

Cambridge Fans United



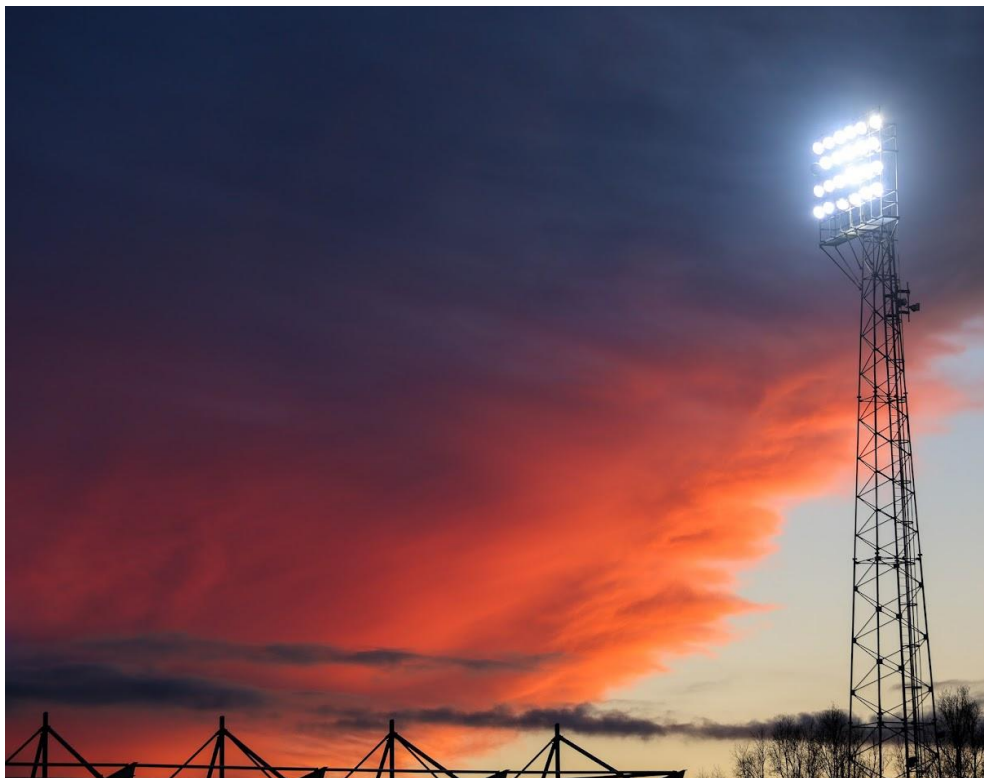
"Uniting Our Community"



AMBER NEWS

Special 'Going Places' Edition

FEBRUARY 2026



Opening Celebration,

“There is only one way to succeed in anything.....and that is to give it everything.”
V. Lombardi

How good it is to be writing this at a time when we are second in the table, a mere two points behind Bromley who show inevitable signs of faltering. There are only 12 fixtures left and one of those is at Bromley, a game which promises to be hugely significant. Of the other fixtures, on the face of it, Notts County looks the most difficult. I really hope that we make up for our lacklustre display at Meadow Lane. Certainly we've come a long way since then and our performances since our unexpected defeat at lowly Harrogate, who have made quite a recovery since and might yet escape. I hope they do. MK Dons on Saturday will be tricky but if we have serious intentions of finishing as champions, and we should, we must aim to win. Nevitt and Appere up front perhaps? It will be brilliant if Mayor and Kouassi feature in the run in. I also think that Raggett may prove to be the signing of the season. We will see.

The way gates have continued to increase after last season's relegation has been, frankly, astonishing. Our away following has always been loud and passionate. Now there are so many of us that a Priority Booking system often has to be in place. That reflects great credit on Cambridge fans, who are second to none, and on the team which clearly play for each other and for the manager. There were those who were sceptical about the return of Neil Harris after his brief return to Millwall. No one is questioning it now. Even the regulars on Habbin North look forward to matches with optimism! A far cry from the dark days of last season. I hope that many fans will take the opportunity to attend the CFU AGM next week. The Fans Forum is always interesting and entertaining. It's always fascinating to listen to Mark Bonner and the occasion might be a good opportunity to ask about the club's plans, particularly to do with the stadium and expanding the fanbase, inevitable as Cambridge becomes much bigger and crowds become more diverse. It remains to be seen how much the needs of fans will influence the work of the Independent Football Regulator and his team. Obviously the survival of the clubs which are so dear to us is the main priority but, now clubs need to be licenced there are many requirements which have to be met concerning finance, staffing, Heritage matters and nurturing a meaningful relationship



with fans. CFU is rightly proud of its record of representing the views and interests of fans and is positively involved with the Shadow Board which will continue to evolve more meaningfully.

The business part of the AGM is a great opportunity to question the committee about its work and to raise issues with them. I believe that anyone who claims to represent the interests of fans should be able to show full transparency and accountability. Minutes and Finances of CFU are always publicly available and all our Committee directly elected. Like any other organisation we are always looking for young people to

represent their particular interests and also because we want to make sure that CFU has a future and a model for growth. This would be in the interest of fans and of the club. Obviously, given the success of the club on and off the field, there has been plenty of speculation about our venerable old ground. Government Agencies are talking about building another 50,000 houses in and around Cambridge and prosperity is certainly being planned for. The Oxford to Cambridge railway link is central to plans for economic growth and plans are in hand for a fourth railway station for Cambridge, called Cambridge East. Whatever the University or City Council think about these plans, I'm fairly sure that they will happen and if it looks in doubt, central government will just take over, as it has done elsewhere. I hope not because I believe that local people should have the biggest say in things which affect their neighbourhood. Having said that, will our local council encourage us to increase capacity at the Abbey and place more and more pressure on Newmarket Road and on parking?

I doubt it. Our owners have already said that redeveloping the Abbey isn't economic under present circumstances and I'm not sure that it will ever become possible. Of course, in order for the club to grow, we are probably going to have to consider relocating, albeit not as far as Wimbledon once did when they were hijacked by Milton Keynes. As a romantic and a United fan since 1967, I would love to stay at the Abbey. I would love to see Barnwell Junction reopen as a transport hub and for the P+ R to stay where it is and expand. I have visions of having a seat in the newly completed Habbin Stand but in my heart I don't think it will happen. We will see. This can only be speculation at the moment and it's only become speculation now because we are a club going places.

We are United In Endeavour. Always.

How Did We Become Cambridge United Fans?



Trevor George

My Grandfather Frank lived in Ditton Fields and physically helped build the Habbin Stand. His reward was a few shares. His life was spent in the Supporters Club.



My Grandmother served teas from the same Supporters Club match days.

My Dad Albert played for a number of years in the late 1940s and early 1950s including being in our famous Eastern Counties league side that got to the FA Cup 2nd Round.

My mum must have been a WAG as she rarely missed a game.

All that before I was born.
As you say Andrew, "I had no choice".

Four years as a ball boy as a teenager and now 43 consecutive years working in the ground as a copper and in the Control Room.

I agree..... Your Club chooses you and you don't want to escape.

Richard Stephen

I really became a U's fan in September 1972 on return to the UK. Dad, who was in the RAF, had just served for 3 years at RAF Episkopi in Cyprus. On return to England, Mum & Dad were posted to RAF St Mawgan in Cornwall. Dad thought it would be better for me to seek employment in Cambridge where my grandmother lived. From my gran's house in Fairfax Road, I could see the floodlights at the Abbey Stadium. I had always played & followed football but living overseas in the late sixties/early seventies meant only radio coverage on forces radio or the BBC world service.

In that 72-73 season United had a decent side with Brian Greenhalgh being the star player, to be fair I didn't know many of the players but soon they all became a familiar bunch. Bill Leivers was of course an excellent manager. Some of my new work mates were also United fans so I had friends standing on the NRE (then the corona end) with me. United were promoted to the old division 3 at the end of the season, I remember some big matches. My relationship with Cambridge United was born and for 53 years I have been a loyal supporter. This despite me also joining the RAF and spending 28 years on the move in various countries.



I have been a season ticket holder for around 25 years and could never consider following another club. I've probably visited about 75 of the 92 league clubs plus of course a fair number in what is now the national league. You get attached to your club and over the years I've made many good friends. I even looked after the match officials for about 5 years so have seen the club at a few angles.

This season didn't go well for a number of reasons but I am optimistic about reforming and coming back stronger. As always we will be 'United in Endeavour'.

Terry Wilby

It started in 1970 when my friends at school (who lived in Cambridge and were already fans whereas I lived in Melbourn and getting to a match was not too easy, especially with little money!) were very excited, and I was able to get to a few matches with a few other friends from the Melbourn area. Bus, train, cadging a lift and occasionally cycling was the only way to the Abbey until I learnt to drive. I do recall a few times there was a "Football Special" bus which helped.

Prior to 1970 I supported Chelsea, and they are still my Premier League club.

Since then there have been many promotions, and just as many relegations. Being the first club to be promoted through the playoffs at Wembley (the old one) was great, as was getting back into the League at Wembley (the new one). Worst relegation by far was falling into the Conference. "We're going to piss this tin pot league" is a phrase every football fan thinks following relegation, it took us 9 years!

Getting promoted to League 1 during Covid was odd not being able to go to the matches. My image was at the Abbey in the form of a "Face in the Crowd" cardboard cut-out in the South Stand though, so I can claim to have been there!

Highlights of the League 1 years are beating Pish at the Abbey with the Darlerites from Norway and avoiding relegation 15 minutes after the end of a match in 2023!

I became a member of Cambridge Fans United (CFU) as soon as it started in 2000. I helped out by refereeing at a CFU Youth football tournament in 2002 and was co-opted to the CFU Board in November then formally elected at the following AGM and have been involved ever since. I believe fans should have a say in the running of their football club. CFU purchased enough shares in Cambridge United to enable a Fans Elected Director to join the CUFC Board, Brian Attmore, Colin Proctor and Dave Mathew-Jones voted for by CFU members to be the FED over the years. The influence has continued with CFU being part of the Shadow Board. CFU prides itself on being an open and approachable group, the Cabin at the front of the Abbey Stadium is a good place to meet the CFU Board members. Minutes of the regular meetings and AGM's are available on the CFU website (<https://www.cambridgefansunited.org/>)

And so to the 2024/5 season. Garry Monk (who came in to replace Neil Harris when he left for Millwall) had kept us up, and made it known he wanted to change the style of football. No more "hit and hope", instead keep possession.



Like most seasons there was quite a turnover of players in the summer, and the ones coming in seemed to have played at a higher level so hopes were high.

Preseason wins at Braintree and Ebbsfleet were expected, as was a narrow defeat to WBA. But a 0-6 drubbing at Colchester was not expected!

The first league game away at newly promoted Stockport started badly with a once in a lifetime long range lob over Reyes in our goal. We had some chances but conceded another goal late on to end up losing 0-2.

Vertu cup was next with a home game to Championship side QPR, who showed a bit of classy play to take the lead, then a goalkeeping cock-up gifted them a second before half time, U's did much better in the second half

Apparently Mark Twain said “lies, damn lies and statistics”. Generally in football the team with most possession has the most shots, gets more on target than the opposition and wins the match. CUFC didn’t do that all season but got close with a 1-1 draw at home to Wycombe. It was correct in away matches at Wycombe, Reading, Orient, Rotherham and Birmingham. Bolton and Barnsley away had the best stats but we got a draw. Similarly at home to Huddersfield and Birmingham we didn’t deserve anything. On the flip side CUFC beat Burton and Stockport at home and won at Huddersfield when the stats suggested otherwise! The table of these figures is below:



Home team	Possession	Shots	On target	Score	On target	Shots	Possession	Away team
Stockport	48	20	6	2-0	2	11	52	Cambridge United
Cambridge United	40	14	6	0-1	3	11	60	Crawley
Cambridge United	52	9	6	4-4	7	12	48	Blackpool
Bristol Rovers	35	12	3	2-0	1	9	65	Cambridge United
Mansfield	50	15	6	2-1	5	16	50	Cambridge United
Wycombe	65	19	6	2-1	2	4	35	Cambridge United
Cambridge United	60	13	2	0-2	4	10	40	Lincoln
Cambridge United	42	10	4	0-1	2	8	58	Rotherham
Exeter City	56	11	4	1-0	4	12	44	Cambridge United
Cambridge United	33	13	4	2-0	3	9	67	Wigan
Stevenage	61	10	4	0-2	5	11	39	Cambridge United
Cambridge United	46	13	4	1-0	5	15	55	Burton
Peterborough	55	12	9	6-1	3	11	45	Cambridge United
Cambridge United	38	10	4	1-1	5	14	62	Barnsley
Northampton	55	9	1	0-0	3	10	45	Cambridge United
Cambridge United	30	11	4	1-1	4	13	71	Bolton

Reading	<u>67</u>	<u>14</u>	<u>9</u>	3-0	3	11	33	Cambridge United
Cambridge United	41	11	6	4-1	4	11	59	Shrewsbury
Wrexham	56	11	4	2-2	6	14	44	Cambridge United
Cambridge United	37	13	3	<u>0-4</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>16</u>	<u>63</u>	Huddersfield
Charlton	42	13	6	2-1	1	12	58	Cambridge United
Orient	<u>54</u>	<u>14</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>2-0</u>	2	6	46	Cambridge United
Cambridge United	50	18	6	1-3	7	13	50	Reading
Cambridge United	47	17	6	0-1	2	7	53	Bristol Rovers
Bolton	<u>71</u>	<u>17</u>	<u>4</u>	2-2	2	5	29	Cambridge United
Cambridge United	41	15	4	3-2	3	9	59	Mansfield
Rotherham	<u>58</u>	<u>18</u>	<u>8</u>	2-1	2	6	42	Cambridge United
Cambridge United	<u>58</u>	<u>14</u>	<u>4</u>	1-1	3	10	42	Wycombe
Lincoln	53	12	2	1-1	4	8	47	Cambridge United
Birmingham	<u>76</u>	<u>24</u>	<u>12</u>	4-0	0	2	24	Cambridge United
Cambridge United	54	10	2	0-1	2	9	46	Exeter City
Cambridge United	40	5	2	2-0	<u>5</u>	<u>18</u>	<u>60</u>	Stockport
Crawley	69	17	1	0-2	2	10	31	Cambridge United
Cambridge United	51	1	0	0-1	5	10	49	Stevenage
Wigan	53	7	5	1-0	4	12	48	Cambridge United
Blackpool	53	12	7	2-1	4	14	47	Cambridge United
Cambridge United	43	12	4	0-1	2	10	57	Peterboring
Barnsley	<u>74</u>	<u>16</u>	<u>4</u>	1-1	2	4	26	Cambridge United
Cambridge United	54	4	2	1-1	1	11	46	Northampton
Cambridge United	45	13	4	2-2	6	11	55	Wrexham
Shrewsbury	50	4	1	0-1	3	11	50	Cambridge United

Cambridge United	57	13	0	0-1	6	10	43	Charlton
Huddersfield	66	18	5	1-2	2	9	34	Cambridge United
Cambridge United	29	11	6	1-2	4	15	71	Orient
Burton	43	6	5	2-1	5	12	57	Cambridge United
Cambridge United	30	9	4	1-2	6	11	70	Birmingham

But of course the most important stat is goals, and we didn't score enough, and conceded too many. There are so many "if only's" in the course of a season, and every fan of any team can think of many occasions when a result could have been different, and at least we don't have the added burden of VAR. So many defeats by a single goal is a sign that we are not too far away from being good enough! Maybe the biggest "if only" is that if we had beaten our Cambridgeshire neighbours they too would have been relegated with too!

A poor season for U's, but for some ex-U's a good season: Will Mannion, Llyod Jones and Luke Berry getting promotion to the Championship with Charlton. But the best performance was by Dimi Mito, saving 2 penalties against Celtic in the Scottish Cup final. A cup winners medal to go with his L2 promotion medal.

And so to next season in League 2. Oldham or Southend will join Barnet in L2 from the National League. Doncaster, Port Vale, Bradford and AFC Wimbledon have been promoted to L1. The shortest travel distance matches are against MK Dons, Barnet, Bromley, Colchester and Southend if they go up. Gillingham should be good for Mark Bonner and Neil Harris too! Midlands matches include Chesterfield, Notts County and Walsall, the rest are all fairly long distances to travel.

U's fans will be hoping we can do a "Port Vale" and be promoted at the first attempt and not do a "Carlisle" who managed successive relegations.

At the end of last season Neil Harris made quite a lot about the team not being a "Neil Harris" team. I am not sure what a "Neil Harris" team is, but I hope it means we play well and win games!



Gareth Winters

My first memory of coming up the Abbey was in the mid-nineties. I believe we played Fulham and drew a blank, nothing new there I suppose. But once you're hooked it's in your blood. I've been all around the country supporting the U's - some highs but mainly lows unfortunately. Hopefully I can get my lad hooked as well. As you know, you have seen young Alfie attend a few matches, but I don't think he quite understands the game

just yet. He loves to kick a ball at home regularly and always talk about the likes of Messi, Ronaldo and Haaland etc. One day hopefully he will be talking about the legends that play in Amber and Black.

Ian Dobson

I live in St Ives (the nearby one) and I am 74. My first U's match was away at Darlington in one of the years (1969-73) when I was a student at Newcastle on Tyne. My big university buddy Rob, since then lifelong best buddy, had asked me to go with him to the match. From Newcastle we caught the train there and back, had a great time and a welcome Saturday afternoon break away from our studies, German and Scandinavian languages. Rob was bred, born and brought up in Cambridge and I hailed from Leeds.

Since then we have both moved around a fair bit, but for numerous years now we have lived hereabouts with our families, me here in St Ives and Rob up in Norfolk. We are both CFU members and aim to meet up two or three times a season and support the U's very vocally from the Newmarket Road end. We have a great afternoon out, hitting *The Haymakers* pub in Chesterton before and after the match. Always great fun: win, lose or draw.

For my son, me and his two boys it is usually seats in the stand. Our boys play for U's Elite teams and also for Cambridge City and Huntingdon Town. The U's have to share our family's loyalties with Leeds United and the Leeds Rhinos. But for all of us, Rob included, it is very much *Up The U's*, a quick return to League One and some more big FA Cup runs!



Stephen Barber

I started supporting united in 1970, just after we went into the League.

My grandparents lived in Ditton fields and my uncle went to all games at the time.

The famous Barmy Les (The General) lived across the road but he was actually a really nice guy and would do anything for you.

They persuaded my uncle one day to take me, and at the time we lived in Biggleswade so I went to stay with grandparents. Grandad was a city supporter and although he had an allotment behind the ground would never go.

It became quite regular at the time; I always was taken for a drink around 5.45 after the game to the racehorse so we could get the light blue at just after 6.00 when it arrived.

After a few years the first game I could really remember was Mansfield when we won 3-2 and got promoted. After that I was hooked.

I got my first season ticket then and went to nearly every game home and away and of course then joined the Supporters Club where I first met Paul Mayes but our paths crossed many times in the future.

I always went in the Newmarket Road End as I do again now.

Over the years my brother and then cousins started going as they still do now. My cousin currently lives in Hong Kong and only comes home 4 times a year but likes his seat so still has his season ticket.



With life and job changes I moved to Flitwick but still went to most games.

I joined the VIPs then and, with my wife, we met some lovely people and some are still friends now.

I have taken my love of the club a little further now and have helped launch Abbey Action and am involved in many fund raising events for the Club.

I also helped arrange the testimonial year for Steve Fallon and Steve Spriggs which was a really enjoyable year.

I helped where I could on the commercial side and got to know Keith Lorrington well and indeed kept in touch in later life as he was also near me in Derby at the football and we met a few times at the cricket where he was the chief executive till he passed away a few years ago sadly at the end of 2021.

David Rushton also at this time persuaded me to buy some shares in the club which of course I did.

I've met some lovely people over time but then found I had cancer which meant I could not go to games.

The club were brilliant and I ended up in the Lea Hospital. One afternoon Chris Turner came to see me. He said he could only stay 10 minutes but could see I was low and ended up staying six hours and eating all the grapes he had brought for me and left with me feeling a lot happier.



Thankfully after eight months I got through it. My first game back we lost 1-0, met Chris in the bar afterwards and told him the good news and he was over the moon and said the game does not matter but this news does and was really pleased and stayed to have a drink with us.

Had many memorable games. Of course Wembley games were great but I remember the 2-1 defeat at Arsenal and all the supporters at the game.

Also I was lucky enough to go on the team coach a few times. One mid-week game we went to Bristol City, lost narrowly but played well. Tom Finney was bar man on the way home and we had a double decker luxury coach so the manager could not see him. He had managed to get a few crates on the coach and although most of us were driving later he made sure none were left. When we got back to the Abbey at around 2.00 am the driver said be careful it is slippery. Tom got off and went flying - a great guy and so friendly.

I moved to Staffordshire 30 years ago and so only get to about 10 home games and about the same number of away games each year now.

I'm still very keen and get to as many games as I can.

My favourite players: a few really - Tom Finney, Andy Sinton, Andy Beattie and the two Steves - Fallon and Spriggs.

My favourite manager: Chris Turner RIP and probably a strange choice; John Ryan and his wife Kay – we always got on well and became friends. We still speak occasionally now at his home in Spain.

UP THE U's

Dennis

I don't think that we have ever met, but for some years I stood in the North Habbins. I see that you are endeavouring to put a book together to show thoughts of supporters. I did write a piece for the book "Cambridge 'Til I Die", which now I see is about 15 years ago! I can't believe that all those years have just disappeared. Like most young people, I suspect that I never expected to get old, but recently it seems as if old age is careering up on me at too fast a pace! Although, I still follow the U's as avidly as ever, I do find it harder these days to get to Cambridge, a 260 mile round trip, especially during the winter months, and, recently when I have been there, I have booked myself into hospitality, as I am not sure that I could now stand all game in the Habbins and get moving again at the end of the match. The spirit is still strong but the flesh is definitely a lot weaker.

I have already said that I don't know where the last 15 years have gone, and then I realise that I first saw a match at the Abbey over 70 years ago, when we were in the Eastern Counties League, only recently having changed our name from Abbey United to Cambridge United. From my first visit, I was hooked, and even though I moved from Cambridge over 50 years ago, I never once thought about switching my allegiance to another club - absolutely unthinkable. So many happy memories, and not a few heartbreaks along the way, but one tries to treat both with a longer term view, and, certainly, thinking back to the 1950's, we have come a long, long way.



I hope that you manage to get your book off the ground. If there is anything else you think I may be able to help you with, then please let me know.

William Arnold

My parents were brought up in Cambridge and I was born in Cambridge but soon after I was born (in Mill Road) my parents moved to Essex to be within easier commuter distance of London where my Dad had his first job. Regular visits to both sets of Grandparents in Cambridge and Milton continued and in Easter 1970 my Grandfather took me to my first game which was not a Cambridge United game but Histon v Lowestoft in the Eastern Counties League and I recall a former Cambridge United player "Scobie" Saunders playing on the wing for Histon. My Grandfather took me to Cambridge United the following day to watch a schoolboy game and, if I recall correctly, we spoke to the wife of Bill Leivers whose son was playing in the game. By this time I had started to take some interest in football with the Mexico World Cup coming up and the first FA Cup Final I watched was the Chelsea v Leeds game with an equalising goal from former United player Ian Hutchinson. I then recall my Grandfather telling me soon afterwards about the Chelsea game at the Abbey Stadium and soon afterwards (on a Saturday) hearing via a telephone call and on Grandstand that Cambridge United had been elected to the League. We then attended the first away league game v Northampton Town in August. Fast forward to 2014 and I then also attended the first away game in the return to the league v Portsmouth. Now working in China, I attend games whenever possible on my returns to the UK and try to spread the word of Cambridge United on my travels. I have also encouraged Chinese students



now studying in England to attend and all speak very warmly about their visits and how kind and friendly everybody is.

Leanne and Dan Huff

It all started with my son. He was just four years old and absolutely desperate to go to a football match. I was a Tottenham fan myself and had already had the opportunity to sponsor the match ball for a pre-season friendly between a Spurs XI and Cambridge United.

That day turned out to be more than just a first matchday experience for me. Cambridge United didn't just win—they dismantled the Spurs XI 5-1. But it wasn't just the scoreline that left a mark on me. There was something about the Abbey Stadium: the closeness to the pitch, the friendliness of the stewards and the fans and the sense of community. It felt like a proper place to take a young child—welcoming, exciting, and full of heart.

So that's where I chose to take him for his first football match and we came back. Again, and again.

Before long, the matchday routine became a part of our lives. Saturday afternoons at the Abbey became something we looked forward to as a family.

When the club dropped out of the Football League, it would have been easy to drift away—but we felt the opposite. We became season ticket holders that year, not just for the football, but because it felt like the right thing to do. The club needed support, and we wanted to be part of keeping it alive.

Since then, we've ridden the highs and lows together—cup runs, promotion battles, those cold Tuesday nights where you wonder what on earth you're doing... until the ball hits the back of the net. Supporting Cambridge United wasn't something I planned—but it's become something I treasure. What started as a way to share football with my son has become part of our lives, a shared passion, and a bond that's lasted far beyond that first 5-1 win!

Susan Ryan

I live in Beckenham, Kent but am unable to do the fans who live away thing as there is no English map.

I got into football because of my brother. He used to put me in front of the side wall of our house in Cottenham and use me as target practice! He also stole my white hair ribbons for his bike (Spurs).

I brought my brother to the home games as he couldn't afford a season ticket and when he got dementia I brought and am still bringing his youngest daughter.

I travel from Beckenham every home game.



Graham Fairweather

My Dad took me to see the U's for the first time when I was around six or seven. I can't remember who we played but I do recall we had a goal disallowed, the first of many appalling refereeing decisions that would disadvantage the U's over the years. I can also remember a man who lived in one of the houses that backed on to what is now the main stand watching the game for free over his garden wall.

Other than the F A Cup Final there wasn't much football on the television in the 1950s and up until then my involvement with the game was kickabouts with my mates, listening to the football results on '*Sports Report*' on a Saturday tea time as my parents checked their football pools, or trying to read the sports pages of the *Daily Mirror* or the escapades of *Roy Race* and *Melchester Rovers* in *Tiger* comic. That there was a real football team playing just up the road from our house on the Whitehill Estate was a major discovery for me, though I couldn't have guessed what a big part of my life the U's would become. From then on I was hooked.

At first I'd haunt my Dad or Granddad to take me to games but by the time of the 1960-61 season I was allowed to make my own way up Whitehill Road to the Abbey where I seemed to be spending most of my time there watching not just the first team but



also the reserves in the Peterborough League, and the youth teams. One advantage of attending reserve games was that if you hung around by the dressing rooms at the end of their game somebody would usually ring up with the first team result.

Failing that you often didn't know how the first team had got on until around six o'clock when the '*Sports Paper*' or '*Light Blue*' as it became, would be delivered to local newsagents. The delivery drivers were on a tight schedule to get the papers out to all newsagents so if you waited near the kerb they would usually hand you the pack of papers to take into the shop. This guaranteed you a place at the front of the queue which meant you were in a good position, as the newsagent cut the string securing the papers, to see from the expression on Harry Habbin's cartoon face whether the U's had won, lost or drawn.

The North, or 'Corona', stand as we called it, after the soft drinks factory it backed onto, was in place but the main stand was a wooden affair about twelve rows deep, the terracing at the 'allotments' end was a mix of concrete and railway sleepers and the Habbin was at a formative stage. The dressing rooms were what is now the toilet block in the Cut Throat Lane corner of the ground and the floodlights hung from telegraph poles. At half time supporters would cross over behind the 'main stand' as they made their way to stand behind the goal their team would be attacking in the second half.

As you entered the ground for the princely sum of a shilling (5p) you were greeted by a man calling out 'Tanner for the pot', selling jackpot tickets from a small table. Crowd funding was in its infancy in those days, a blanket being carried round the edge of the pitch at half time into which fans could throw loose change to boost club funds. Basic maybe but it played its part in raising the funds for our new floodlights and I can remember celebrating in Mrs Wilford's class at Priory School with a couple of my classmates when we gazed across the skyline and saw the first of the new pylons rising above the then Coop store.

In 1960-61 the Abbey was a work in progress but to me it was a theatre of football, the pitch the stage on which my heroes performed, entering to the sound of 'The Post Horn Gallop' and, hopefully, departing to the sound of 'Coconuts'.

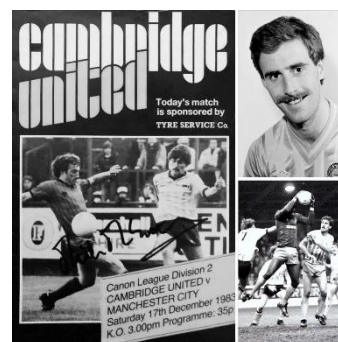
Smith; Gammie and Deacon; Howell, Kirk and Welsh; Woods, McCrory, Hayes, Basted and Daley. I could recite their names far better than I could remember the times tables they were trying to teach me at the nearby Priory School.

Two of that team were particular favourites of mine, Andy Smith, a very good goalkeeper, who after he was replaced by Rodney Slack went on to win two Southern League Premier Championship medals with Romford, and Fred 'Chopper' Howell, a copper haired wing half and a real 'Boys' Own' hero, the Paul Wanless of his day and

a man who would run through brick walls for the U's. When he left to join Wisbech one of my mates broke down in tears.

At centre forward the slightly built Phil Hayes didn't fit the image of the muscular centre forward of the time but what a player he was, scoring an incredible 95 goals in 134 games. He was Cambridge United's very own *Roy Race*!

Reynold's News, a long defunct national Sunday newspaper, published a full colour picture of that team in 1961, I never quite understood why, which I still have on the wall at home. Alas Phil Hayes was missing on the day, replaced by Peter Rapley, a real asset, who could play up front or in defence.



My Granddad was a huge U's fan; he originated from South Wales and travelled back to Newport in 1953 to see the U's win 2-1 in their F A Cup 1st Round replay. He would take me anywhere to see the U's play with one exception. He would never set foot in Cambridge City's Milton Road ground. I wish now I'd asked him why he became a U's fan or why he disliked City so much.

City seemed to have the edge on United; they got into the Southern League Premier Division before us, they had a bigger ground and they seemed to have more money than we did. There even seemed to be more City supporters than U's fans in my school class even though it was only half a mile from the Abbey. When there was talk of the two clubs merging it always sounded more like a takeover with the U's being swallowed up by City and my constant nightmare was that City would sign our best players, especially throughout the sixties Rodney Slack. Games against City were real local derbies where unlike matches against Peterborough United, you'd be likely to bump into City fans the day after the game. That was great if the U's had won but if we'd lost it was painful having to live through the defeat all over again.

What the U's did have though, both on and off the field, was heart and determination, and as well as all the other reasons that led me to be a U's fan, even as a child, I liked the idea of supporting the underdog.

The first away game I can remember my Grandad taking me to, on one of the coaches which Lil Harrison used to organise for away games, was to Kettering on 3rd May 1961 to see the U's play in the Southern League First Division Championship decider. I'd seen most of the home games that season and was really hopeful that the U's could get the win we needed to be Champions but on the night Ted Smethurst was outstanding in the Kettering goal and we were well beaten 3-0 and had to settle for the runners up spot.

The U's success in the 1960-61 season wasn't restricted to the first team and the week before the Kettering game I saw the Reserves play two games in one day, beating Sutton Bridge in the afternoon to win the Peterborough League and then a few hours later beating Stamford Rovers to win the Peterborough League Cup.

The following season we were off on the coach again to see the U's make their Southern League Premier Division debut at Clacton where a certain Rodney Slack, for

me the greatest U's player of all time, was making his first appearance after signing from Queens Park Rangers.

Since then I've seen the U's play in the then Second Division for an incredible six seasons under their best ever manager John Docherty and I've seen them come within two games of a place in the Premier League under John Beck as well as countless other highlights. But if you ask me which was my favourite United side of all time, the side that committed me to supporting the U's for life, I'll say 1960-61, Smith; Gammie and Deacon; Howell, Kirk and Welsh; Woods, McCrory, Hayes, Basted and Daley and if you wanted a player who epitomises what the U's are about I'd say Fred 'Chopper' Howell.

Carl Badcock

Neither of my parents were into football, in fact, neither were into any sports. As a child, my brother and I were sent to mini rugby at Cambridge Rugby club, my brother getting hooked, and became a lover as my late mother used to say, of the odd shaped ball.



From a young age we both swam for Cambridge Amateurs Swimming club (now City of Cambridge, having merged with Granta, years ago), involving training at the Leys school every morning, 06-07:30, Parkside on Thursday evenings and galas on Saturday evenings.

So, you can see, not a lot of time in our childhoods for anything else really, but.....

My late father used to be a leading fireman in Cambridge Fire and Rescue, stationed at Parkside.

He done his initial training with, and worked with the CUFC Goalkeeper legend, Rodney Slack, at the Fire Service's Moreton-in-Marsh training centre.



Rodney did, and still does, live opposite the Abbey Stadium, and on matchdays, dating back to 1974, a then sub officer, Alan 'Jumbo' Pilsworth (became fire chief and fire safety officer), offered to take me up United, when he wasn't on duty, watching the likes of Workington, Southport, Hartlepool, Darlington and Halifax.

Well, that was me hooked, whenever Jumbo was free, I would be dropped off at Rodney's, to be picked up by Jumbo, and at the end of the game, if my late father was on duty, Jumbo would drop me off at Parkside station, for dad to take me home at 18:00.

So, here I am, 51 years later, still a U, and now heavily involved at the club I love.

I am now, as my wife says, 'like a pig in shit', being semi-retired, after a 40 year Senior Engineering Design Management career, I am now a very happy, fit and healthy, part

time groundsman up the club, volunteer electronic scoreboard announcement facilitator and match day operator, CFU Board member and CUFC Lottery committee member.

I have followed the U's up the length and breadth of the country and have supported Gina Heath stewarding on the away travel coaches.

I have lived through so many highs and lows, following the U's over the years, I have seen it all.

I've seen us win at the old and new Wembley, I've seen us get stuffed at the Millennium Stadium Cardiff and, of course, win at St James Park.

It's the anticipation that keeps us going, and that great feeling and high, when we win.

I have never turned my back on my club, nor will I ever, UIE, till I die.



So, my love, following and devotion to CUFC is all down to Alan 'Jumbo' Pilsworth, as had he not offered to take me.....

Richard Toombs & Gina Parkin

As with most football-mad kids I had a favourite topflight team and, being a kid in the 60's, mine was Leeds United.

Born in Cambridge in 1957, for the first eight years of my life any football match that I was taken to was at Milton Road. My grandparents were heavily involved with Cambridge City so my brother and I used to tag along with my grandmother who worked in the tea hut at the far end of the ground. I still have my black & White scarf.

My grandparents were City fans despite living in Ditton Fields but this is easily explained with the fact that they had been relocated to the new Ditton Fields development when their home in the St Paul's area of the town had been scheduled for slum clearance in the late 1930s

In 1965 my dad got a job on the other side of the world...Bristol. With no motorways and only an old Austen A40 for bi-annual visits to Cambridge, it really felt like the other side of the world.

For the next twenty years most of the football that I watched was at Eastville Stadium, the then home of Bristol Rovers.

However, in the summer of 1970, whilst at a Boy Scout Jamboree in Torbay in Devon, I caught a glimpse of a newspaper sports report stating that Cambridge United had been elected to the Football League, at the expense of Bradford Park Avenue. At last I'd had a hometown football club in 'the league'. The rollercoaster had begun.

For the first fifteen years 'in the league' most United games that I attended were away matches, including the 30th August 1976 at Everton in the 2nd Round of the League Cup. In 1985 I secured a career move back to Cambridge and had my first season ticket (for five years until being transferred to Portsmouth). For the following twenty

years it was back to United away matches (and a lot of visits to Fratton Park – walking distance from my house at one point).

Then, in 2010 I was transferred to Munich for a three year secondment. On the face of it you'd suspect that it was the end of CUFC matches for a while (especially as we were non-league again by then), but no, with £29 flights to Stansted I didn't miss many home games during that period.

When I returned from my secondment I was able to receive a voluntary redundancy settlement and only had one aim, to live close enough to United to get to every home game. Little did I know that it was going to include all away matches too. In fact. As well as United matches I completed 'the 92' without missing a U's match and clocking up 25,000 miles (just football related) one season. For comparison, the circumference of the earth is 24,901 miles.

In the past 15 years I have been involved more closely with the Club and fans organisations (currently Chair of 100 Years of Coconuts). In 2010 I enticed my partner to a match (against Eastbourne) and she has been staunch United ever since (and now runs the Away Travel coaches and is Chair of CFU). In 2013 we sponsored the first home game of the promotion and cup winning season (5-1 win against Halifax) and organised the Player of the Year event in a marquee in the main carpark at the end of the season. We even rode on the open top bus with the players to the Guildhall.

Earliest Memory: sitting on the wall at the front of the Habbin, cigarette smoke swirling around and a man with the loudest voice I'd ever heard, regularly shouting "come on U's".

Funniest Memory: (more like incredulous actually) was during a home match in the mid-80s when a voice over the PA system announced, "Congratulations to Mr so & so, your wife has just given birth to a baby boy". Obviously a man of his time!

Up the U's.



Martin Peel

I have been a supporter since the late 1960's after a move out of Cambridge, where I have to admit to watching City, to a South Cambs village. Here I met new friends who supported United. One in particular, Joe, became a good friend who died all too young, not many years after I left Cambridge for University in 1972.

Since then I have watched United more times at away grounds than at home, but whenever I can take up my season ticket seat in the Main Stand, I look across to the Newmarket Road End and remember standing alongside Joe at the back of the terrace.

Would I still be holding a season ticket and getting back to Cambridge when I can if not for Joe and his memory? Probably not.

PS

I also recall the arrival of the Chelmsford players and was it Dover who had a team of man mountains?

Favourite players? Possibly Martin Butler and Paul Wanless. For very different reasons!

But probably Terry Eades, Lee Philpott and most recently Josh Coulson. I was behind the goal at Grimsby for his sublime and surprising volley and his clearance against Man U at the Abbey was worth a lot of money.

Hats off too to Jez George and the youngsters who I watched hold out at York, sparing us from Conference South (or probably Conference North!).

Another random memory, my wife and I standing at the bus stop outside Cambridge Station and getting chatting to Tom Champion's mum, also headed for the Man U cup tie. Can't imagine Man U players relatives travelling like that!

Margaret and Frank Pearson

As a London teenager in the 60s, I (Margaret) went with my friends to the boys' entrance at Stamford Bridge to watch the likes of Bonetti, Cooke, Osgood etc for the princely sum of 1 shilling and 6 pence.

Frank, meanwhile was watching his home Kent team (Gillingham) and university East Anglian teams (Ipswich and Norwich.)

Marrying and moving to Royston, we carried on occasionally getting to matches as a family and then our eldest daughter Gail started coming to watch Cambridge and one of us had to bring her.

With Ipswich in the Premier League, and us with 4 children, costs were prohibitive even if you could get a ticket. So we all started coming to our local club, standing at the front of the Habbin, the children with season tickets.

Then came relegation to the Conference and we decided that if ever the club needed our support, now was the time. So we all became season ticket holders and started travelling to away games as well. Otherwise we came to the Abbey to watch the youngsters play as CRC.

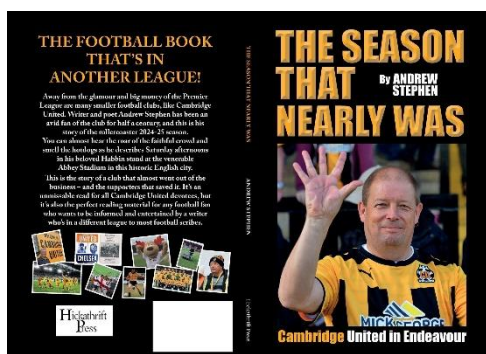
We volunteered at the club, helping in the ticket office, cleaning the stadium, serving in the shop, weeding the track - helping wherever we were needed.

The crowds were smaller, but there was a feeling of belonging .

And here we have stayed. Still in the Habbin. Still volunteering. Still supporting CFU to encourage the Club to be as good as it could be.

CUFC season 2025/6 is looking really good!

I started writing this just before we played Harrogate. We were at the top on a long unbeaten run, they were bottom on a long pointless run. What could possibly go



wrong? As a rather “mature” person I have seen this so many times.....If you are on a bad run play CUFC and that run will end! However wins at Crawley and at the Abbey against Bristol Rovers show that defeat was just a blip. January did give us a double though, Neil Harris being Manager of the Month, and Ben Knight was Player of the Month. Ben is in great form, and it is good he has signed a new contract.

We have now played 31 league games this season and have 59 points, which averages at 1.9 per game, and if we continued at the same rate that would put us on 87 points by the end of the season, a good promotion position.

Current table (15 February 2026)

<u>Position</u>	<u>Team</u>	<u>Played</u>	<u>Goals For</u>	<u>Goals Against</u>	<u>Goal difference</u>	<u>Points</u>
1	Bromley	31	55	33	22	63
2	Cambridge United	31	45	25	20	59
3	Swindon	32	53	37	16	58
4	Notts County	31	47	31	16	58
5	MK Dons	31	60	33	27	57
6	Salford	29	41	35	6	52
7	Crewe	32	48	38	10	50

Bromley continue to be the team most wouldn't expect to be near the top, but are slowly being caught by the chasing pack.

It is interesting that we have to play all those teams, with only Bromley and Crewe away, so we need to keep our great home form going and pick up points on our travels to ensure we stay in the top 3. Our long term injuries seem to be reducing just at the right time to give Neil Harris a selection headache.

CUFC v CUFC (Col U) at the Abbey on Tuesday 17th February is next, they will be thinking a late run can get them into the play-offs, and as a localish derby there should be a good atmosphere

At the other end of League 2 Newport are bottom, and next Saturday we play Newport away. What could possibly go wrong again!

Having just played Bristol Rovers, managed by the now slim Steve Evans assisted by the not so slim Paul Raynor, I think it is about time my idea to stop the team officials leaving their technical area during a match is implemented. Raynor in particular seemed to have a vision issue that meant he couldn't see the white line! My idea is to

have a bungee strap attached to the back of the dugout, the other end connected to their ankle so that as soon as they go over the line it yanks them backwards into the dugout on their backside!

Where might we have moved to?

With the recent news that ground redevelopment was on hold I have been trying to think of all the times since I have been supporting the U's that plans have been considered to re-locate. I came up with:

2021: Teversham/Quy. A football stadium on or near the site of the airport.



2013: Trumpington. Green belt land by the junction of M11 and A10. Part of Grosvenor's plan to allow redevelopment of the Abbey site.



2000's?: Milton. Another alongside the A14 on farmland.

2000's?: Stourbridge Common. Land not released.

1990ish: Teversham. Farmland near the village. Floodlights on the flight path to the airport would have been interesting!

1990ish: Chesterton sidings. I guess there was a railway there that was not used.

1980's? Cowley road. Close to the A14 on the sewage works site (shit ground jokes?).

Anyone remember any others?

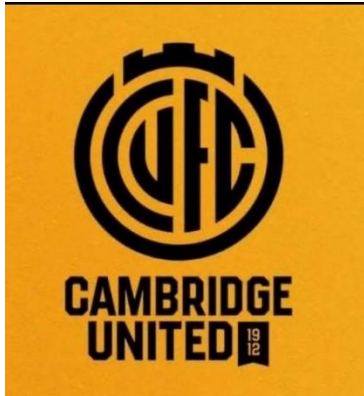
Terry Wilby

Report On The Shadow Board

I have included the latest set of Minutes in the Amber News so that people can see the kind of topics which are discussed with the club. As you can see, there are now eight fans on the SB, Ben Phillips and Nigel Pearce having recently stood down. Emma Smith, representing the Amber Belles, stood down some time ago. Currently the Supporters' Club has two representatives, as have CUSP and CFU. The Amber Belles has one member, the CU Lottery is also represented and 100 years of Coconuts has been. It's fair to say that the Shadow Board has gradually evolved since its inception. It's membership has changed and, to a degree, its purpose. We were one of the first Shadow Boards to be formed and Nigel Pearce wrote its constitution before the Fans'

Led Review reported and before the Football Governance Bill was passed and an Independent Regulator appointed. Early signs are encouraging but we wait to see just how much more fans can expect to be represented . It has been accepted that the Golden Share concept is no longer needed since all Heritage Matters are now protected by law and the majority of fans must be in agreement before changes in this area can be made.

CFU are attending a meeting of the FSA where ,it is hoped, there will be greater clarity about how fans should be represented. This has implications for the Shadow Board. How many members should there be? How long should their membership last? How should they be elected? Who should they be accountable to and how? How do we guarantee transparency-and so on. We have increased membership, held separate meetings from those with the club and plan to have a presence on Social Media. To many fans the Shadow Board is still invisible. We need to be quicker at getting minutes published and better at telling fans what we do and at finding out what they would like us to do.



Personally, I think the Shadow Board could have made more of its role in the process of changing the crest, which was more successful the second time round because fans felt involved. This is now a requirement and it is in the interest of the club and the fans that the system works and is seen to work.



I don't know what recommendations will be made but I do believe that CFU have a case for greater representation. It is fully independent and democratic. It was a major shareholder and were represented by a Director for many years. It has put a lot of money into the club, and , most significantly of all, its representatives are directly elected and accountable to members. CFU have a proud history of representing fans' interests when the club is in crisis and we have worked closely with it in better times with no crisis in sight. The club will need to guarantee that fan engagement happens effectively and I believe that CFU can help significantly in that process.



Finally, I would like to thank Alex Tunbridge for his determined efforts to make the Shadow Board effective and productive and also Nigel Pearce who, despite stepping down, has offered his help in modifying the original constitution which he wrote for the Shadow Board. There are exciting days ahead.

Andrew Stephen

Minutes Shadow Board Meeting 14.2.26

Present

Alex Tunbridge(club), Gina Parkin and Andrew Stephen (CFU), Jim Hardingham and Paul Mayes(Supporters' Club)Nigel Pearce (100 years of Coconuts) Chris Neild(CUSP). Anouska Wright (Amber Belles) arrived later. Nigel Browne (Chair CUSP)

Apologies received Phillip Saitch(CU Lottery)

1 Stadium Redevelopment

The discussion ranged over points made to the Greater Cambridge Development Plan and the implications of Central Government taking over the development. All the indications are that the council would not welcome attracting bigger crowds to the area of the Abbey Stadium, whereas the club needs to continue expanding its fanbase as much as possible. The club has been very successful in presenting a case that its successful growth can be a significant contributor to the future success of the city. In



addition the stated intention to develop the East West corridor, build 50,000 new houses and a new railway station called Cambridge East means more prosperity and more people-likely to lead to bigger crowds watching Cambridge United. Redeveloping the Abbey has not been written off but we have to face the fact that a move of ground may become essential .Work to improve the stadium and to increase its capacity will continue for the moment and it is likely that if the club did move that the Abbey

would be retained perhaps for training. The club will continue to be open and transparent with the fans. The Shadow Board and fans' groups will have a role to play. Lessons were learned from the two campaigns to change the badge.

2 State of the Game. The Independent Regulator will be reaching out to fans. CFU will be attending a meeting of the FSA where the IFR will no doubt be discussed and may even be present. We will see how the views and interests of fans can be better represented. Given that changes in the way football is being run were brought about by the Fans' Led Review, it seems strange that more hasn't been said about the role and rights of fans everywhere. No doubt the way the game is run is evolving but vested interests such as TV companies and some Premier League clubs are resistant to the reforms designed to guarantee the future of the game and greater equality.

3 Job titles. Job descriptions of all posts are available to the public and comply with new rules. They must in order for any club to get its licence. Technically commercial operations don't fall within the remit of the Shadow Board but regulation should mean that this is not a concern anyway. The Club Secretary position has disappeared as the role became too big for one person. These roles are now shared. Finance and Safety are now prominent in the club's structure and organisation. Amelia's specific job is to grow the fanbase, arranging visits to schools and overseeing matchday packages and

mascots. The SLO is more concerned with comfort and safety in the stadium. Revenues increased by approx. £1,000,000 last season. The club have been working hard to achieve this and the staffing in place has supported this

4 Fans Survey Results provoked 350 responses. More take part at the end of a season. CUSP have been receiving far fewer complaints in surveys and, it was pointed out, when a team is winning, complaints about catering and comfort tend to disappear because people are happier. New catering outlets and signage about to appear.

5 A request was made that season ticket prices could be made available earlier. This seems to be impractical.

6 Priority tickets will be in operation for Barnet and Bromley. A question was asked about whether a booking fee is payable on tickets for cup games played at home and purchased in the club shop.

7 It was suggested that we are now approaching the time when we might look again at the constitution of the Shadow Board. How many meetings, members, duration of membership etc. It was felt that clubs will need to demonstrate that fans representation is fair, transparent and representative. How should members be elected-if at all. How can they demonstrate accountability. The SB plan to make greater use of social media platforms and try harder to tell fans what it is trying to do. Its minutes should be available quickly and obviously. This Shadow Board was one of the first to come into existence but regulation has changed significantly since then. The Shadow Board needs to evolve to show this. There was an opportunity to show what the Shadow Board could do during consultations for the new crest but we missed it. It is in the club's best interest that the Shadow Board has more credibility and visibility.



8 Nigel Pearce ,creator of the Shadow Board constitution, has decided to step down. He is happy to work with others to modify the constitution. He has done a fine job.

Andrew Stephen 15.2.26

CFU AGM

This will be held at the Supporters' Club on Tuesday 3rd March at 7.30pm

Fans Forum will be led by Ian Mather, Mark Bonner and Amelia Edwards (Supporters' Liaison Officer).

Formal Reports Follow about Membership, Lottery, Accounts, Away Travel And Shadow Board.

We hope that Shaggy will be in attendance with the Legends Trophy. Plenty of photo opportunities!



Match Report – Accrington Stanley

A sort of match report.

“The Winter Solstice is the time of ending and beginning, a powerful time-a time to contemplate your immortality.”
Frederick Lenz

I love football under the lights and it was great that the last game of the year should be an evening game. Rumour has it that the game was held on a Friday night so that husbands would accompany their wives to the Grand Arcade on the Saturday for a glorious bout of Christmas shopping. Perhaps I'm the only one to ignore that temptation ?Anyway, although the crowd was smaller than it has been and the South Stand looked a bit sparse, there was plenty of noise and atmosphere. I had to admire the 99 hardy souls who had travelled down from Lancashire on a Friday night to watch a team which has been struggling-albeit one which has beaten Swindon and MK Dons. These days it's hard to travel anywhere ,as those who expected to get onto the A14 at Fen Ditton would testify. I rarely wear Christmas gear but gamely donned a Christmas hat with a beard attached. Some found it sinister but at least it appealed to Marvin who was also in festive mood. We were all hoping that we would end this year rather better off than last year. Indeed we already had. Surely we could settle back and enjoy a feast of football?



I was pleased with the lineup, which featured a back three including Mamadou Jobe, and had Gibbons playing behind Bennett, who had licence to roam-and what a game Bennett had as a result. I always anticipate a good performance from George Hoddle.



Apparently Uncle Glenn was in the crowd and enjoyed a fine pie as well as another performance full of promise. He looks here to stay .Mayor looks better and better and, like Jobe, will play at a higher level-if I know anything. We began really well for about 15 minutes, after which we went a bit flat. Stanley changed formation and played some pretty stuff without mounting much of a threat, indeed I laughed at loud at an overhead kick by Whalley which missed his intended target by a long, long way. The Accrington team had been weakened by a flu epidemic. They could only manage five subs and I thought , considering that, they were making a good fist of things. Unlike rookie Referee Ritchie Watkins ,who wasn't really up to it. Watching Accrington's staged injuries was a bit like watching Liverpool, who surely coach their players in the art of rolling about as if shot .The booking of Watts for a perfectly good tackle was particularly absurd, especially as he missed a few nasty challenges on our players, notably Mpanzu and Bennett, who was causing chaos. If only we had a big, awkward centre forward to make the most of his crosses. We are in the market for a couple of forwards. I gather that Paul Mullin isn't getting much game time at Wigan and no doubt there are some youngsters at Premier League clubs desperate to make an impression. Just saying. This is a very good squad, especially in defence but we do need a cutting edge.

Jobe and Appere both had chances to score with headers and I was beginning to think that it was going to be just one of those nights when James Gibbons scored a cracker. Game over really at that point. We could have had two or three by then but I couldn't see Accrington scoring if we'd played all night.

For periods of the second half Accrington were ripped to shreds and defended desperately. We might have scored more but Kai Kai scored a header, of all things ,from close in and then it really was all over. Lavery and Mcloughlin came on and, towards the end, the away side had a bit of a go. Eastwood wasn't really troubled though. People had their doubts about him early in the season but what a fine goalkeeper he has turned out to be. Fortunately he stood up to an appalling challenge from a Stanley player which the hapless Referee seemed to miss entirely.

It wonderful to watch a stress free game and to anticipate the rest of the season with the confident expectation of success. We are just outside the playoffs but only six points behind the leaders ,who won't relish coming here on New Year's Day. How good it was to see the 2014-15 squad at half time. They will always be part of our proud heritage. The current team have a lot to live up to and somehow I think they will.

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year- which leads to promotion!

Andrew Stephen



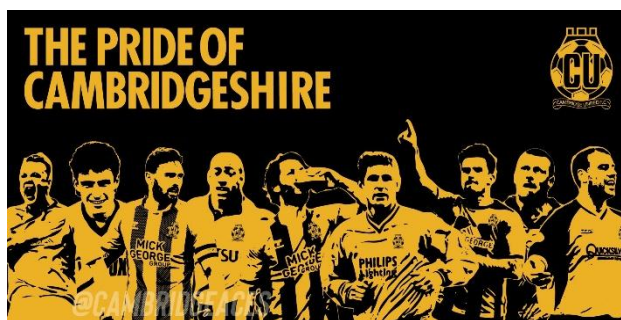
Hot off the Habbin – Walsall

“Challenges are what make life interesting.
Overcoming them is what makes life
meaningful.”

J.J.Marine

In terms of challenge, this looks to be a pretty demanding one. Walsall are top of the league again, as they were last season and, with the Saddlers being managed by a Sadler, you'd have to say the portents look pretty good. That said, at one point last season Walsall led the table by twelve points. The second half of their season saw a spectacular collapse in form and no doubt they will be determined to learn from that very painful experience. We've tended to avoid each other over the years by being in different leagues but out of eight games between us, we've won six. If we are serious about promotion we must fear no one and expect to win. I remember Ron Atkinson saying that teams at home have a duty to attack. The other team, whoever they are, should do all the worrying. Generally that approach worked for him pretty well. Their home form is excellent but ours is pretty good too and it looks like we are getting better and better as we start to believe in ourselves.

Several players have appeared for both teams. The ones I remember most fondly are goalscorers Bobby Shinton and Martin Butler. Shinton came here from Walsall in 1974 and did his best to boost a struggling side. He scored 25 goals for us, despite playing in a team which didn't score many. He went on to Manchester City and Newcastle but he made his name and gained self-belief here. Similarly, Walsall sold us Martin Butler pretty cheaply and he promptly scored 41 goals in 104 appearances. His rich vein of form in another fairly undistinguished United team meant that, when we sold him to Reading, he cost them £750,000. Some clubs just seem to suit some players. A friend of mine, who is a passionate Tranmere Rovers fan, told me that Paul Mullin didn't score very often and that he would do no good for us. I think that was another good piece of business. I note that he can't get into the Wigan team at the moment. Just saying. Walsall have a number of well known players in their squad, including Kemar Roofe, Jamille Matt and Aden Flint. They've done well at a higher level but they will need to be at their best today.



As I write, we are eighth in the table and looking a good bet for promotion, particularly if we reinforce in January. Not for the first time I noticed, in the match against Gillingham, the difference a big ,strong number nine can make. I don't like the way teams like Gillingham play but they make it hard for their opponents, particularly if Referees are not strong enough to discourage the black arts. We should be very heartened by the way we stood up to some fairly primitive tactics and very nearly kept another clean sheet. I suspect that Bennett, Mayor, Brophy and Kai Kai will be even more effective against Walsall who keep the ball on the deck and rely on skill rather than force to win matches. We play better against good sides. I look forward to another top performance from George Hoddle, who always seems to be in the right place and has a wonderful range of passing skills. It's good too to see competition for places now that a number of our injured players are available for selection. I am sure that we will give a good account of ourselves and with some smart work at the January Sales, this, I think, is going to be a season to remember.

Come on you U's! And Happy New Year!

Andrew



Hot off the Habbin – Grimsby (Postponed)

“Oh fortune, fortune! All men call thee fickle.”
William Shakespeare

All football clubs are subject to the endless merry go round of Fortune. We have had our wonderful moments, financial crises and years in the wilderness ,when we long for a return to better days. So it is with Grimsby, who have enjoyed Wembley moments, promotions and a number of fine managers, notably Bill Shankly , Alan Buckley and Lawrie McMenemy, all of whom made the Mariners tough to beat. They also dropped out of the league twice , once for six years and ,more recently, for a single season. They ,like us, will be longing for a better standard of football, something notoriously hard to find in League Two, where most teams rely on a very physical approach and

speed rather than skill. Those are my impressions anyway. Our record against each other is absolutely even. 8 wins each and 7 draws, which makes today's encounter even more interesting. We drew 1-1 at Blundell Park, with Grimsby equalising at the death with a penalty that most Grimsby fans thought they were lucky to get. Some of the officials this season have not been good. That said, at least we are not burdened with VAR, which continues to fail in its main task of correcting "clear and obvious" errors, like being offside by a bootlace when a wonderful individual goal has been scored, undermining a Referee's authority and making crowded stadiums wait ages for the correct decision. I could go on.

We have had a number of players in common. Some were very good. Others, like all action, all-rounder Terry Fleming and Darryl Clare, whose career here was blighted by a sore finger, would inspire mixed opinion. Not perhaps in Darryl's case. We've all enjoyed trips to Blundell Park, where the air is bracing, the fish and chips are delicious and the locals know their football. We haven't triumphed over the Mariners with a big score very often, although we did beat them 5-1 in the final game of the season in May 1981. In those days it wasn't uncommon for players to have half an eye on their Summer holidays and to hold back from challenges which might risk injury. They didn't seem very interested on that particular day anyway.

The match which always stands out in my mind was the first game of the 91-92 season, under John Beck. After two successive promotions, many people had us as relegation favourites. We found it hard to sign players to strengthen the team, although Phil Chapple certainly did that. There was talk of a new ground in Teversham. That kind of talk never quite goes away, does it? Amazingly, we finished fifth, our highest ever position in the Football League, something that the current financial distribution in football would surely make impossible today. That must change. The fact that we almost made it to the inaugural season of the Premier League was proof that there was real competition in the Football League then and proof that we fans are right to dream. It's why we turn up, year after year. Three times we took the lead at Blundell Park. Three times Town equalised. Danny O'Shea scored the winner for us in the last minute, by ignoring Beck's instructions. The record doesn't show what the General said about that but it was a great start to a sensational season. As it was, we lost 1-0 in the return fixture and we will never know what might have happened if we'd won. Fortune is fickle. Let's hope fortune favours the brave today and that we are the bravest!

Andrew

Hot off the Habbin – Birmingham City (No match programme)

Preview

Shaking Off Those Blues-A kind of prediction
"On what slender threads do life and fortune hang!"
Alexander Dumas. The Count Of Monte Christo

It's always difficult making predictions about results in the 3rd Round of the F A Cup, even if you are Nostradamus. Currently, thanks to Storm Goretti, we can't even be sure that our game with Birmingham City will go ahead. The Abbey pitch is frozen deep down and if we get the deluge of water or snow that the media have predicted, we'll be looking at another date. If anyone can get the game on, our resident worker of miracles, Ian Darler, is surely the man who can. It'll be a tough game for both sides. We will throw everything at it in the hope of an upset and of drawing a Premier League giant in the fourth round. It would be good for the coffers and great for the fans too. However undervalued the cup has become by some, for clubs like ours, cup glory is what our greatest memories are made of. Certainly Wembley finals, like the first ever play off final and the game against Gateshead, which took us back into the league, are the favourite memories of many fans of a particular vintage. We all loved taking Manchester United to a replay at Old Trafford and no one who was there four years ago will forget beating Newcastle, the richest club in the world on their own pitch. That is what makes sport so glorious. You can't always know what's in the script. Everything is possible. When I watched the U's against teams like Romford, Hillingdon Borough and Bedford Town, games like the ones I have just mentioned seemed out of the question. In football, dreams can and do come true.



Last season of course, we were in the same division as Birmingham, if not in the same league. The season was a bit of a disaster, although the margins were often as fine as those once described by Shaun Derry. Everything went against us, luck, decisions, the weather and a ridiculous number of injuries. Blues fans will remember a fine player named Gary Gardener. We don't. Although he was on our books for a year, he never actually played for us. Typical of the season lamented in my book "The Season That Nearly Was." No matter. Our fortunes have changed dramatically and, unlike last season when we were clearly not good enough for league 1, we are in the play off positions, unbeaten in ten games and rarely conceding goals. Admittedly, we are not scoring often enough but I'm sure that work is going on behind the scenes to correct that. In addition, Ben Knight has struck a rich vein of form which struck fear into the hearts of the Walsall defenders during our last game. Liam Bennett is a fine crosser of a ball and at times Brophy and Kai Kai have caused chaos. Fulham know how good we can be on our day. Watching George Hoddle and Mpanzu in midfield has been hugely encouraging too and Korey Smith must relish playing alongside them. In addition, Jake Eastwood has emerged as the best goal keeper in League Two. Of course we don't know whether either side will give fringe players a go but, if we do, I'd like to see Zak Bradshaw in the team. He is another great talent waiting for an extended run.

Neil Harris has given us a discipline and strength of purpose entirely missing last season. We are easily the best of the four relegated teams and are particularly strong



at home. After losing to Notts County on October 25th, we just haven't looked like losing again. Birmingham are a side with pedigree and a history of fine players. Most of us remember Trevor Francis but it would be easy to draw up a pretty long list of Birmingham's stars. Some of them played for us too. Michael Morrison, who will be desperate to play against

them, Liam Daish, another superb centre back, Gary Rowett, and two of our best ever forwards, Steve Claridge and Dion Dublin. They were in the John Beck team who were the masters of set pieces. We should remember going to Saint Andrews on a hiding to nothing in January 1991. We won 3-0, a result which, like many of Beck's achievements, rocked the football world and gave us fans far greater ambitions for United than we'd ever dreamed of.

Of course the way the game is set up now makes the whole David and Goliath thing much harder but it's what all real football fans want. Maybe the Independent Regulator and his team will achieve a fairer distribution of wealth, away from the half dozen Premier League clubs which currently hoard most of it. For the long term future and health of the game I truly hope so. Looking at the way Birmingham beat current Championship leaders Coventry City and their plans for an amazing and futuristic new stadium, you'd think that little old Cambridge don't have a prayer. But football is not like that. Progress to the next round depends on belief, determination and maybe just one inspired moment. Chris Davies and his team know that and they will be hoping that it won't be us who have that moment. There won't be a Cambridge fan anywhere who doesn't believe we can win. I haven't been to the new Tottenham stadium yet. I'd like to add that to my memories. Surely that's not too much to ask?

Andrew Stephen

Match Report – Birmingham City



Clash Of The Titans

"Sometimes you just have to say
Today's just not my day."
Justin Medolf

We all know what can happen in the third round of the FA Cup. At the very least a game against one of the top sides with the TV coverage and the financial windfall that all little clubs need. Anything can happen, from the 10-1 hammering Exeter got at the hands of Manchester City to the supreme joy felt by Macclesfield fans who saw their Conference North team beat cup holders Crystal Palace. For fans of a certain age to tell youngsters that, "I was there when....." is one of the great joys of being a fan. Cup victories become part of club folklore. Thrashings are just embarrassing and less common now that the big boys put out weakened teams because not everyone sees the FA Cup in the way we used to. Birmingham had been on a bad run, we were unbeaten for quite a while. Surely an upset was in the offing? I noticed that the Blues had beaten Table toppers Coventry and remembered that they are two divisions above



us. We know that to beat better teams you need a bit of luck and to take your chances when they come along-as they will.

I have to admit that Birmingham were the better side more or less throughout, which meant that there would be no margin for error. We looked a bit in awe of them and unable to get at them in the way you have to if you believe that an upset is possible. Bennett was getting nowhere against the Birmingham left back and yet we had a player pushed over in their box and Ben White, so sensational against Walsall, skied an effort that he really should have scored with. Inevitably Birmingham scored shortly afterwards with a goal which had more than an element of luck about it. Our defenders

blocked a couple of shots before an effort took a deflection past Eastwood and Bennett on the line. We kept going and heads conspicuously failed to drop. The game seemed dull in comparison with animated conversations about the fog which swirled mysteriously around the stadium. Ian Darler had defied the odds and the weather to get the game on. Would fog undermine his plans at this late stage? I heard a couple of people say that fog was confined to the Abbey and its immediate environs. Turns out they were wrong.

Then poor old Ibsen Rossi was caught in possession by a lively and very speedy centre forward. Maybe if you have skill and speed you don't have to be a giant. The moment he got between Rossi and the goal, he was going to score. A shame because Rossi has played well when we've seen him this season and Eastwood saves penalties and everything. It looked like we'd wilfully thrown the game away. We wondered if the fates had been against us when the scoreboard showed us 1-0 down before anyone had scored. You can't make mistakes against very good opposition. Maybe if we got a goal back by half time we could shake the complacency of the Blues? Maybe if the fog closed in we could start again? Neither thing happened.

The cynics on Habbin North searched for consolation. Jobe was the best centre half in our division. Hoddle oozes class and like Mpanzu, has more time on the ball than



most players We lacked a cutting edge. Appere was doing well but lacked support from a more physical player alongside him. Ben Knight was playing really well but skied another two quite reasonable chances. Not our day then. Or Knight. Birmingham then scored a third from another error from us and must have thought the tie was over. We hadn't really mounted the challenge we were all desperate to see. Kai Kai and Lavery came on and had widely different effects on the game. Lavery looks out of tune and out of sorts. Probably because he lacks game time. Kai Kai was something else. Suddenly the U's were playing with pace and determination and the Birmingham defenders began clearing the ball with increasing desperation , high into the night air. The fog settled and thickened then rose again. Willfully, pointlessly and drearily.

Then Kai Kai scored an opportunist goal after another quick raid. A consolation surely. Many of our fair weather supporters had left at 3-0 but the game wasn't over yet .I had never seen so many unfamiliar faces in the Habbin and yet the crowd was well down on what we'd expected. The weather maybe or the fact that City aren't quite box office. There was plenty of spare room in the South Stand and their fans made far more noise on Newmarket Road than they ever did in the ground. No Matter.

And then Kai Kai did it again with a wonderful shot. What a good player he can be. And he does like playing against good footballing sides. Actually our whole team does. Could they get an equaliser and make up for our slow start to the game? Sadly, it wasn't to be but we showed enough resilience and courage to come back. Without the avoidable errors and the missed chances we could have won but that is what the competition is about. It has to be your day-as it was at St James' Park four years ago.

We left the ground satisfied that our team had had a go, that we had quality and that we will get promotion. We need a bit more strength up front and a bit more swagger. There is no other team to be frightened of in our league. Our future is bright.





Hot off the Habbin – Tranmere Rovers

“If we had no winter, the spring would not be so pleasant.”
Anne Bradsheet

Cambridge fans everywhere will realise just how different our ambitions and expectations have changed from this time last year. Our squad is better, we are more resilient, hard to beat and much more determined. We are unbeaten in eleven games and dominating most fixtures, even if we haven't always closed out the games we might have won. Habbin North has identified a need for a big, awkward centre forward to create chances against League Two defences and a finisher who takes more of the chances we have been creating. Fans up and down the county will be hoping that we sign two such players. If we do, I confidently expect an automatic promotion place. January is a notoriously difficult time to sign players but what a difference even one inspired signing can make. A few years ago I played Walking Football with a fanatical



Tranmere Rovers fan. One day, after a game, we were talking about our new signing, Paul Mullen. “He’s useless,” my opponent said, “he’s meant to be a forward but never scores. I’m glad that you’ve taken him off our hands.” As the weeks went by, I referred to this conversation regularly. Mullen went on to score 34 goals in the season and we did rather better than anyone expected. In retrospect we may have gone up before we were ready but that is the difference

a natural goalscorer can make. Alan Biley used to beat teams almost on his own. If only such a player was available even on loan....

I'd like to say that our record against Tranmere is good but it isn't really. We beat them here in the 73-74 season when we were both battling against relegation. Unfortunately we lost the return fixture at Prenton Park 5-2. We have also lost there by scores of 6-2 in 1985 and 6-1 in 2001. We've never thrashed them by that kind of score but there

is always a first time. Earlier this season it looked as if neither side would score if we played for days but our confidence has risen since then. Meanwhile Rovers have lost four of their last six games. We know how unpredictable football is though and a certain Joe Ironside who once scored a memorable goal for us at Newcastle will be keen to show us what he can do. They've had some pretty good forwards there. Dixie Dean comes to mind. John Aldridge and Pat Nevin weren't bad either. Like us, Rovers have had success and almost made it into the Premier League. They have also had financial crises and spent three seasons in the Conference from 2015-18. Real fans of real clubs know these heights and lows and accept both over decades of unwavering support, while always hankering for more memories to be made.

Tranmere, inevitably, have lived in the shadow of Everton and Liverpool but have a clear identity and culture of their own. They have a terrific ground with a pub very close by, where away fans are made welcome. It is a great place to chat with other fans who know what they're talking about. None of us like time wasting, feigning injury or waving imaginary cards in the air. I'm sure that some clubs actually coach their players to do this. Brian Clough, famously, fined any of his players who got booked-particularly for dissent and what he called, "Being childish", not a bad approach. I was hugely impressed with our fightback against Birmingham and with the determination to win at Fleetwood, having conceded a silly penalty. During the second part of the season I think we will see United going for winners rather than holding on for a draw. We are clearly good enough and, with players like Sullay Kai Kai, more than capable of scoring stunning goals, we must be confident of beating most teams. Especially at the Abbey.

Andrew Stephen



Match Report – Tranmere Rovers

Eleven Games Unbeaten-What Could Possibly Go Wrong?

“Those who win never give up
Those who give up never win.”
R.T.Bennett.

Recent form suggested that Rovers were just coming to make up the numbers. Our team has improved immeasurably since our 0-0 bore draw at Prenton Park earlier in the season, a game of such stultifying dullness that it's a wonder that any of those who watched it ever went to a football match again. Tranmere have been on a poor run of late, although they always seem to score away from home and certainly had their moments earlier in the season. Generally speaking if we're not playing well, I wander off for a coffee. The soothsayers on Habbin North reckon that we are always more likely to score if I am away from that venerable and all knowing terrace. I could have been outside for the entire half and missed nothing, except Tranmere's vaguely deserved and well worked goal just before half time. It was very well worked and well taken but I would have to ask why Dylan Jones' header was completely unchallenged.



An unusual lapse for what has been a very effective and well drilled defence. In fairness we had been disappointing throughout. Rovers had got away with some over robust challenges by a Referee who seemed to think he was the star of the show. As a result Bennett, Brophy, Knight and, in truth, one or two others, didn't seem to fancy the physical approach of a very big team, fashioned in the way most League Two sides seem to be.

No doubt Mr Harris would have made one or two shrinking violets aware of his disappointment at Half Time. Habbin North certainly tried to help Ross Martin with his decision making-as we always do.

The second half seemed to promise little better- until some substitutions were made. One of them, Shane Lavery, showed what we'd been missing, seemingly within seconds, with a blistering shot that Murphy probably never saw. Back to the script then. We attacked with purpose. Brophy was booked for nothing. The Rovers number two was lucky not to add to his yellow card with a number of sly and petulant fouls, kicking the ball away and over zealous protestations. Appere should have had a penalty for a blatant trip and then Tranmere's number seven Charlie Whittaker, who'd been looking good for a while, went on a run, took a return pass and placed a fine shot into the Cambridge net. The lack of challenge was baffling. I'd just been saying how good he looked when he scored. I'd have been better off going for another coffee. Ah well. It's not my fault that Kai Kai didn't hustle but our defence is normally super

watchful. Two bad goals conceded in one game. That's asking for it .And then the game changed. And how.

Brophy charged down the Tranmere left and put in a cross which Kell Watts turned in neatly with his head. Murphy got a hand to it but couldn't stop it. He must have been upset because later in the game he sank to the ground with an imaginary injury, as new instructions were given to the tiring Rovers defenders. They were to no avail. James Gibbons shot from the right and there was Watts again heading past the disappointed keeper. Would he get a hat trick now? We hoped he would. We love his trick of kneeing the ball back to the keeper, which is perfectly legal ,even if opposition fans haven't quite cottoned onto it. Talking of which, Tranmere brought 500 fans with them. All credit to them. Proper fans of a proper club.



Could we, would we do it? Pelly Mpanzu played an exquisite ball through to Ben Knight, who finished with aplomb and it was all over. With a win on Tuesday we will be in the automatic promotion places where we will almost certainly remain. Our new acquisition looks a really good prospect and it would be great for U's fans if we get to see United playing with two up front, at least at home. The plaudits went to Kell Watts understandably but I felt that Mpanzu was our real man of the match. He has his critics because there are times when he doesn't seem to be doing much. He is a class act though. He has vision, a great pass and yesterday he cleared a shot off the line too. Luton fans are very upset that he was ever allowed to leave them. Bradshaw is now back from injury and who knows who might come through the door in this window? An established star? A loan player from a top club? I'm not saying that we could see Mullin back but we must look like a very attractive prospect to anyone whose future is uncertain.

I was sad to hear Crosby lambast his own players ,rather than giving his opponents credit for a very impressive fight back, but that would require a degree of sportsmanship lacking in some managers. To be a little more fair to the Referee, he didn't get much help from his Linesmen. Aren't they called Referee's Assistants? Why? The ones I see at the Abbey are mostly decorative. And then not very.

Finally, a word for Joey Ironside. It was great to see him back at the Abbey and he gave us problems all afternoon. We will never forget his winner at Newcastle which puts him into United folklore. He fully deserved the welcome he got. Real fans appreciate players with a big heart and he will also know The U's Are Going Up!

Andrew Stephen





Hot off the Habbin – Shrewsbury Town

“A life fuelled by passion is like riding on the back of a dragon.”
Suzy Kassem

Passion is much more in evidence these days at the Abbey, as the realisation dawns that something special is happening. Before the game against Tranmere, United had gone 11 league games without defeat and fans are now coming to the ground expecting to win and to see our team playing attractively and with skill. Of course nothing in football is ever straightforward and Rovers obviously hadn't read the script, having the temerity to take the lead twice. Our first half performance was lifeless and uninspired but the second half was something else. Our first goal, scored by Lavery was a thing of beauty. Our fourth, taken by Ben Knight, was in the same class. Meanwhile Kell Watts scored twice, in addition to outwitting away fans with his trademark knee backs to the goalkeeper. Most significantly, we are looking at a team that never gives up and which is beginning to realise its quality. The addition of Elliott Nevitt gives us new options and our bench now looks very strong. Interestingly, of the four teams relegated from League One last season, we are the only team which isn't struggling. The other three, including Shrewsbury, are positioned just above the drop zone, which means that they are fighting for their lives and desperately reinforcing.



Shrewsbury made the leap to league football twenty years before us. They have also claimed big scalps and tasted relegation to Non-League football. Jimmy Quinn got them re-elected after a year, something he narrowly failed to do for us. I always enjoyed trips to their old ground, Gay Meadow, where a man in a coracle would occasionally rescue footballs hoofed into the Severn by agricultural centre halves. It was a lovely old ground, within sight of the town and of Shrewsbury Abbey but it made

financial sense to move out of the town and sell the site for housing. Former goalkeeper Sean Marshall probably shudders at the thought of Gay Meadow, where once he ignored a speculative lob from Nigel Jemson which ended up dipping under the crossbar. Not his finest hour but we all have days like that. The new ground is very welcoming, particularly the lively fanzone ,where rival fans meet and enjoy a beer or two. Sadly, like many clubs before them, Shrewsbury have found that having a decent ground is no guarantee of success. Far from it. What matters most is having a competitive team to watch and solid hopes for progression.

Our record against Shrewsbury shows a fairly even smattering of wins, defeats and draws, without too many high scores. One exception came in February 2003 when, frankly, we were in steep decline. John Taylor was our manager and results had not been good, although we still had some very good players, such as Paul Wanless, Luke Guttridge and Andy Duncan. We also had Dave Kitson and Tom Youngs in the side. What players they were. Dave of course played brilliantly for us in the recent Legends Tournament in Germany recently. Sadly we lost Tom last year to illness. He and all our former heroes will never be forgotten here . Personally, I hope that Shrewsbury stay



up. However, tonight we need the points which would put us in the automatic promotion spots. I think that once we get there we will stay there. Habbin North Expects!

Match Report – Harrogate Town

“Disappointment is a temporary detour on the road to success.”
Zig Ziglar.

Six league wins on the bounce, unbeaten in 14 and playing a team securely nailed to the bottom of the league. What could possibly go wrong? I suspect that those of us who have watched football for decades, and the U's for what seems longer, would have had an answer .I suppose if we could take winning for granted, no one would ever turn up. As it was 1, 050 of us turned up on Saturday hoping for another win and a tilt at winning the championship. Our only real worry was that the game might be called off following weeks of wet weather. Worryingly, the nearer we got to Harrogate, the mistier it got .Then it vanished, or evaporated, or whatever mist does. Anyone hoping to get into Betty's Tearooms was bound to be disappointed. The town was very busy. More so than it was in the Summer when tourists were in short supply. This was not just because of thirsty U's fans who packed a lot of the bars. We found what we thought was a pretty obscure one called Major Tom's- no doubt a product of the seventies when Harrogate was more prosperous and

its hotels were full of the landed gentry. Half the occupants of the bar were from Cambridge and full of optimism despite all the potholes on the A1.

We walked briskly to the ground in teeming rain. It is a little ground. Our end consisted of a stand which was only roofed half way along so it was pretty crammed. The bar, tea bar and toilets weren't really adequate, although the Harrogate staff worked really hard to make everything as efficient as possible. I was told several times that we were the most impressive away support ever seen at the Exercise Stadium. They were pleased rather than put out, as quite a few stewards have been on some of our adventures. I remember in particular Nottingham Forest stewards complaining that 3,500 of us had turned up for a cup tie and they were having to take tarpaulins off more and more seats. I'm sure the club must have been pleased with the receipts though. We were justifiably loud that night. We began loud at Harrogate but the sound became a dirge long before the end of the game.



The pitch was heavy and the rain swept towards the Harrogate goal where a colossal pink figure prepared to time waste for most of the game. To be fair, he wasn't troubled much. We began like a train and the fans were beginning to expect an easy victory. Astonishingly, in the eighth minute, a rebound raced towards Bryan Morris who hit it first time. Before Eastwood could react, it had flown into the corner of the net. He will never hit a better shot. We were astonished and he may well have been too. They don't often score and that one was a real pearler. And it changed the game. Our back four began to creak alarmingly. I'm not sure it's a formation that suits us. Gaps were being found too easily and, eventually, Sutton, a talented loanee from QPR, was found in acres of space in front of the goal and scored from close range. He was completely unmarked and I was as furious with that as I was with Sutton's idiotic and completely disrespectful celebration in front of the Cambridge fans. It looked like it was going to get worse until Jobe, who had a brilliant game, hit the underside of the bar from a cross. He should have scored but it was beginning to look like that kind of day.



Bennet scored from a piledriver on 29 minutes, having one effort saved, and everyone around me relaxed and assumed that we would now complete the job we'd come to do. We didn't but we should give Harrogate full credit for their absolute determination and commitment. Some of it was a bit questionable. Acqua, who was a real nuisance and a constant physical threat, something we don't currently have, was booked and spoken to several times. Similarly

their number 21 was booked for a crude challenge and got away with an almost identical foul not long afterwards. To be frank, it did seem at times as if the Referee would rather not have been there at all in the wind and the rain. He certainly tried to let the game flow but probably allowed too many fouls to go unpunished. He was aided and abetted by a Linesman to our left who indulged in a lot of guesswork and didn't seem to know what a corner was. I've seen too many this season who perform like that or do nothing at all. I thought they were meant to be Referees Assistants.

We were better in the second half with a lot of possession and a number of chances. Nevitt should have taken one of them but blazed an easy chance over the bar. He saw a chance of glory and snatched at it like an excited teenager. It was that kind of day. The fans turned up in huge numbers but the team did not. These things happen. The team applauded their devoted fans, as they should, and I hope any complacency which may have been developing has disappeared for good. We go to Crawley on Tuesday where we need to get back on track. We can still win this league. As for Harrogate, I must wish them luck. They fought like Tigers and I'd like to see a bit more of that from us. So would Neil Harris. Onwards and Upwards.

Andrew Stephen



Hot off the Habbin – Bristol Rovers

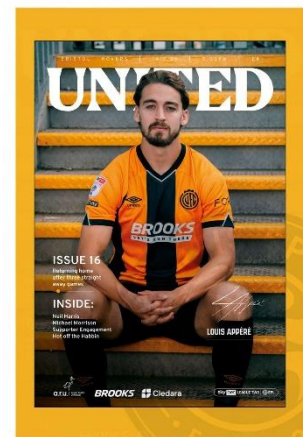
“The future depends on what you do today.”
Mahatma Gandhi



Football at its best is gloriously unpredictable. If you look at our history against Bristol Rovers, it doesn't make pleasant reading. They have beaten us much more often than we've beaten them, but each game is a new game and there to be won. In addition, Rovers are having a poor season. Only 8 wins, 3 draws and 19 defeats. That is why they've appointed Steve Evans until the end of the season, knowing that he makes teams hard to beat and

physically competitive. We were on a wonderful run, until going to Harrogate who hadn't won since September, and lost to a combination of determination, bad weather and maybe a little touch of complacency. The first goal we conceded there was wonderfully struck. On another day it might have gone anywhere but, inspired by that, Harrogate fought like demons and we must give them full credit for that. We all know that all runs come to an end but it feels like a critical week for us. We need to do as well against Rovers as we did against Crawley, an eloquent response to the ever ready doubters. Good results will see us well on the way to promotion and, to be fair, we deserve it. We need fear no one if we play as we can. If we play like Harrogate did in all our remaining games, we'll be back in League One next season, a real achievement after relegation, especially when you consider how the other three teams to go down have fared. Momentum is so important.

I often used to wonder how anyone could support a team nicknamed the Gas, until I realised the link with Eastville and the kind of traditions that all genuine football fans love. I was intrigued by the fact that the blue and white quartered shirts still worn by Rovers first appeared in the 1930's. They are unique in league football and we all like things which we can identify with. Rovers have had some great times. Their attack of Bannister and Warboys was feared and before them they were the first ever winners of the Football League Cup, when they beat Fulham over two legs. They've had some great managers too, although the legend that is Ian Holloway didn't do so well there. He is still making waves and talking like a pirate now at Swindon Town all those years later. One record they won't like was being on the end of a 12-0 defeat by Luton Town. Joe Payne scored 10 of them, which is still a league record for goals scored by one man in one game. Like us, they dropped into the Conference, for two seasons after 2014. Before that, life was a struggle when the lease ran out at Eastville which had been their ground for many decades. For ten years they played at Bath City's Twerton Park before ground sharing with the rugby team at the Memorial Stadium. It was wonderful for them to be back in Bristol and now the ground is their own.



A number of players have turned out for both teams, including Ryan Loft, George Williams and James Gibbons. Loft came here with great hopes which were never realised, as did Rory Gaffney, who left the Abbey under a cloud, having engineered a move to Rovers after claiming that he loved it here. Can't win them all. Most famously, we gave Rovers £100,000 and John Taylor in return for Devon White. He played for me in a school team in Nottingham, where he impressed me with his speed, strength and determination. I played him at left back but he preferred to surge up front, convinced that he was a great striker. I always felt that he missed too many chances to be the centre forward he wanted to be. He always gave 100% though and was a real handful for defenders but it never really worked out for him here. Football owes a great deal to fortune, endeavour and skill. This feels like our time.

Andrew Stephen

Match Report – Bristol Rovers

United vs Rovers-A Clash Of Styles

“Making good decisions is a crucial skill at any level. “
Peter Drucker

Habbin North was full of expectation yesterday as we assembled in the faintly astonishing sunshine. It was an unusual treat to come to and watch a game without rain drifting across everything in the irritating manner almost guaranteed by this winter.



Will there be a hosepipe ban later? Of course there will. We compared pothole stories and then speculated about Rovers. A poor side we thought but Steve Evans was likely to have turned them into a team which would be harder to beat and physically competitive. We know what his teams are like and how fond of the dark arts they are. We learned a harsh lesson at Harrogate. We would need skill and determination and the ability to resist any kind of intimidation. Within a short time it was clear that the Referee was going to add to our problems. Foul after foul went unpunished and some serious rough stuff earned no more than a gentle chat. Rovers were encouraged. Jobe and Knight seemed favourite targets but, eventually, justice was seen to be done and Knight scored with another excellent shot. He has been compared with Biley, praise indeed. He was easily the best forward I've ever seen here ..Harris has uncovered a gem. I suspect we will struggle to keep him .Did Gibbons throw a punch following jostling from a cross in the Rovers area? I suspect he did but the Referee saw nothing blameworthy so I might have imagined it.

Meanwhile a loudmouth in the stand followed up his liberal use of the c word by constant invective against our players and the hapless Ref, who he called a midget several times . He was told to shut up several more times by Habbinites who generally seem to know something about football and acceptable conduct. I never know why such unhappy people come to football in order to make themselves even more unhappy. It's a mystery.

As half time approached I was reflecting on some desperate clearances and a bad Kai Kai miss, and thinking that we should be at least two up, when Mr Parsons awarded Rovers a penalty because one of their forwards stood on the ball and then fell over one of our players. It was such a bizarre award that the wise men of the Habbin argued for several minutes about exactly what had been awarded. A penalty seemed straight out of the theatre of the absurd. Quigley scored and the four hundred or so Bristol fans roared out their relief. The noise was more embarrassed than triumphant. Half Time came and the Referee left the pitch to a chorus of boos louder than I've heard for many

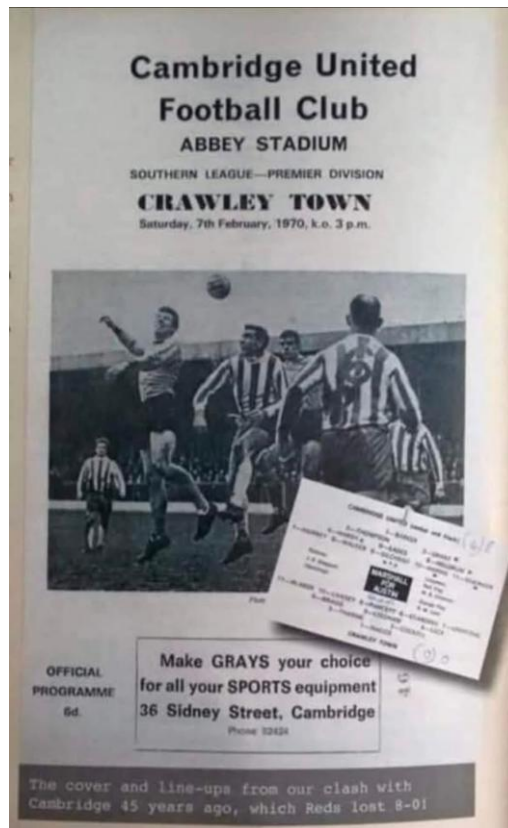
years. It was good to hear the Main Stand so passionate for once. The Half Time talk from Harris would be telling. We all felt deflated. Life can be unfair at times.

We enjoyed the second half, which was full of quality and movement. Rovers looked increasingly primitive and short of ideas. On 56 minutes we had our own penalty after Jobe was hauled down. The normally mild mannered Paul Raynor was booked for protesting , whinging and disputing the decision. Will he ever learn? The crowd was delighted. He is an embarrassment to his profession. Gibbons was having a wonderful game. Apparently Rovers fans were stunned, claiming that he was no good for them but world class for us. He has certainly become more disciplined. It was his long throw headed on by the impressive Raggett that was headed in by Watts, who had produced another masterclass. I wasn't impressed with him at the beginning but he has become a very fine player. We now have three very classy centre backs and ,as various subs came on, we got stronger and stronger. It was particularly good to see Korey Smith back on the field. Our midfield looks better and stronger by the week. There is real competition for places too.



It was good to hear Evans say that we deserved to win because we were the better team. I was shocked though at the way he laid into his own player Sparkes who was not alone in being booked. The Rovers defence was all at sea for our third goal but by that time they had been run ragged. We deserved the win and it was so encouraging to win two games in a row after the debacle at Harrogate. There will be no complacency from us now. There is still a little work to be done up front where I would like to see Appere playing alongside Nevitt and, later, Kouassi. Earlier in the season we were inclined to sit back and so we squandered points. Now we get after teams and make our approach play more aggressive. If we score the goals we should, we will win most games and this league. Bromley are not a patch on us and anyone who doubted the return of Neil Harris must be glad he came back. These are good times.

Andrew Stephen



Hot off the Habbin – Colchester United

“Rivalry adds much to the charms of one’s conquests.”
Louisa. M. Alcott.



I’m never quite sure whether we can call this a local derby or not but there is always more at stake when playing a team within easy driving distance, if there is such a thing anymore. Certainly I felt entitled to a home win on Saturday, having navigated the deep pits and crevices of the A10. We have much in common with the Oystermen. They were elected to the League twenty years before us from the Southern League. They had a two year spell in the Conference, have experienced financial insecurity, worries about their ground and quite a number of cup triumphs. Not surprisingly, we have personnel in common too. Managers Roy McDonough and Ian Atkins worked at both clubs ,though neither set the world alight here. Michael Cheetham, Kwesi Appiah,

John Docherty, John Vaughan, Luke Gutteridge and Danny Granville, amongst several others, played for both clubs. Tragically, after John Lyons left us for Colchester, he committed suicide, dismayed that his career hadn't reached the heights he hoped for. We knew so little about the effects of pressure on mental health in those far off days. Richard Wilkins, who came here from Layer Road, made a real difference. He was part of the great Beck team of the early nineties and one of our finest ever midfielders.

Lyle Taylor might have made a name for himself here but he really didn't.

Colchester fans were sad to have to leave Layer Road but as we know, grounds can reach a stage where upgrading and modernising them to acceptable standards becomes uneconomic and impractical. After the awful fire at Bradford, it was realised that United's traditional ground would need a very costly degree of alteration to meet safety standards. For some years, areas of the ground were sealed off as unsuitable for spectators, but it was not until 2008 that Colchester moved to the brand new Western Homes Stadium, ending years of uncertainty and limited gates. No fan ever likes to see their club move from where they have always watched them, often for decades, but sometimes there is little choice. Interestingly, while thinking of heritage matters, I was reminded of the fact that United's colours are based on those of Huddersfield Town, due to Colchester's manager Ted Davis having strong links with the Terriers. For me, Colchester's finest hour came in February 1971 when they beat "unbeatable" Leeds United 3-2 in the FA Cup, having led 3-0 at one point. I listened to it as a schoolboy on a bus returning from a fixture with mounting disbelief. Veteran Ray Crawford scored twice and Dave Simmons, who later played for us, got the third. The football world was delighted.



Naturally, we will be hoping for a third straight league win. Our performances against Crawley and a typically physical Steve Evans managed side in Bristol Rovers showed that our side has character, resilience and skill. It's no wonder that Ben Knight won Player of the Month or that Neil Harris won Manager of the Month. It helps that we have players coming back from injury and that we have made two excellent acquisitions. Team selection is no longer straightforward and the bench looks very strong. I was hugely impressed with Sean Raggett and Korey Smith when they came on and McIloughlin and Lavery are looking better and better as they get stronger. Some seemed to think that, following Harrogate, we might do a Walsall but I think it's had the opposite effect. How teams react to setbacks is what defines them. This team fears no one and this season I look forward to watching them. Up the U's!

Andrew Stephen

Hot off the Habbin – MK Dons

“Every good work has to face opposition, and the reaction of the opposition offered always helps the work.”

M.Baba

Certainly there is no doubting the quality of today's opposition. Their away form has been particularly impressive and earlier this week they beat Walsall on their own pitch pretty comfortably. We will need to be at our best and yet we have seen this season that United are at their best when facing opposition of high quality. Fulham would attest



to that, as would Charlton. To some extent so would Birmingham, who were a little fortunate to ride out a stirring comeback. We have perhaps struggled more against less gifted, more physical sides, whose skills in the dark arts makes up for limited ability. I'm not necessarily thinking of Shrewsbury or Bristol Rovers but I'd rather face teams that try to play good football, like Swindon and Colchester. Many objective fans have been made heartily sick by Arsenal's gamesmanship at corners and freekicks. They are even

more appalled by players diving, collapsing and writhing around in order to manipulate referees whose job now is harder than ever before. Real fans don't like it and there have been times when the purists of Habbin North have directed their eloquent invective even against our own players when they have had the temerity to dive.

Fans of a certain age will remember the likes of Terry Butcher and Dave Mackay who would never acknowledge pain let alone wave imaginary cards about. I don't expect any of that today. Our games against MK have usually been fairly close but they have generally had the better of us. They have beaten us 6-0 and 4-1 in the past and it's high time the trend was corrected. Earlier this season, when things were not going to plan, the other Dons sacked their manager Scott Lindsey and replaced him with Paul Warne, who did well at Rotherham and perhaps less so



at Derby, where expectations are always so high, certainly since the days of Brian Clough. MK have a very short history, starting life in the league as a new incarnation

of Wimbledon, who were “relocated”, lacking the funds to modernise their ground at Plough Lane and apparently not able to find another ground nearer to London. Milton Keynes didn’t really exist as a town either until 1967. Since then it has acquired concrete cows, one of the first shopping malls and a street plan which is the envy of the world. Acquiring a football club in the way it did would not be possible now and neither should it be. For many years I thought that Franchise was their nickname. Now Wimbledon are back and doing well, MK has gained greater acceptance.

It has also gained a new stadium since beginning life in the national hockey stadium. It is a very impressive ground ,designed for a higher level and bigger crowds. Pete Winkleman’s ambitions have not dimmed, as a number of managers who didn’t quite succeed would agree. We have a surprising number of players in common. Harry Darling and Luke Chadwick were outstanding for both clubs. I thought that Samir Carruthers was going to be but he never quite lived up to expectations. Sullay Kai Kai, a real Rolls Royce of a player, is in the form of his life here ,where he has blossomed under a manager who has the greatest of faith in him .At last he has a midfield oozing with skill which supplies him with the passes he needs to create havoc. As players return from injury the squad and the bench look the strongest they’ve been for some years. We have yet to see the best of Nevitt and Raggett but they are two excellent additions to a very talented squad. I expect an excellent game today as both teams aim for promotion. Bromley are looking over their shoulders now and today’s match will give us a very good idea about who will finish the season as Champions.

Andrew Stephen



Match Report – Colchester United

An Evening Under The Lights Toiling Against The Oystermen.

“Winning isn’t everything, but striving to win is.”
Vince Lombard

There's something other worldly about a midweek game under the lights, especially when you're winning and expectations are high. We all came to the game knowing that we are playing well and hoping that we can be consistent enough to take a title which is clearly up for grabs. Bromley are stuttering. Salford lost to the bottom club-and who does that ?It's the time of the season when character and quality come to the fore. For all that, no one has a divine right to win and no game is a foregone conclusion . Sage judges on Habbin North agreed that an early goal for us would take the pressure off and bring out the quick passing and movement we've seen when we're at our best. I was disappointed to see that we weren't playing two up front. As the home side with every right to expect to win, I'd like to see a more aggressive formation . Nevittt alongside Appere perhaps? Appere is a good player but not the number nine for this division. Harrogate certainly had one, albeit one short on skill, and Colchester have at least two .As it turned out, Appere looked out of sorts and not quite fit. Maybe Nevitt and Lavery from the start ? Lavery is a good finisher butt I do think he does better with a big bloke next to him. Later on in the game I wondered if it would have been worth putting Raggett on at number 9 to win balls in the air for him. Now you see why I am not a manager.

Stunningly, we took the lead on two minutes, when Ben Knight, who else, fired in a shot off Watts. Curiously it didn't come off his knee. It was a great shot and for a while we were witnessing some quick interchanging of passes and fine wing play, mostly on the right. After this bright opening Colchester had two men on Kai Kai and Knight, which should have given some of our



other players more room but it didn't seem to. The blue team, backed by over a thousand fans, gradually grew into the game and began to dominate the midfield with quick and accurate passing. Ours became less assured and, at times, very wasteful .To begin with I was very impressed by a Referee who was a huge upgrade on Saturday's and by Colchester who were not a particularly dirty side and possessed skill which belied their twelfth place in the table. Before long the grumblers in our vicinity began to mumble and gripe about the fact that we weren't 5-0 up and therefore not trying. He was corrected several times but we all know that some people come to football so that they can be as miserable as they

like, effortlessly and without penalty. Our visitors from the NRE were doing their best to sound like a whole end of celebrating fans, without quite being convincing.

And then, after a bit of a defensive fiasco, featuring Purrington and Kai Kai, Colchester scored. The whinging became more continuous, moderating slightly when Brophy's

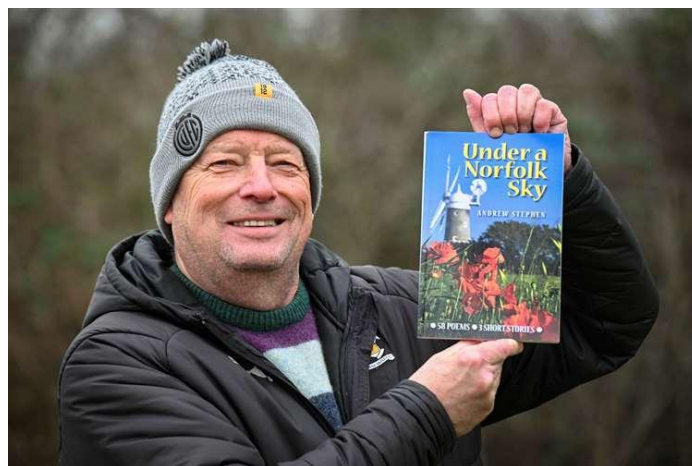


brilliant shot hit the inside of a post and cannoned out again. In most cases it would have gone in but it showed how determined our team have become. We were level at half time. Both dressing rooms were going to be interesting places.

Colchester dominated much of the second half but some of our attacks were swift and dangerous. Jobe and Bennett were skinned in turn by a very quick left winger. Edwards lost control of a very good opportunity and collided heavily with Eastwood who, fortunately wasn't seriously injured. Edwards should have been booked but came off shortly afterwards anyway with a painful shoulder. He should have been more careful. The Referee now became more erratic, Colchester hit the bar and Lisbie collapsed inexplicably to the floor in what looked suspiciously like a luvée overacting. Some people have no shame. Having said that, Gibson was seen grinning following what appeared to be a fair tackle. Korey Smith came on and made a huge difference. He has class. Lavery came on and didn't appear to touch the ball. We seemed to have lost our cutting edge and yet we remained dangerous. Indeed Gibbons had a good chance to score the winner near the end. I won't criticise him though. He had another fine game as did Watts, Mpanzu and Eastwood. Some of the others looked a bit off the pace though. Inevitable maybe after so many games recently. Kouassi and Mayor are on their way back and will make a huge difference as we enter the final phase of the season. I noticed that Notts County also lost. Last night's point could be very valuable I think. A draw was the right result on the night. Colchester impressed me and had obviously done their homework. Sometimes you have to give credit to the opposition even if you have to finish your pint first.

Andrew Stephen

Cambridge-born writer Andrew Stephen celebrates Norfolk in new book



Cambridge-born writer and poet Andrew Stephen is back with his fifth book, *Under a Norfolk Sky* – a collection of poems and short stories dedicated to the county he now calls home.

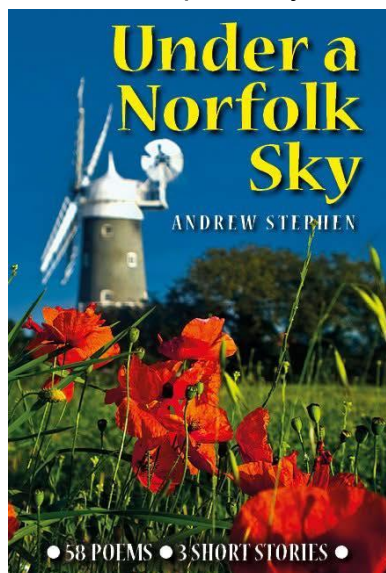
Andrew, whose previous book *The Season That Nearly Was* was about his beloved [Cambridge United](#), is a lifelong supporter of the U's and is the editor of the club's *Amber News* fanzine.

Speaking to the *Cambridge Independent* from his home in Barton Bendish, Andrew says: "I was born and bred in Cambridge, but my father was in the RAF and he went around the world a little bit, and around Britain a little bit.

"And one of the places he was stationed at was RAF Marham, which I can actually see through my window.

"They were very happy there, and I was very happy there. I did very well at the local school, and as a result of that I went off to boarding school in King's Lynn.

"And I think probably, having spent my adolescent years in King's Lynn, I developed a taste for Norfolk.



"It's not that I've gone off Cambridge – although I don't know very many people who could afford to live in Cambridge anymore.

"It's a very different place from the place I knew when I was growing up. A lot of my ancestry came from Cambridge, and I guess I would like to have continued in that way.

"But it's very quiet here [in Norfolk] and very old-fashioned and very community-based, and I think those are things that other people have to miss, unfortunately."

For a number of years, Andrew, a retired teacher, was chair of Cambridge Fans United.

"People were constantly asking me to write a book which included contributions from long-term fans," he recalls.

"Last season was such a bizarre and unsuccessful season, I thought: 'This is the time to write it'. Maybe I'll end up writing one about a more successful season!

"But to be fair, the book I've just published – my fifth – was the one I always wanted to write, and it's been years in the preparing, really.

"I owe it to the pandemic, curiously enough, because like everybody else I had a lot more time on my hands. And I think I took what was an interest to a better level.

"One of my earlier books – my second book – was a collection of poetry, and that originated in a box file that I'd started to put together when I was 18, and somehow or other I never threw them out.

“I was leafing through them one day and I thought, ‘I think I can do something with this’, so I did. And I was very pleased to produce that particular book, which was called *Endless River* – a title I pinched from [Pink Floyd](#).

“Since then I’ve written a bit more, and I honestly think this book [*Under a Norfolk Sky*] is probably as good as I could hope to write.”

- [Under A Norfolk Sky](#) by Andrew Stephen is available in hardback, paperback and Kindle e-book editions, direct from Amazon.
- This is the fifth book I’ve had published during a prolific period. I am delighted that our local paper has pointed out that I am Cambridge born and proud of it. I love living in Norfolk but there is only one team for me. I am delighted that my last book “The Season That Never Was” is being sold in the club shop and in the CFU Cabin. Its foreword was written by Mark Green. If you haven’t read it, the personal accounts of how people became Cambridge fans featured earlier in this edition of the Amber News will give you a flavour of it. Our fans are remarkable and deserve to be celebrated. (Andrew)

and finally....

“The harder you work, the harder it is to surrender.”
Marv Levy.

Another good reason for looking forward to the game on Saturday is the opportunity to applaud some of our former players on the pitch at Half Time. The Legends Team did really well in a five a side competition in Germany recently. In fact they came



second and Wes Hoolihan was voted player of the tournament. I suspect that he would be just that at any age. Class is permanent. Danny Potter was in goal and remains the showman and entertainer he always was. I remember meeting him at St Pancras before a Playoff Final. He was great fun to be with as you would imagine. The other players were all a part of United’s illustrious history. Dave Kitson was some player and he has always been fiercely loyal to United, as he

made very clear when inducted into the Hall of Fame at the Abbey. Andy Duncan stayed with us during some very dark days and Dusty Miller was a commanding presence at the back as we fought our way back into the League. Michael Kyd, Warren Goodhind and Omer Riza all played their part in some fine performances. Omer of course spent time recently as a manager-with some success. Nothing is more fun than playing though, particularly when your manager is none other than Shaggy. They will be watching the game from the South Stand and I am sure that they will all be happy to chat to current fans.

It has been terrific to watch the character in this team in recent games, not just when they were unbeaten for 14 games but, having lost to Harrogate, seeing them take 7 points from their next three games. Having not quite hit the heights against Colchester, they won away well at Newport, a team fighting for their lives. Last season we often seemed to surrender. This crop of players don't do that. They work hard and keep going until the end. Neil Harris expects that and this season we have players more than capable of moments of magic. Ben Knight is a danger to anyone, as is Mayor and Kouassi when fit. Appere is hugely underestimated. Lavery at his best is lethal and there is a lot to come from Nevitt. Behind them Pelly Mpanzu now has Korey Smith and McLoughlin to work with. Watts and Jobe are the best centre halves in the league and Raggett is of that standard, as we will see. Bennett is an enigma, capable of casual brilliance and I haven't even mentioned Kai Kai or Brophy. Eastwood has been simply imperious. I could say something about them all but you get the picture. We shouldn't be frightened of anyone. I'm not counting my chickens but I think we should always be confident and on the front foot. What a contrast to last year.



I think my favourite game this season was at home to Tranmere, when some of their players thought that it would be fun to taunt the home fans. Habbin North told them that this was not gentlemanly or called for. Falling behind twice doesn't discourage this team. Lavery scored within seconds of coming on and Knight got our fourth. In between, Kell Watts scored twice. Not only has his knee back to the keeper become a trademark but fans everywhere don't seem to realise it's legal. He is a great defender too.

We lost of course at Harrogate but I felt proud to be part of the 1,000 plus fans who went there and took over the town and the ground in dreadful weather conditions and when the A1 was nightmare. It's important to be a part of what's happening now, building on all the fine traditions of the past.

Will we be Champions? I don't know, but if we do, I might have to write another book to show that last season's wasn't definitive.

Up the U's!

Andrew

Make a difference and join CFU.
Your opinions and contributions are always
gratefully received: acstephen@hotmail.com



[Deadline for next newsletter- **26th April, 2026**]

United in Endeavour

