

## CHURCH

By  
**ARTHUR  
CHURCH**

former editor  
of the  
Bucks Free Press

**VIEW**



# Legends live despite move to the flat

When, in about a year's time, Wycombe Wanderers settle in to their new stadium at Sands will the shades of players past flit across the valley from Loakes Park or will their ghosts still haunt their old soccer home?

Those were the days, we ancients say. The days when the ambition of every local youngster kicking a ball about in the back streets was to draw on a Wanderers' shirt; the days when the game was played for the love of it. The days when youngsters stood around the players' entrance pleading 'Can I carry your bag, Sir?' — and in the process gain free admittance.

Some of those old players, probably because of economic necessity, turned 'pro' — men like 'keeper Jimmy Wicks and defender Archie Gomm. Others, like the legendary Reggie Boreham, treasured their amateur status.

Many of us remember with affection such characters as Tim Hinton, a beanpole of a figure who headed most of his goals, 'Salt' Smith, Joey Grace, Billy O'Gorman, Nelson Rolfe, Bill Brown, the chunky Ted Beeson who also, I believe, played at one time for arch-rivals Chesham, Frank Adams, who captained the side and who gave Loakes Park to the club. It was only later in life that Frank bowed to the inevitable, giving a reluctant blessing to the days of the semi-pro.

Those were some of the Wanderers greats — not possible in this column to mention them all. Johnny Timberlake graced the scene there and long kept up an interest in the club as he moved into town council service and donned the Mayoral robes.

Although, as one former player told me, most would have given their right arm to play for Wycombe, there were one or two so loyal to their village side that they took a lot of persuading to go to Loakes Park.

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One such was George Hunt, of Stokenchurch. When he did finally make the move he was an immediate success as a powerful centre-forward. But, sadly, a serious leg injury side-lined him and cut short his career.

I still have the occasional chat with Tony Chubb, who flashed into the side with, if I remember rightly, seven goals in a trial match. Will there ever be another Tony Horseman? I hear you ask. Are we likely to see another local boy make good as did Paul Bates? Thirteen players, through the years, were awarded amateur international caps while playing for Wycombe — a fair record of club achievement.

One or two of the players I have mentioned are still alive and kicking (though not a football) and some I see now and then, like 'Chalfont Wonder' Len Worley, the cheery Jackie Tomlin, the quiet Jim Moring, Jock McCullum, the stocky George Jackson. But it's strange that one sees so few former ranking players watching the Wanderers nowadays.

Times have changed, with growing pace, and some of the change has been for the better. The club itself is less insular, more community minded. For years it was a pretty tight shop. And it is certainly more ambitious. Not too many years ago, when the Blues were veritable giants in the Isthmian League, they might well have 'done a Wimbledon'.

So far as the move to a new home is concerned there were bound to be mixed feelings among the spectators. How could it be otherwise when to so many older supporters Loakes Park has for years been a tradition, something of a shrine?

Had it not been for an unhelpful town council a quarter of a century back Wycombe may well have had a flat ground in the Holywell Mead area. Incidentally, what are the national press boys going to substitute for 'Wycombe's infamous slope'?

I have never been able to understand the opposition to the new site on environmental grounds. When I went along a few months ago to see work in progress at Sands, I found it cheek by jowl with an industrial estate. Green Belt my foot!

As for crowd trouble, it is rare at Loakes Park, as householders in Suffield Road, many of whom I have known well as keen Blues fans through the years, will tell.

Speaking personally, the move will stretch my journey time. But it will still be 'Up the Blues!'.