

GOING STRONG SINCE OCTOBER 1985

# Wombles Downunder



**Issue 193    March / April 2012**

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- ◆ 'THIS IS OUR TIME' AUTHOR TELLS ALL
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- ◆ FOUR PAGES OF 'AROUND LEAGUE TWO'

Editorial: 14 Northcote Road, Leura, N.S.W. 2780 Australia

Telephone: (61) 02 47842385

e-mail: [wdsa@tpg.com.au](mailto:wdsa@tpg.com.au)    web-site: [wdsa.com.au](http://wdsa.com.au)

## DID I SAY THAT?

"In a sense, AFC Wimbledon is a perfect example of what we want to create across sport. The link between the team at the top end and the community is so strong here. One of the things that is difficult about English football is that there are so many ownership issues and it is difficult to say what works and what does not. But there is no doubt that the achievements of AFC Wimbledon in such a short space of time are extraordinary and is a remarkable tribute to the club, its supporters, and the community." **Minister for Sport Hugh Robertson.**

"EVERYONE has told us that 47 points will be enough, but the target has always been 50 points. Hopefully, we can do that in the next couple of games. I would like to give the likes of Brendan Kiernan and Kieran Djilali a chance to stake a claim, but we need to get 50 points."

**Terry Brown.**

"I'M going to stick my neck on the line here – probably controversially - and state that the time is now right for Terry – who turns 60 during 2012/13 – to enjoy a well-earned retirement with his family, walk away with his head deservedly held high after earning three promotions and guiding us to League 2 safety, with our grateful thanks, thus ensuring himself the warmest of welcomes whenever he wants to return to Kingsmeadow." **Ray Armfield.**

"WE think that there is only one place for us to be – the Football League. So we need to give Terry Brown a budget that is as competitive as possible (even then, our starting budget this year was the fourth smallest, according to figures compiled by the League) and we have to generate that money ourselves. We will continue to be as inventive as we can about how we raise money." **Erik Samuelson.**

"I have to show people what I can do as I had not played for months before coming here. When you are out, it seems like people in the football world do not know you, but at least by coming here I have got a chance. I want to perform as well as I possibly can at Wimbledon." **On loan defender Pim Balkestein.**

"WE as a team have had a stop, start season. We started like a house on fire and then we had a really bad patch, which was disappointing. Now we need to have a strong end to the season." **Luke Moore.**

"It is good to get off the mark - that is all I have been trying to do since I came here. Maybe I had put too much pressure on myself. I have always been used to scoring goals and when you do not do that, a few doubts start to creep into your mind. But I am a confidence player and hopefully that is the start for me." **Byron Harrison.**

"THE fans here are great, they have been unbelievable with me and I thank them for that. But I did not do

myself any favours [against Oxford] - I did not show my best for the team. Things did not come off for me, but I still tried to put a shift in for the team. I have to move on and rectify it. I have to get more goals for the team and work harder on my fitness."

**Billy Knott.**

"I am not one to look back and think that I missed out. It was their decision and it has probably done me a favour as I am here playing regularly now and scoring goals, which I needed. The fans there (at Oxford) were brilliant and it was the manager's decision not to renew my contract."

**Jack Midson.**

"IT was great to get my first league goal and even better to do it at home in front of our fans," **George Moncur.**

"IT has been so frustrating because I had missed just one game in two-and-a-half years at Bognor so being out is not something I am used to. It has been the worst time possible. I had an inflamed tendon in my knee and it is usually two or three weeks, but this injury has been particularly stubborn."

**Jason Prior.**

"FULHAM contacted us about Reece, but he has turned them down and shown his commitment to us. That shows the quality that we have now in our youth development programme. Reece is a strong and powerful forward, who has been with us since he was in the U10s. We see Reece as Wimbledon through and through and believe that he could potentially move up towards the first-team at Wimbledon in the future. Hopefully, this shows the rest of the schoolboys in our youth set-up that they can stay here and progress." **Jeremy Sauer, AFC Wimbledon Centre of Excellence Manager, on 13-year-old Reece Williams-Bowers.**

### WOMBLES DOWNUNDER

First issue - October 1985

Issue 193

**Editor/Production:** Robert Smith

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**In fond memory:** Jack Russell

**WDSA inspiration:** Eric 'Mr Wimbledon' Willcocks

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**FINAL SEASON ISSUE**

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## HOW I SEE IT

*robert smith*

### SHOULD TERRY STAY ON?

Oscar Wilde once said *"Experience is the name everyone gives to their mistakes."* And there is no doubt Terry Brown and his backroom staff have made a few mistakes in AFC Wimbledon's vexed first season in the Football League. The Dons are all but assured of staying in League Two but not without many fraught months when doubts set in. Hindsight is, of course, a glorious gift to second-guess after the fact, but TB's squad got there in the end only with the aid of a few sedatives. To most fans consolidating a place in L2 at the first attempt was the main objective. The thought of a quick return to the Conference after the euphoria of Eastlands would have been too much to bear. As Wimbledon make sure of securing a spot in next season's League 2, the question is posed: should Terry Brown remain the manager? I have canvassed a wide variety of views on the subject in this issue and you can make up your own minds, but by keeping TB as the gaffer and the current coaching arrangements are we ensuring that there will be a less bumpy ride next time? There is no doubt, in hindsight, that Terry Brown miscalculated hugely with some of the players he brought in to bolster the promoted team: Max Porter and Charles Ademenio didn't measure up and were let go, while Brett Johnson, Jamie Stuart, Fraser Franks, Chris Bush, Ryan Jackson, Ricky Wellard, Lee Minshull and James Mulley struggled to take the step up in grade. Granted Jack Midson was an inspired buy and is currently joint leading league scorer, but the quality of players TB trusted to get the job done plainly weren't up to it. His tactics, playing formations and timing of substitutions also didn't help at times. So it wasn't until the January transfer window that TB was able to reinforce the squad and largely he got it right: Billy Knott, George Moncur, Pim Balkestein, Jason Euell, while record signing Byron Harrison took 13 games to score his first league goal and Jason Prior has only made one appearance. TB signed loanee Callum McNaughton permanently, played him three times (for three wins) and then only used him once more before a cruciate ligament injury wiped him out for up to nine months. These are decisions which confuse Dons' supporters as to the direction TB wants to pursue. TB admitted his job was on the line during the squeaky bum time around the Dagenham & Redbridge and Bradford City home games, which his players responded to the pressure with victories. It remains to be seen at season's end whether TB will decide that he does not want to proceed and walks away with his head held high and an absolute Dons' legend. There is the fear that if he continues he won't be able to leave in the future on his own terms, and that would be a massive shame.

## FULL-TIME COACHES

I'll take this a step further. IF Terry Brown does remain as manager and I am fairly sure he will have the support of the club if he does want to go on, then something that must change is the position of Terry's back-up coaching staff. The players are full-time, TB is full-time, but assistant coaches Stuart Cash and Simon Bassey are not. Cash and Bassey have jobs outside of Kingsmeadow and they juggle their working hours around their part-time roles at the club. I came across this recent post and while it may not be absolutely accurate then it's pretty close to the mark... *"Would I be right in saying Stuart Cash drives from Brighton in the morning, does training from 10-12, drives back, works a full 8 or 9 hour shift and then also obviously has family/other matters to attend to? We need at least 3 or 4 people watching games all week every week and have an encyclopedic knowledge of teams and players for opposition and recruitment purposes (like every other club does). Not only do they need to be watching Football League and Conference but reserve matches to find young pros and also gems out of the Ryman League as it is evident we can't always afford the finished article. When have SC (and Bassey) got the time to do all the essential roles, plus afternoon training, planning the club's future, keeping in regular contact with the many people inside the game and up to date with the goings on at other clubs. It's impossible. We have got to be more professional and put ourselves on the same level as all the other clubs in our league."*

Apparently Cash looks after the defence, while Bassey works with the midfielders. Wimbledon's defence has been diabolical this season, and only the arrival of Pim Balkestein has helped plug the leaking of goals. The Dutchman is unlikely to stay beyond his loan (apparently he's too expensive), so he is unlikely to be a full-time solution. If Wimbledon are to be competitive next season, then the defence has to concede around 20 goals less just to be a credible top half outfit. It is likely that if TB stays on as manager then he will want Cash and probably Bassey to remain. If that is the case then the club must insist that if they stay then they become full-time. If that is not possible then the club and Terry must track down full-time coaches within its budget who will help improve the club. Cheshire Womble in this issue suggested someone like Tony Adams to look after the defence. That kind of experience is what is required. Otherwise Terry Brown is likely to find it tough going once again next season and that is the risk TB takes if he decides to bat on in 2012/13. The coaching staff much adapt to the full-time challenges for the club to ensure there is no repeat of this season's white-knuckle ride for next time.



**PAGE SPONSOR: HENRY MANNING; Brisbane**

## FORTY SEVEN (POINTS) AND COUNTING ...

**RAY ARMFIELD writes the jump into League 2 has been far steeper than many thought and he sticks his neck out and says once this season is all over Terry Brown should enjoy a well-deserved retirement with the deep gratitude of all Dons' supporters.**



It isn't mathematically certain yet and there's no denying that 50 points looks and psychologically sounds far more, but the recent win over Burton Albion has, whisper it quietly, *probably* secured League 2 survival for the Dons and spared us the unwanted embarrassment of turning "*It only took Nine Years*" into "*It only took Nine Months!*"

I don't know about you, but if I'd been given a pound every time I've heard the phrase 'learning curve' during the season, then we could have probably afforded to buy another player. But there's no denying that the jump from the Blue Square Premier into League Two has been a far steeper one than many of us (me included) would care to admit.

Momentum can only take you so far and perhaps a few people got a bit light-headed in August as we briefly flirted with the promotion places. Then, of course, reality set in and having seen a Burton side in a worse tailspin (no win since Boxing Day) than AFC Wimbledon, it's been a huge relief that we've strung together the necessary home victories that have rescued the season and almost certainly with it, Terry Brown's job.

Plenty of others in and around the L2 trapdoor have already parted company with managers, ironically with little success in most cases, and even Brown himself alluded to the end-game situation facing him had we lost to Dagenham and then Bradford after the debacle of being turned over by Plymouth. Thankfully, we got the result(s) and improved performances at Bristol and Oxford coupled with the Burton result have given everyone at the club some much-needed breathing space.

But what of the summer and next season? I'm going to stick my neck on the line here – probably controversially - and state that the time is now right for Terry – who turns 60 during 2012/13 – to enjoy a well-earned retirement with his family, walk away with his head deservedly held high after earning three promotions and guiding us to League 2 safety, with our grateful thanks, thus ensuring himself the warmest

of welcomes whenever he wants to return to Kingsmeadow for functions and dinners, etc. and hand the baton over to a younger man – although one with seasoned experience of the Football League. Where that will leave his trusty lieutenants Stuart Cash and Simon Bassey, I don't know, as personally I'd favour a fresh managerial duo who are **both** full-time. I don't know if such a change is being contemplated by the Board (or even Terry himself) but if a change is thought necessary, then I hope it's an amicable but, more importantly, a clean break. What I don't want to see is a halfway house of a decision whereby Terry is shunted upstairs in an artificially-created 'Director of Football' role and end up inadvertently looking over the shoulder of his replacement.

This situation didn't work at Manchester United many moons ago when Matt Busby moved onto the Old Trafford Board and hovered over the likes of Wilf McGuinness and Frank O'Farrell like a vulture – and it wouldn't work here either, in my opinion. But contrary to an ill-advised remark made by Terry earlier in the season, there is perhaps a bit less 'deadwood' in League Two than many imagined and we cannot afford to go into next season anything less than 100% prepared and believing we can simply 'wing it'.

My expectations for next season would be to continue to consolidate the club in League Two, avoid the nervousness of recent months by not flirting with relegation and to hopefully bring through some of our talented youngsters such as Brendan Kiernan – oh and a cup run would be nice too!

Supporters will have at least noted a change off the field with the unveiling of Chris Slavin as the club's new Communications Executive.

His brief, as Erik Samuelson outlined, includes a rather formal title "*which we might change as the role develops, reflects the fact that we see the role as wider than being just a journalist who covers our games and interviews Terry and the players: it should include newsletters, social media, parts of this programme, and liaison with the local and national press.*"

Chris is a journalist who previously covered AFC Wimbledon news for the *Hounslow Chronicle* (that occasionally scooped the OS anyway!) and his appointment is part of the Dons Trust Communications Strategy in advance of the club's website moving to the generic Football League FLi format, which will require regular updating in a number of areas and formats. He's a Liverpool supporter mind you – but we'll soon cure him of that I'm sure! — **Ray Armfield**



## BROWN IS THE MAN TO TAKE WIMBLEDON FORWARD

**TERRY BROWN has made mistakes but he has the ability to marshall relatively scant resources, who knows the lower divisions well enough to shop there successfully, and who 'gets us.' TB will be a better manager next season, argues TREVOR PEARCE.**



*AN excellent start to the new season in a new division, that sees the club dreaming of play-off glory only for reality to kick in round December. A plethora of loan signings in the transfer window with mixed results, followed by a pretty disastrous run, leading for calls for the head of the manager, who, it is claimed, has taken the club as far as it can go. A group of players highly rated in the division below, but for whom any number have shown fairly clearly that they cannot really cut it at this level, and who will go in the summer. But will the exodus include Terry Brown?*

This was the position in March 2010, and the answer as we all know now was no.

I am writing this just after the 1-0 loss against Oxford, a team we played in 2010, and one of the many consistencies is that they are a better team than us and won.

We played them in February 2010, in front of 6,750 fans at their stadium, and lost fairly comfortably 2-0. Of the 14 Dons who played that night only two (Hatton and Wellard) remain at the club. To be sure, some of the others were loan players, but others including Pullen, Lorraine, Taylor, Hendry were fairly unceremoniously dispatched come the summer as Brown took the necessary action to move us on.

When Brown joined the Dons, most of us were happy at recruiting a manager with a proven non-league record. However, he had come unstuck at Aldershot, resigning after finishing 9th, an unpalatably low position for Shots fans, who duly saw their club promoted the following season with 101 points.

There were those who wondered if Brown's "level" was around the Blue Square South, which he had successfully managed to extricate Hayes and the Shots, but had never managed to get them further.

And sure enough, while Brown managed to scramble us out of the Ryman League and then rather less painfully through the Blue Square South, that first Conference season didn't indicate that we had a manager who necessarily knew how to get us to the next level.

We brought in the likes of Luke Moore, Ricky Wellard and Seb Brown, but also Derek Duncan, Paul Lorraine, Alan Inns and Ben Judge.

Brown's transfer record has always been hit-and-miss, and the question remains whether Brown is the best judge of a player, particularly at a new level. The likes of Max Porter and Charles Ademeno have borne this out, and questions remain over the likes of Chris Bush, Callum McNaughton and most recent record signing Byron Harrison.

We don't have the money to import large numbers of signings that can't cut it at this level, and there is surely a limit to how many players Newport County will take off of our hands!!

But I still remain of the view that Brown is the person to take us forward.

Football fans are fond of believing that good managers can be plugged in to make their team work. Management in any field, and least of all football, doesn't work like that.

You need a manager that understands the market, the environment, the club and the players. There can be no doubt that Brown has the respect of the team and the fans, which as Andre Villas-Boas can tell you is the majority of the battle.

Brown has shown that he can be as ruthless as he needs to be. The likes of Brett Johnson, Jamie Stuart, Fraser Franks and Ricky Wellard have served us well, but will join the Jon Mains and Ryan Jacksons of this world as ex-Dons come the end of the season, unable to cut it at the new level.

With loanees Billy Knott, George Moncur and Pim Balkestein unlikely to remain with us past the end of the season, the team is likely to have a radical new shape next year.

Brown has shown before that he can help players assimilate quickly, and we'll need someone with that ability next year. Bringing in a new manager as well as half a dozen new first team players is a big risk for a team whose resource base is so much lower than most of our rivals.

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And as Napoleon also said, give me lucky generals. Brown replaced Dave Anderson, who had committed the crime of failing to get promoted from the Ryman League after accumulating 75 points but losing in the play-offs to Bromley.

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 9 ]



**PAGE SPONSOR: '10,000 miles from KM but still kicking every ball' - COLUM McANDREW; Sutton, London**

## CHANGES TO BACKROOM STAFF A MUST

**WE are all breathing a little easier after looking to have secured League 2 safety, but DAVID BUGG says if Terry Brown is to remain then he must be given full-time backroom coaching staff and learn from the lessons from this tough first Football League season.**



FORTUNATELY for AFC Wimbledon it looks very much now like we've avoided being dragged into a late season relegation battle. Sitting in 15th place on 47 points at the time of writing it would take a freak set of results for the Dons to finish in the bottom two. Hopefully, we will have moved past what is considered the required 50-point barrier by the time you have read this and can rest easy.

At times this season it had looked like we would get sucked into the relegation zone. In my view there were two key moments where decisions were made that ultimately saved our season and hopefully we will learn from our mistakes and avoid a similar scenario next season.

The first one came during the transfer window in January. After a horrific run of results the Dons were only 5 points above the bottom two after a defeat at Swindon on 2nd January. Wimbledon had lost their way badly. Confidence amongst the playing squad appeared to be at an all-time low and Terry Brown appeared powerless to turn it around. At this time the first murmurings about whether we needed to change the management team surfaced (mainly on Internet chat rooms, I might add) and there was little faith amongst some of our fan base that we could stop the rot.

The football club board decided to back Terry and give him the funds to strengthen the playing squad. This was a brave move that could have backfired badly (and it looked like it might have in early March). The arrival of Billy Knott, George Moncur, Jason Euell and Byron Harrison gave the squad an instant boost with three wins on the bounce against Port Vale, Gillingham and Macclesfield. Things were looking up and some even talked rather optimistically about a late surge into the playoffs.

Instead we went on another run of poor results starting with loses against Aldershot and Northampton and ending in the lowest point of the season with the defeats against Hereford and Plymouth. This led to key moment number two. By now the fans were openly talking about Terry losing his job. Many felt that if we lost our next game at home to Dagenham that he should

be sacked and someone else bought in to stop the club sliding towards the relegation zone. If the Dons had lost that Dagenham game they could potentially have been only four points off the bottom two and that would be way too close for comfort.

Again the board held their nerve and backed Terry. Giving him further funds to make the long overdue signing of a centre-back to sort out our defensive woes. Luckily for us (and Terry) the arrival of Pim Balkestein from Brentford has considerably strengthen the back four and led to three wins from five games that have taken the club to the verge of safety.

**We'll never know what the board would have done with a defeat to Dagenham game but the sheer sense of relief on and off the pitch was clear to see when the referee blew the final whistle and the three points were confirmed.**

We'll never know what the board would have done with a defeat to Dagenham game but the sheer sense of relief on and off the pitch was clear to see when the referee blew the final whistle and the three points were confirmed.

So how did the Dons end up in such a sticky situation (twice)?

I really think that Terry Brown and Stuart Cash underestimated the strength of League Two. The promotion squad was not really well enough equipped to cope with the standard of League 2 football and in particular the physical aspects. Teams were bigger, stronger and more tactically aware than the Dons in too many games and team management had to wait until the January transfer window to try and put it right.

Losing Danny Kedwell, Kaid Mohamed and Steven Gregory were much bigger blows than maybe some anticipated and you could argue that pre-January the playing squad was actually weaker than the one that had won promotion from the Conference the previous season.

Terry's record in the transfer market has been patchy at best since last summer. Charles Ademeno, Max Porter, Chris Bush and more recently Byron Harrison can be labelled flops. There is still time for Harrison to change that although I think Bush will join Porter and Ademeno through the exit door this summer.

**[CONTINUED ON PAGE 8 ]**



## A TONY ADAMS TYPE TO SCHOOL DONS' DEFENCE

**CHESHIRE WOMBLE is hedging towards keeping Terry Brown on as Dons' manager but he has some provocative solutions for the Dons' coaching staff to work on the team's shortfalls for next season, particularly in defence.**

SINCE Terry Brown became the AFC Wimbledon manager close to five years ago, he has overseen some of the most amazing moments since our reformation — the dramatic late show in the play-off win at Staines, the Conference South title-winning game at Hampton & Richmond, and of course, that amazing day at Eastlands last season.

What an amazing achievement, what an amazing last five years. He has done this playing good football.

Terry is not scared to be ruthless, his end-of-season culls normally contain one or two surprises on top of the expected departures.

In some respects our brief flirtation with relegation is not really a bad thing.

Take a cross-section of our fans' expectations for this season once our league status was secured, some thought it would be a relegation struggle, some thought comfortable survival (which seems to be what we have), I thought top half, some thought higher.

The struggle has quashed a lot of the higher expectations, without our club being right in the thick of the bottom places.

The programme notes for the Bradford game were written by Stuart Cash, prompting some conspiracy that if we had lost to the Daggers a few days previously, then Terry Brown would have been sacked, will we ever know?

Terry had every right to be at the helm when we kicked off against Bristol Rovers in August, it was his first chance to manage in the Football League, and he had earned that right through his achievements.

The perplexing thing was his reluctance to make changes to the formation, and personnel, despite being obviously detrimental to the team.

In 1986/87, Liverpool and Everton both changed tactics when they went to Plough Lane, that could be viewed as a sign of weakness, or that they were scared, they both won. Winning is not always outplaying the opposition, but snuffing out their threats and effectiveness.

Look at Jose Mourinho for example; he has made tactical substitutions within 10-15 minutes of the start of games. If you want to play a particular way, make sure you have the players who can play that style.

Egil Olsen wanted a zonal defence when he was manager of the old WFC, it was an alien system to the existing defence, and the mistakes made were costly, if he wanted

to play zonal, he should have brought in players who could play that way.

I'm in two minds to whether I want Terry to lead the club next season, as well as being successful; he is also a fantastically nice guy. I am hedging towards wanting to keep him, and hope he has learned valuable lessons from this campaign — what doesn't kill you makes you stronger.

He may well walk, head held high, job done, ambition fulfilled.

Terry was signed as a full-time manager, with part-time back up, and part-time players, the players turned full-time at the end of our first conference season, now we need full-time coaches to improve our standing, to work on our shortfalls, particularly the defence.

It seems illogical to have part-time coaches coaching a full-time team.

If Terry is not our manager next season, I want to see a more aggressive man at the helm, someone like, dare I say it, Steve Evans. We need to forget sentiment and old Wimbledon connections, we need someone to challenge the board, someone to rattle a few feathers (not too many though). Evans for all his faults does appear to get the best out of his players — results speak for themselves, he is doing something right.

I don't think Evans is right for us, someone like Graham Westley maybe a better choice, but whether his brand of football would be palatable is another argument. — **STEVE NUTTALL.**

**To me, Terry should be the manager, I'd say get Tony Adams in as a coach, he is someone who has needs to learn the managerial ropes, he has fallen short so far in that capacity, but as a coach, he could massively assist the defensive side, and if we get that right, we could probably improve by up to 20 points next season, that is a play-off challenge.**



# The Wizard of Oz



## Safety in Numbers

I can't resist a bookshop. I will browse the shelves of an established chain and fossick second-hand shops for bargains. I will make a point of buying from an independent store and never miss the book tables with their discounted offers. Charity shops are a gold mine. Wherever I travel I try to visit the local Waterstones which can be a treasure trove of variety and quality. It was in Waterstones that I found a little gem called "*The Mavericks*."

It tells the tale of a group of footballers that is almost extinct today. Footballers who played the game for fun; who laughed, and once famously even kissed. It's the tale of the footballer who was never really trusted by the pragmatist but gave enduring pleasure to the romantic. None was European Footballer of the year; nor even Footballer of the Year, though thousands flocked to watch them play. They were as representative of their era as The Beatles, pot smoking and the mini skirt. Peter Osgood, Charlie George, Alan Hudson, Stan Bowles, Rodney Marsh, Tony Currie and Frank Worthington still evoke a nod of the head, a knowing smile and a warm inner recollection of the good old days.

**George Best was their talisman; once described by Bobby Charlton as "a good player but not a team player" which is akin to saying Angelina Jolie is great in bed but she can't cook. Players of this calibre and attitude barely exist in English football today and for that I blame the French. As you do.**

George Best was their talisman; once described by Bobby Charlton as "a good player but not a team player" which is akin to saying Angelina Jolie is great in bed but she can't cook. Players of this calibre and attitude barely exist in English football today and for that I blame the French. As you do.

In 1790 the French, exercising the muscle left by the Napoleonic era, imposed decimalisation on most of Europe. There is nothing more boring or predictable than decimalisation. Decimals are the province of the anorak. A decimalised currency is a currency without an ounce of character; it is without emotion and is utterly banal. Its retreat is that of simple logic:  $10 \times 10 = 100$ ;  $10 \times 100 = 1,000$  and so on. Metrication, introduced in 1794 is its mind-numbing stable mate. It wasn't until 1971 that a reluctant United Kingdom made the switch: out went

240 pennies to the pound, the threepenny bit and the sixpence, the half crown and the two-bob bit. In short, out went eccentricity. Furlongs and chains have disappeared. Feet and inches succumbed to centimetres; the mile stands alone in resisting conversion; if Great Britain had capitulated in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century Roger Bannister would not have had his 3 minutes 59.4 seconds of fame.

**Out went 240 pennies to the pound, the threepenny bit and the sixpence, the half crown and the two-bob bit. In short, out went eccentricity. Furlongs and chains have disappeared. Feet and inches succumbed to centimetres; the mile stands alone in resisting conversion; if Great Britain had capitulated in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century Roger Bannister would not have had his 3 minutes 59.4 seconds of fame.**

The late sixties and early seventies, a time of creative self expression and joyous eccentricity, whose like has not been seen again was undermined by the bland introduction of decimalisation marking the beginning of the end of a golden era. Individualism has been replaced by the nanny state, by politically correct constraints, wowsers and dogooders doing no good at all. Footballers no longer try to beat their opponent: they resort to geometry, keeping possession by passing in triangles. Thankfully, amid the decline, the mini skirt has survived.

Terry Brown, born in 1952, is a devotee of this golden era; he believes in the romance of football, the expression of the freedom of the spirit, the essence of entertainment. He does not willingly accept the reality of the game, the constriction imposed by accountability, the stifling of the individual. He wants the crowd to applaud the trapeze artist on the high wire; he hates the thought of the safety net. It is why he took a punt on Andre Blackman.

**Terry Brown is a devotee of this golden era; he believes in the romance of football, the expression of the freedom of the spirit, the essence of entertainment. He does not willingly accept the reality of the game, the constriction imposed by accountability, the stifling of the individual. He wants the crowd to applaud the trapeze artist on the high wire; he hates the thought of the safety net. It is why he took a punt on Andre Blackman.**

Watching his lugubrious face girm its way through yet another explanation of defeat, eyes struggling to shine in the gloom, shoulders slumped, is painful to watch. It hurts Terry to have to blame yet again his defence; he so desperately wants to forget that little detail of why the other teams find it so easy to score against Wimbledon, he wants so much just to score more goals that the opposition.

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 8 ]



**PAGE SPONSOR: STEWART KEVILL-DAVIES; Sunshine Coast, Queensland**

## CHANGES TO BACKROOM STAFF A MUST [CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5]

Billy Knott and George Moncur were very good signings. Pim Balkestein has been excellent as well. Jason Euell looked a shadow of his former self but did have an impact in some games and was good to have around off the pitch. Jason Prior played for 10 minutes against Aldershot and hasn't been seen since while Gavin Hoyte's loan spell was a complete waste of time as he was dropped after two games for the returning Sam Hatton (who has been poor for most of the season). Finally, Callum McNaughton was signed permanently, played three games (which we won) and was then dropped. Quite what this did for his confidence nobody can be sure but I bet it didn't help!

Some of Terry's decision-making this season has been strange to say the least. His poor use of substitutes, persistent use of the diamond formation in midfield when it never seemed to work and the strange treatment of some players like McNaughton, Hoyte and Harrison have had some questioning whether it would be a good thing to change the management team this summer.

My personal view is that if Terry stays that he needs to boost his backroom staff. A full-time first team coach to take the pressure off him would be a start. If Stuart Cash and Simon Basse are unable to commit themselves full time then I think we really need to address this in the summer as I suspect the quality of training and tactical approach to games has suffered a bit as a result.

Off the pitch there is still much to do. The new Kingston Road End stand will give us the additional seating to meet Football League requirements but there are still other works that need to be carried out to improve the match day experience.

In particular a plan to improve the John Smiths Stand side of the ground needs to be agreed and implemented so that we can increase the capacity and bring in extra revenue.

Longer term, some positive news on a new stadium in Merton would give everyone something to aim at in terms of pushing the club further forward. At present it feels like we have reached the limit of our capabilities due to being constrained by the stadium and our lack of additional income outside the fan base.

In time I think we will need to explore ways to bring in extra income from outside the fan base without compromising our ownership of the club. There might be some difficult times ahead if we don't have that discussion soon.

Enjoy what remains of the season and roll on the summer! Take Care, **Bugsy**.

## Wizard of Oz



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7

Defending for Terry is like a bad marriage he can't get out of: he doesn't like it but he is stuck with it. He is reluctant to do the painstaking effort of putting together a defensive structure that actually works. Structure, though, is the key. A-League side The Central Coast Mariners and their NYL team both finished top of their respective ladders. Both teams have one statistic that stands out: they concede less than a goal a game. Mariners' captain Alex Wilkinson explains "We have a structure; every player knows their responsibility. They all know their role. It becomes second nature." Given that Terry Brown confessed recently that he did not even know which was his best back four it is not surprising that nothing appears second nature to Wimbledon's defence.

**It was with no small reluctance that Terry had to announce, to an ironic round of applause, at the Carvery before the Dagenham & Redbridge game that the team would be lining up in a 4-4-2 formation. A flat 4-4-2 with the emphasis on flat. The flat 4-4-2 is English football's DNA.**

It was with no small reluctance that Terry had to announce, to an ironic round of applause, at the Carvery before the Dagenham & Redbridge game that the team would be lining up in a 4-4-2 formation. A flat 4-4-2 with the emphasis on flat. The flat 4-4-2 is English football's DNA. It is the blueprint for English Football as endorsed by Sir Trevor Brooking. It is a system that begrudges invention; it is the antithesis of freedom of expression, of eccentricity. It offers security and comfort – a line of four defenders with a line of four defenders in front of it. The installation of double glazing to keep relegation's chill at bay.

The flat 4-4-2 is football's equivalent of decimalisation; we can't even blame the French: it is all of England's own doing. It is boring, predictable and lacking in character. Its strength is that every Englishman knows the structure; it is second nature to every player. For the time being the anoraks have won – Wimbledon's season is back on track - and Terry has to forget romanticism. Simple logic is prevailing much against those natural instincts forged in the golden era of the early seventies. Wimbledon will survive this season – a wonderful achievement – but whether Terry Brown survives for another year is a moot point. But for now, there is safety in numbers.



**PAGE SPONSOR: EILEEN, ERIK, PIETER AND JOHN**

## ERIK SAMUELSON FORESHADOWS HIGHER ADMISSION CHARGES TO RAISE EXTRA MONEY FOR PLAYERS' WAGES

EVERYONE I talk to at this club of ours has said how they absolutely love being in the Football League again, and how it's the only place to be. Many talk optimistically of rising further – and I share that ambition. But in the short term, our aim has to be to build on what we've achieved this season, and that is what we've been preparing for. Recently I analysed the one-off income we've had this year: from two live televised games, transfer fees for Danny Kedwell and Stephen Gregory, and higher-than-budgeted cup profits. I looked at the reduced central income for next season (there's a new, less remunerative TV deal) and extra unavoidable costs we'll incur (e.g. arising from the new KRE stand). Then I calculated the extra income we expect from sponsorship of the new stand and our new official website. The end result is that, unless we take some action, we'll start next season with less money for players' wages than we started with this year. So we need to identify other sources of possible income, such as sponsorship of the East Stand (John Smith's are no longer our drinks suppliers, so we'll be dropping that name), additional deals around the new official website, and changing ticket prices. I obtained an analysis of what other clubs charge for admission. Getting genuinely comparable figures isn't easy because other clubs have more complex pricing structures than we do. And most League 2 clubs have masses of unused capacity and use it to offer special deals to attract fans. We, on the other hand, had a renewal rate in the Paul Strank Stand for this season of close on 100%. Here are some figures from that analysis. The average terrace price for an under-16 is £5.78 (although not all clubs have terraces, and the average under-16 price where there are only seats is £8.50), whereas ours has been unchanged for ten years at £2. The average price of concession seats as a percentage of the full adult price is 75%; ours is 59%. So yes, we are looking at increasing prices for 2012/13. The prices in the KRE will be higher than this season, since we will continue to charge a premium for a seat. And we are looking at other factors: the very high demand for the central seats in the Paul Strank Stand; whether we ought to have differential pricing for the terraces; what is a reasonable price that will encourage young people to continue to support us when family budgets are strained. We haven't finalised our thinking, but we will need to do so very soon because season ticket renewal letters are scheduled to be sent out. This is earlier than in the past as we need to notify direct debit payers of any changes in the amounts they pay. The renewal notes will also explain how we propose to allocate seats in the new stand. To summarise, we think that there is only one place for us to be – the Football League. So we need to give Terry a budget that is as competitive as possible (even then, our starting budget this year was the fourth smallest, according to figures compiled by the League) and we have to generate that money ourselves. We will continue to be as inventive as we can about how we raise money, but if we want to stay fan-owned and competitive on the pitch, we have to look at price increases of some kind — *(From club programme)*.

## BROWN IS THE MAN TO TAKE WIMBLEDON FORWARD

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4 ]

Brown accumulated 75 points in his first season, and was eight minutes away from losing to Staines in the play-off final when Luis Cumbers got that (whisper it) dodgy goal to draw us level.

Over the course of his career Brown was probably owed a bit of penalty shoot-out luck when it came to us last year, but it is a fairly one-eyed Dons fan who will claim to have been a better side over the course of the season than Luton Town.

Football is a game of margins. It remains to be seen whether the luck will run out this season, but if we assume we do manage to survive, it is difficult to believe that any new manager will bring some mystical League Two level ability that Brown doesn't have.

**Football is a game of margins. It remains to be seen whether the luck will run out this season, but if we assume we do manage to survive, it is difficult to believe that any new manager will bring some mystical League Two level ability that Brown doesn't have.**

We need a manager who can marshall relatively scant resources, who knows the lower divisions well enough to shop there successfully, and who 'gets us'.

Brown continues to tick these boxes at least as well as any alternative that springs readily to mind. He's also been lucky with us (although the signings of Kieran Djilali and Jason Prior perhaps indicate that this particular tide might be turning).

I'm always fairly conservative when it comes to managerial change; if you care to look back to editions of this magazine from four years ago you'll find me arguing that we should keep Dave Anderson, but (probably fortunately) Erik doesn't come to me for advice before making these decisions.

But I believe that Brown will have learnt more than most from this season, and has the skills to apply that knowledge. I believe that under his leadership next season we will be a better team. I doubt that will be the case if we seek an alternative.

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**PAGE SPONSOR: STEFAN KING; London**

# SHOTS' FANS URGE PATIENCE WITH TERRY BROWN

**THE debate simmers away .. Now that Terry Brown has kept the Dons in League 2 should he walk away at season's end head held high, or stick at it and try to consolidate AFC Wimbledon in the Football League. WDSA asked some Aldershot Town fans for their views on their old manager.....**

**MARK MAYNARD writes:** Having served on the Shots Trust board, I have spent a good amount of time analysing the relationship between club and supporter and it's my opinion that fans are reluctant to accept anything less than success. Take the situation at Aldershot. A couple of months back, very similar criticisms were being levelled at Dean Holdsworth (poor formation, poor signings etc.) and then a run of six games saw him feted as a hero that was going to take us to the play-offs! Unfortunately, the image of any football club is that fans support owes more to expectations fuelled by fantasy rather than reality. Aldershot and AFCW are no different to any other club in that respect but, of course, AFCW and their supporters are intrinsically linked due to its ownership structure so the supporters will be due full pretty much full transparency as the owners when it comes to season post-mortems and major decisions. A quote from Terry Brown from his time at Aldershot is poignant. He said something like "if the performance over three seasons had been in reverse (indifferent season, play-offs, play-off final rather than play-off final, play-offs, indifferent season) things might have been perceived differently." Yes, Terry had his detractors amongst the Aldershot supporters but the vast majority stuck by him. My own personal view is that success should be measured by a lot more than the league position. What also needs to be brought into the equation are the playing budget and the strategy for long-term sustainability. If AFCW's final league position is close to the position in the 'league table' of playing budgets and there's enough cash in reserve to sustain the club, then fans should view the situation favourably. No manager is in a job forever but I've a hunch that the reversal of the season's success that Terry pointed out at Aldershot might be the pattern that develops at AFCW. Trust in Terry and good luck.

**CHRIS AMY writes:** Sorry to hear about all at Kingsmeadow, it certainly does sound familiar, particularly the 2005/06 season for Aldershot. This was our third season in the Conference and the first two we had ended up in the playoffs. The fans expected more of the same but several players left, the key player being Ray Warburton who had just got too old! He was a rock at the centre of our defence and was simply fantastic. We had lots of players come in who weren't

up to the level we had expected over the past three seasons (Ryman champions, playoff finals, playoff semis) and Terry's success was his undoing in a way. Young players were brought in and a phrase was born in "two in by the weekend". Terry assured us on the local radio and on *Shotsweb* that he would bring in one or two players by the weekend in time for our next game. The team didn't gel. I sincerely hope that you stay up. Terry is a fantastic man and he brought success to your club and mine so quickly. Fans in this day and age who are used to success get frustrated quickly when times do get worse and they need to take a step back and realise what Terry has done and how far he's brought you. Some of our fans were guilty of the same thing. We were lucky in that after Terry left us in February, the next season Gary Waddock came in and signed a few decent players and we won the Conference with a then record 101 points (until Steve Evans thugs beat the record last season.) Let's hope you can stick by him until the end of the season and see what the pre-season brings. Patience is what is needed by the sounds of things and you don't realise how much of a great man he was until he has gone.

## WHAT DONS FANS ARE SAYING....

**BEEN** a full-time team for less than two years, achieved promotion after only two seasons in a national league, currently in 14th place with a club that's only been in existence for less than 10 years... if we finish comfortably mid-table this season I have no reason not to believe Terry Brown won't improve things next season, after all his history has proven year after year he improves his squads/clubs. This season at times hasn't been great but I do hope we stick by him... can't think of another manager who 'gets' this club the way he does and conducts his self the way he does. TB despite his faults comes out above most battles in victory in the long run. Just ask Luton. — **Sussex Don.**

Terry Brown is an all-time Dons legend, but IMO he doesn't have the tactical nous to take us further. He sets up his teams to attack - great, that's what got us promoted in the first place - but our defence is simply inadequate. Partly personnel, but mostly tactics. Other sides don't really earn their goals we give them away like a banker's bailout. Terry really should have done better in the window in terms of permanent signings of defenders. We didn't need two strikers (Prior, Harrison) three attacking midfielders on loan (Euell, Knott, Moncur). Who did he get? McNaughton, who we already had and Hoyte, who sank without trace. Not Good Enough. — **Kentish Don.**

## DONS WANT MORE OF INSPIRATIONAL SAMMY

**SAMMY MOORE has been one of the more consistent players in AFC Wimbledon's inconsistent debut season in League Two. BUSH WOMBLE says Moore is a player the Dons must keep over the summer.**



THIS time of year thoughts turn to candidates for 'Player of the Year' and in truth there are few players in the running this season. The award is likely to be closely contested between Jack Midson and Sammy Moore. There's no doubt that Midson, currently the joint top scorer in the division, will have plenty of support. However, for his sheer consistency over the season my vote is likely to go to Moore.

Sammy joined us at the start of our second season in the Conference and was initially seen as a fairly underwhelming signing. Though he started out as a league player, with Ipswich and Brentford, he had spent the season prior to joining us playing for Dover Athletic in the Conference South. At the time of his arrival there was more focus on higher-profile signings like Andre Blackman (described as a 'Championship quality' player) and ex-Barnet captain Ismail Yakubu. Nevertheless, Sammy was a regular starter in a team that led the Conference during the opening months of the season and emerged as our standout attacking midfielder.

Moore's promising first season was ended at home to Kidderminster in mid-March. Switched to right-back after an injury to Sam Hatton, Moore picked up a serious knee injury in the match and was ruled out for several months, missing the triumphant season finale.

The summer following promotion to League 2 was rudely interrupted by the departure of two of our best players, captain Danny Kedwell and Steven Gregory. Gregory had been our midfield linchpin in the promotion campaign and it was felt that we'd struggle to replace his passing ability and vision in front of the back four. Initially, Terry Brown tried to replace Gregory with Ricky Wellard but he was quickly found to be too lightweight and too laid-back to compete with seasoned League 2 midfielders who refused to give him the time on the ball he wanted.

Moore was given his first start of the season in the holding midfield role at Plymouth in mid-August. It was a more defensive role than the one he played in his first season at Kingsmeadow but it was a position he knew from his time at Dover and he quickly looked at home at the base of the Dons midfield. He has not looked back since, hardly missing a minute of football and turning in strong performances almost every week. He may not have been 'man of the match' in every game but he has rarely been outside our top three players.

Moore's consistency, in my view, marks him out as a better performer in the holding midfield role compared with

Gregory the previous season. While Gregory could look a class apart on his day (such as in the play-off final) he had just as many days when he seemed incapable of finding a teammate and many games largely passed him by.

You certainly cannot accuse Moore of not getting stuck in. According to my extensive research (well, Wikipedia), he is only 5ft 8in tall (which seems a little generous) but is always at the centre of the action, fighting for every ball and rarely losing a 50:50. At the same time he is also often underrated as a footballer. His first touch is usually excellent, he is comfortable receiving the ball under pressure and always seems to turn into space. Despite being relied on as our single defensive midfielder, Sammy has also seized any opportunity to get forward and has scored several important goals, including a vital winner at home to Macclesfield. The only downside of Moore's role is that he cannot get forward more – particularly in light of the fact that our nominated 'attacking' midfielders have rarely got on the score sheet.

Some have said that Terry Brown's much-maligned midfield diamond has suited Sammy and he may struggle more in a conventional 4-4-2. However, my view is that he has the ability to be effective in a range of systems and he recently looked good at home to Dagenham in a flat midfield. In that game he played alongside Billy Knott in the middle and they took it in turns getting forward. They also both enjoyed the physical battle in the midfield and, despite conceding their opponents several inches, emerged on top.

Some fans have already started to draw up their lists of players to 'keep' and 'lose' in the summer. There is no doubt that Sammy Moore features near the top of most 'keep' lists but there's a fair chance that there may be a list of other, bigger, clubs looking to take him away. He seems to enjoy it at Wimbledon and I hope that with a strong finish to the season and a few summer signings Sammy will decide there is enough potential here to stick around. I very much hope so, as he has the ability – and certainly the attitude – to be an inspirational figure in our midfield for years to come. He also looks like captaincy material and wore the armband for the first time in the recent home match with Plymouth. That game ended in a disappointing defeat but, if he does remain with the Dons, there must be a chance that Sammy will go on to gain the captaincy on a permanent basis.

Looking back at previous winners of the 'Player of the Year' accolade the last midfielder to triumph was Lee Sidwell, back in 2002/3. Even he was a wide midfielder and it is hard to think of many notable performers in central midfield over the last ten seasons. Fans will fondly remember Chris Gell and Gregory was excellent on his day but few other candidates come to mind. It is to Sammy Moore's immense credit that he has put a serious injury behind him to give himself a great chance of becoming the first central midfielder to be voted 'Player of the Year' in the AFC Wimbledon era.

## KEDS TURNED AND SAID 'THIS IS OUR TIME'

**NIALL COUPER once said 'never again' when asked about writing a followup to his book 'The Spirit of Wimbledon.' That is, until one day in May last year in Manchester when he, like all Dons' fans, were swept away by that moment. Niall, in this piece for WDSA, tells of the behind-the-scenes to his latest work.**

So where did the idea of writing "*This Is Our Time – the first 10 years of AFC Wimbledon*" come from?

Well, I had been thinking about it for a while. I had written '*The Spirit of Wimbledon*' several years before and a few people had asked me over the intervening period whether there would be a follow up. And I laughed. And laughed.

You see I still had the memories of how difficult and time consuming writing the first book had been back then – 140,000 words, hours and hours of trying to track down players who would speak to me.

Then there was the search for decent images. I remember saying at the time, yes, nice for the CV, good achievement, but never **never** again!

Time softens the pain and by 2011 I had mellowed. I was weak and then well, frankly, there was Manchester.

It was impossible not to be caught up in the emotion of the moment. It helped massively that I had a pending knee operation and I was about to be signed off work for six weeks.

So I was left stranded, immobile on a sofa at home, with nothing but a mobile, a laptop, a notepad and a pen for company – British daytime TV simply didn't cut it. A new book was calling.

I spoke to my previous publisher, Cherry Red Records. They were up for it and off I went. (OK so it helped that their MD also happened to be a vice-president at AFC Wimbledon, but what's the world without strings to pull!!) I had been on the inside of AFC Wimbledon in the early days, first as programme editor and then as a board member – and throughout I had been a season ticket holder.

I thought I knew all the stories that were worth telling, but as I dug more and more little nuggets came to the surface.

**I thought I knew all the stories that were worth telling, but as I dug more and more little nuggets came to the surface.**

The amount of behind-the-scenes activity by the local politicians astounded me – they weren't all bad after all. Then there was the issue of Halifax – I never knew that swooping in for them had even been an option.

Then there were the views from the inside: from Kris Stewart and Nicky English on the dismissal of Terry Eames, AFC Wimbledon's first manager; from Erik Samuelson on the approach from Darragh MacAnthony to buy the club; the whole Jermaine Darlington affair and the

18-point deduction; and then the long battle to reclaim our history from the *Side That Cannot Be Named* from Simon Wheeler, the chair of WISA. Then of course there's the action on the pitch. Staines play-off anyone? The victory at Aldershot? The 9-0 win over Slough? The wins at Herne Bay and Gillingham? Then there are the emotions of Simon Bassey and Seb Brown, Dons fans who became legends on the pitch. But for me there was one interview that sticks out above all others – Danny Kedwell.

**There were the views from the inside: from Kris Stewart and Nicky English on the dismissal of Terry Eames, AFC Wimbledon's first manager; from Erik Samuelson on the approach from Darragh MacAnthony to buy the club; the whole Jermaine Darlington affair and the 18-point deduction; and the long battle to reclaim our history from the *Side That Cannot Be Named* from Simon Wheeler, the chair of WISA**

At 5.56pm on 21 May 2011, Dons captain Danny Kedwell was about to begin the long lonely walk to the penalty spot at the City of Manchester Stadium. Two hours of football had failed to separate AFC Wimbledon and Luton Town in the play-off final of the Blue Square Premier. After nine penalty kicks the scores were tied at 3–3.

History was thick in the air. Just under nine years earlier, an FA Commission had permitted Wimbledon FC to relocate to Milton Keynes. A goal from this kick would propel AFC Wimbledon back into the Football League. With those thoughts ringing in his ears, Danny turned to his team-mates, lined up arm-in-arm on the halfway line, and uttered the prophetic words: "*This is our time...*"

**'*This Is Our Time*' will be on sale in late August and will be available from Amazon, Cherry Red Records and AFC Wimbledon as well as shops across the London area. It is expected to go on sale at £14.99. Details on how to pre-order will be announced in June.**

# YOUR HARRY BASSETT MEMORIES

**THE Dave 'Harry' Bassett interview in the last edition of 'Wombles Downunder' initiated a flood of memories for Dons' fans saluting Harry's extraordinary achievement of taking Wimbledon from Division 4 all the way to Division 1 (now the Premier League). We relive some of those great times under Harry Bassett.....**

THIS one stands out for me. We had just won the fourth division in 1983. A few of us were invited into first-class on the train back to London with the players and Harry. The champagne was flowing and we all drunk out of the Fourth Div cup. The next thing some of the players got hold of Harry pushed him under a table opened up another bottle of champagne and poured it all over him, then the shoes came off and were thrown out of the window. Harry was supposed to get off at Watford but the players would not let him get off, so he had to stay on the train until we got back to London. Seeing Harry as he got off the train singing with everyone as he walked down the station with no shoes on and his suit dripping wet people must have thought this IS the Crazy Gang. — **MARTIN CHEESMAN, Perth.**

**Seeing Harry as he got off the train singing with everyone as he walked down the station with no shoes on and his suit dripping wet people must have thought this IS the Crazy Gang.**

THAT was a fantastic interview between yourself and Dave Bassett. You both deserve credit for evoking some wonderful memories. It just shows how interested Harry still is in WFC and AFCW. My main memory of Harry was in fact the first time I came to visit Wimbledon FC on my travels in 1984/85. I began subscribing to the match programme for that rip-snorting season we got promoted from the Third Division. Actually my interest in Wimbledon started a year before when I saw MOTD in Australia with Brian Moore showing the Dons playing up at Bury on the last game of the season the year won the Fourth Division. I remember Dave Beasant saving a penalty and Wally Downes running up to him and making him perform the famous "Magaluf Shuffle". It was hilarious to watch the big fella dancing around on TV. I thought they look like a fun team to follow and so they were. Harry mentioned that 2-1 win at Bramall Lane to secure Wimbledon's promotion to the Second Division in a thrilling game. I can still remember the commentary on MOTD of the two goals

scored. "Cork in and Cork scores" with a typical brave header. My favourite Don at the time Stewie Evans scored "and the former Sheffield United player returns to Bramall Lane with a stunning goal". The Dons held on in front of that loud Blades crowd. Years later my best man was/is a life-long Hull City fan said the Tigers had their pockets pinched by Wimbledon for promotion that season. Harry mentioned in the interview about the two-leg win over Forest in the League (Milk) Cup in 1984/85. That was an amazing result and it really galvanised the club that first season in the Second Division. Forest under Cloughie at that time were a pedigree team having recently won two European Championships, the League and other trophies. Forest put out a strong team against the Dons - it wasn't like these days of Premier League teams putting their second-string line-ups in the Carling Cup. Harry would also remember I'm sure the two weeks in a row the Dons won 5-0 (over Sheffield United - the last game I saw for 12 seasons) and the following week at Selhurst Park. That season started slowly and picked up momentum as the team became more comfortable in the Second Division. The year we won promotion to the First Division (1985/86) I really felt that Harry showed his managerial attributes. Under Harry the Dons had the bottle and composure to tough out a very tight promotion race. They pushed aside Pompey under Alan Ball and it showed when he was distinctly hot under the collar with our new signing Fash. Wimbledon went something like 16 games unbeaten to get into the top three. It was a high standard promotion that season as Norwich (Champions), Charlton and the Dons all did well and stayed up for a number of seasons (14 in the case of Wimbledon). Harry summed up those great memories of the first season in the First Division in your interview but honestly every game seemed to be a highlights package. Going top after five games was special and beating Liverpool at Anfield with Nigel Winterburn's 25-yarder was amazing. However my favourite that season was turning over the cocky Everton in the Cup 3-1. I remember Stevie Galliers I think whistling a drive past the post at the Durnsford Road end and the commentator stating "Wimbledon have Everton on the rack now". Harry is bang on - Glyn Hodges was a special player, could have been anything. He drifted in and out of games, appearing to go missing for extended periods and then a flash of brilliance. One match v Blackburn he conjured a shot that hit the post in the first 30 seconds and then did nothing. Harry would remember Ian Holloway's

**[CONTINUED ON PAGE 14 ]**

**YOUR HARRY BASSETT MEMORIES**  
[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13 ]

perm. Something that would appear impossible these days! The long ball was a case of horses for courses as Wimbledon had at least a half dozen six-footers then. Recently "*Four Four Two*" produced an excellent article on how detailed and forward thinking the preparation was that Harry and his staff did. I'm sure he did not receive the due credit for that at the time. So back to that winter's afternoon. I walked out to Plough Lane and into car park and the old club offices and met the genial Eric Willcocks, the Dons Commercial Manager. He said "I know who you are" and stopped what he was doing, made me a cup a tea and introduced me around the office to the staff. (Seriously how many football clubs would do that to their fans?) He told me about this interesting chap called Robert Smith who lived in Sydney, who had visited the club recently and maybe we could get in touch with him. In bustled Harry and Eric introduced him to me. We chatted about football and how the Dons were going and how funny it was that Wimbledon had fans from Australia. He was bright and busy and chirpy and left a positive impression. I had a photo taken of him and I and Harry and Eric. I met Eric a few times more but did not catch Harry. Soon in Australia supporters clubs started sprouting up, mainly due to adverts in "*British Soccer Weekly*" (WDSA were # 4 from memory), I would fondly recall to other fans (mostly from much larger clubs) about the day I met Eric and Harry and their time for a fan from down under. That was one of the reasons why I supported Wimbledon. — **DAVID KENWERY, Cape Cod, USA & Esbjerg, Denmark.**

I remember one mid-winter game in the old third division when we had a mini-injury crisis on our hands. We had a big game one Saturday but it hardly stopped raining on the preceding Thursday and Friday. The game was eventually postponed allowing some of the players to recover from their knocks in time for the next game. However I heard rumours that the Plough Lane pitch was playable late on the Friday afternoon. How did the game get postponed? Apparently a certain club official phoned the local Fire Brigade who came down and watered the pitch. I'm not sure if this is true but if it is it epitomises the Crazy Gang spirit. — **COLUM McANDREW, Sutton, London.**

EXCELLENT stuff - interesting interview. Things are busy here with the kids and works etc. but I still enjoy reading the fanzine and checking the web from time to time. You know, it occurred to me that Bassett left Wimbledon in 1987 and I didn't end up in London until 1989 and quickly becoming a fan in 1990. So to me he was also about Sheffield Utd as well as Wimbledon,

so I don't have any recollections of his managing days. But crikey, what a list of talented players he signed and had access to. Will that ever happen again? — **GARY WALKER, Washington, USA.**

FOR ME, there are two unforgettable moments. The first, not surprisingly, is that wonderful day at Huddersfield when we won promotion to the First Division. At the end of the game, the players threw their shirts into our end and hoisted Harry onto their shoulders to celebrate the achievement. It was the picture that ended up as the cover shot for the *Mission Impossible* booklet. That one moment sums up our debt to him – a manager who was able to take a small club from the Fourth to the First in only four years. When people say “do a Wimbledon”, a lot of it is meant as “do a Harry”. The second moment, or rather set of two moments, was off the field. Hearing that he had left to manage Palace, only to change his mind and return to Plough Lane 3 days later. If that doesn't show how much of a true Don he is, then nothing can. — **LIAM NOLAN, Adelaide.**

I guess the things that will always stick in my mind are the way in which everyone hated us for our long-ball game under his rule. Route One football (or more often skittles where Vinnie and Fash were involved) was fun (particularly when viewed from the terraces!) Everything about football under Harry seemed to be about enjoying the game. It was almost as though if we didn't take the match too seriously, we'd win. Division One seemed to be as much a concern to the team as a Sunday knockabout in the park. I do vaguely remember the second time we got promoted to League three. It didn't go too well for the first few games I recall and then we played Newport (I think) and I think we won 6-0. There was something about that game that seemed to set the tone of what we became for all those glorious years that followed. I thank the man for creating the legend that became Wimbledon. My only sorrow is that it was not him that took us all the way to Wembley, he deserved it. — **ANDREW POWELL, Bideford, Devon.**

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**OFF THE  
POST**  
WDSA forum  
Send in your views

### CLICKING GOOGLE ADS

ANOTHER excellent issue. Enjoyed the Harry Bassett interview immensely. I've been clicking on your Google ads religiously, even if I don't contribute to the WDSA forum.

**[Ed: Good idea, Jeff, how about you others following his lead?]** I'd love to share a Bassett anecdote but I didn't get into the Dons (or real football) until it was over. Looking back, I would have to say it is one of those rare instances where a manager gets together with a group of players and the whole thing just clicks. The sad thing is, with the way football is these days, it is unlikely to see a club work on that level again. To a certain extent you can see a bit of it at Spurs at the moment, but they would all bugger off in a heartbeat if they got an offer for more money at a 'bigger' club. Keep up the good work, from your slackest subscriber. — **JEFF SIMS, Geelong, Victoria.**

### WDSA TOE-HOLD IN DENMARK

I have arrived in Denmark and will be living and working in Esbjerg for the next nine months. That is mainly because the job on Cape Cod that I was brought on for has been delayed again; this time for up to a year. I will be working for Siemens Wind Power there getting experience at the staging port for an offshore wind farm called Lincs in the UK. I will probably get over to the UK (Grimsby is the home port) and hopefully to see AFC Wimbledon and the Olympics as well as a few trips back to the US. Maybe play cricket in Denmark too and travel on my own in the area and make the most of it. I will get to see the second half of the Danish Superliga (they take a break for winter). Already I have identified AGF Aarhus as the team I like to follow (despite their Tottenham-like strip), the ground is nice and fans are good. FC Midtjylland play in Herning which is a lot closer so I will likely see them. The local team ESB Esbjerg are in the first (second) division and wear Wednesday colours. I am booked to catch up with a mate from Siemens in March and we will see FC Nuremberg in the German Bundesliga.

I was scrolling through Cricinfo and read an article on former great Australian paceman Jeff Thomson and came across this passage:

*You count some famous ex-footballers from the UK as your best friends. How did that happen?*

*Thommo: I go to the UK a lot. I used to stay at this health farm called Champneys. These guys used to stay there as well. They're all mad golfers, so we hooked up together. People like [the late] Georgie Best and guys who played for England. George Best was at a health farm? Thommo:*

He was! He was drying out. No one else was drinking, bar us. George Best, Vinnie Jones, Mick Harford, Andy King, there's a whole list of them that goes on and on. We all play golf together every year.

What a bunch of characters. Would have loved to have been a fly on the wall at the bar at Champneys! — **DAVID KENWERY, Esbjerg, Denmark.**

### ROVERS EXCITED BY NEW GROUND PLANS

MARK MCGHEE was a shock to everyone as he was a late runner for the Bristol Rovers managerial job. I certainly thought why us as he has managed at higher level and could do a job in the Championship. I think he can see the potential for success given our potential new ground and support base (40,000 at Wembley) I still think he will use Rovers to get a better job in the future. I thought we just shaded it against AFC Wimbledon. The Dons were well organised and had Jack Midson up front who looked dangerous. Our keeper made a couple of saves in the second half which on another day would have gone in. Wimbledon bought a good following of what my mate and I call proper fans. Fans that have stuck by the team through thick and thin certainly in Wimbledon's case. I can't wait for the season to end really as we are mid-table and building for next year. I think a good year of consolidation is what Wimbledon would have wanted before the season started. I think you will achieve that with a mid-table finish. Our new ground is pretty much signed and sealed, planning permission is awaiting for approval for the new ground and the old ground which will be turned into a supermarket, if all goes ahead. The supermarket, buying the ground, have already signed a contract to buy the land if planning approved. So all in all fingers crossed but most are fairly optimistic we should be playing at the UWE stadium in August 2014. — **JAMIE STOCKLEY, a Bristol Rovers' fan for 23 years. He goes regularly with his wife and two kids to the Rovers' home games.**

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## 2011-12 FIXTURES & RESULTS

Fri 29/7	A Crawley Town CCPrel L2-3 3,205
<b>Sat 6/8</b>	<b>H Bristol Rovers L 2-3 4,629</b>
Sat 13/8	A Dagenham & Red W 2-0 2,904
Tue 16/8	A Plymouth Argyle W 2-0 5,900
<b>Sat 20/8</b>	<b>H Hereford Utd D 1-1 4,239</b>
Sat 27/8	A Macclesfield Town L 0-4 1,881
<b>Sat 3/9</b>	<b>H Port Vale W 3-2 4,404</b>
Sat 10/9	A Aldershot Town D 1-1 4,110
<b>Tue 13/9</b>	<b>H Northampton Town L 0-3 4,271</b>
<b>Sat 17/9</b>	<b>H Cheltenham Town W 4-1 3,860</b>
Sat 24/9	A Bradford City W 2-1 10,255
<b>Sat 1/10</b>	<b>H Gillingham W 3-1 4,606</b>
<b>Tue 4/10</b>	<b>H Stevenage JPT D 2-2 pens 1,416</b>
Sat 8/10	A Morecambe W 2-1 2,631
<b>Sat 15/10</b>	<b>H Crewe Alexandra L 1-3 4,604</b>
<b>Sat 22/10</b>	<b>H Crawley Town L 2-5 4,549</b>
Tue 25/10	A Torquay Utd L 0-4 2,353
Sat 29/10	A Shrewsbury Town D 0-0 5,861
<b>Sat 5/11</b>	<b>H Barnet D 1-1 4,369</b>
Tue 8/11	A Swindon Town JPT L 1-1 pens 4,321
<b>Sat 12/11</b>	<b>H Scunthorpe Utd FAC1 D 0-0 2,933</b>
Wed 16/11	A Tooting&Mitcham SSC W 2-1
<b>Sat 19/11</b>	<b>H Swindon Town D 1-1 4,581</b>
Sat 26/11	A Burton Albion L 2-3 3,282
Tue 29/11	A Wingate&Finchley LSC W 2-1
Sat 3/12	A Bradford City FAC2 L 1-3 3,432
<b>Sat 10/12</b>	<b>H Accrington Stanley L 0-2 4,053</b>
Sat 17/12	A Rotherham Utd L 0-1 3,343
<b>Sat 26/12</b>	<b>H Oxford Utd L 0-2 4,547</b>
<b>Sat 31/12</b>	<b>H Southend Utd L 1-4 4,529</b>
Mon 2/1	A Swindon Town L 0-2 8,374
Sat 14/1	A Port Vale W 2-1 4,326
Sat 21/1	A Gillingham W 4-3 6,236
<b>Tue 24/1</b>	<b>H Macclesfield Town W 2-1 4,000</b>
<b>Sat 28/1</b>	<b>H Aldershot Town L 1-2 4,634</b>
<b>Tue 31/1</b>	<b>A Corinthian Casuals SSC L 1-2</b>
Tue 14/2	A Northampton Town L 0-1 4,072
<b>Sat 18/2</b>	<b>H Morecambe D 1-1 3,964</b>
Tue 21/2	A Cheltenham Town D 0-0 2,603
Sat 25/2	A Crewe Alexandra D 3-3 4,240
<b>Tue 28/2</b>	<b>H Metrop Police LSC W 5-0 417</b>
Sat 3/3	A Hereford Utd L 1-2 2,147
<b>Tue 6/3</b>	<b>H Plymouth Argyle L 1-2 4,578</b>
<b>Sat 10/3</b>	<b>H Dagenham &amp; Red W 2-1 4,243</b>
<b>Tue 13/3</b>	<b>H Bradford City W 3-1 4,064</b>
Sat 17/3	A Bristol Rovers L 0-1 5,828
Tue 20/3	A Oxford Utd L 0-1 6,366
<b>Sat 24/3</b>	<b>H Burton Albion W 4-0 3,819</b>
Sat 31/3	A Accrington Stanley L 1-2 1,627
<b>Tue 3/4</b>	<b>H Hendon LSC</b>
<b>Sat 7/4</b>	<b>H Rotherham Utd</b>
Mon 9/4	A Southend Utd
Sat 14/4	A Crawley Town
<b>Sat 21/4</b>	<b>H Torquay Utd</b>
Sat 28/4	A Barnet
<b>Sat 5/5</b>	<b>H Shrewsbury Town</b>

## 2011-12 LEAGUE 2 TABLE AS AT MARCH 31

	M	W	D	L	GF	GA	GD	Pts
Swindon Town	38	24	5	9	63	27	36	77
Torquay United	40	22	9	9	57	42	15	75
Crawley Town	39	20	12	7	67	46	21	72
Shrewsbury Town	39	21	9	9	55	35	20	72
Southend United	40	21	7	12	68	46	22	70
Oxford United	40	17	14	9	55	38	17	65
<u>Cheltenham Town</u>	<u>40</u>	<u>19</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>13</u>	<u>55</u>	<u>45</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>65</u>
Crewe Alexandra	40	18	8	14	57	53	4	62
Gillingham	40	18	7	15	70	56	14	61
Aldershot Town	39	17	6	16	42	43	-1	57
Rotherham United	40	15	11	14	57	54	3	56
Morecambe	40	14	12	14	57	46	11	54
Accrington Stanley	40	13	14	13	49	53	-4	53
Bristol Rovers	40	13	11	16	46	58	-12	50
<b>AFC Wimbledon</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>-13</b>	<b>47</b>
Burton Albion	40	12	11	17	46	65	-19	47
Port Vale	39	16	8	15	61	53	8	46
Northampton Town	39	11	9	19	50	69	-19	42
Dagenham & Red	40	12	5	23	41	67	-26	41
Bradford City	40	9	13	18	47	54	-7	40
Plymouth Argyle	40	9	13	18	41	57	-16	40
Barnet	39	10	9	20	44	68	-24	39
Macclesfield Town	40	8	12	20	36	53	-17	36
Hereford United	40	8	11	21	41	64	-23	35

## LEAGUE TWO PROMOTION ODDS

1/250	Swindon Town
1/100	Shrewsbury
1/50	Crawley
1/50	Torquay United
1/12	Southend
1/4	Cheltenham
4/9	Oxford United
9/4	Crewe
11/4	Gillingham
22	Aldershot
50	Rotherham

## LEAGUE 2 LEADING GOALSCORERS

<b>JACK MIDSON</b>	<b>AFC Wimbledon</b>	<b>18</b>
Izale McLeod	Barnet	18
Adebayo Akinfenwa	Northampton Town	16
Kevin Ellison	Morecambe	15
Marc Richards	Port Vale	15
Lewis Grabban	Rotherham	15
Tyrone Barnett	Crawley Town	13
Matt Harrold	Bristol Rovers	12

# AROUND LEAGUE TWO

**A traipse around League Two to check on what the other clubs' fans are saying.**

## **NORTHAMPTON TOWN**

OH dear. Our season. That's the elephant in the room that we don't like to talk about really, but since you asked so nicely...

Basically, we had high hopes for this season with genuine ambitions for promotion. It started when Gary Johnson arrived last year amongst much hype and expectation and, to be fair, clattered into the club like a bull in a china shop. He upset all the players, told them they weren't good enough, bought in loads of loanees and dragged us into a relegation fight that we narrowly escaped. Still, we all breathed a sigh of relief and believed what Johnson told us; we'll see what he's all about next year when he has his own team of players to work with. Over the summer our chairman backed Johnson to the hilt and he bought in his own players. Lots of them. Some proven players, some unknowns but it looked like a good mix. Unfortunately, the unknowns were all rubbish and under our tubby leader's stewardship the "good" signings turned into a disorganised rabble. Still, no problem, Gary knew exactly how to deal with this. Tell them they aren't good enough and bring some more loans in! Over the course of less than a season Johnson bought in over 30 players, which meant we had no continuity and no one had a clue about what they, or anyone else, was supposed to be doing. Add to that a constant denial that any of it was his fault, him labelling the crowd as "restless natives" and blowing our entire budget on dross and I'm sure you can see why by the time he left, there wasn't much love left for him amongst Northampton folk! Aidy Boothroyd, by contrast, has been a breath of fresh air. He comes over as an intelligent, knowledgeable manager who has organised the team and, despite our league position, got us playing better football. He's had to bring yet more players in but unlike many of his predecessor's signings, these players have added to the side. Full credit has to go to our chairman for making extra funds available to give us a fighting chance of surviving this year, and despite some hideous bad luck to go with plenty of hideously bad performances, we're still hopeful we might make it. Before I comment on Wimbledon, can I just say how pleased I was to see you make it back into the league. I think all right-thinking football fans felt the same as the whole MK franchise business was just plain wrong and should never have been allowed to happen. AFC Wimbledon getting back in the league was fairly tale stuff. That said, um, not very impressed with you last night, I'm afraid! I thought you were fairly unadventurous and seemed to have come for a draw from

the off, which is odd considering our home record of only one home win all season before last night; I'd have thought any one would fancy their chances against us! Then again, we have now got 25% of all our league points from playing you guys so maybe they knew something we didn't... — **NEIL PORTER**  
*"I've been going to Cobblers games for 20 odd years. At first I was dragged along by my dad as a kid and hated it but I eventually came to identify with the team and support them through thin and thinner. A bit like Patty Hearst, really."*

## **CREWE ALEXANDRA**

SINCE the arrival of Steve Davis from Assistant to the Manager's seat, the Alex have enjoyed an upsurge in both performances and points gained. Following the 3-3 draw with the Dons, Crewe have taken a total of 27 out of the 45 points on offer since Davis was handed the reigns after long-serving Dario Gradi stepped aside at the turn of the year. Whilst this count ought to read 29, Saturday's surrender to the Dons will not deter Crewe fans' optimism that the Reds can continue their charge as play-off hopefuls. After a pleasing first 45 minutes, in which Crewe cantered into a 3-1 lead, Ashley Westwood's 60th-minute penalty miss served as a stark warning that the Railwaymen will need to improve if they are to make the top seven come May. Davis was left bemoaning his side's eventual capitulation, issuing a warning to his players that these types of performances have become all too familiar in recent times and will no longer be accepted under the new regime. Davis wants his players to be able to see out games like this, despite seeing Crewe climb to their highest position of the campaign. Whilst the result felt like a defeat, credit must be given to the Dons for a gutsy fight-back. After a positive start in which the visitors took a seventh-minute lead, the Dons showed their own defensive inadequacies when they handed Crewe a 3-1 lead. Former Alex player Mat Mitchel-King was part of the Dons' back-four which allowed first Byron Moore to equalise before Nick Powell put the hosts ahead and further frailties afforded Greg Pearson the time and space to volley the Alex to a 3-1 lead. Yet Mitchel-King, who looks to have finally overcome his injury problems, and the rest of the Dons' XI showed a spirited improvement in a second-half which saw them eventually drew level in the 90th-minute, to seal a deserved comeback. Crewe will need to learn fast if they are to overturn the 5-point deficit between themselves and Oxford who currently occupy the remaining play-off spot. Meanwhile, following the late drama in South

**[CONTINUED ON PAGE 18 ]**

# AROUND LEAGUE 2

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 17]

Cheshire, the Dons look to be cementing their place in League 2 as they head towards the safety of mid-table. The Gresty Road encounter marks an improvement from when the sides last met in October and Crewe ran out 3-1 winners in the sun at Kingsmeadow. It now looks as though boss Terry Brown has found the formula that will see the Dons in League 2 again next year. — **SIMON HUGHES, following the 'Alex since 1995.**

**JIM LAWRENCE (30-year Crewe fan) adds:** Got to say that as we left Norbiton station that sunny Saturday afternoon back in October, no one could have guessed that in just over a month's time Dario Gradi would step down as manager and Steve Davis would get to step up. We all knew that was the long-term plan but were resigned to DG seeing out the season. The win at Kingsmeadow was one of a sequence of win-loss-win-loss and was followed by defeat at home to Macclesfield, a win at Cheltenham and a woeful defeat at Aldershot. Another defeat at home, to Southend, saw the crowd actually calling for Dario to be sacked. Whether he made the decision himself or the Chairman had a word in his ear, Dario graciously stepped down and has gone to look after the Academy. Steve Davis had an immediate impact - he upped the fitness training (not one of Crewe's traditional strengths), shipped out those who didn't want to play for us and instilled a bit of steel in the team (again, not one of Crewe's traditional strengths). He's also brought in a few loan players to encourage competition for places. It's not been a total success - three of our four red cards being due to reckless tackling - but no one was expecting miracles. Crewe now look a tougher side to beat and our recent run of form and an outside chance of making the play-offs are testament to that. Haven't really followed the Dons since that game although I see they had a pretty disastrous run in the league following our game. Pleased to see Mat Mitchel-King getting a run, although I hope he's not the reason you're not winning games! Never spectacular for us at the Alex but a solid enough player and a decent bloke.

## HEREFORD UNITED

THESE are difficult times for Hereford United. Life following this club is never boring and we are in the middle of a prolonged period of change. For the better or worse has yet to be determined. It is the 40th anniversary of 'that goal' and our subsequent election to the Football League. [In February 1972, Hereford (then a non-league side) caused a major shock when they beat Newcastle United 2-1 in an FA Cup Replay. The first Hereford goal is considered one of the great Cup goals and is replayed each year on national television. *You Tube* has many links to it. It was scored by Ronnie Radford and the victory was instrumental in gaining Hereford election to the Football League.] A brief foray into what is now the Championship was followed by wall-to-wall years of mediocrity. In 1997 we lost our place by drawing with

Brighton on the last day of the season much to the nation's relief. Our manager offered to resign but ended up 'buying' the club. The Graham Turner era began. The club struggled to survive on and off the pitch but gradually adjusted to its new environment. Eventually in 2006, after a couple of play-off disappointments, 10,000 Bulls supporters celebrated an extra-time play-off final victory against Halifax Town at the Walker Stadium, Leicester. We were back and the good times would return. But it hasn't quite turned out that way despite promotion to League 1 in 2008. Relegation quickly followed and Turner sold the club to David Keyte, local businessman and fan, prior to the start of 2010-2011 season. Simon Davey was brought in as manager and was sacked 10 games later! Our ex-player and then physio Jamie Pitman was appointed as caretaker manager. Results improved, he got the job and we secured our league place. But only just. This season has been a continuation of the last. Results have been very poor, particularly at home. Gates have dropped well below break-even and money appears very tight. Off field improvements, somewhat neglected in the Turner era, are in stark contrast to the turmoil on the pitch. (Former Dons' captain) Gary Peters was brought in to assist Pitman but this move was not well received in some quarters. Peters built a reputation with arch rivals Shrewsbury for a more direct form of football which is effective but not necessarily attractive to watch unless you are a seagull! He has not won all the crowd over and it is no longer clear who is dictating tactics and selection any more. So AFC Wimbledon took the field at Edgar Street with Pitman under pressure to keep his job, Peters keeping a low profile and the board holding a two-day Emergency Board Meeting the results of which remain unclear. Nothing less than 3 points would satisfy the home crowd baying for heads to fall. Wimbledon started the more brighter of the two sides without really threatening. Against the run of play, on 17 minutes, Hereford played a neat move down the right with Purkiss crossing for loanee Lyle Taylor to shoot home at the near post. Another raid down the right doubled the lead 20 minutes later with Tom Barkuisen turning in Taylors cross. 2-0 to Hereford at half time. Hereford have a reputation for throwing away leads, especially two-goal leads having 'achieved' that feat twice earlier in the week against Gillingham. As is the norm, we defended too deep, let Wimbledon attack and made a couple of curious substitutions. On 68 minutes Midson headed home Moncur's cross and the nerves began. But the expected onslaught never really

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 19]

# AROUND LEAGUE 2

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 18 ]

occurred and the 3 points were secured. Sorry, but we needed them more than you! So what about the two sides. I fear my side will still struggle to stay in the league. It will be a close call. Will Pitman be in charge by the end of the season? Will Keyte still be Chairman? What was the Emergency Board Meeting outcome? All these questions maybe answered in the next few days. What about Wimbledon? I quite liked the look of Moncur and Jack Midson is a proven goal-scorer. But workmanlike is the best I can offer about the rest. A lot of honest effort but not a lot of flair or quality. You do have a proper manager in Terry Brown. Top bloke. League 2 is poor by comparison with recent seasons. Swindon and Shrewsbury looked the business recently and Crawley were a typical Steve Evans outfit, if you know what I mean! Most of the other sides are a 'much of a muchness'. I think you should be looking down, not up the table. You should be safe for this season but you look no better than the likes of Barnet and Bradford just outside the relegation battle. Next season may be tough if you don't improve in all areas. Special mention for the away support. 399 was quite a turnout! Good luck and pick up points against any of our fellow strugglers please! —

**RICHARD POWELL (Hendre), following Hereford for 40 years.** [Richard adds: *Since the match against Wimbledon, Hereford sacked their manager Pittman! Not even the 3 points saved him!* ]

**RICHARD BRIDGES (30 years following the Bulls)** adds: Mate, I couldn't really give you my honest views without swearing a great deal. Hereford United are dreadful this season and I can't wait for the season to end. Pitman is out of his depth and that is why Peters was brought in to offer a bit more experience. It hasn't worked, Pitman wants to play football but only until we have a lead and then he wants to shut up shop. Peters on the other hand wants to play hoofball and we don't have the players to succeed at that. It's a nightmare for proud supporters of Herefordshire's only professional football club. We used to be thought of as a good footballing side and no-one came here and turned us over easily. The problem is partly, of course, money.....we haven't got any! Well not enough to compete with the bigger clubs in this league and our ground is old and in need of repair. Steps are being taken to improve things such as a new supporters club and bar in part of the main stand that had previously been destroyed by fire. But it seems that everyone else has a bigger budget or is able to attract better players than us at present. The match? Two poor sides on the day with Wimbledon having more possession but no punch and us dangerous for only brief moments. I'm afraid Wimbledon disappointed me. I thought this was a side on the up and passing us en route to better things. Not on this evidence. I wish you well and will always regard you as the real Dons. Hopefully our paths will cross again next season when we are first and second in the table....well, we can dream. :).

## BRISTOL ROVERS

OUR season started off full of optimism, we had a new manager who had tasted success with his previous club Torquay. Paul Buckle was pretty much given a blank cheque to assemble a squad of his choosing. The early promise quickly vanished though, Buckle managed to alienate himself from the supporters with some ridiculous comments and even had public fallouts with some of the senior players. I am not ashamed to say that fan power coupled with unacceptable results brought about his early departure. Shaun North, Buckle's assistant took the reins, generally the fan base was unconvinced since he was Buckle's right-hand man but he did very well. During the handful of games that North was at the helm he steadied the sinking ship, played players in their correct positions and was honest with the supporters -- a breathe of fresh air, to be honest. It was obvious that we needed a proper manager, though ,so the board were under pressure to bring one in. Without trying to sound too big-headed, we feel that as a club we are below where we should be. Looking up the divisions we see local-ish teams Exeter, Yeovil coupled with our fiercest rivals "The other team from Bristol" (82ers) playing in the Championship. We feel that we should be a League 1/Championship yo-yo club, especially given the catchment that we have in and around Bristol, England's 7th largest city. Along came Mark McGhee! A big name at Bristol Rovers! Brilliant stuff, hopefully with his contacts and the fact that he has "done it" at the highest level we can start to be the force that we dream of. His points-per-game ratio paint a promising picture for next season, all with a team that he has inherited. I didn't go to the Rovers v Dons game, I did watch the season opener on TV. Listening on the radio it was an even match, both teams tried to play decent football but unfortunately our pitch is a disgrace after only a little rain. I guess that is an advantage for us since the players know what to expect even though we are a fairly decent passing side now. It's difficult to compare between the teams because apart from a few exceptions every team can beat everybody else on their day! This is a really unpredictable division, if you look at the table after 15 games then look at it now the changes are amazing! If any team in League 2 can keep a fit squad of 15 players for the year they should fare ok. This season we will all be happy to finish mid-table, we were rapidly tumbling for the Conference prior to Buckle's departure, so 10-14th will be fine. There will be a new optimism in the summer and most Gasheads will feel that we should make the play offs at the very least. The

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 20 ]

## AROUND LEAGUE 2

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off-field developments are also reaching a crucial time. Planning has been submitted for a new stadium to the north of the city in the Rovers heartland. Since Rovers left Eastville in 1986 there have been promises of new stadiums but nothing has come as close as this time. It really does seem that we have done our homework this time around. If the authorities take the plunge and accept this proposal it could catapult us to new levels. Capable of taking 38,000 fans to cup finals we really could fulfil the much-talked about potential if the new stadium goes ahead. The thing that makes it so much sweeter is watching the other lot squirm at the bottom of the Championship!— **SI HARTLEY, “Great Grandfather and Grandfather played for Rovers in the 1930s and 1950s respectively, so I was born a Rovers fan in 1979! my first game was around the 1987 season at Twerton Park in Bath. This was our temporary home for 10 years once we were forced out of Eastville.”**

### OXFORD UNITED

It finally seems that Oxford United's season could be about to take off. After a steady first half of the season and an inconsistent period in which a significant gap was built between the automatic promotion places and the rest, Chris Wilder's side are seemingly making their move. This squad is far from perfect and possess a nerve-fraying ability to make the last ten minutes of games torturous, but this team play a far more attractive brand of football than that seen in recent years. In Ryan Clarke, United have a goalkeeper who has won games single-handedly, whilst Michael Duberry has been one of the finest acquisitions in Wilder's reign. Despite a dip in form after injury, Peter Leven should not be a League Two player and even when considering the injury and loan merry-go-round among the team's strikers, there is always a threat at the top of the field. The number of loanees has resulted in a greater expenditure than anticipated and as ever, one of Oxford's greatest challenges remains the financial one. The club's owners and Kelvin Thomas were thoroughly reassuring at a recent forum and despite the losses anticipated, there doesn't appear to be a need for panic. As ever, the purchase of the stadium and its facilities would be a major boost to the club as a whole. All football managers will have criticism from some quarters, but Wilder remains a thoroughly popular manager amongst the vast majority of Oxford fans. Every season has seen improvement thus far and ending the season in a play-off position would guarantee that this run continues. There would be no guarantees therein, but there is an understanding that Wilder insists that his squad doesn't stand still and until the club fails to make progress, there will be few complaints. The speed of progress will not please everybody, with many believing that a club of Oxford's size should be gaining automatic promotion, but in a league containing the big-spending Swindon Town and Crawley Town, aims must be kept realistic. Those in charge of the club seem to understand this and in Wilder, they understand that they have

a good manager. AFC Wimbledon fans must tire of being told how liked they are, but there is an understandable fondness of the Dons within League Two. As an editor of an Oxford United fan-site, I can't claim to be any different. The victory over Luton Town in the play-off final brought a smile to my face and the fact that we always get the three points makes the club far more easy to like! I was disappointed by what the Dons had to offer in the Boxing Day fixture. Oxford don't specialise in routine away wins but the 2-0 victory earlier in the season was one of the more simple that you will see. From the latest evidence, Wimbledon have improved since then. The style of play is attractive and there is a clear desire to play the game the right way (although Sammy Moore's dive doesn't quite fit that criteria). AFC Wimbledon are far from the worst side we have seen at Grenoble Road this season and will be more than comfortable this season. This brings me onto Jack Midson. Good old Jack. Let's get this straight to start with...I do like Midson. He was a part of the team that got Oxford United back into the Football League and he will always be respected for that. He was brave, he tried hard and he had a habit of scoring useful goals. It wasn't his fault that he was never going to be able to remove James Constable from the central position in the front three and he didn't complain about his wide role all too often. However, Midson is one of the modern brigade of social networking footballers. There have been a few at Oxford recently. These are decent players whose ability is greatly heightened by some fans due to the fact that they can speak to them on Facebook or Twitter. As a prolific 'retweeter' and blogger, Midson was more accessible than most and had a lot of fans who would support his every move on a football field because of who he was. He was a nice bloke, but he didn't fit Oxford United to an extent that could see the club push forwards in League Two. His hold-up play was frustrating and although he was very intelligent, the ball didn't stick well enough for him to claim a central berth every week. Footballers can be far more effective in a different team or style of play (ask Andy Carroll) and this is certainly the case with Jack. He seems to thrive as the big fish in the smaller pool and given a regular run of games that plays to his strengths, he will score goals. 18 goals reflects this ability, but he would not have had the same tally in an Oxford shirt. I'm delighted that Jack is doing well and the move has worked out well for all parties. AFC Wimbledon's growth was always likely to slow when reaching the League, but a mid-table finish would be more than acceptable. — **GEORGE DUGDALE, following Oxford since 2004.**



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