

MUDHUTTER

FOOTBALL EXPRESS

2021 CHRISTMAS SPECIAL



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Strange Days Indeed

Welcome to this winter digital edition of the Mudhutter. We've had to change things around a bit in order to keep this thing going, whilst also attempting to retain what people like about it.

It wasn't a difficult decision for us to start up again, once fans were let back into grounds. We are all creatures of habit and this fanzine is a habit. Maybe not a particularly good one, but still a ritual we adhere to, whether you write it, sell it, buy it, read it, edit it or just give us a nod on the bridge as you walk by.

Two key things have changed. Firstly, the cost of posting out the magazine has become nearly as much as the fanzine itself, if we go over 48 pages certainly. Of course, we recover postage on orders but we are fortunate to have over 100 subscribers, and to ask them to pay £15 for five fanzines a year felt a bit much. It costs around £1 to send each mag out via post, so by doing 4 printed mags a season means we are selling at £1.50 each, which covers the cost of printing it, so a nice happy compromise. To offset this, we will do a digital version in the winter (THIS!!) and maybe even a summer one, but we'll make it free after a few days to try and reach a wider audience.

The second thing is perhaps not as vital given the first one, and it is simply that, historically, we were only ever a matchday downpour away from losing hundreds of pounds. If a match gets called off or if the weather is horrendous, then we have to personally find the money ourselves to pay the printers. None of us take any money out of it, but nor should we have to put any in of our own. Time, hard work, effort, passion and a smidgeon of creativity is the only currency we should have to put forward as fanzine writers.

As a footnote to this, when we started up after lockdown, the response to subscriptions went through the roof and we now have over 150 subscribers and are printing/emailing over 500 copies each issue. So maybe, we were just being soft and scared of the weather, what with us mainly being gentlemen of a certain age.

We're not here for the sympathy and if we were, we'd be here a bloody long time. It was suggested that we could put a button in this file inviting people to buy us a pint but then we don't need free beer (WHAT???) so maybe suggested that, if you enjoy it, you could give a few quid instead but again, there's enough asks for charity donations both now and in the future, and not just from us. So, just read it, and if you enjoy it, feel free to share it far and wide.

Ultimately, the upshot of this is that the dependency of selling a fanzine on a match day has reduced somewhat but we still wouldn't be viable without it. Nevertheless, scroll up a bit (cos you'll be doing that with this issue) and remember what I said about rituals. We all piss and moan about it, but we love that hour or two's interaction on the bridge and around the ground with fellow fans who appreciate what we do: we put the effort in to produce a printed magazine all about Wigan Athletic, and loads of other stuff and we've done it consistently now, year on year for nearly twenty of them, with a few of us being around even longer than that with previous fanzines.

So, with that, let me say, thanks to everyone who reads this, in particular to regulars and subscribers and those who helped to contribute to it. As ever, the digital one is a bit different. There's loads of positive changes but some of our contributors don't

quite do digital compared to print, and maybe you as a reader don't do digital either. It's not something any of us set out to do, but I've listed the reasons above, so we hope you understand.

Look at it as a demo copy, a mixed bag of articles on various topics, yours to read or discard for free. Either way, we appreciate you downloading it and as we all know, clicks and downloads are king now. We will return in print, in February and again in April, there's no point putting exact dates on it yet, as the last year or two have shown, nobody has a clue what the future holds, but that is the intention. And that's the admin bit over.

Let us both wish you all a wonderful Christmas and a Happy New Year, however hard it might be to enjoy with all else going on in the world. This football club is back and flourishing and looking forward to an exciting 2022 and doesn't that feel great?

Cheers

• Jimmy

THE MUDHUTTER XMAS 2021 CONTRIBUTORS & STOCKISTS

Editor Grinch: Migs

Editor Scrooge: Jimmy

Contributors: Les Bagg, Tony Topping, Finton Stack, Tat, Ian Such, Bernard Long, Steadies No.1, JonnyF, Moonay, Nick Taylor, Statto, Barca Jim

Sellers: Chris Marsh, OPM, LAW & Purdham

Migs was supposed to give Christmas character names to all the people above, but he gets lazier every year, and just stopped after himself and Jimmy. It's a Christmas miracle that you're even reading this, such is his level of idleness. He doesn't even try to hide the fact any more.

All views contained herein are purely those of individual contributors and not necessarily the view of the Mudhutter Football Express. We offer the right of reply to all parties but we will only end up cackling heartily at you in our Whatsapp Group.

You can buy the Mudhutter online at www.mudhutter.co.uk including a limited selection of back issues. You can also now download the digital Mudhutter online at the same address and save 51 pence in the process.

There's also a few copies of MFE78 (print version) which you may be able to pick up from our website or at Waterstones in the Grand Arcade; Wigan Central and The Brickmakers Arms. You'll have to pay £2 for a print copy, mind you, we're not made of money.

Finally, from all of us here, to all you out there, you are the very reason we do this year after year. Without the people who buy every issue, and our wonderful subscribers, the Mudhutter simply wouldn't exist.

We genuinely wish you health and happiness for 2022 and beyond, and thank you sincerely for keeping us going.

Wanker, Wanker, Wanker, Wanker



So sang the Wigan Athletic fans as the hapless Bobby Madley made another terrible decision at a recent home game. OK it probably wasn't Madley but he's been by far the worst ref we've had over the last couple of years. Some refs at League One level are simply inept, you could say that they aren't of the required PEDIGREE but Madley goes further than that.

He is one of those refs, all too familiar from our Premier League days, who is in fact, ept, but usually uses that eptness against us to favour big clubs. In short, he doesn't like us, we're not his CHUM and his ability to officiate a game involving us fairly ends up with him BARKING UP THE WRONG TREE!

But this article isn't about him, it's about the crowd singing "wanker, wanker, wanker" to him, as this was the trigger for this cobbled together article, which goes by the name of:

FIVE LONG FORGOTTEN FOOTBALL CHANTS

"WHO'S THE BASTARD IN THE BLACK?"

Is it racist to call the ref a black bastard these days? I'd say it is at least risky, in case he (she) is the slightest bit mixed race, let alone of ethnic origin. Not that this had any sinister connotations in any way, it's just that referees used to wear all black kit. The fact they wear grey or green or yellow these days, just furthers muddies the waters and has probably caused this chant to fade. No idea why this happened, possibly to avoid a clash with dark blue or part black kits but the plethora of styles and colours now is ridiculous. Nobody ever goes into Sports Direct and asks to see their range of replica referee kits. "Do you have a Mike Dean in XXL please?"

Another popular song of yesteryear, would invite the linesman (linesperson) (assistant referee) to stick their yellow flag in a private place, where stuff more often comes out of. Would this be considered homophobic these days? What if it was a female liner? Oh here comes, the Mudhuts HR Director....Erm yes, let us conclude that it is vulgar either way and needs to be consigned to history!

THE HOVIS SONG

A regular dirge trotted out by the Popular Side at Springfield, punctuated by "oohs" and "naa naa's" at the appropriate point. Quite what the point of it was, I'm not sure anybody knows, other than a free advertisement for bread, or the sight of Pat Gavin moving forwards was reminiscent of a lad trying to wheel his bike up a very steep hill. Very Lancastrian, very traditional, very self-deprecatory. Maybe we need one for gluten free Vegan rice cakes these days?

"WE ARE TOP THE LEAGUE, I say, we ARE TOP THE LEAGUE"

You know the one don't you? You remember it? With the emphasis on the ARE bit? Miles better than that dull drone of "we're top the league, repeat ad nauseum" to the Viva Ronaldo tune. I suppose that is why we persevere with it, because it can



be repeated for a while. As opposed to more aggressively chanting that, we are indeed, top of the league, which is usually just a short burst of noise. Times change though, and I suppose we have to accept that this is the commonly used version now, heard on stands and terraces across the country nowadays. Except at Bolton, because they're still fucking useless and don't get the opportunity to sing any variation of above song(s) and

have to console themselves with having parties for finishing third behind Cambridge and Cheltenham.

THE CIRCUS SONG

Another wordless serenade like the Hovis one, usually featuring when an opposition player, or indeed one of your one, has tried something audacious and cocked it up badly. Again, it has been bastardised by the Viva Ronaldo tune of "you're fucking shit" but if we're talking (semi forgotten) chants, I even preferred the more earthy "what the fucking hell was that" to the latter, which still does get an airing every now and then to be fair.

"GET YOUR T*** OUT FOR THE LADS"

Ahem, and as a modern, inclusive, forward thinking football fanzine, can we just say that the matchday experience is 100 times better without this derogatory, disgusting chant and we are as a man (and woman) delighted that it has been consigned to history!! Leave it in the bin, thank you. Mind you if Grant Holt ever returns, it's fair game. Or indeed, if there is a particularly fat lad in the away end acting up. Thankfully, preferred insult of choice appears to be "he's got a pie in his pocket". Which is highly insulting to those with eating disorders, so please stop it and instead #bekind to the gobby prick. Bloody hell, this is confusing....

Good songs

Just can't get enough. We didn't start it obviously but we sing it well, and it's usually a good ES2 rallying call in the second half

YAMS. It faded but hopefully will never die

Let's Hang On / I'm a Believer (see YAMS)

"Ooh Aah" the Zulte one not Mudhuts one. Always a giggle cos there's only us that do it, although Derby fans did us like a kipper that time when they fired back a succession of "YOU.....TWATS" Fair fucks for that one.

Any songs for players, as we are sadly lacking and it's hardly a surprise given our complete squad overhaul

Callum Lang is indeed one of our own but does need something better, that Belinda Carlisle one sounds OK for a start

Your editor here has already given you the Will Keane "Ra Ra Rasputin" one but alas he

sits in the West Stand and doesn't sing

There must be loads, just needs a bit of enthusiasm and co-ordination or Blackpool away

Sing their names in an original manner, and they'll love you forever

Bad songs

Allez Allez Allez. Caught on briefly at Donny, and to be fair we did actually win a title that year. Otherwise left on the shelf as rightly so, we're not Scousers. Just one of those shit songs that the likes of Plymouth and Fleetwood are now adopting, see also that one that goes "ally ally oh". SHITE.

Up The fucking Tics. Well I'm on the fence to be honest. The cons are, it's just another Viva Ronaldo rip off and is slightly profane, as we have children watching us as well as women with boobs (see above) these days

But then the positive side, is that we have more or less copyrighted the "Up The.... [Tics]" in recent times, only for it be ripped off everywhere, so we do perhaps need a song to support that. See also "what a club", "massive club", "HMS Piss the league", "piss boiling" etc and everything else every other set of fans is now ripping off on Twitter. Oh, you're not reading any more, you went looking for the boobs...

I was going to get a tin hat whichever side of the fence I fall on here but I don't like the James McClean one, and think we could find an alternative. I'm not a woman (yet, but keep buying the mag please) so I don't know how they feel about it but it feels a little sexist and it has perhaps had it's time. Not my call though, like I say.

• Andrew Lloyd Webber

MERRY CHRISTMAS, AND THANK YOU

It's been a testing year all round, for everyone. We at the Mudhutter feel incredibly lucky to have reappeared after a year without being able to produce an issue, and still see all our old friends putting their hand in their pockets to buy a magazine.

Add to that record numbers of subscribers, and it's fair to say we've come out of it all in a better position than many.

It's said elsewhere in this issue, but we really wouldn't be here without you. This is neither a boast nor a complaint, but nobody makes a penny out of producing the Mudhutter. Any money we do manage to stay ahead with, goes towards buying a drink for our regular writers and our team of hardy sellers twice a year, and who never (okay, rarely) let us down.

It's been the strangest two years for us all, with both administration and covid to content with. Let's all use 2022 to start again, try and be kinder to ourselves and others, and see if we can't make the world just a little bit better.

Here's to next year.

The I can't believe I'm wasting my time even looking at this ridiculous excuse for a Christmas quiz..... Quiz

This is following on from a quiz I came up with a long while ago, where I gave ridiculous clues to suggest the names of English football clubs.

This time the idea is to guess the name of the Scottish Football team by the pathetic/corny clues I've supplied. (Hint) the clues and the team names aren't totally serious and only I may have any idea what the fuck I'm hinting at by the information provided.

As an example I'm going to give you one of my weaker efforts to help you see the kind of crap I've come up with

Clue. We will rock you.. In Brighton Answer Queen of the South

Ok so now you know the kind of shite you're up against. Clues below. The answers are on the next page, so don't scroll too far if you're actually keen on taking part.

There are no prizes, by the way.

1 Holy Helen

2 Stupid Scouser Joey

3 Hello Bernard Nolan

4 Mum is better

5 Pig meat is poorly and a heavy Scholar

6 Supports us as well, Scottish flower

7 Dean loves Sweden's finest

8 Marnock has to die

9 Sailed Chester's River

10 Sailed Chester's River.....Together

11 A quartet of distant Athletes

12 Cardiac of the centre hates Botham

13 Breathing Granite

14 Visit Pilkingtons Whelan did it to us

15 Sten's residence is horse shit

16 A Marble statue of Ian St John

17 You breath it, Ted's with me

18 Bonnie's mate

19 If Raheem manages West Brom

Read on for the answers...

QUIZ ANSWERS

- 1 Saint Mirren
- 2 Dumb Barton
- 3 Hi Bernie N
- 4 Mother Well
- 5 Ham ill ton Academical
- 6 Part Tic Thistle
- 7 Abba Dean
- 8 Kill Marnock
- 9 Done Dee
- 10 Done Dee United
- 11 Four Far Athletic
- 12 Heart of mid Loaths Ian
- 13 Living Stone
- 14 Glass go Sell Tics
- 15 Sten's house manure
- 16 St John's Stone
- 17 Air You and I.....Ted
- 18 Clyde
- 19 Stirling's Albion

And to finish some that wouldn't fit on the questions page. But show you just how weak and barrel scraping my ideas were.

Take the double glazing They shop at the Range - Glass go Range'ers

Bovine lions house Steak - Cow Den Beef

A former Norley pub - Montrose

And last and least for which I apologise

Broath is my Brother - R Broath

If you got all 19, give yourself a pat on the back. Mind you, if you even got one that's worth a ruffle of your hair, or something.

Nice to see you, to see you nice!

- **Bernard Long**

Walking With Scotsmen



If I can start with an understatement, Twitter is a really odd place and I think it's fair to say that "Wigan Twitter" is at the cutting edge of that oddness, and one that I have been sucked into.

My relationship with the 'Tics and the support had quite a strange beginning. I lived in Barcelona for years and around 2010, my mate Chris, a Red who writes for United We Stand (@MadCyrilUWS) brought me over some fanzines from the UK. Magazines from United, FC United and a couple of issues of something called Mudhutter. Having been a fan of

the Celtic fanzines of the late 80's, I was able to recognise that the Mudhutter one was at the forefront of the drive to give borderline sociopaths a platform for their inner monologues to be committed to paper.

Fast forward six or seven years and I'm living in Manchester, fucking about far too much on twitter and I find myself on the periphery of Wigan twitter. Then came a fateful day, Wigan drawn against Manchester United in the FA Cup. An opportunity to put faces to many of the names and have a quiet sherry while discussing the major world events of the day...

In reality, it involved a HUGE feed of the ale in the City Arms pre match, lads getting taxis to Old Trafford five minutes before kick off, those of us not going to game heading to Town Hall Tavern round the corner where more than half the lads appeared back from the game before the second half had kicked off. More ale supped and the highlight was a young lad, dressed as Iron Man (Comicon was being held nearby that day) being serenaded with "You're just a shit superhero" as he walked by, confirmed that Wigan twitter, If anything, was a watered down version of the live show.

That kind of cemented my position as a welcome outsider (more on this later) of the Latics support and I kept in touch with a few of the lads, even appearing on the Pie At Night podcast, where I still am the only guest to get up during a recording to get the beers in, as I couldn't be arsed listening to Jimmy. I'm amazed it hasn't happened more often in truth.

It was that night where I agreed to take part in the inaugural walk for the Joseph's Goal charity, a decision that was simultaneously the best and worst one I have ever made. A walk from Wigan to Fleetwood with an overnight stop in Blackpool, what could possibly go wrong?

The highlights are too many to mention, was it the stories of the police horse getting bottled in the Montrose bar, the winner of the Wigan Post Wayne Rooney lookalike competition or a huge number of other tales that libel lawyers and probably GMP would have a field day with? Who can say?



For me though, the biggest laugh was when we arrived at Fleetwood's stadium and Paul Kendrick was concerned that they might not be able to have a bucket collection at half time, as he and a load of us had tickets for the stand at the side of the pitch. I told

him not to worry as I would blag my way around the pitch at half time and get it done.

In interests of full disclosure, I should remark that for the last leg of the walk and the game, I had chosen to wear my 1988 Centenary Celtic top, which was handy to convince the steward to let me walk round the perimeter of the pitch but didn't meet with the wholesale approval of the Tics fans. Despite the bucket saying "JOSEPH'S GOAL" and it being absolutely clear, I was one of the walkers, one lad was shouting "Don't give him anything, he's collecting for the IRA"

Absolutely fucking joyous

I did the walk the following year to Leeds and will happily do the next one, as I know good people when I see them and lads like the one that shouted at me, just add to the joyful madness that surrounds The 'Tics

I am nowhere near being a Wigan supporter. My "English team" is United but I do keep an eye out for Wigan's results and am always happy to see you win, so I was concerned when, due to a horrific turn of events and incredible dereliction of duty by the football authorities, there was a risk that the club would cease to exist.

What I never doubted was that the fans would rally to the cause. There are few clubs that have such a diverse fan base, from the reasonable lads at one end, to the throw shite at the buses mentalists at the other and everything in between. I knew that somehow you'd mobilise and come out the other side. It's no surprise that you did and it is glorious to see you back to your best, falling out AOTS, wishing the worst on Bolton, wanting managers sacked after one bad performance and moaning like fuck about away tickets

Nature is indeed healing.

You've got a brilliant football club, you have some of the best c*nts around in your number and some of the worst and for that reason I'll happily remain a welcome outsider of the WAFC family

UP THE FUCKING 'TICS

• @BarcaJim3



FOOTNOTE

We are WALKING FOR JOSEPH again in 2022. We are walking from Morecambe on Friday 18th March 2022 to the DW Stadium, arriving in time to watch the game on Saturday 19th March 2022.

If you want to take part or help support this event, please get in touch via email walk4joseph@gmail.com or get in touch with @JosephsGoal on Twitter

It'll be one of the most uplifting and self-fulfilling things you will ever do.

But for the Grace of Darlo



It was March 2017 and we found ourselves with a free Saturday. Well, what do you do? Drown your sorrows in the pub and watch your coupon go down with Soccer Saturday? Maybe a bit of shopping or DIY? (Yeah, right!) No, for a few of us it was a trip up the road to home of one of our old adversaries, Victory Park, Chorley.

Fans of a certain vintage will have Chorley as one of the old non league enemies but that was a tad before my time and I've

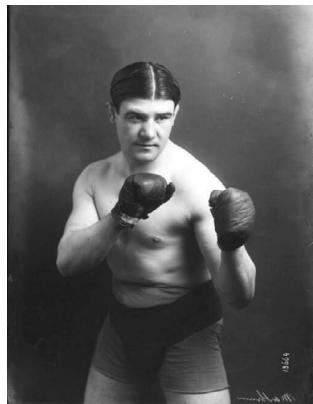
always had a soft spot for them. They were playing one of the old adversaries that I have many memories of, the reincarnation of Darlington, the reborn Darlington 1883. Now Darlo were involved in a few of my football "firsts" as a young fan falling in love with Latics, football and the football craic. At the end of my first full season as a fully-fledged Laticsmon, Darlington were the last home game of the season and the first time I felt the pitch invasion buzz!

The first time that I'd been part of the ritual where the fans hugged the touchline for the last few minutes until the ref blew the final whistle and it was hey lads, hey! Everyone ran on the pitch, the players at the tunnel side got off sharpish, the rest got a pat on the back if they were Latics (and a request for sock tie ups!) or if they were opponents they were respectfully given free passage to the tunnel (after requests for sock tie ups!). Then it was all gather round on the pitch in front of the stand to wait for the players to appear on "The Balcony" in front of the director's box. We loved them, they loved us and it was bloody ace!! A tradition now sadly gone in the modern game as clubs seem to think that fans want to see the players kids and wives walking around the pitch that for just twenty minutes a year belonged to us, the fans. We don't, and modern football has stolen that moment and tradition from us.

The second "first" if you get my drift, came only a few months later as we played Darlington away on the first game of the 79/80 season, my first football special train awayday! The sheer giddiness of a new season was doubled by the fact that a few of us from school had booked on the "Special" and then trebled by sneaking a few cans of Long Life on! We felt dead grown up and then wondered what all the fuss was all about as we ended up brassting for a pee and all the bogs had the Engaged sign on the lock! Another first maybe? That feeling of aaaaaaaah, yessss! When they flicked to vacant! Latics had a great following that day at Feethams in the sunshine, walking down from the station with the hundreds from the special made you feel good, united, part of something brilliant. "Give us a W...." I loved the ground there, where at the time you had to walk round the cricket pitch to get to the little football ground. A lot of grounds like Crewe, Rochdale and Darlo seemed little to us in those days, cos they were smaller in area than ours and we thought of Springfield as our Wembley. Darlo got much smaller crowds than us in those early league seasons, we felt like the big club, but the locals weren't too happy about this mini invasion and they were a pretty tough lot. But it was OK, we just stuck with the big lads! Like that last home game, it finished 2-2 and we were happy with that. The atmosphere coming off the ground around that cricket

pitch was very different to before the game, before we were all together, singing and feeling like we owned the place. Coming off the Latics fans were all split up and mixed with the home fans. Again, we just tagged on with some of the big lads and all was well, at 14 (and a half!) years old, life couldn't be better!

The season after in 1980/81 I had one of my first experiences of having to kick someone up the arse to save my own! We'd been in some shady situations before then but this was a bit different. The crowd that day was slightly bigger than the season before but the Latics following wasn't as good. We went on the coach this time, got dicked 3-1 on the pitch which was bad enough. Then after the game going across the main road to where the coaches were parked we were the stragglers at the back, and got surrounded by their lot. What do you do? You feel the first one take a swing at you and miss and look for a gap, the gap was created by me kicking this mon in front of me as hard as I could in the backside and legging it across the road to the safety of the coach park, hoping my mates had followed! They had, and luckily the little fracas had stopped the traffic for a few minutes! It was brilliant talking about it all on the coach on the way back, but that little feeling was always at the back of the mind, what if the traffic hadn't have been stopped? We would've got twatted good and proper, basically!



So Darlington were involved in some pivotal moments in my life as a developing home and away football fan! As a little post script to this little Darlo memory fest. In the mid 80's they once brought a little mob of let's say, rum lads. Due to a few midweek phone calls it was known that a few were coming down on the train. They had done their homework and instead of the expected and normal arrival point of people coming from Manchester they got off the train at Ince. They then came into Wigan the back way, to the total surprise of the assembled Wigan Wall Boys (Pre Goon Squad) who were looking down Wallgate, and for a few minutes all hell broke loose!

A little trip to Chorley is heartily recommended for anyone with a spare Saturday (or indeed Tuesday!) £5.30 return on the bus and the world is your oyster (well, maybe not the world as such!) It's just a nice change to get back to some grass roots stuff, where the fans are a bit more than a season ticket number and things have a more personal touch. Of course, the bigger you get, the less personal you can be, that can't be helped but it's always good to get to places where the overhyped EPL stuff playing on the telly is an afterthought, they've got far more important things to think of! Drink as a neutral watching football in a pub full of Premier League replica shirt wearers, or as a neutral in a supporter's club with people who turn out to keep their local club alive? As long as I've got the spare cash it's a no brainer for me for a non Latics Saturday afternoon. Stood on a terrace with your mates watching two teams go full pelt at each other is one of life's beautiful pleasures. And it was a good game, a 1-1 draw which hung on a thread until the last kick, good pies (see elsewhere!), good pints in the club and jolly good company before going on an alcohol fuelled bender in the (errm) fleshpots of Chorley, Standish and Wigan. It's what Saturdays were made for, innit??

Darlington had a good following behind the goal in the first half, I was expecting



maybe a few more but you should doff your cap to anyone who follows their team away at that level. I was a bit surprised by the differing ages of their fans, some had obviously been long standing from the good old days of Feethams. But some, maybe the sons or daughters of them just didn't look old enough to have known the old ground. So their only memories of watching their team will have started with a horrendous carbuncle of a stadium which ultimately led them to extinction, reforming as a new club and playing home games in another town. They are now thriving again and have a new ground called Blackwell Meadows and it's all down to the hard work and determination of fans to have a football club in their town. Which leads me nicely onto.....

IT COULD EASILY HAVE BEEN US....

There are some obvious similarities with ourselves and Darlo in how our clubs were taken over at our respective spiritual homes. Both clubs were getting poor crowds when their new owners took over and seemingly going nowhere. Both those owners were viewed with suspicion when they did make their moves. They were self-made, very rich men, our own Mr Whelan started off with a market stall, their Mr Reynolds a little less honestly, cracking open safes!! They both pledged to build stadiums for their new clubs that were far, far bigger than the clubs needed. If you are old enough to remember, look back to the day when it was announced that Dave Whelan was taking over. And look back to what you thought when he said he was going to build a Stadium for 25,000 when we were struggling in the bottom league and getting 2,500 on for home games. Reynolds went a step further and did his to 30,000 for a club who very rarely averaged more than 4,000 in a good season. The initial suspicion from Latics fans about Dave Whelan was this. Why would a man who spent the whole of the mid to late 1980's trying to get himself on the board at Wigan Rugby suddenly want to get involved in the club that Wigan RL and its local Wiggin Mafia detested?? Of course, we didn't know what Dave had gambled on, the 1990's football explosion with the birth of the Premier League, he wanted in and we were perfect for it. With a bit of investment, it was a gamble worth taking (even if it sounded a little outlandish to say the least). Darlo fans suspicions were just, "What the f*ck?" He took them to a huge ground miles out of town to this place in the middle of nowhere. After a promising start, he didn't invest in players or a manager who could take them any further than they already were. But he revelled in being seen as some kind of saviour with a stadium he named after himself being his only legacy. He turned out to be an assassin! If Darlington had had a Dave Whelan instead of a George Reynolds it could have been them in the Premier League, signing players who had played in World Cups, their local derbies would've been Newcastle and Sunderland instead of Hartlepool. They could have been playing in cup finals, winning the FA Cup and being one of England's representatives in European football. If you think that sounds mad then just think what people would have said to you 25 years ago if you'd told them WAFC would do it!

Likewise, if Dave Whelan had been a Reynolds, well, it doesn't even bear thinking about does it? Instead of Dave Whelan keeping his word and eventually getting things sorted (famously after the embarrassment at Wrexham) Things could have stagnated like they did at Darlo. He could've withdrawn his patronage, no big games, no players

come. We go down and after a couple of seasons battling against relegation on 3,000 crowds in a 25,000 seat stadium we drop to the conference. And then we end up falling further and then eventually lose our existence itself. We could now be called FC Wigan 1932, having been reformed by a fans group after Wigan Athletic were wound up. Ground sharing with St Helens Town for a few years until our new 3,500 capacity stadia on the spare land near the new road at Goose Green was being built. It took ages to get the planning permission as the council already had the land earmarked for another leisure project. It had to be taken to arbitration to decide whether a football ground or a roller-skating complex and Rugby League history museum were more beneficial to the people of the town. The council lost their case and the New Springfield Stadium was finally built.



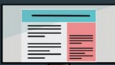
Scary innit? And it happened to them and other clubs who were long standing established league clubs. It isn't just the fine lines on the pitch and in transfer market that can shape whether a football club succeeds or falls on its arse is it? Every time I feel a bit down or pissed off about Latics, I think about Darlington and George Reynolds and think "Phew, thank f*ck for that!"

• Les Bagg

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The Story Behind the Azzurri



In the world of calcio, one word that stokes the flames of passion in the hearts of those who hear it, and brings glorious images of the past to mind is 'Azzurri.'

Azzurri is of course the nickname for the Italian national team. And simply translated means 'The Blues' - not the most intimidating of names but one that has stood the test of time. But why are Italy known as the Azzurri? And why do

they wear this colour when they take to the field?

When thinking of any national team and the jerseys they wear, it is natural to expect the colours of the national flag to be featured. This is true of France, Spain, England, Brazil, Argentina and many others. But when it comes to Italy, it is not the case.

The Italian national flag consists of the green, white and red. The romantic notion of the provenance behind these selections suggests that green represents the hills of the country; white, the mountains; and red, the blood of those who fought wars for Italian independence. The reality is much more mundane and relates to the amalgamation of regional flags - but don't let that get in the way of a good story. However, the colour blue is absent from the flag. So where did it come from?

The Italy of today is very different from the one of the early 20th century. Italy is now categorised as a Republic, with the power held by the people, and the men and women they elected to represent them. However, in the early 20th century, Italy was still a monarchy ruled over by a King or Queen. This royal family was known as the 'House of Savoy' or 'Casa Savoia.'

This royal house ruled Italy (with some interruptions) from 1861 to 1946. Significantly, the official colour of the House of Savoia was blue, so when the Italy national football team played their first ever match back in 1910, they adopted the colours of their royal family rather than those of the national flag

Following Mussolini's downfall at the end of WWII, a referendum was held to determine the future governance of the nation. The question was whether Italy should continue under a monarchy or become a Republic. King Victor Emmanuel III, who was tainted by his earlier support for Mussolini, abdicated in favour of his son, Umberto II. On June 2, 1946, Italy went to the polls to determine the future of the country. Nearly 13 million voted and 54.3% opted for a Republic.

However, a graph of the results showed a much divided nation with the majority in the north voting in favour of the Republic, and the south voting heavily in favour of retaining the monarchy. While the country itself was divided, one thing remained a constant throughout, the Italian national team continued to take to the field in blue. The colour of a royal family which no longer was at the head of the state.

More than 70 years after the referendum, Italy has added two more World Cups and a European Championship to its haul of silverware - all achieved wearing the iconic

Azzurri shirt.

Italy are the Azzurri. But the word born in a bygone era has since taken on a new significance, one that is a far removed from its origins in the realm of Kings and Queens. Today, it represents national sporting pride, it has the power to fill stadiums, and to bring families and friends together - to cry in defeat and to cheer in glory.

- Ian Such @suchy_77

Fancy a pie? The reprise.....



It was ten years ago now when I embarked on the embryonic journey / millstone around my neck that gave birth to The Life of Pies [Life of Pies - The Journey of a Lunchtime](#)

For some reasons best known to myself, I am currently working on a more mainstream follow up, the Good Pie Guide.

The old pandemic hasn't exactly helped matters but I am still on the pie trail and hoping to publish a follow up next year, or early the year after. In any case, the research phase is by far the best bit...

I'm not asking for anything here other than your support, to help grow my socials reach. So if you would kindly mind clicking the links below to help grow the audience for this project (if indeed you aren't already part of the pie cult), it would be hugely appreciated...

Website: [Life of Pies - The Journey of a Lunchtime \(goodpieguide.co.uk\)](http://goodpieguide.co.uk)

Blog: [Brockleby's Northerner Meat and Potato Pie - The Good Pie Guide](#)

Twitter: [The Good Pie Guide \(@thelifeofpies\)](#) / [Twitter](#)

Facebook page: [\(11\) The Good Pie Guide | Facebook](#)

Facebook group: [Good Pie Guide \(facebook.com\)](https://www.facebook.com/goodpieguide/)

Instagram: [Good Pie Guide \(@goodpieguide\)](#) • [Instagram photos and videos](#)

Cheers,

- Jimmy



Back in the (Not Quite) USSR



Kyiv, its minus bastard in winter and hotter than that JLo Pammy Anderson wet dream in the summer. But what else is Kyiv about?

I've been here 18 months, escaping in the summer of 2020 after all that lockdown stuff, as well as a job loss and messy separation from my ex. I knew the square root of fuck all about the place other than it was cheap, so what have I learned in 18 months exile? Well, there's been a few things, some good, some strange, some that need some explaining, I'll do my best.

The language

Kyiv is the capital of Ukraine which obviously as you know was part of the U.S.S.R, and most recently had a revolution

in 2014, (streets of fire on Netflix, watch it in awe) The main language here is mixed depending on age range, the older generation still use Russian and the generation around my age, critical late 20's (39) use a mixture of Ukrainian and Russian, the youth over here, although able to understand Russian, tend to go with Ukrainian, which always make it's a pain when trying to ask for things as, 1 it seems rude to use Russian when an attractive young lady is asking for your order (More on the female of the species later). And 2, I am shit at learning new languages, currently I can just about order beer (peeva) or ashtray (pipenitza) or fags (Marlboro Gold). Many places have menus and staff with English skills, and the City is becoming more westernised regarding shopping, food and fashion, but I'll say more on each of those as we go! Both Ukrainian and Russian are without a doubt the angriest languages I know.

Transport

Kyiv has a metro (underground) system of 3 lines which is fucking ace for getting around, currently it's costing around 18 pence per journey, and runs 22 hours a day. The metro from where I am, in the suburbs to the city centre is around 20 minutes, but the best thing about the metro system is, not only the huge escalators, but some of the metro stations themselves are things of beauty, Teatralna, in the theatre and arts district certainly isn't what Paul Weller wrote about many moons ago. With the number of stations, it's easy to spend a day exploring new areas and seeing the old soviet areas or the new developments such as Plodil by the river, all these have their own charm and the artwork and craft in building the stations is something quite fantastic to see.

Buses or Mashukas as they are known here are soviet minibuses, with the odour of mouldy bread and as a comfortable as a weekend in Bolton. Having experienced these twice, I can say that I'd rather walk back to Wigan than ever have to use one of these again, avoid like you would a certain muscle measuring fan from Merseyside.

Uber and bolt are the main taxi firms and are as cheap as chips (35Km for a tenner) however the caveat to this is being on the roads, which is something akin to playing

Russian roulette (forgive the Pun) Mainly due to the fact that, not only are the roads full of potholes bigger than the grand canyon but also due to the fact that driving with a mobile phone isn't illegal here, it's actually encouraged and I've yet to see any driver ever be breathalysed (more below). The roads here are also mainly three lane affairs so its motorway driving with added stock car racing. If you do need to use a taxi service wear a seatbelt, I've had 2 minor bumps and one bigger bump in 18 months and around 30 journeys. You have been warned!

Alcohol

Sweetie Jesus of Nazareth, the 12 disciples and the rest of the bible people, Ukraine likes alcohol and it shows. Vodka is plentiful and cheap, although some would strip the paint from an old bike. It seems that the custom here is to order or brew the stuff and consume it at every opportunity day or night (Disclaimer, I don't drink spirits at all) and make sure anyone within six feet is also offered some of the transparent home wrecker.

Beer is available in 99% of shops and drinking on the street isn't frowned upon. The average pint of lager here is about a quid, and the variety is staggering, from wheat to blanc to crisp to dark, it's all here and easily accessible. For those who don't like trying new beers, most of the restaurants and cafes in the centre will serve Heineken or Staropramen on tap, as well as bottles of Bud or Corona. Stella is available but costly (as I found buying 8 cans before the game after Talal's takeover and having already consumed 6 pints from work, not a happy Wednesday there readers).

The culture of drinking is normalised here, and you will see anyone from businessmen in suits to Oleg the tramp, happily sat with a bottle of beer from the shop, enjoying the fresh air or walking down the street. Now of course we have all enjoyed a beer and then realised our bladder isn't as strong as it was back in the day, which is why you will find many a staffed portaloos dotted near metro stations and on main roads. This may sound like a good idea, but it is not!!!! The toilet in train spotting would be considered regal in comparison to the smells that emanate from these blue shit pits, because

The Food

Bland, boring, carp, three words I could use to describe the cuisine of Ukraine. The old soviet ways are still plentiful when it comes to cooking. It's waste not want not here but, believe me, I'd rather waste half the shite on offer. Spice is considered the return of the devil and God help anyone who likes vinegar, spoiler: there isn't any.



Some of the highlights include, borsh cooked soup with beetroot and vegetables, this is probably the best dish of Ukraine and when made well it isn't too bad at all, hearty and filling and guaranteed to make you gassier than a can of pure CO2. Bulgur, a rice and noodles mix that can be used as a base to make various dishes, and buckwheat is always popular cooked in butter with some good mushrooms and onion. And so on to the bad....

Carp, perch and Pike, three classic catches from the River Dougy or Leeds & Liverpool

Canal would be considered a delicacy here, I kid you not, walk down the street and there will be fresh caught carp still breathing their last breath, waiting to be bought and eaten. I don't eat fish but if I did I wouldn't eat something that I can catch on the canal! Kebabs, can be bought 24/7, of the Chicken variety, but served with sour cream red chilli sauce which is as spicy as baby food and some horrible selection of pickled carrot and cucumber. Add to the fact, the dubious food hygiene standards, example, watching a guy pick up a dropped elephants leg and put it straight back on the grill and it's a pass from me on these, I long for the day of a proper beef doner with salad and real chilli sauce. Sausages and bacon are a no no, the sausages tend to be chicken and taste like a condom full of cheap dog food and the bacon isn't cured or smoked, just a slab of pork to be cut at your own pleasure. Vegetables are in good supply, but take longer to wash the mud off them than actually to prepare and cook.

Eating out, there are lots of Italian, Indian, Chinese places but are all following the Ukrainian culture of not seasoning, flavouring or doing anything to the food other than boiling it. My last Chinese meal was sweet and sour pork which was neither sweet, nor sour or contained anything but badly fried chicken and a red sauce which seemed to be covering every dish. The Indian cuisine isn't exactly faring much better, if you usually order a korma and want the equivalent heat in your meal here, then I suggest asking for a vindaloo with extra spice, just to make sure you can actually taste something other than sauce, oil and meat. Having said all, that the Maccies and KFC aren't too bad.

Shopping and fashion

There are significant numbers of rich Ukrainians, with clearly more money than sense judging by the number of designer shops selling stuff straight from the catwalks of Paris. For men it is customary to have one of those little shoulder bags as beloved by scrotes and drug dealers, of course these bags are Gucci, Armani or YSL. Add to some questionably tight trousers with no socks and loafers and you have the idea. For the ladies, this is again straight from the catwalk with very very big hair and very tight clothing, though this is in no way a bad thing. For some reason, 90 percent of the female population look like supermodels, and the other 10 percent actually are supermodels. Summer here is about flesh and there are times when I have had to look and thank the Lord for being here.

Although if you aren't a criminal with a vast tax dodging fortune then shopping is somewhat limited, yes there is a H&M, a Zara and, for some reason, a United Colours of Benetton, but these tend to be at least 25% more expensive than the U.K. So, for clothes it's a very mixed bag, your average Ukrainian wage stretches to cheap imported clothing, which is surprisingly overpriced, and without a Primark, most locals will head to the second hand markets which are plentiful but also grim. **Finally, the weather**

Picture the scene you leave England at the start of August, just as Covid lockdown is over but as is the typical 2-week summer heatwave. You step off the plane and it feels like an oven, that holiday feeling when you land. But it stays hot, not just hot but dry. Day in, day out, it is 33 degrees with no wind and stifling heat, you think you have hit the jackpot, all those warnings about Siberian winters were just bollocks, and this continues for weeks, heaven, sat outside, beers at less than a quid, smokes less than £1.50, a job that's easy and you meet a rather tasty Ukrainian who likes a beer with you, what could go wrong.....

Then it happens, literally it feels like the weather is switched off, from walking home in just a shirt, suddenly it's a jacket and within a week of that, it's a bigger jacket and suddenly within 3 weeks its below zero, and not just a little bit, its dropping on a daily basis where -3 is considered a warm day. The winter literally hits home, its cold, a dry horrible cold that just never leaves, the wind chill suddenly arrives and feels like weather that makes you pine for a wet cold day at Boundary Park, just to be warm again.

This hell, and some days it feels like hell, lasts for months, the coldest day I experienced, it dropped down to minus 17 but the wind made it feel like minus 27, that was horrible, your phone the moment you remove it from your pocket starts to die just because it's so cold; the hot drink you bought no longer feels hot after the first drink, as your nose hair is frozen and you can't breathe, but you keep going, in the knowledge that come March it will suddenly warm up again, that by the end of March it's back to sitting outside, late nights and endless summer.

Random things from Ukraine.

A bar maid with White pride on her legs, and this wasn't her tights.

There are mobile phone repair shops everywhere, the Ukrainians must be the clumsiest people on earth if they need so many.

Mobile phone bills are cheap as chips, Data and calls is about a fiver a month.

Apple isn't well liked here, mainly Android, if you want a cheap Samsung here is the place.

The female population have massive pride in their appearance, there is more hair, make up and nail salons on one street here than most of the U.K. Pubic hair hasn't been seen since Gorbachev stood down, apparently is seen as a dirty thing? Your guess as good as mine.



If there's meat, there's a BBQ on the go, pissing down, middle of a snowstorm, no bother, these hardy fuckers are out BBQing the shite cuts of meat until it can be eaten.

Money is mental here, it's around 38 Hryvnia to a quid, which makes walking round with a load of 10 Hryvnia notes utterly pointless but does feel good walking the streets with 3,000 worth of notes on the Hip, about 60 quid!

So, all in all, apart from the horrible winters, the shite food, the lack of proper toilets and a currency more suited to a monopoly set, Kyiv is actually good, if you're ever at a loose weekend, Ryanair do flights from a fiver, and a weekend walking the centre and sampling the local beers will be a weekend well spent, just bring a food parcel if you do.

See you later, or Zaz ve danya as they say here, allegedly.

• Nick Taylor

Masks, Morsy and (Ex) Managers



Hands up here, this was on the end of my editorial but got a bit lengthy as you will see, so it is now presented entirely in it's own right. As ever, we offer anyone a right of reply.....

Lost in cyberspace

I'm trying and failing to keep to a script here of not going down the road of talking about online stuff, because I know exactly where

my pen/keyboard will go. Most of the time, I have lived by a rule whereby on social media, I try and leave politics (and indeed COVID, by extension) at the door. Why argue about Brexit when you can savage chippy teas?

When I first joined Twitter 12 years ago, it was a fun, gregarious place, full of oddballs and loonies (so clearly Wigan was well represented) and I'd dearly like to keep it that way, despite how mainstream it is now. I'm not saying politics isn't massively important, just saying I'd rather just keep my counsel, have a laugh and not fall out with anyone. I've never blocked anyone in my life on there, though I believe that around 86% of rugby fans have me blocked for daring to challenge the sort of opinions they get away with on their Pravda style forum.

But you can't ignore the social media side of football nowadays however, as it all consuming and such a fertile ground. All too often the story on the pitch is driven by the narrative off it.

So about the football then. I think that we have come out of the most difficult period in our history and turned it around in an amazing way, and we are in an unbelievably brilliant place at the moment. Yep, I really do believe and subscribe to that "as long as we've got a club" nonsense because we nearly didn't. True story.

There should be happiness but instead, online at least, there is anger and bitterness everywhere.

I feel blessed that we have such a great manager, such spirited players and fantastic owners, who might not get everything right but more often than not they do, and given what they inherited eight months ago, deserve more than a little bit of time and credit to fix matters. I keep that in my head by and large, because soon enough the social media sneers will start to fly in the direction of this happy clapper.

I'm not here to settle scores with any individual who has a different opinion than me, even though they are clearly wrong, I'd rather take a look at the bigger picture. A person's social media is just an expression of their personality really isn't it? And fuck me, there's some shockers out there! There's also lots of wonderful people: full of wit, charm and intelligence, the downright bonkers and those who suffer in many ways unimaginable, mentally and physically but manage it with amazing humility, which fills me with admiration.

I try and add their inspiration to my own inner thoughts and not get too swept up or angry about what some other dickheads are saying, as it is a waste of effort for me to get them to change their minds, as they never will. I get triggered a dozen times a day (oh look

there goes some inbred Ipswich twat slagging our crowds!), but I take a deep breath and move on, and focus back on all the other, more positive uses of my time.

I'm sure this will be old news even in the few days it takes to get this online, but last week was all about Masks, Morsy and Managers (ex and current).

My view is that Paul Cook was a



very good manager for us, and could have taken us even further if that Choi fucker hadn't pulled the plug. I think that bit is pretty undeniable given the way the season was going. The opposing narrative ignores that, states he left us in the shit, in our hour of need, whereas Leam stayed. There's other sub plots: he'd had enough; the admins tried to sell Kiefer Moore underneath him; he was doing the club a favour by getting his wages off the payroll. Whatever, the first sentence doesn't change (I don't think), he was a good manager for me, and it doesn't matter if he (arguably) left on bad terms. Nearly every single manager does. They all get fired or find a better job or throw the towel in eventually, otherwise no club would ever need to find a new one.

I also don't see the point in contrasting Cook and Richardson. Of course, Leam Richardson is the better man and in time, if not already will be the better manager but who brought him to Wigan Athletic?

See? No Paul Cook, no Leam Richardson. And no Leam Richardson, where would we be now?

But as for Cook, can't we just y'know find a bit of balance here and remember the good times? He won a title for us (angry man: yeah but he had a big budget!!), he got us to mid table in the Championship (angry man: yeah but no away win in 18 months the year before that!!) and he knocked Man City out of the FA Cup (angry man:[silence...er they only had TEN MEN!!!])

Paul Cook has his flaws, like every man and woman on this planet but if you go around hating people because of something they might have done, then you end up living your life *hating* everybody, including nearly all our ex managers and players. Oh.

You're entitled to your opinion but we're not a football club that is about hate, and feel free to hate me for pointing that out to you. It says more about you than me.

On the subject of ex-players, and now I'm getting stuck in, I suppose I can approach the thorny subject of Sam Morsy. "Will he be welcomed back or booed?" was the other topic of le jour prior to the Ipswich game, with the social media battlelines fiercely drawn (but never crossed, heaven forbid anyone should use the @ key to have a grown up discussion rather than a snide #wafc subtweet)

Winding back, Morsy was probably one of the last players standing during admin (angry man: cos nobody wanted him) Actually angry man wasn't too far off in this case. He got an offer from a Championship club, who then changed manager and then, even they



didn't want him, so he took the opportunity to join his former manager in order to get first team football (angry man: but he left to play at a higher level!!) Course he did, and it didn't work out. You know what, he's probably earned a few bob in signing on fees and increased wages too, heaven forbid a footballer should look after himself during his limited career?? Should he really have stayed at Wigan Athletic where, at the time, we could barely pay the wages at all?

Looking back, when admin hit, he was our captain and basically, he led the charge to keep the club going and fulfilling it's games on the field in the face of a catastrophe going on off it. Sure, his resolve wavered the more time went on, just like Cook's did. Just like all the other coaches and medical staff went and found other

jobs. Some wonderful people like Leam Richardson and Gregor Rioch stayed and deserve all the accolades for that. But the rest? Well they didn't know whether they were getting paid from one week to the next, but I doubt they will get booed if they ever come back.

Stop trying to find a narrative and a scapegoat where there is none, and with Cook, remember the good that he did for us. I suppose here is where it all changes however, Cook was denied a return this time but Morsy returned to the DW Stadium playing for his (second) new club in the same division as us. Sam Morsy, chief gobshite in a team full of gobshites, excelling in fouling, diving, stamping, backchatting the ref and gamesmanship.

It's Sam Morsy though, for fuck's sake, it's not like he didn't play for us for long enough! What exactly did you expect? It's like you never watched him play before. Did you think he'd stay out of the way and avoid the ball all game so as not to offend his former club. He wouldn't have it any other way, and neither would you. He is a horrible player but the sort who, you don't mind when he's on your team.

I appreciate what he did for us, but I'm happy we've all moved on. I have neither love nor hate for him, just appreciation for his efforts. Mind you, he can fuck off with that shite he came out with about the ref apologising to him for not disallowing a goal. Yet again, that is just him, as a captain of a football club, spinning things his way. He'd have done the same for us if he was still playing for us.

I've still got enough room in my heart to thank him for what he's done for us but not enough to hate him.

I'm sure at some point in the social media circles, the next accusation would be to "move on" by angry man, so I will but not before mentioning the other favourite "why do our fans have such an obsession with our ex-players"

I'd also like to call bullshit on this. We don't. Or rather, we do. Indeed every club does. You'd have to be pretty insular to fail to notice this. Every club in the country and probably the world celebrates their ex-players, they are part of your memories and your life experiences. Sure there's the odd exception, who you genuinely might remember for bad reasons. There, that's this month's Josh Windass namedrop sorted.

Every football club in the land has past players' awards, events, books, videos, ahem DVD's/streams, memorabilia, stands and statues. Your past players pave the way to the

future. And yes for most of them it is a job to them and they move on and a small minority even become sworn enemies for later misdemeanours, but if they have contributed at least something positive during their time in blue and white, then where on earth is the harm in Wigan Athletic fans celebrating that contribution?

Again, bitter minds boiling their own piss and flinging it at other people. Just let those who want to acknowledge our past stars get on with it. I must admit I find the pile on over Reece James and Joe Gelhardt a bit cringey at times, but both players have been a massive part of our history and (sadly) an even bigger part of other club's futures. I get why the last part of that sentence might meet with a "move on" heckle but I also understand why Latics fans might be chest beatingly proud that they saw such exceptional players wearing our colours and develop into fine footballers at our hands, and I'm fairly sure the club itself will see it that way too.

And finally, kick off number three comes down to masks, and of course the beauty of this being a print, well, digital PDF is that it doesn't hit social media directly so I can tentatively offer an opinion without attracting all manners of daft fruitcakes. You know what, I've thought many a time about putting forward my opinion on social media, but like with politics, not all my friends agree with each other on matters, let alone offering it out to the ether of the internet.

Because of what is happening in the world, it has been deemed necessary to be double jabbed and wear a mask when you are in indoor areas at football matches these days. First of all, let me state here and now, I don't trust the government, they're wankers. I trust the medical professionals and scientists (real ones) who advise them. To suggest, that not only the government and the world, are involved in some giant conspiracy, when half of them either are, or have been at war with one another, over the past hundred or years, is a bit of a stretch in my mind, but crack on if you feel otherwise.

Anyway, upon the club announcing the rules, which they had been asked to enforce in order to protect the wider public, they were met with shitloads of abuse and large swathes of our own fans took to social media to disapprove.

It's funny how the world moves on, especially in football and even more so at Wigan Athletic.

Around about this time last year, we had the last game of 2020, and there was a moving tribute to all the fans and ex-players we had lost during the pandemic. Not all due to COVID-19 I hasten to add but it was a poignant reminder of how precious life is. (angry man: ooh look at him, now the fucking hippy "as long we've got a life!!" is it now?)

Don't you think those people who have passed away, plus the families of those people who have passed away would love to be back or have them back sat alongside them, for even just one match? Do you think they'd object to wearing a bit of cloth over their faces for ten minutes while they have a pint or a piss under the stands? Is it really that much to ask?

Like everyone else, I've loved things getting back to normal and even though they aren't quite, they are still better than they were a year ago. I'm also hoping that we can win this battle in 2022, as we nearly did in 2021. It does seem things could even go backwards before they go forwards, but for me, it is all the more important that we have a football club we can watch and love, to help relieve some of the massive stress this is putting on people's lives in general. How does the song go, don't ever take my sunshine away?

I get that nobody wants to listen to the government, they tell us to do as they say, not say as they do, which is usually the exact opposite. But don't do it for them, do it for yourself, do it for your family and do it for society, so that we don't lose any more of that famously low fanbase we have.

I'm far from perfect but I believe that we should rise to the level that society needs protecting, not fall to the level of our own selfishness. It should be the government's job but here we are. And I speak as someone who is in the middle of a ten day stretch locked in a box room, wearing a mask around my own house in order to protect my medically vulnerable wife from catching it. Just in case, you were wondering why I've not been at the last few home games. I also missed my youngest's nativity play and her 6th birthday party too, and a group of my mates are all currently on the piss in Koln on a 50th do, while I am lying here with a knackered back due to sleeping on a My Little Pony bed and I can't even smell my own farts. All of this is less than ideal but a small sacrifice in the grand scheme of things, hardly a loss of human rights as many of the "me, me, me" brigade like to decry.

(angry man: "just hide behind your couch the rest of your life") Well, no, I don't want to, nor do I have to. I'm just happy to make a few small sacrifices to help to protect the more vulnerable in society, because they deserve some kind of life too. Opinion ends.

Finally, on the subject of helping others, and with the unlikely hope that I haven't offended anyone over anything contained in the above** let me bring one final matter to your attention.

*(**Final angry man I promise: why is it AM always says "we're not entitled to an opinion" despite having their opinion every single, fucking day, if only they actually believed what they were saying was true, the world might be a slightly nicer place)*

^^^^THIS, IN ITSELF, IS JUST MY OPINION SO DON'T GET TRIGGERED^^^^

We're walking for Joseph again. We're doing a 3rd charity walk for Joseph's Goal but this time we are walking to a home game from the away team's ground with an overnight stay in Preston. We are walking from Morecambe FC's Globe Stadium on Friday 18th March 2022, arriving at the DW Stadium on 19th March 2022.

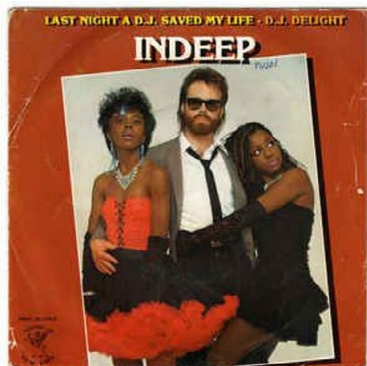
It is hard work, and this time, we will be walking our furthest ever distance in a single day (30 miles) but it is good fun, life affirming, and the chance to do something good for some children who might really need it, if not now in the future. They aren't the only kids who need it and it isn't the only charity in the world, or Wigan, but it's a nice opportunity to give something back.

I'm not sure that anyone can fix the pandemic, the country, or the world right now but we can all do our bit and I encourage you to do the same if you are fit and able, if not for Joseph's Goal, then for another charity close to you. Let's make this world a better place. If you don't, it will just end up worse, like Bolton, and nobody wants that, DO THEY????

Cheers

• Jimmy

Last Night a Manager Saved My Life



It's possible that over time, one or two DJs may well have done exactly this. However, there's no doubt that our manager saved a man's life recently. Amazing, but not surprising. Given our remarkable achievement - led by that same manager - of staying up (and afloat) last season, he very possibly saved a few more back then. Our club was dying both on and off the field, and needed urgent resuscitation post Sheridan's departure. Somehow, by coralling a bunch of has beens, never wases and a few kids, all injected with a not inconsiderable amount of passion and self belief, he led (in the absolute definition of "leadership") the team to

survival ... both on and off the pitch as it happened.

If I had to pick out superlatives for this man, I'd be here all day. Can there be too many? Is any particular one good enough? Maybe it's sufficient to say that we're proud - nah, not proud, far more than proud - we're chuffed to buggery that he's our manager. One of us. One of our own. One who gets us. One who wants to be with us. One who could probably walk into our houses, have his own way with our partners, and we'd happily make him a brew and a biscuit afterwards.

The fight he instilled in the team last season is still evident in this season's games. Of course he/they don't get it right all of the time - hell, I bet some couldn't have picked their team mates out of a line-up back in August - but that doesn't stop 'em fighting to the end, fighting for their mates, fighting for us. I suppose we don't know how much of that is down to Leam, and how much is instinctive in the make-up of the various players ... but maybe that's the point.

Those players were brought in because they had fight, because of their attitude. It can't be coincidence that more than one player has openly stated that the current Latics dressing room is one of the best they've ever played in. That doesn't happen by chance. That happens through planning. Just like Leam helping to save the life of Charlie Wyke happened through planning. He'd been on a course recently. He saw the possibility of summat horrendous like this happening one day ... never wanting it too, obviously, but planned for, just in case.

Was Leam Richardson the "brains", the "planner" behind the success achieved by Paul Cook (and his backroom staff)? I've no idea, moreover, I'm not sure it matters. What does matter is that in the absence of his long-time boss, Leam Richardson was/is able to muster, organise and motivate a team firmly established in the promotion race (second on GD at time of writing), into the 3rd round of the FA Cup, and within a sniff of pepperoni away from a trip to Wembley for the Pizza Trophy (we've won it two times ...).

And so, having very likely saved quite a few of our lives metaphorically these last two seasons, he's now done it literally for one of his players. I'm sure that he's massively embarrassed by Talal's (well meant, but knee-jerk) reaction to name the South Stand

after him, but I'm equally sure that he'll just get on with business as he always does. Charlie's recovering, the injury room is emptying, the young lads being given their chances are snatching them with both hands, and of course, he's probably allowed himself a titter or two that Choi seems to be getting rid of IEC shares quicker than Bolton are dropping down the league and that Begbies are being sued by their investors. (As Sam Cooke might say, we're having a party!).

So Leam, thank you. For keeping us up last season. For establishing the foundations for us to go forward again. For helping save a man's life. For having the sense not to call Talal a silly bugger (a daft arab is an old Lancastrian equivalent, but maybe not quite PC nowadays) for making you add "South Stand" after your name. Most of all, thanks for restoring the pride in our club ... not that it went really away, it just needed a little CPR.

• Moonay

A FRIEND WE LOST

The morning before the Wimbledon game I received the very sad message off Vaughanie that his mate and ours London Gal, Chelsea Gal, had passed away. A Chelsea fan from way back when before all the glory, one of the original Cockney Latics. He could be seen in away ends all over London and the south of England. He was also a regular visitor to Springfield Park and the JJB Stadium as was.

The man himself was a legend of bad time keeping, he would always go the bar more than he should in rounds and I don't think I've ever seen him without an overcoat, be it winter, spring, summer or autumn.

He'd long since given up his season ticket at Chelsea due to the astronomical prices but the year they beat us eight nil to lift the Premier League trophy, he was sat with me, Jimmy and Tippy in the away end to see it. To be fair, he'd probably seen more Latics games over the years than 70% of those there anyway, we left him to see his club celebrate.

He was once pulled by British Transport Police on a Friday evening looking at train times to Northampton, which is funny, because he was the least likely looking football hooligan you could find, must have been being with Vaughanie that did it. He was the first person I spoke to on the Sunday morning after the FA Cup to congratulate us, my head was banging when the phone rang. That was the type of man he was always thinking of you.

So, to Gal, it was an absolute privilege to know you these past 20 odd years or more. London trips will never be the same again, many pints were drunk in your name at Wimbledon and many more will be. God Bless.

R.I.P. Gal

• Statto

Are you a muppet or a goon?

The following is a long form article that appeared in an international football magazine written by our editor regarding the events of July 2020 to March 2021

My football club is unique. Let me explain why.

The above question was first asked in the late 80's in an article in the seminal Wigan Athletic fanzine Cockney Latic. Essentially, it was a social study intended to break supporters into a number of categories based on their match day rituals.



The muppets were the happy clappers. Clad head to toe in official club merchandise, travelling to away games on official coaches, and never a bad word to say about the football club. The goons, on the other hand, just liked punching rival fans. But that's not to say they weren't every bit as loyal as the muppets in supporting the club, when they weren't looking for someone to hit in the face.

There were also the traditionalists: favourites sayings "He's not a patch on Harry Lyon", "No, that game was March 1976, not April 1975", who watch the game with a flask and a tartan blanket. And of course, the drunkards, who would treat the ninety minutes of football as a brief moment of sobriety in a hazy weekend.

I rewrote the piece in the late 90's, arguing that each classification was a phase, a rite of passage to travel through. Some fans would only ever fit into one box, but many would start off young, supportive and excitable (Muppet), then fall in love with the naughtier side of football in their teenage years (Goon), then decide that was too much like hard work and stay in the pub (Drunkard) only to spend their senior years as a traditionalist, wistfully recalling the good old days.

THE POTTED HISTORY

This might not be unique to Wigan Athletic but we are certainly a unique club. We have had to be. We have had to adapt to a changing status that took us within a few decades, from the regional Cheshire League playing on pitches full of dog shit and tyre marks, all the way to the English Premier League. Yep, and now back down again. Few clubs have risen so high, and then threatened to drop back to insignificance.

That's before we even start on the politics of history in the town, where there has long been an establishment that favours the advancement of the regional sport of Rugby League over the globally loved sport of football. Plus, with the cities of Liverpool and Manchester a mere twenty miles either side of Wigan, you'd have to be crazy to support us, with so many more palatable options on your doorstep. So that's us: muppets, goons, drunks and oddballs.

United with a common cause; the ones who didn't go down the establishment route and saw our little club rise from the Northern Premier League to winning the FA Cup at Wembley in 2013, all of which has happened in my lifetime.



Another way to look at our history is to define it as two eras: pre-Whelan and Post-Whelan. Dave Whelan, local lad made good who built a sports shop empire, decided to invest in his local football club in 1995 and promptly announced to a few hundred fans, huddled in the Supporters' Club at the old ground, Springfield Park, that "he would take us to the Premier League". A few fans choked in laughter. Or maybe it was the pie crumbs stuck in their throat. Yet he achieved it, in ten years and also built the 25,000 all seater DW Stadium, capable of hosting Premier League football for good measure.

The ambition was clear, if a little unbelievable, but it was executed: we will take this football club to the Premier League. Nobody bothered to ask the follow up question: "What happens when we get there?"

We arrived fully expecting to beat battered 10-0 every week, yet we were ecstatic to see Rooney, Gerrard, Henry and Berbatov gracing the DW Stadium. No surprises here but we gave a very good account of ourselves. On the very first day, we took current title holders Chelsea all the way to the wire before Hernan Crespo, having a rare good game, smashed home a screamer to snatch a 1-0 victory. We somehow finished 10th in that first season and made it to the League Cup Final, still with most of the team that came up through the divisions with us.

Of course, the much vaunted "second season" syndrome hit us the year after, but we managed to stay up on the last day, and indeed earned another six years in the Premier League, mainly under the astute leadership of Belgium coach and former Wigan player, Roberto Martinez.

The best was saved till last, on the glorious day of 11th May 2013, when little Wigan put Manchester City to the sword, with a last minute winner in the FA Cup Final. Sadly, it was achieved at the expense of our Premier League status, and we were relegated a few days later. So what's the plan now then, Dave Whelan?

Nobody really knew. In the short term, a European tour was prominent on fans' minds. As if little Wigan would be playing European football! Unfortunately, Martinez left for Everton and Dave Whelan appointed the awful 70's footballing dinosaur, Owen Coyle. The landscape was changing regardless. Our millionaire chairman increasingly found himself in a billionaire's playground in the Premier League, and now approaching 80 years old, was perhaps looking for an exit from the club. Easier said than done when you are subsidising it to the tune of £5-10m pounds per year once the parachute payments had dried up.

Whelan put his 23 year old grandson in charge for a year or two, and was spending considerably more time in his Barbados retirement home, only returning home occasionally to bait Leeds United fans on the DW pitch. He was actively looking to sell, but for a long time, nobody was buying, despite bringing on board ex-Man City fixer, Garry Cook. Hey, he found them some great owners didn't he? Let's not mention Thaksin Shinawatra though.

Eventually, and over a protracted period of twelve months, he sold up to a Hong Kong based group going by the exciting name of International Entertainment Corporation. With hotels and casinos across Philippines and the Far East, well it would make perfect sense to acquire a small, provincial football club in North West England for their portfolio, wouldn't it?

For a while, everything was hunky dory. Sure, some of our fans weren't happy with performances on the field, struggling near the bottom of the Championship and our owners weren't exactly present, preferring to reside in Hong Kong whilst appointing Darren Royle (son of ex-Everton and Man City manager, Joe Royle) to run the UK operations. But bills were being paid, players signed and our existing CEO continued to build a strong relationship with the fans. But what is the plan now then?

DESTROY AND EXIT

IEC were in charge for a sum total of 18 months, and their dramatic, calamitous exit will live long in the memory. Towards the end, their involvement had become more and more erratic. Small armies of board members were appointed and the holding company was delisted from the Hong Kong Stock exchange and moved to the Caymen Islands. There then became talk of a punitive loan to be placed on the club, with interest rates as high as 30% if any payments were defaulted. The one thing the owners had always managed to do, was to advance money each month, to fund operating losses of between £500k and £1m every month. Essentially, they put the money in as they were sold the Premier League dream. The reality was somewhat different, the Championship in particular is where fading clubs spin the roulette wheel, and gamble their whole existence to try and reach the promised land. IEC were poker players though, right? They knew what they were doing!



They didn't. It was the 1st July 2020, when our world fell apart. Fresh from a 3-0 walloping of Stoke City the night before, relegation fears were finally quelled and our talented young side was eyeing up the top half of the table for the first time all year. Then the news broke. It was a journalist called Alan Nixon who broke it, it simply said "Drama at Wigan!"

Well, that's no big deal: there's ALWAYS drama at Wigan!! Yet, this was serious, very serious. From nowhere, absolutely nowhere, out of the blue, Wigan Athletic were put into administration. The owners had pulled the plug. It was also payday.

Begbies Traynor were appointed as administrators and according to them, IEC had simply told them to wind the club up and liquidate everything, midway through a season. The poker players simply wanted to fold, with no concern for the football club, it's staff or the fans. They had had enough.

Whereas the way it was executed was swift and savage, it should be pointed out that there were plenty warning signs in the months leading up to it. Taking the holding company private and moving it offshore was a sort of red flag, but we were certainly not the only club to do that. I was very much getting a “Carson Leung at perennially in financial trouble, Birmingham City” vibe here. Myself and my cohorts at the Mudhutter fanzine had been raising the questions for a while: just what do they want with our football club? What is their plan? Their motives? Their intentions?

The sleight of hand which led to our demise was that the owner of IEC, one Stanley Choi, professional poker player had “sold” the holding company of Wigan Athletic to a gentleman called Wai Kay Au Yeung for £36m. Au Yeung was then, and still is now, a virtual ghost, who very few people are aware of his actual existence. Choi, however, had managed to wash his hands of this loss making business, that was dragging down the share price of his IEC property companies. Au Yeung never spoke to the fans, never put out a statement, never visited the club and you could spend a lifetime searching for information about him (indeed many of us did) and you will get very little in return.

It appears his only part to play in these proceedings was to unceremoniously throw the football club in the bin and walk away, as within a few weeks of taking over the club, he called Begbies Traynor via his lawyers, asking them to liquidate.

Finding a paper trail was nigh on impossible, as the paperwork if it did exist, mainly resided in tax havens. A man who had no footprint, no assets and no significant business history of any kind had been allowed to wash his hands of a football club, he had only just “bought”, causing a wave of destruction that still goes on to this day.

The next task for the EFL (English Football League) who had gloriously waved this guy through the ownership test as being “fit and proper” just a few weeks earlier, was to immediately communicate to Wigan Athletic that they would face a 12 point deduction for going into administration. Well, gee, thanks guys! But you know what? Maybe you could have just....oh forget it!

In their eyes, they were applying the letter of the law but in our eyes the EFL had put us in this position by letting some bloke walk in off the street with a tatty bank statement, takeover our club and then attempt to wind it up immediately, because the real owner had got bored of it.

The administrators, Begbies, whom we had a love/hate relationship with from the second they came in (mainly hate) to their credit, set about trying to finish the football season for the sake of completeness, and also to see if they could find a buyer. 75 staff were made redundant, and these were low paid, behind the scenes backroom workers of long tenure, not highly paid players. Wigan Athletic’s academy had become our pride and joy over the past few years, beating top Premier League clubs and having players representing England at all levels, but young assets were flogged for scandalously low fees in order to fund the delayed payroll.

The players and the fans? Well, we just got on with being Wigan Athletic. The fans rallied around and raised a quarter of a million pounds to keep the club going until the end of the season. We’ve seen that when clubs enter administration and players aren’t paid, those players tend to get in a sulk or even go on strike. The Wigan Athletic players went out and smashed Hull City 8-0. Suddenly, we had to overcome a 12 point deduction that now threatened to move us from 13th to 23rd in the table. They were

defiant. They had been fucked over, we had all been fucked over and we would fight tooth and nail to overcome it.

Suddenly, despite a global pandemic meaning we were sat at home, we were kicking every ball with them. Not just fighting to win a football match but fighting to keep our football club alive. Whereas the 8-0 took the headlines, it was a couple of dropped points at fellow relegation candidates, Barnsley and Charlton, which meant that the club fell short. Then an agonisingly soft free kick at home to Fulham on the last day of the season, which culminated in our fate being sealed.

Relegation, and the pain was about to get real as £30m of talent was sold off for a fraction of the price. Seven months later, just four players remained from the Championship squad and two of those spent most of last season on the treatment table (hmmm). Thankfully, our academy came to the rescue, and a whole crop of talented young players, who might have otherwise never got near the first team, put up an excellent fight in keeping the club within touching distance of safety at the bottom of League One. There were moments of real pride, and also some horrendous beatings, as you'd expect from a team with so little experience.

For most of the season it was in the balance whether we would sink back to the fourth tier or manage to stay up. The mantra was "as long as we have a club". We'd watch them on the local park as long as we have a club. Who cares if we get beat five nil, as long as we have a club. It only holds truck for so long though.

The truth is that Wigan Athletic are one of a long line of football clubs in the town, and all of its predecessors failed, or were pushed out by the rugby league fraternity in the corridors of power. The local council are viewed with great distrust. Throw them on the pile with the EFL, the administrators and essentially, the fans had nobody we could trust to do the right thing for our club, we are on our own.

ADMINISTRATIVE ERROR

The other thing nobody tells you about administration is the level of rumour and secrecy, it is absolutely tortuous. If Wigan Athletic fans had to hear the three letter acronym NDA once more in this, or the next lifetime, it would be once too many. If any other business goes into administration, yep, sure there can be uncertain times for the staff and concern from customers and suppliers but unlike any other business, football fans are not "customers". We invest our lives in our football team and to be fed snippets, rumours and in many cases outright lies, over seven months with no idea what the future holds has been seriously testing. As the old adage goes, where information is sparse, rumours are rife.

Numerous people and groups have attempted to buy the club and either failed, or been outed as chancers and the politics and skullduggery at play has been evident throughout. There was a fallback plan, whereby the fans raised another half a million pounds to buy the club and training ground but it would require significant local and external investment, to even get close to being viable. In short, it wasn't viable. The dream of a fan's run utopia in the English Football League requires a) a lot of fans and b) a lot of money and in Wigan, we have neither.

I have to give enormous credit to the Official Supporters Club and what was less than a handful of people behind it who worked tirelessly to ensure that there would be a

Plan B, no matter how unpalatable it might have seen (our tenants, Wigan Rugby club would become our landlords for one) and also standing up to rogue bidders and the administrators at time. It's not my story to tell, and hopefully they will tell theirs one day but the down side of becoming a party interested in buying the club, also meant signing NDA's and the wall of silence, meant they too, a handful of volunteers were seen as a legitimate target of the club by not speaking out. I can only give thanks here to them, and I speak as someone who had previously been critical of them as a group in the past.



Still as the months dwindled by so did the team. Unfortunately, when you are in administration, you are only allowed to have a total of 23 players in your squad in any season. We started the season with a few players left over from the Championship, who promptly made their excuses and left. Several senior players have been mysteriously injured all season, which has absolutely nothing to do with them dropping a division and seeing their pay packet cut on half.

So, we bring on young lads from the academy.

The trouble is that once one young player has put his foot on the pitch, he counts towards the 23, so the ludicrous EFL rules mean that we have spent large parts of the season with a half empty subs bench and we are unable to sign or loan anyone, every time our threadbare squad gets another injury.

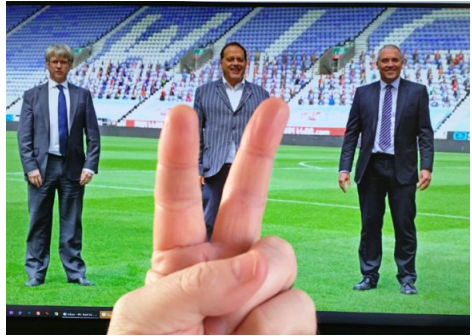
Just as well, we're not in a global pandemic with players dropping out all the time with COVID, no income coming in and a drastically curtailed season, meaning that we are playing every Saturday and Tuesday from August to May. Not easy when your squad is made up of 19 year olds, who have no first team experience and 29 year olds, who have lots of experience but whose legs are made of pasta, and have only rocked up here because nobody else wants them.

Our world was ripped apart in a matter of months. The English Football League sanctioned the takeover. They then punished us when it went wrong, even though it was a deliberate stunt by a Far East consortium to briskly wash it's hands of the football club. And they continued to sanction us throughout administration. I get the punishments, they are there to stop football clubs from spending big and waiving their obligations. But IEC didn't want to stop paying creditors, they wanted to wind our football club up. Poker players folding their hand and exiting the game. This isn't a game though, it is a football club that has served and been loved in it's community for nearly 90 years now. And we have come so close to losing it.

We were, once again at the mercy of the administrators, one of whom who seemed to be enjoying playing at being a football chairman and another who sold some of our best bits to his mates at other clubs and then sloped off into the background. A third, by all accounts, quietly went about finding a buyer, at first a bad one and, as time passed, finding a credible buyer looked more and more of a long shot. We would fail, we would fail, and who knows whether we would ever make it back. We were bumbling from own mishap to another, falling on hard times and we were turning into a club we hate. Yes, we were turning into Bolton Wanderers.

BAHRAINI MEN, HALLELUJAH

Yet eventually, we had our white knight, from an unlikely source. A Gibraltar based Irish management team, funded by Bahrain money. Turns out Bahrain is a hotbed of Wigan Athletic support, who knew that eh? Aside from some up front concerns about where the money was coming from and ethical dilemmas about this small Arab nations dubious human rights methods, essentially it was all systems go. We are a football club up shit creek without a paddle, of course, we will take your money.



There were a full three months of torture (if you will pardon the pun) for Wigan Athletic fans from the first interest being registered to the takeover being completed on 30th March 2021 but on that day, tears were shed and champagne bottles were popped in kitchens all over the town. In part because we had been saved, but also because we were delighted to see the back of the awful Begbies Traynor, who had been the de facto owners of the club.

Now the new owners are in situ, we can once again look forward to the future. So, what is the plan? What do these people want with us? Why is Bahrain any better than Hong Kong? Neither has any ties to the town so why would they give us money to spend on people kicking a ball about in a corner of South West Lancashire?

Throughout our period of destruction, one word was used more than any other: sustainability. To the extent that you could say, it's overuse has made it no longer sustainable. This is the thing with football fans, nobody cares how much money is being spent when the bills are getting paid. But when it stops, that's when the trouble starts. The financial workings of a football club have been laid open to the world for the last year and it has not been a pretty sight. And I should add, that we are pretty well run by comparison. We only lost £9m in our last Championship season, the average loss per club is getting towards the £30m mark. Great news eh?

In truth, we don't know how much money the Bahraini group have, or indeed how much they plan to invest. But for now, knowing that they can pay the bills is a million times more important than how much they plan to splurge on their latest project. The new chairman, Talal Al-Hammad, is engaging with the fans on Twitter and having a whale of a time. Though I do worry about the stick he'll get after the first goal-less draw at home, let alone a 3-0 defeat. The owners have also brought in the vastly experienced Mal Brannigan as CEO, who has spent decades in football at clubs such as Sheffield United, Dundee United and Everton.

The steps forward are tentative but are in the right direction, and that is all we need right now. A football club to watch and the safety of knowledge that someone can pay the bills. Although technically, there is nothing stopping them doing exactly what the last lot did, we'd have to be pretty bloody unlucky for that to happen.

Their plan, as indeed they have one, is to be a stable Championship club within five

years. Essentially, right back where we were before administration. It is no over-exaggeration to suggest that any club going into administration typically gets set back five or even ten years, so that will do me fine.

The pain still hurts though. Watching Euro 2020 whilst our centre forward, Kieffer Moore scores, sold for less than we paid for him, a paltry £1.85m. That Scotland goalkeeper, David Marshall, who performed heroics in the shootout to get Scotland there, yep he was ours too, given away for free once we were relegated. We were building something special and it was destroyed in an instant. Even now, our young players are being given away for free, as we couldn't offer them contracts sooner due to being in admin. These are not mediocre youngsters either, they are youth internationals, such as Kyle Joseph and Sean McGurk, who will go right to the top, alongside Joe Gelhardt, Jensen Weir and Alfie Devine. All three sold to Premier League clubs for buttons.

But at least we have a club, as we keep saying. I think it is fair to say that, whilst there will be a lot of pent up release when football fans do eventually return to games in numbers, all across the country. Well, in Wigan, you won't have seen anything like it. We nearly lost our whole football club. We thought we might never see it again. And when the fans return, we need to celebrate keeping hold of what we nearly lost. There are hardly any players left who have stayed throughout the whole carnage as you'd expect but players past and present, will be warmly appreciated for playing their part in getting us through the worst situation that any football club could face.

There will be smiles and cheers, and a few cold beers and we will sing and dance to celebrate our football club's existence, like never before.

Then, five minutes into the first game, a player will misplace a pass and the moaning and groaning will start up around me in the West Stand as the manager's team selections and tactics are questioned. Soon followed by the immortal words: "Bloody rubbish, Wigan. I'm not coming again!"

Never change, Wigan Athletic, never change.

- Jimmy



For Auld Lang Syne, Poseurs, Praters and the Pouring Rain...



Tiffany's was heaving with people on the biggest night of the year, New Years Eve 1978. We dressed to the nines for this one event, peacocks preening in the mirrored columns that ran around the garish mock Greek architecture. The competition for girls was fierce and sometimes heated as fights broke out sporadically before being quickly extinguished by the bulls on the doors, violence beaten by brutality. The sensuous scented serpent would halt its

circling and look on in horror but when the dust settled the girls would return once more to their pulsating perambulations.

Safety was to be found in numbers and I belonged to a large gang, a small lad with big brothers gave you an armour of confidence and I thought it would last forever. I was about to discover that everything in the world is fragile and it can fall apart at any moment.

Everything had been arranged, when the nightclub closed we would jump in taxis and head to 22 Montrose Avenue Worsley Hall to eat the meat and potato pie my mam had made especially for the gang. It had been her idea to invite us all even though the family would be in bed by the time we arrived. She knew most of the lads I knocked about with and she fussed them like a mother hen whenever she saw them.

But things didn't go according to plan. One of my friends suddenly announced that his aunt was also having a party that night and we were all invited. The aunt, a lady we all fancied, lived in Marsh Green a short hop home for my mates who all hailed from that neck of the woods. It was a more attractive proposition than mine and they quickly agreed to go there instead of my house. I made my way out of the nightclub unseen when the balloons fell and the clock ticked over to 1979.

It was raining, absolutely teeming down and the queue for taxis stretched the length of the street. I made my way to the taxi rank at the side of Wallgate station not really expecting it to be any different there. I wasn't disappointed when I saw the shuffling black mass before me. Nothing to do now but walk home in this biblical tempest.

By the time I got to Seven Stars bridge I realised I might get home too early and the family would still be up celebrating the New Year so I slowed my walk and headed right, down Wilcock Street turning left at the corner onto Miry Lane and there it was the place where I spent my formative years, Yates Street. A Street by name only for no houses remained in this area now, all that was left was the thick paving blocks shining like varnished stone in the falling rain.

I made my way down the pavement until I came to the spot where my old house had stood, a two up two down building with an outside toilet and no bath, a draughty house full of warm memories. I crouched down and placed my palm flat against the cold wet pavement wanting to feel something, anything, that would take me back for a few seconds but it was just a desolate broken landscape and even the old ghosts had

departed like scattered seeds on the wind, never to return.

I turned and left this lonely place walking slowly home...

The house was in darkness when I finally arrived there drenched and shivering. I felt for my key and sighed with relief when my hand found that cold metal and for once I hadn't misplaced it. I went quietly upstairs and changed into my old jeans and a jumper glad to be out of the soaking mess of my New Year apparel. Back downstairs, down the hall and into the warm kitchen with its little stovepipe still casting out some welcome heat. The dog was curled up in his basket and sleepily wagged his tail in greeting before returning to his dreams.

A pile of plates lay on the table and on the stove a large dish of meat and potato pie was waiting, still lukewarm from the oven. I started to work on that pie immediately, hungry from the walking and the nights drinking. I struggled to eat it all and had to leave some but I put the unused dishes upturned on the side of the sink to give the impression they had been used and washed. The remainder of the pie went into the dustbin and I covered it with the now redundant Christmas Radio Times.

It was late when I got up the following day and my mam couldn't wait to hear about my friends' visit. I told her they had loved it and thanked her for taking the trouble to make the meal. She was overjoyed to hear it.

It's our secret dear reader, don't spoil the glow my Mam felt on that New Years Day in 1979.

• Tony Topping

WANT TO WRITE FOR THE MUDHUTTER?

Despite the rumours, we're not just a bunch of grizzled old men who hate everything and everyone. Well, we're mostly like that, but not exclusively.

If you feel you have something interesting to say, and fancy turning your hand to writing an article or two for the next Mudhutter, we'll be happy to hear from you.

You can email us at -

admin@mudhutter.co.uk

In case you were wondering, it doesn't need to be about football, you can write on any topic so long as it's interesting. We actually have contributors who have never written a word about football in all the time they've been writing for the Mudhutter, so go with your heart.

You should also know this isn't some closed shop boys club. We welcome everyone to show us what they've got. And don't use the excuse that you can't spell, either. We make Jimmy go through all the submissions and correct most of it, so you have no excuse.

Go on, try it, you might like it.

Merry Christmas

Shit Christmas Stuff

Christmas Crackers

They usually work out around two quid a cracker. So that's two quid for a couple of bog roll tubes wrapped in tissue paper that contain plastic infant-choke-hazards, paper crowns, and jokes that were rejected by lolly stick makers.

I want proper Christmas crackers. Ones that have jokes that start with 'A priest and a donkey stumble upon a nun masturbating with a carrot...' and that contain proper gifts like a flick knife, some love-egg, a Rudolph red nose and antlers butt-plug, or a Santa Clause crack-pipe.

Imagine the delight on Christmas day when you and yours pull on a cracker - whose crack is so loud that it comes with an IRA coded warning - and see a paper crown and a flashing, glittery strap-on go whistling across the table and into your Auntie Margaret's prawn cocktail starter.

Turkey

It's fucking horrible. As Gemma Collins' boyfriend (probably) once said: 'It's harsh, it tastes funny, it's usually too dry, it has giblets, and there's way too much of it. A bit like the turkey'

Turkeys are not even native to the UK, so I can't understand why we insist on eating the fake chicken bastards.

American food is generally shit. They eat cheese from a can for fuck's sake. So why have we gone with them on this?

We used to eat goose here in the UK at Christmas, and being someone who was chased by a goose as a child, and who now regularly gets stuck in traffic going to work because a million fucking geese decide to walk from a pond near the office, cross the road and park themselves in the middle of a fucking roundabout, I would happily bring that tradition back.

In fact, I'll readily volunteer to slaughter the honking twats one by one with a cricket bat. Place your orders here.

Alternatively, something with more universal appeal would do, like a massive Christmas sausage.

Everyone loves sausages, so even the kids would eat it, and it would provide hours of fun asking your sister in law if she wants stuffing with a big sausage over the dinner table.

Gobble gobble etc.

Glitter

Glittery wrapping paper. Glittery decorations. Glittery cards. I really really fucking hate the stuff.

And it comes to something when the silver shoulder-padded, platform shoe wearing

nonce isn't the most irritating glitter at this time of year.

I end up getting the sparkly fucking stuff everywhere. In my hair, in eyes, all over my clothes.

Last year I took the dog out after getting all the Christmas decorations out of the loft, and was so covered in glitter, I got mistaken for Julian fucking Clary.

Fake Father Christmases

Kids aren't fucking stupid you know?

They know Santa doesn't touch down every single year at Birkacre Garden Centre.

He doesn't fly around the entire world, spot Chorley Tip and think 'Fuck it, I'll land at that garden centre again. They do a cracking flat white and Eccles cake there'.

Kids play us for the mugs we are.

They know that bloke in the fake beard is really Graeme - the Timber & Sheds department assistant manager, but they play along because they know they'll be getting some sort of toy out of this yearly charade.

And you'll carry on paying for young Callum and Chardonnay to sit on fake Santa's knee - while he asks in a Chorley accent - 'What prrrreserrrrnts do you want this yearrr?'

The real Santa sounds like Benny from ABBA. Even the fucking kids know that.

Mistletoe

The whole kissing under the mistletoe thing is fucking weird.

In Victorian England, the understanding was a man could kiss any woman standing under the mistletoe, and if any of those women refused, they'd suffer a year of bad luck.

An odd and presumptuous tradition maybe, but bear in mind, mistletoe itself is a plant that attaches itself to trees uninvited, and sucks the moisture out of them through their trunk.

Yes, that does all sound a little bit gropey and rapey, and basically, the Victorian opposite of #metoo. More a case of #andfuckyou.

The use of mistletoe actually originates from Pagan times, where the white berries represented sperm, and it was seen as a fertility symbol. So presumably, they used to hang mistletoe up on the door and demand a hand job from any passing females.

And it was an office party misunderstanding like that that saw me sacked from my last job.

Ho ho ho. Merry Christmas.

• JonnyF

WIGAN'S NO.1 BOTTLESHOP



NORTHERN BEER TEMPLE

MONDAY		CLOSED
TUESDAY		11-5pm
WEDNESDAY		11-5pm
THURSDAY		10-6pm
FRIDAY		10-7pm
SATURDAY		10-7pm
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