two early games at Kenilworth Road remain vivid. Goals flew in against Notts County with a Paul Walsh hat-trick to see the Hatters win 5-3.

"Two weeks later they put five past Brighton including an overhead kick from Wayne Turner, no less.

"There are more recent gems as well with Jean Louis Valois scoring a wonder goal on his debut and the roar when the Croatia Sensation scored against Hull last season was as loud as those 1950s celebrations.

"Mike Newell and the lads are adding to the history of the famous old ground with its secondhand stand. When they build the new stadium will they put a pillar in front of the press box so we'll feel that it's home?"

ONE hundred years up – would you believe it! Over the 40-plus seasons that I have supported the Hatters we have seen many developments to the old ground.

Since the days of the open terraces, when my father and family took me and needing a stool to stand on to look over the front wall of the Kenny End, to what has now become an all-seater stadium.

There have been many memorable games and seasons that I could mention. But a season that will stick in my mind forever has to be the 1981-82 promotion season to Division One (now the Premiership). During that period I was the official scoreboard operator, and what a team I had the privilege to watch. One of the perks of the job was being able to meet them after the games.

In my earlier days, and not so interested in all the star players, one player that gave me the most enjoyment was the one and only Malcolm MacDonald, who scored some fantastic goals and got me so interested in watching the team week after week.

The most memorable game (and there have been a few) was the FA Cup match v West Ham United when Scott Oakes scored a hat-trick in the 1993/94 season, which has to top the list.

Finally, Happy Birthday Kenilworth Road. It will be a sad loss for you to go, but if Luton Town are to compete in the modern world of football we have to move forward NOW in the 21st century.

Up the Hatters!  
John Pyper  
Bobbers Travel Club President  
Luton Town Supporters Club  
committee member

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**DAVE PACEY:** Dave scored the Hatters goal (pictured) when Luton lost 2-1 to Nottingham Forest in the 1959 FA Cup Final.

He played 246 league games for Luton between 1956 and 1965.

He said his favourite Kenilworth Road memory was the FA Cup sixth round replay game on the way to the Wembley final which attracted a crowd of 30,634 – against

Blackpool on March 4, 1959.

He said: "We drew at Blackpool. Matthews and Mortenson were playing against us.

"The return match was on Wednesday afternoon and it was a record crowd. Vauxhall closed but workers had to go back in the evening.

"We all know the size of the Luton ground. From the touchline

to the brickwork for the terraces there is not space but the children were sitting all around there.

"I was surprised they were allowed to do it. It was different in those days, I suppose.

"It was tremendous walking out to a record crowd.

"The cheers as we walked down the tunnel got louder as we got nearer the pitch."

## 'I got first goal of a great comeback'

**BILLY WAUGH** (former player): A THRILLING four-goal comeback to beat mighty Newcastle United is former Luton Town winger Billy Waugh's fondest memory of Kenilworth Road.

The Hatters were struggling in the reformed football league, in 1946, facing a strong Second Division containing Manchester City, Tottenham, West Ham and Newcastle.

More than 25,000 fans packed into Kenilworth Road on a wet November Saturday to watch Luton play the high-flying Magpies, with a front-line including Jackie Milburn.

Newcastle tore into Luton and three goals in 16 minutes sent them in at half-time certain the

game was lost. Billy, 84, who still lives in Luton, said: "We were feeling sick. There wasn't a word spoken in the dressing room as we listened to the Newcastle players laughing and joking in their dressing room next door.

"The manager George Martin came in at half-time. There was a bucket of water in the middle of the dressing room floor. Without warning he kicked it over."

The Luton team responded by racing on to the pitch for the second half and outside right Billy, nicknamed Rabbit, scored the first goal of the comeback.

The stage was set and Luton struck three more goals to win the match 4-3.

Billy, who played for Luton from

1943 to 1950, said: "I don't remember much about the goal but it was probably the most satisfying I scored in my career. It was probably the most exciting game played at Luton for many years."

**MICK HARFORD** (former player and ex-director of football):

"It was always a fantastic place to play because of the intimidation factor. It is a lovely tight ground. My best memory was a hat-trick against Watford in 1986 – and they had my best mate Tony Coton in goal!

"There are a lot of good memories and it was probably the most enjoyable times of my career. It was a lovely club and there was a lovely spirit about the place."

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Thanks everyone for such a great day and look forward to seeing you all on 17th September

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Hatters special: 100 years of fantastic memories at Kenilworth Road



Roger Wash, Luton Town Football Club's historian, takes a look-back at the highlights of the Hatters' history since their move to Kenilworth Road in 1905

WHEN the Town moved to Kenilworth Road in 1905 they were an established Southern League Division One side and although never setting the world alight more than held their own until a disastrous 1911/12 season which saw them relegated to Division Two where most of the teams were based in Wales.

Thankfully promotion back to Division One was achieved two years later, in 1914, and the club emerged from the ordeal far stronger and a great deal wiser.

Following the Great War, Southern League Division One was taken 'en bloc' to form a new Division Three of the Football League. There then followed several seasons that always started full of hope and ambition but ultimately ended in failure to even challenge for promotion to a higher level.

By the mid-1930s, such was the growth in population in Luton and surrounding area, that the Board of the club felt that they could afford to push the boat out and spend some money on the side, safe in the knowledge that spectator support would be forthcoming.

With this decision taken, great changes were made within the club and players that would normally have been outside their reach were taken on and, as predicted, the crowds increased rapidly. Promotion to Division Two was narrowly missed in 1936 but the team made no mistake the following season when they won the Division Three championship on the back of a superb home record and the 55 goals of Joe Payne.

With promotion secured, the club embarked on major ground improvements which supposedly increased the ground capacity to over 34,000. More players were brought in to bolster up an already strong squad with the ultimate destination of Division One firmly fixed in the Board's sights.

It was a major disappointment that the club initially struggled in Division Two and although a mid-table position was eventually reached there were times during the campaign that relegation, after only one season, was a real threat.

The sale of Payne to Chelsea did not help the club's chances but in the following year a ready-made replacement was found on their doorstep. Amptill-born Hugh Billington, late of Waterlows, stepped into the side in November 1938, scoring twice in a 3-2 win at Trannmere and it was no coincidence that his introduction brought about a new found confidence that sent the Hatters

# Century of top action



JUST TOPS: The victorious championship winning team of 1936/1937, back row, left to right: Ned Liddell (manager), Tom King, Jock Finlayson, Joe Coen, Jack Nelson, Tom Smith, Billy Fellowes and Horace Pakes (trainer). Front row, left to right: Ted Hancock, Albert Dawes, Joe Payne, Fred Roberts and George Stephenson

surging up the table.

Billington was a revelation, banging in 28 goals in only 27 games and by Easter 1939 promotion looked a real possibility. Unfortunately the final three games of the campaign failed to produce a victory and the Town missed out on a prize that was there for the taking.

Undeterred, the team started the 1939-40 season in fine form and actually led the table when Hitler's invasion of Poland brought about an abrupt halt to the League programme. We can only surmise as to how much this team would have achieved.

After the end of hostilities the Hatters settled back to League action but could not replicate their pre-war achievements. After a few seasons of indifferent performances the club actually dipped with relegation in 1950-51 and it was only important wins over fellow strugglers, as the season drew to a close, that kept them up.

Relegation scares were thankfully to become a thing of the past as manager Dally Duncan saw his youth policy come to fruition which brought into the side youngsters such as Bob Morton and Gordon Turner who were to give sterling service to the Town over many years.

Aided by some astute signings of experienced professionals to complement the younger players the team moved up a gear and narrowly missed out on promotion to the top flight in 1952-53 and 1953-54 before finally achieving the ultimate goal in the following campaign.

The promotion season was a personal triumph for record Luton goalscorer, Gordon Turner, who netted 32 times, but it was a close run thing with the Hatters, Birmingham and Rotherham all locked together on the same number of points. Goal average came into play and the unlucky Millers lost out.

In the big time for the first time in their history the Town made the football world sit up and take notice by tearing into their opponents in the early part of the season, especially at Kenilworth Road. Newcastle and Blackpool were seen off 4-2 and 3-1 respectively while Wolves, Billy Wright included, were hammered 5-1. The biggest battering, however, was reserved for league leaders Sunderland who returned to Wearside on the wrong end of an 8-2 defeat.

Lack of strength in depth meant that the Town could not keep up this start but they still finished in a respectable mid-table position. Over the next couple of seasons further mid-table positions were achieved while early in 1958-59 a run of wins pushed the side up to top spot.

Season 1958-59 is, however, best remembered for the club's march to Wembley where they reached the FA Cup final for the first time.

Since the club won promotion they had gone out of the FA Cup competition at the first time of asking, so there were major celebrations when Leeds were beaten 5-1 at Kenilworth Road in round three in 1959.

Leicester were then seen off after a replay and by the time the fifth round draw took the Hatters to Ipswich, cup fever had hit the streets of Luton. That hurdle was overcome and after another replayed tie, this time with Blackpool where a record 30,069 was attracted to Kenilworth Road, it was through to the semi-final.

Giantkillers Norwich were to be the Town's opponents in the penultimate stage but it was to be no happy ending for the Canaries as the Hatters swept through after yet another replay.

Talking of happy endings that is as far as the Town's interest in the competition went as, on the big day in May 1959, the team did not perform and Nottingham Forest won 2-1 and, to rub salt in the wound, played for much of the game with only ten men in the days before substitutes.

Reaching the FA Cup final in 1959 proved to be a watershed in the club's history. An ageing side, a reluctance by the Board to spend money and a new manager in ex-centre-half Syd Owen, who although a great skipper and sound coach, had difficulty in moving into the hot seat.

The upshot was that the Hatters lost their top flight spot in 1960 and the slide had begun. Successive managers tried and failed to arrest the fall but, only six years after

relegation was the end result.

Grave financial problems then hit the Town during the following campaign as Division One contracts still had to be fulfilled and only the bargain basement sale of midfielder, Peter Anderson, prevented the total collapse of the club.

The hatches were battered down for a couple of years and it was only after David Pleat was appointed manager in early 1978 that the purse strings were allowed to be loosened slightly.

Pleat set about almost completely changing the personnel at the club and his first full season in charge almost ended in relegation but he knew what he was doing and gradually his new-look side and attacking style of play began to reap rewards.

David Pleat's new-look side, after flirting with relegation in its first season, began to blossom and finished only four points off promotion in 1979-80. A win over Oldham in the last home game of the following campaign would have sent the Hatters up but the match was lost. Would it be third time lucky?

The Hatters answered that question in emphatic style and won the championship of Division Two at a canter with skill and pace in abundance. Players such as Ricky Hill, Brian Stein and Mal Donaghy came into their own aided by the astute signing of Brian Horton as skipper.

Pleat did not pretend that Division One would be easy but his team's brand of cavalier attacking play soon came to the attention of the television companies as the goals flew in at either end. Unfortunately as the season drew to a close the goals against started to outnumber the goals for and a relegation fight was on the club's hands.

The final game of the season pitted the Town away at Manchester City with the winner taking it all. In truth City only needed a point to stay up and luckily for the Hatters they played cautiously intent on holding on to what they had.

With a few minutes left manager Pleat threw on substitute Raddy Antic as a last throw of the dice and the Yugoslav responded by hitting home the only goal of the game.

In the following season the Town were up to third spot by Christmas but then a second half collapse of dramatic proportions meant that supporters were looking over their shoulders as the campaign drew to a close. The poor form continued into 1984-85 and as Christmas approached Pleat could see another relegation fight looming.

Money for players was sanctioned by new chairman David Evans and Pleat went out to buy some outstanding talent that had an immediate effect on the team. Relegation fears were eventually swept away and a run to the FA Cup semi-finals, for the first time since 1959, took place.

→ to page eight

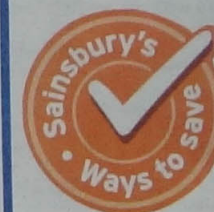


Syd Owen (centre of front row) pictured with other members of Luton's 1959 FA Cup Final team

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## Hatters special: Celebrating 100 years at Kenilworth Road



**TURFED OUT:** The Kenilworth Road pitch turf was replaced with an artificial surface for the start of the 1985-86 season

from previous page

Although defeat by Everton was a bitter pill to swallow the supporters knew that they now had a side that could compete with the best.

The club decided to lay an artificial surface at Kenilworth Road for the start of the 1985-86 season and although not too many comments were raised initially, when high profile teams such as Liverpool and Everton suffered defeat at Luton the complaints began to surface.

The team finished the season in ninth position and in Mick Harford and Brian Stein had one of the most potent attacking partnerships in the country. David Pleat then decided to take up the vacant managers position at Tottenham, leaving the Luton hot seat in the hands of a reluctant John Moore.

It is a credit to Moore that given the furore created by the club's decision to ban away fans in the aftermath of a riot created by Millwall supporters a year before and the increasingly noisy anti artificial surface brigade that the team finished in seventh spot, the highest in its history.

The high profile nature of a Division One manager's job was not to Moore's liking and he resigned after only one year in charge, handing on the baton to his assistant Ray Harford, who was to take the club on into a new era.

Ray Harford inherited a settled and successful side but even he could not have predicted the events of the 1987-88 season. A position of ninth in the table was reasonable but at one time the Town were marching towards Wembley on an unprecedented four fronts.



Steve Foster captained Luton to their 1988 Littlewoods Cup Final success

The Mercantile Credit Centenary tournament was a bonus, the Simod Cup one to forget but the chance to play at Wembley in both the FA and Littlewoods Cup was a mouth-watering prospect.

The Hatters failed in their attempt with the first competition, going out to Wimbledon at the semi-final stage, but were glorious winners in the latter.

April 24, 1988 will forever go down as a red letter day for all Luton supporters as the Town won the first major trophy in their long history, with Brian Stein sweeping home a last-minute winner as mighty Arsenal were beaten 3-2.

The Town actually reached the Littlewoods Cup final the following season but were disappointingly beaten 1-3 by Nottingham Forest. The alarm bells were by now beginning to sound in the league as the players that had served the club so well over the past ten years were allowed to leave and were not adequately replaced. Only a last game win over Norwich at Kenilworth Road preserved Division One status.

Midway through the following campaign, with the Town once again struggling, Harford relinquished his position in favour of coach Jim Ryan, who had the difficult job of keeping the Hatters in Division One. He achieved this task at the death with an improbable 3-2 win at Derby on the final day as fellow strugglers Sheffield Wednesday lost at home to Nottingham Forest.

It was down to the wire at the end of the next season as well for poor Ryan, who managed once again to keep the Town up on scant resources with a win over Derby, at Kenilworth Road this time, on the last day. The reward for his efforts was the sack, with his replacement being David Pleat, who returned after a five-year absence.

Pleat was unable to wave a magic wand and the Hatters struggled from the start of the 1991-92 campaign. The artificial surface had been ripped up, away supporters were officially allowed back and the leading scorer from the previous season, Lars Elstrup, had packed his bags and returned to Denmark. Relegation looked a certainty from the beginning, although a win at Notts County on the final day could have staved off the drop. It proved to be too much to ask.

If Pleat thought that relegation would allow the club some breathing space and a chance to consolidate he was in for a rude awakening. The team struggled from the off and again did not know until the final day that they would escape a further drop.

The following campaign, although disappointing in the league, produced an unexpected

FA Cup run that took the Town through to the semi-final, where they went down 0-2 to Chelsea at Wembley.

Pleat departed once more at the end of 1994-95, this time to Sheffield Wednesday, and his replacement, Terry Westley, was unable to prevent the team dropping like a stone to the foot of the table. After only a few months in the job he was replaced by the experienced Lennie Lawrence, who initially got the side to put together an unbeaten run.

The loss of talismanic goalscorer, Dwight Marshall, with a broken ankle, however, knocked the stuffing out of the side, with relegation the inevitable consequence.

Back in a division they last left in 1970 the Hatters took a little while to acclimatise but when sharpshooter Tony Thorpe got his eye in, the goals started to flow and by Christmas they had hit top spot. Unfortunately, a late season wobble with too many points dropped at home meant that the Hatters had to settle for third at the death and a place in the play-offs, where they were beaten by a superior Crewe.

Since then the Town have seen even more up and downs that seem to have been a recurring feature during their long history. Two periods in administrative receivership, relegation to the bottom level in 2001 followed by two promotions must leave the average supporter with his or her head in a spin!

The Town enter the new era as a Championship club with an enviable squad of youth and experience led by a bright, young manager. All the supporters now need is the long awaited news that it is all systems go for a new ground.



Dwight Marshall's goals were missed after he was seriously injured during the 1995-96 season when the club was relegated

## A record crowd for FA Cup clash despite early start for match



**GOAL-DEN MOMENT:** Allan Brown scores against Blackpool in front of a record crowd of 30,069 in 1959

A FAVOURITE of many older Hatters' fans is the FA Cup sixth round replay match against Blackpool on March 4, 1959. The Town won the match 1-0 in front of a club record attendance of 30,069. Here, Luton Town historian Roger Wash looks back on the historic cup tie which helped Hatters on the way to the 1959 FA Cup Final.

LITTLE did Luton Town supporters know, but the club's FA Cup run of 1958/59 would end with a trip to the Twin-Towers of Wembley.

The run started with a home thumping of Leeds in round three, followed by a replay win over Leicester at the next stage.

By now FA Cup fever was sweeping through the town and over 8,000 travelled to Ipswich to see the Hatters win through 5-2 to set up a quarter-final clash at Blackpool.

All seemed set fair for the Town to win through to the semi-final for the first time in their history when Billy Bingham netted just before the end.

With the final seconds ticking away, full-back Ken Hawkes elected to pass the ball back to goalkeeper Ron Baynham rather than launch it out of the ground.

The ball fell short, leaving Blackpool's Ray Charnley to nip in for a fortunate leveller.

After the last-gasp equaliser at Bloomfield Road the Town players were disappointed, but immediately started to prepare for the forthcoming replay.

Due to Blackpool's refusal to play under the Kenilworth Road floodlights, allegedly emanating from Stanley Matthews, the re-match had to take place on a Wednesday afternoon.

The Town officials resigned themselves to the fact that the game would be less than a sell-out because of the early kick-off, but they were amazed when the turnstiles stopped clicking and it was revealed that a record crowd of 30,069 had gathered.

Truancy was rife that afternoon but as a good number of schoolteachers were also present there were no repercussions!

The contest itself was a typical full-blooded cup tie with no quarter given on a difficult pitch.

Few chances were created at either end and it looked increasingly likely that only one goal would swing the tie.

Fortunately, that one goal fell to the Hatters inside-forward Allan Brown, who was playing against his old side.

Six years previously Brown had broken a leg as he scored Blackpool's winner in a quarter-final tie at Arsenal and the thoughts of that game must have come flooding back as he ran on to a clever George Cummins pass and swept the ball into the net just as Seasiders' goalkeeper George Farm crashed into him.

Mercifully, Brown jumped straight to his feet and was able to assist the Town defence, brilliantly marshalled by skipper Syd Owen, for the final 16 minutes of this pulsating tie.

At the final whistle the crowd invaded the pitch and for a time the players were submerged under a sea of delirious supporters.

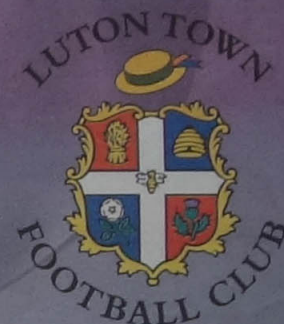
Luton Town: Baynham, McNally, Hawkes, Groves, Owen, Pacey, Bingham, Brown, Morton, Cummins, Gregory.

Blackpool: Farm, Armfield, Wright, Hauser, Gratrix, H. Kelly, Matthews, Mudie, Charnley, J. Kelly, Durie.

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**Hatters special: Celebrating 100 years at Kenilworth Road**

# Hatters' new ground's capacity could be increased



CONFIDENT: Luton chairman Bill Tomlins is focused on a new ground

HATTERS are hoping to mark their 100-year anniversary at Kenilworth Road by finally signing a building agreement for their proposed new home at land on Junction 10 of the M1.

The club is still involved in discussions with landowner Stockwood Park Holdings and potential developers as to the final details of the deal.

But it is hoped an announcement on a tri-part development will be made before the September 10 centenary celebration game against Wolves.

And a big boost for Luton fans is that the new stadium may well feature a capacity above that of the originally proposed 15,000 seats.

Chairman Bill Tomlins told The News-Gazette: "A 15,000 seater stadium suits our current situation at the club - we know we can fill it."

"You don't want to have too big a stadium that you end up rattling around in. But with the progress that we've made as a team in such a short time already there's no reason why we shouldn't increase that capacity."

"We've surprised one or two people with the way we've started the season and if we can keep that progress going then we will have to think seriously

by Andy MacKenzie

about increasing the size of the build in line with the additional costs that will incur."

The original £19.5million building plan for the stadium was of an enclosed-style ground with 15,000 seats on an 18.5-acre site that could be increased to 26,000 seats at a future date if demand required.

But Tomlins has admitted that the first build could now be of a size between those two figures, probably around the 20,000 seats mark.

The club is still hopeful it can have the new stadium up and running by Christmas of 2007.

Included within the stadium would be 150,000 sq ft of office space and club suites and 215,000 sq ft of commercial retail space.

One hotel would be built as part and parcel of the stadium, with a second hotel possibly being built in future years.

Discussions have already taken place with the relevant bodies over gas and water supplies to the site, while works to widen the M1 would mean the Highways Agency subsidising the cost of removing electricity pylons from the land.

Tomlins added: "It's nice to be celebrating 100 years at Kenilworth Road and we have improved the ground where we can with the additional seats at the back of the Kenilworth End and upgrading the toilets."

"I'm not one who believes in standing still, but in the longer term everything we are doing at the club is geared around the relocation."

"I'm totally focused and committed on getting the club to Junction 10a."

"There is a time element, but everything revolves around having the right deal for the club to move forward and I'm confident we will be in a position to announce a tri-part agreement between the club, the landowner and the developer before our centenary celebrations against Wolves."

Once the land agreement has been secured, a planning application is hoped to be submitted by October of this year.

Planning consent is then hoped to be gained by next April, allowing the new ground to be completed by the end of 2007.

Whenever the move does finally happen, Hatters fans will be hoping the new ground will go on to hold as many memories as Kenilworth Road has done during the past century.

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