

Issue 72  
Spring 2007

# HATTERS

LUTON TOWN



SUPPORTERS CLUB

## Dear Members!

I MAY BE in a minority now, but I am still trying to be optimistic and I believe we can still survive in the Championship. However, it is not going to be easy.

Post-Christmas, the league table usually gives us an indication of what our final placing might be. However I hope this year we can do better than might currently be anticipated. At the time of writing this article we are all looking nervously over our shoulder at the relegation places.

I am sure I am not the only one wondering what's happened to our team and asking why good players have left the club without adequate replacements seemingly being found. Yes, we have had a large share of bad luck this year with injuries but what has happened to our fighting spirit? (although the last couple of matches have shown small glimpses). Having said this, I do think we have to expect player sales and I wish both Carlos Edwards and Rowan Vine all the best. I would also like to extend a welcome to Matthew Spring on his return to the Town.

It is disappointing to see the boo-boys returning to the club on match days. Everyone has the right to an opinion, as a supporter it goes with paying for your ticket, but the team needs our support more during the tough times than they do when they are flying. It was pointed out to me that when Leeds visited us earlier in the season they were in a worse league position than we are at present, were losing 5-0 and their fans still out-sung the home crowd. Let's get behind team and manager and try to push the team to safety.

Inevitably poor performances on the pitch affect away support and this has an impact on the numbers travelling on the Town on Tour coaches. It is an odd phenomenon,

The views expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of  
Luton Town Supporters Club

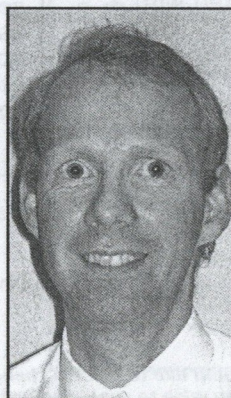
that of all the clubs in our division, we have such a low proportion of fans travelling to away matches by supporter coaches, even though our overall away support is usually good.

The Supporters Club tries to provide a cost-effective (and comfortable) travel option but if the service is being under-utilised then prices may have to rise. I understand as well as anyone the cost of supporting Luton Town both home and away and we are looking to our members for suggestions of how we can improve our travel service. So whether you have used Town on Tour before or not had the pleasure yet, please let us have any constructive comments you would like to make.

As some of you may have seen, a number of committee members helped carry out a bucket collection at the Coventry home game in aid of an appeal for Bruce Sewell (the ex-Luton physio) who unfortunately has Motor Neurone disease. We are pleased to announce that we managed to raise £550. We have forwarded this to Bruce's charity Road2Hope, more details of which can be found at [www.road2hope.com](http://www.road2hope.com)

We have also donated a back-pack drink dispensing machine to the football club which you will see making its way round the stadium at home matches. We hope this will benefit all fans, by making your half time cup of tea a little easier to obtain.

It has been difficult for me to write this article without becoming too negative about our team's chances of Championship survival. But let's get behind the lads and ensure that it is another club's fans who are crying into their beer at the end the season!



Kevin  
Barrett

LTSC  
Chairman



### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

2: 'Newell  
is not to  
blame'

\*

3: Town  
On Tour  
details

\*

4: Still  
plenty of  
cause for  
optimism

\*

5: A chat  
with  
David Bell

\*

6: Looking  
back 100  
years

\*

7: Luton's  
answer to  
George  
Best!

\*

8: Hatters  
on the  
bookshelf

Photography supplied by  
Gareth Owen



# Don't blame Mike for recent woes

A NUMBER of criticisms of Luton Town and their manager, Mike Newell, have appeared in the local press recently, and any true Town fan can readily sympathise with the enormous frustration of seeing a team slip from promotion prospects to relegation favourites in the course of a few months.

The majority of these comments have been cogent, well-written articles that have gathered together a whole raft of negative evidence to re-inforce their views, but one particular article compared Newell rather unfavourably with Joe Kinnear.

It is relatively easy to knock somebody when things are going badly and there seems little doubt that Newell, like any manager, has made errors. However, if critics are going to harp back to the days of Kinnear they should also analyse all the facts, in order to give a balanced view of the present manager's contribution since he took over.

Kinnear left a team in good heart in mid-table. He had previously led the Town to its first promotion in 20 years and it was always one of his proud boasts that he had spent virtually nothing on transfer fees. He had, however, brought in a huge number of players

predecessors did, without taking credit from the players, and without blaming them in public when things went wrong. He has helped to make Boyce, Curtis Davies, Foley, Vine and Barnett into top class players. It was not that he merely took over Kinnear's players, but that he moulded them into a far better team with one of the best disciplinary records in the league, rather than the worst.

At the beginning of the season I fully expected Luton to finish in the same position, or possibly even a little higher than last year. That judgement, however, was based on last year's team, before the departures of our inspirational captain and the best goal-scorer we have had since the days of Harford and Stein.

With Coyne also out injured, the team started this season without the backbone of a side that had been together four years and the protracted injuries to influential players like Underwood and Davis was hardly an auspicious way to start the season.

In spite of these setbacks the Town started the season well and Newell continued with his bright attacking policy. Almost inevitably though, in the most competitive of our four leagues, where the bottom club can beat the leaders away from home, losing players, to injuries and transfers, plays a pivotal role in the success of a small club like Luton and the Town have certainly had far more than their fair share of both.

Events at Ipswich must have had a devastating effect on the whole team and, at roughly the same time, Newell became a victim of his own success. Bigger clubs, with gates four or even five times larger than ours, hungered after Luton's best players, and, as Newell has rightly stated, it is virtually impossible to stop players leaving when they can earn three times the wage at another club.

During Newell's term of office we have seen many of our best players leave, Spring, Boyce, Curtis Davies, Howard, Nicholls, Edwards and Vine in order to counterbalance the economic shortfall from relatively small attendances: or so we are led to believe.

It has been said elsewhere that the Board is simply asset-stripping and has provided us with a new chief executive to cover up their failings and the apparent lack of information about locating to a new ground.

If supporters are to start apportioning blame, please do not start with Newell. Blame the lethargy of the people of Luton who have never really got behind the team, even in our greatest days. Blame the local council which has never helped the club. Blame a series of Directors who have sold the ground and left us to moulder away in a tin-pot stadium below some non-league standards. And last of all, blame the appalling run of injuries and unmitigated bad luck the Town have had this season.

**But don't blame Newell!**

## LTSC member FRANK BATT reflects on recent events

of vastly contrasting abilities and spent a great deal of money on wages before he was most unfairly dismissed. When Newell arrived he brought instant and long term changes to the club, not in personnel, but to the ethos and attitudes to the Town's style of play.

Solid club men, like Boyce, Brkovic and Robinson, suddenly appeared far more confident and consistent. Those with poor disciplinary records, such as Davis, Nicholls and Howard, gradually realised their responsibilities to the team and became far more disciplined and professional in their play. The outcome was that Newell introduced a brand of efficient, flowing football, that was not only more exciting than anything we had seen for well over a decade, but was also highly effective in winning the championship of league Division One.

What the previous five managers had achieved was a gradual decline from the top English league to the bottom, and even the subsequent success of Kinnear, after his initial failure, adopted a brand of long-ball belligerence, more often associated with a team just down the motorway, rather than Luton's historic tradition of neat passing movements on the ground.

What Newell brought was immediate success, without attempting to hog the limelight, as some of his

## LUTON TOWN SUPPORTERS CLUB COMMITTEE • 2006/07

LTSC President • Nick Owen  
LTSC Lifetime Vice President • Brian Swain  
Chairman • Kevin Barrett  
Vice Chairman • Mark Chapman  
General Secretary • Trish Johnson  
Membership Secretary • Vic Fussell

Treasurer • Ian Kelly  
Press Officer • Maureen Ingram  
LTFC Representative • Cherry Newbery  
T.O.T Co-ordinator • John Heley  
Newsletter Editor • Rob Hadgraft

Additional Committee Members:  
John Pyper, Yvonne Fletcher, Helen Gatward, Marilyn Fussell,  
Adrian Shotbolt, Audrey Bray, Christine Bray, Caz Meers,  
Dave Baker, Ray Lelliott, Maureen Barrett, Ryan Canney.

FOR SUPPORTERS BY SUPPORTERS!

If you have any queries regarding membership, or would like to make a change to any of your membership details, like change of address, please call Vic Fussell on 01908 569339. If you wish to supply an article for future publication, please email [r.hadgraft@btinternet.com](mailto:r.hadgraft@btinternet.com)

# TOWN ON TOUR 2007

THE LTSC's travel club, Town on Tour, continues to follow the Hatters throughout the UK and beyond!

Our service provides refreshments on board, video entertainment and our predict-a-score competition. So why have all the hassle of driving and finding somewhere to park when you can relax and enjoy the journey with us?

For your convenience, we pick up from Leighton Buzzard and Houghton Regis before picking up at Luton, in the Maple Road Car Park where you can securely leave your car for just £4. All journeys going north on the M1 also feature a pick up from Milton Keynes Coachway. Prices have been kept as low as possible and of course it's even cheaper to travel with us if you are a member of our supporters club.

For more information on travelling with us or to book seats on a forthcoming trip, please give the Town on Tour mobile a call: 07960 567465 weekdays between 9am and 5pm. Terms and conditions can be obtained on request.

You can also book at the Supporters Club kiosk in Kenilworth Road before or after home games; on one of our coach trips; and now you can book and pay online by visiting the website: [www.townontour.org](http://www.townontour.org)

## FEBRUARY

**17.02.07 STOKE CITY 11.00am\***  
**£17 adult, £15 Concession, £19 Non-member**

**24.02.07 CRYSTAL PALACE 11.00am**  
**£12 adult, £10 Concession, £15 Non-member**

## MARCH

**10.03.07 LEEDS UNITED 10.00am\***  
**£21 adult, £19 Concession, £23 Non-member**

**31.03.07 BURNLEY 09.00am\***  
**£21 adult, £19 Concession, £23 Non-member**

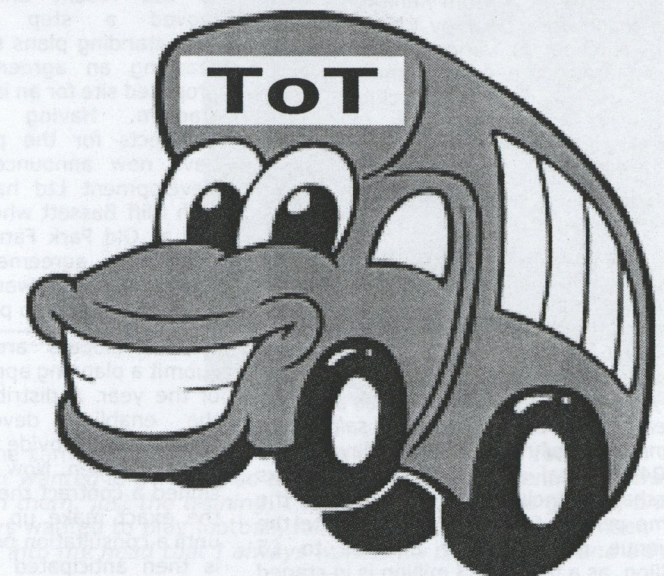
## APRIL

**09.04.07 QPR 12.00pm**  
**£10 adult, £9 Concession, £12 Non-member**

**21.04.07 DERBY COUNTY 11.00am\***  
**£15 adult, £13 Concession, £17 Non-member**

**28.04.07 SOUTHEND UTD 11.00am**  
**£17 adult, £15 Concession, £19 Non-member**

(\* Denotes a pick-up from MK Coachway approx 30 mins. later)



## Supporters Club news round-up

ALREADY this year the supporters club has donated funds to Luton Town to assist the youth team undertake both a UK and a European tour. As we all know the youth team has always been, and will continue to be, an important source of new players.

We have also bought a mobile hot drinks machine for the club. This can be seen operating around the touchlines at Kenilworth Road, both before kick-off and at half-time, bringing a welcome cuppa to home fans.

At this time of year a lot of effort is going into planning the end of season presentation evening that we run in association with the football club. Raffle tickets will be coming out soon, together with voting slips for player of the season and goal of the season.

In addition to the above we have had a meeting with the new Chief Executive of Luton Town FC, John Mitchell, to discuss the way forward. We will be keeping in contact with John and trying to assist him where we can while always putting across our members' views.

If you think there is something the supporters club should be doing, please let us know or ask about what you can do to help.

KB



## A STEP CLOSER...

The Town have moved a step closer to their plans of relocating from their Kenilworth Road ground.

The need to move from Kenilworth Road, was made very clear by Chief Executive John Mitchell, in various meetings with fans prior to the ground announcement being made. In 2004 the club turnover (income) was £4.2 million (all before player sales), this has increased to a current turnover for 2006 of £6.8 million with predicted turnover in 2007 of £7.2 million.

The costs for a Championship side require a current football (*Player & managerial salaries*) budget in 2006 of £7.1 million, along with administration costs estimated for 2006 at a further £1.7 million. Total costs £8.8 million. Annual loss (excluding player sales) £2 million (This has been the average loss, excluding player sales since coming out of receivership). Player sales 2004-07 total £8 million, with players purchased, including signing on in the same period. £2 million. But to date the revenue received only equates to £5 million, as a further £3 million is in staged payments. The Town currently have 7 years left on a lease at Kenilworth Road, which assuming Championship football is maintained will require a further £14m of player sales in today's terms.

John Mitchell confirmed that the cost of the planning application will be born by the developer, in addition he confirmed that the borough Council were still been helpful, this to me appears to be to supportive of them. But that no one will offer land for free with enough extra land to fund development of stadium without a considerable mortgage commitment, it is this factor that is currently crippling a number of clubs with new stadia. The council wholeheartedly supported J10 (but were unable to help with money). Vauxhall site was deemed too expensive and was therefore not considered by LTFC or LBC, how short sighted might that decision prove to be.

J10 - The club had 2 years of negotiations with SWC over ownership of J10 land. Price kept escalating with every discussion, from an initial figure of £4 million then £8 million then £12 million !!! SWC also wanted to keep naming rights (i.e. £20 million) so the cost of stadium would exceed £50 million (including land)

just for a stadium with no other income streams to support a stadium or football. We cannot afford £50 million for a stadium.

It is these circumstances which have led to the recent announcements which moved a step forward in their long-standing plans to move home, after reaching an agreement regarding the proposed site for an initial 22,000 capacity stadium. Having already appointed architects for the project, the Hatters have now announced that Rosemound Development Ltd have clinched a deal with Cliff Bassett who owns the 250-acre site at Old Park Farm site near the M1. Under the agreement Rosemound will provide £25m towards the 22,000-seat stadium, subject to planning consent.

The developers are not expected to submit a planning application until the end of the year. A distribution centre will be the enabling development for the stadium, i.e. provide the finance to enable this to happen. Now the developers have signed a contract they have to determine the exact make up of the development until a consultation period is completed. It is then anticipated to have a planning application in at the end of this year.

They are aiming for a world class stadium that is in the right place and delivers all the facilities that both the fans, the employees and the local area needs. Meanwhile, John Mitchell, the Chief Executive of Luton Town said "They are providing a £25 million contribution to the stadium costs" he said. "I think it's very important to make that very clear so it's effectively a tri-party agreement. You've got the developer, you've got the landowner, you've got the football club and they are all interfaced. So, in essence, the football club are being gifted, not just by receiving the £25 million contribution but they are being gifted 30 acres so we'll actually own the land that the stadium is built on. Therefore see the first game played, debt free".

M1 widening between J10 and J13 will take place during 2009-2011 and will ensure transport objections will not hamper the plan as it did for David Kohler's dream at J10 twelve years ago. The green belt land will still be an issue but is increasingly being brought up as the Government meets it's housing shortage. This ultimately will see Luton grow from 75,000 houses(185,000 population) at

present to 90,000 houses and a population of approximately 215,000 (new fan base)by 2015. The current north Luton border will then have moved from the Toddington Road boundary at present, further northwards and be approx 1.5 miles from the proposed stadium site. Planning permission will be granted on this basis despite any local objections. Harlington train Station will be improved to handle match day transport and is only a 5-10 minute train ride from Luton/Leagrave stations. On site club "megastore", pubs, restaurants and other retail space will boost the experience of matchdays that we cannot even contemplate at present. A stadium that will be a modern day "Kenny" and not a Walkers or Ricoh ghost town.

The Hatters have been angling for a move away from Kenilworth Road for a number of years and the announcement on Thursday 15th February will go some way to appeasing the club's fans and manager Mike Newell, who has previously voiced his frustration at a lack of progress. Although, the club have yet to satisfy a vociferous minority of the fan base, of the benefits of moving the club out of the Borough.

A number of obstacles still remain, notably Luton Borough Councils preference for a site near a possible Junction 11a of the Motorway. However, the Council have consistently failed to provide a leadership in this area, and are now considering an option on for a piece of land which the club, do not own, or have an option to purchase. In addition they have failed to persuade Central Government to confirm the construction the access Junction 11a.

Is it no wonder that Town fans are becoming increasingly frustrated about the lack of progress.

Personally I welcome the announcements recently made, but I urge the club to address the concerns of all supporters and in particular it is imperative that local politicians agree on the way forward in what will be a pivotal development for the area. In addition if this plan is not to move forward then a way needs to be found to secure the land at Junction 11a, which can mean the club can move forward, but it needs to at least or partly meet some of the benefits provided by Junction 12.

Mark Chapman - LTSC Committee

## The last optimist?

Football fans are notoriously fickle and Luton supporters are certainly no exception. After a cracking start to this season, we went to Goodison on the back of a delightful thrashing of Leeds 5-1 and thereafter watched our world fall apart. Our plummet down the Championship table is remarkable only in that it has stopped short of the relegation places in spite of the paltry points return of recent weeks.

Putting common sense aside for a moment - there's never much room for it in our national game anyway - I feel confident that the Hatters will return to form and end the season in mid-table respectability. I seem to be surrounded by doom'n'gloom merchants and even our Chairman's got the winter blues (Kevin, not Bill, that is). An extraordinary run of injuries and illness depleted a squad that never had the greatest depth in the division, throw in a few of the usual

appalling refereeing decisions that everyone's used to and, hey presto, bottom 4 here we come.

So what gives me cause for optimism? Simple, I can remember the winning performances against Birmingham, Leeds and Preston, amongst others and see no reason why the team won't perform like that again this season. As I write, Bjorn looks good for a couple of goals during his short dip down the league and once Boyd gets into shape (insert your own joke here) I think he'll be banging them in too though that may be something of a minority view, I realise. We've got quality all over the pitch and once we get a settled line-up, there's little in the remainder of the fixture list to fret about.

What else? Well there might be an element of denial, I admit. After all who wants to contemplate a season with away fixtures at Blackpool, Chesterfield, Carlisle, Yeovil, Port Vale, Rotherham and Oldham?

Yvonne Fletcher - LTSC Committee

# David Bell

Born • 21/01/1984

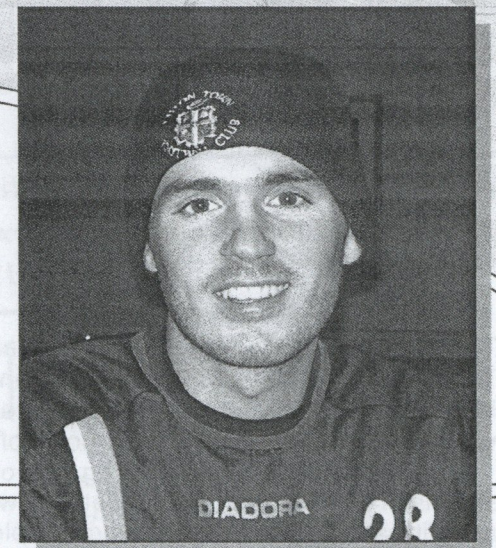
Height • 5'10"

Signed for Luton • January 2006  
(from Rushden & Diamonds)

Squad Number • 28

Position • Midfielder

Goals scored this season: 2



## Player Interview

**EARLY YEARS:** When David was younger, his family all lived in the same area and his elder cousins used to play football for a team called Westfield Rovers F.C. 'I was the youngest and I always wanted to go along so they took me one weekend and I was just kicking a ball about on the side and ended up joining in with them, just the training, I didn't play any of the games, and then the next year I joined when I was old enough.' David always wanted to play football, for as long as he can remember. 'I was 6 or 7 and started playing for Westfield Rovers, and I got it into my head that I always wanted to play football and be a professional footballer, and thankfully I am!'

Midfield has always been David's playing position. 'I've always played in midfield, from Westfield, to the school team, the county team, then when I was at Rushden and now at Luton - except for the game I had up-front against QPR!'

**RUSHDEN & DIAMONDS:** At the age of 13, David left Westfield Rovers to join Rushden and Diamonds. 'I joined Rushden when I was 13 and was in the youth team there for 2 years. Then I joined full-time as YTS at the age of 16 when leaving school. I got into the first team when I was 18 and I played 3 seasons there which I enjoyed before joining Luton.'

Moments that stand out in David's career so far are breaking into the first team at Rushden, and also winning the Coca Cola League Two with them. 'My best moment so far though is my move to Luton and a chance to play in the Championship. I'm pleased the gaffer came in for me at Rushden and has seen something in me and I'm grateful for that.'

When Rushden got relegated, it has stuck with David as one of the low points of his career. 'Getting relegated from League One to League Two wasn't very nice and I didn't enjoy that at all, but then again, nobody likes getting relegated! Now I'm at Luton, I just want to put that all behind me.'

**LUTON TOWN:** In January 2006, David had an offer from Rushden to sign a new contract, as his was due to run out at the end of the season. 'The club offered me a new contract just before the transfer window opened and I turned it down and in January I got a call from then the Manager, Barry Hunter. He said they had accepted a bid from Luton, and they gave me permission to come and talk to Luton, so I came down that evening, and signed. 'It was a big move for David as Rushden were down at the bottom League Two. 'To take a jump up to the Championship was a big jump for me, the lads were doing really well, but I'm delighted that I signed on.' David already knew Paul Underwood from when they were at Rushden together and also knew Kevin Foley, when playing in the Ireland under 21's, so that helped him to settle in quite quickly.

As far as this season goes, David is confident that we can pick up and turn things around. 'We have had a lot of injuries to key players and we have sold a lot of good players in the last few years which is always hard for any club when you are selling the better players, but I think we have got enough in the dressing room to turn things round and I think if we can get a couple of good wins it could kick start our season. It's an old cliché, people say when your at the bottom things go against you but I think in football you make your own luck at the end of the day, and I think once we get 1 or 2 wins our season will turn around.'



David has been pleased with how he has played this season. 'I sat out the first 7 or 8 games but then came on against Birmingham and scored. After that, I got a run in the side for about 11 or 12 games, playing in central midfield, which I feel is my best position, but I'm having to play on the right now. I don't mind playing out on the right for the team, I'd be happy playing right back or in goal, as long as I was in the team, but I think my best position is in central midfield, and hopefully there is still lots to come from me yet. I'd like to score a few more goals too!'

**INTERESTS:** David is a family man outside of football. 'I enjoy spending time with my family, and I have a little boy who is 3, so he takes up a lot of my time. Other than that, I don't mind a game of snooker, I'm not the best, but I like to have a game every now and again. Sometimes golf, but I'm not really a big golfer, but I don't mind to go along with my mates and have a bit of banter!'

David will also watch football when he has time too and is an Arsenal fan. 'I do watch football, most of the time is when we are at a hotel somewhere for an away game on the Saturday and there is a match on the Friday night and I'd sit and watch it in bed! I'd probably say I watch it more than I do at home!'

Many thanks go to David for taking the time to talk to me. Good luck for the rest of the season.

Interview by Helen Gatward, LTSC Committee

*David Bell*



# Going back in time

*The second and concluding part of LTSC member BRIAN ELLIS' article, looking back at how Luton Town fared in the Southern League in 1906-7, exactly 100 years ago*

THE FA Cup 1st round replay with Gainsborough Trinity took place at 2pm on 15th January 1907 in front of a decent size crowd of over 4,000 who managed to get the afternoon off work.

Brown returned but Hogg was out. His surprise replacement was Fitzpatrick, whose mobility supporting the left wing troubled Gainsborough's defence. The crowd that day saw witnessed Luton's first ever giant killing when Alf Warner scored the first goal. Gainsborough never recovered and Brown's goal sealed their fate.

Victory brought a Second Round tie against First Division Sunderland. Before that there were two league games to play. The following Saturday nine members of the replay side found the game at Southampton too much for them, going down by a solitary goal. A week before their FA Cup 2nd Round tie West Ham visited Kenilworth Road. A good crowd of over 3,000 saw Luton rest several key players but still manage a 1-1 draw.

The FA Cup tie against the three times Football League Champions drew a crowd of over twelve thousand, a record at the time, with several hundred more locked out. Alf Warner who had done so well in the previous tie was missing. He had been replaced by Bob (Smiler) Latheron who had played against some members of the Sunderland team as a youth player. Latheron had a good game on the wing and despite a good team performance the Town could not break Sunderland down. At 0-0 the result was a morale victory for the underdogs.

## *Sandy Brown among the goals*

The replay on Tuesday 5th February saw an unchanged Luton team go down to a 1-0 defeat. The extra income proved useful and the press coverage brought scouts to look at several Luton players. Fortunately defeat in the cup did not bring a hangover in the league. Hogg returned at full back; Fred White took over from Bob Hawkes in defence and a Brown goal at Norwich City started a run of four wins and a draw as Crystal Palace, Brentford, and Bristol Rovers were all defeated. A Brown goal prevented defeat at home to Millwall and brought his total to ten for the season.

A surprise 1-0 defeat at Leyton on the 23rd March was the last of the season with Luton registering five wins and four draws. Sandy Brown's four goals, plus Abe Jones being encouraged to go up with the forwards proved decisive in most games. Notable victories over

Portsmouth and Brighton had an effect on where the Championship was to end up. Had Luton been able to turn draws at Watford, New Brompton and Northampton Town into victories, a higher placing than fourth could have been achieved.

One event that could only have happened 100 years ago occurred when local solicitor and park footballer, JGC Bendham, stood in for Sandy Brown. Brown had picked up an injury at Northampton, the opponents the following day. Bendham scored and his goal was all that separated the two teams over two days. His moment of glory lasted only one game and he returned to the obscurity of local football. The season ended as it began with a 1-1 draw home to Reading.

## *Dire financial straits*

As with the previous season, a fourth place finish was very respectable. In the United League Luton went one better, gaining a third place finish while 9th place was achieved in the South Eastern League. Attendances towards the end of the season could not pay the Town's share of the opponents' gate as well as the players' wages. As a result four influential cup players and four fringe players left during the close season. Bill Barnes and Alf Gittins joined QPR, later helping them to the Southern League Championship.

Harold Fitzpatrick and Alf Warner joined Liverpool and Notts County for large three figure fees. Bartram Jackson, who had replaced John Hogg, brought in a large fee from his home town team, Manchester City. John Pickering and Alex McDonald went to fellow Southern League teams New Brompton and Croydon Common while Pat Gallagher returned to Scotland.

Joe Schofield, whose move promised so much, had failed to settle and he re-joined one of his former teams, Ashton United.

## **Southern League 1906-7:**

P 38, W 18, D 9, L 11, F 52, A 45, Pts 45, Pos 4th.

League Appearances (FA Cup in brackets): Barnes 37 3 (4), Bendham 1 1, Brown 32 14 (4 1), Fitzpatrick 20 7 (4), Gallacher 2, Gittins 23 5 (4), F. Hawkes 38 2 (4), R Hawkes 21 2 (4), Hogg 24 (2), Jackson 14 (1)

League goals (FA Cup in brackets): Jones 23, Latheron 12, McDonald 11 3, McGurdy 38 (4), Murphy 8 2 (2), Pickering 19 3 (1), Platt 38 (4), Schofield 7 1, Warner 21 2, White 29 1 (4).

# Colourful career of Luton winger Graham French THE STORY OF A TROUBLED GENIUS

## **PART ONE, by LTSC member ROB HADGRAFT**

A CRIMINAL court judge called him 'an unsavoury man with synthetic glamour'- but to Luton Town fans he was the finest winger ever to hug Kenilworth Road's muddy touchlines.

Wild-man of the flanks Graham French has often been referred to in soccer folklore as 'the poor man's George Best'. But such an accolade is way off the mark - French's behaviour made Best look almost angelic!

After all, was Bestie ever charged with attempted murder? Did he ever fire a revolver into a punter's chest from point blank range? Did Best ever serve time at Her Majesty's pleasure and then emerge a few years later with a new name?

## *Goal to remember*

French may not have had Best's looks, but as a youngster he had similar potential, playing a dazzling role as England's youth team won the 'Little World Cup' in 1963. His defining moment would arrive in 1968-9 season when he conjured up an astonishing goal at Kenilworth Road against Mansfield.

The ball was rolled to him on the edge of his own area and he immediately made a bee-line for the other end. The crowd's roar of encouragement built up as French loped on and on, dummieing and changing pace as he passed all opposition. With Brian Lewis' clever off-the-ball run pulling opponents out of position, French got ever closer, and finally slipped the ball nonchalantly past keeper Dave Hollins. Those who witnessed the goal were amazed and swear it was better than any by Best.

French would later have plenty of time to think about his

greatest goal while behind bars. In his own words: "The further I went with the ball, the more confident I was that I could beat whatever came up in front of me. It was no freak goal because I had the Mansfield goal in my sights as I crossed the halfway line."

French's wing-play was full of golden moments, but his outrageous behaviour off the park saw him heading for inevitable self-destruction. The first hint of trouble had been the moment he made an enemy of Tommy Docherty after returning from the Little World Cup as a 17-year-old on Shrewsbury's books.

'The Doc' wanted French to join Chelsea and went to meet him at Heathrow but, amazingly, was given the brush-off by a teenager fast gaining a reputation for arrogance and surliness. Docherty immediately washed his hands of the young upstart.

Eventually Swindon took a chance and coughed up £12,000 for him. But French soon made it known he was fed up with life in Wiltshire and he drifted to Watford where boss Bill McGarry insisted he lose weight and change his attitude. After a few weeks of



**Graham French**

jogging around Cassiobury Park wearing two or three tracksuits, a miserable French was released.

He returned to his native West Midlands and joined non-League Wellington (later to become Telford United) where he became a local star, turning the wing-wizardry on and off like a tap as the mood took him. In the local paper he admitted he'd been a silly lad in the past by becoming a member of the 'party set', but promised to repay Wellington for the faith they'd shown in him, and for providing his young family with a club house.

*Spotted by Luton*

It was then in 1965 that that Ex-Luton winger Mike Cullen spotted him in action and recommended him to The Hatters. Having just lost young winger David Pleat to a broken leg, Luton paid £5,000 for French as boss George Martin desperately tried to reverse the club's slide from Divisions One to Four.

The maverick winger would fit in well at a club which at the time was using goalkeeper Tony Read as a makeshift striker!

Although his off-field shenanigans continued, French became a revelation on the pitch, terrorising defences with nimbleness and speed that was rare for someone of his height and weight. Luton got the best out of him, but bigger clubs were frightened off by his reputation.

At the end of his fourth and best season with Luton (1969-70), a row blew up over his contract and he stopped turning up for training. Things then got even worse when one morning Bedfordshire police turned up at the football ground with some incredible news . . . . .

\* To be continued in the next issue.



# Hatters on the bookshelf

LIKE ME, many supporters will have been enjoying the A-Z series of player profiles in this season's matchday programmes. This gives a quick pen-picture of every player to have appeared for Luton Town since the second world war.

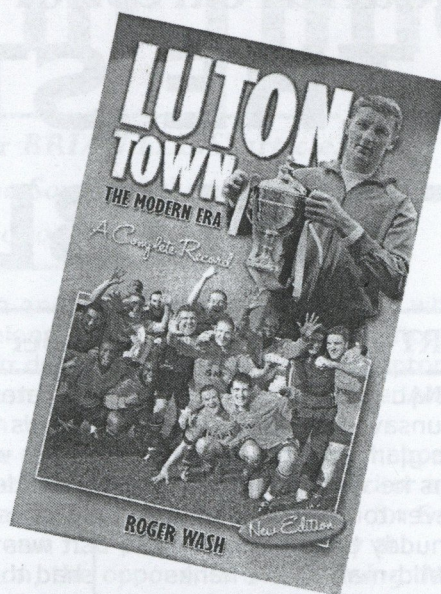
The series is the work of club historian, Roger Wash, and it prompted me to find out what other reference material was out there for anyone interested in our club, its players and its history.

First stop, the club shop. There you can buy "Luton Town: The Modern Era" and "Luton Town : An Illustrated History", both by Roger Wash. The modern era starts in 1967, and the book gives a very comprehensive overview of the matches, the players, and the highs and lows of our progress since we opened the season in the fourth division. The illustrated history goes back to when the club first started. Both books are a fine introduction to the club and how we got where we are today.

Going into my local bookshops, namely The Book Castle in Dunstable and Ottakars (formerly Hammicks) in Luton, I came across another book by Roger Wash, called "Luton Town at Kenilworth Road", published in 2005, our stadium centenary year. It'll be interesting to see if we celebrate our bi-centenary there!

On to other authors, and I found a copy of a book called "Kenilworth Sunset?" by Tim Kingston, published in 1998. Tim was a well-known local journalist at that time and his columns always contained lively and outspoken views on how the Hatters were faring that week. We've not heard from him for some time, although I assume he still lives locally and comes to home matches.

Two books by female fans deserve a mention. Firstly, there is "A Brand New Bright Tomorrow" by Caroline Dunn, published in 2002, with a foreword by Steve Howard. This is a Hatters promotion diary of the 2001-02 season. Ironically, this was published the year before J\*\*n G\*\*\*\*\*y and the administration debacle of 2003! And then there is "A Hatter Goes Mad" by Kristina Howells, which appeared in 1997. This is an interesting book - it avoids



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## LTSC member BERNARD ELWEN browses through books about LTFC

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statistical information on who won, when and who scored how many times, but focuses on interviews with the players, managers and other famous commentators who have shaped the club over the years. They have all been asked to give their perspective on what makes the club a great one to play for or to be associated with.

And then we have "Completely Top Hatters" by Dean Hayes, which was published in 2002. It is an A-Z of the major players, matches and records over the course of our history, with many good photographs of players in their heyday.

I browsed the second-hand book website abebooks.com to see what else I could find. There were loads of old matchday programmes on there, but few books. I could buy "The Definitive Luton Town F.C." by Steve Bailey, Brian Ellis and Alan Shury, published in 1997. The website entry lists it as a statistical history to 1997. Secondly, there is "The Luton Town Story 1885-1985" by Tim Collings. There was no supporting information but several second-hand dealers appear to have copies for sale. By the same author, there is "Luton Town: A Pictorial Celebration of their Cup History", published in 1988. This was the year we won the League Cup final 3-2 against Arsenal.

Finally, we have a book called "MIG Down" by Tommy Robinson, which charts the progress of the Luton-based Men in Gear and chronicles the 25-year career of the author as part of the football violence that accompanied the soccer scene in the 1970s and 80s.

If anyone knows of any books on Luton that I have missed, it would be interesting to hear from them in a future article.