

SUSOT

NEWSLETTER 49

THE pink-haired Womble has found a new home at last. While the benefits of the SUSCT Music Quiz night on June 7 were many and varied, for yours truly that had to be the biggest. This stuffed black and white monster had been taking up a seat on the bench round my kitchen table for weeks and seeing the happy smile on the face of the young lady who won him in the raffle warmed the cockles of the heart. I hope he is settling in at his new abode.

Someone also quickly snapped up the attractive basket of produce with the yellow bow on top, so that will please the Trust's current oldest member – the mater – who spent hours making sure that everything was just so while fondly remembering her last trip to the Hall on the day we stuffed prospective First Division champions Bolton 5-2 back in September 1996. Nice one, Net!

In fact, it was an excellent night all round. Twelve tables filled with varying numbers of enthusiasts – thanks chiefly to Alan Perry's Herculean efforts – around 150 tracks of music put together over days by our king of quizmasters Guy Rickard and an answers marker showing the mental agility of an Einstein (he said modestly).

The night raised another superb £700 for Trust funds and, as usual, the only disappointment at the end was the one which seems to afflict just about every social event the Trust puts on. The number of actual Trust members in attendance was nowhere near what it should have been. I can't believe the majority of our number are simply anti-social, but we really would like to know why more of you do not support our functions. If you have a viewpoint, send it to terry.jeffreys@btinternet.com and then the Trust committee can discuss them.

The aforementioned raffle was another major money-spinner courtesy of Alan's usual relentless cajoling, while Kathy Jeffreys handed over £60 to top the bidding in the auction for a Damon Searle signed shirt and Steve Stone gave up £20 for a set of three signed and framed player photographs. The one slight embarrassment here was the auctioneer's sad lack of knowledge of current first-team players. Rest assured Rickard Jnr has been suitably censured and I am sure I heard him say he will definitely be upping his attendance record in 2003-04.

A report on the above evening was just one of the points at the first of the two recent committee meetings held on June 9 and 30. Thanks for starters to treasurer Craig Fillary for popping his head round the door of the Blue Boar on the ninth to settle some Trust debts before departing for Germany on business in the early hours of the following morning. What a trouper.

Dave Scrivens' early pronouncement on Quid A Goal revealed that Ron owed £137.50 – reckoned to be about the level of his nightly Caribbean cocktail bill. It was agreed that, despite his presumed holiday excesses, he should not be allowed to pay by instalments – and, anyway, we might need the money fairly urgently to pay for a pedicure for Sammy the Shrimp, whose feet are stated to be in a bit of a mess. But, to his credit, he has now coughed, along with Geoffrey King and Derek Wilshire, though all the other board members involved have continued to keep a tight grip on their wad. If you still owe Quid A Goal cash, PLEASE contact Dave immediately. Better still, pay him. Work is already well under way on the format for next season's QAG, which is designed to be even bigger and better under the stewardship of Alan Perry. It will feature new categories and also, while keeping the same title, allow smaller amounts to be 'wagered'. In-depth fliers will be available at the Meet the Blues Day on July 20 and you can get early details and info from Alan on alanperry4@hotmail.com Even the players are thinking about getting involved, so there is no excuse for any of us not to.

Paul Napper and John Everett, two new committee recruits, were welcomed one to each meeting by vice-chairman Paul FitzGerald.

There were fairly lengthy discussions on the Trust's contribution to the Meet the Blues Day at Boots and Laces, which will once again be in liaison with the SJS. It would help us if anyone with a spare unwanted Blues shirt or any memorabilia they would be prepared to allow us to sell could let us know via Terry Jeffreys (also on 01268-523974). Terry will have 300 of our new badges to dispense too. In addition we will be chasing our sponsored shirt from the football club and, in a major coup, look to have landed Ian Selley's. 'Beat the Goalie' starring Jon-Paul FitzGerald and Joe Elliott is looking like a major attraction for starters, with United players due to be available for autograph signing under one of our collection of attractive gazebos. We hope Steve Wignall or one of our squad stars will deign to hand over our agreed £100 donation to the Elizabeth Venture Play Scheme. Anyone will be able to join up on the day and, apart from pushing QAG as mentioned earlier, Alan P will be on familiar raffle duty with first prize a hot air balloon flight. If you win it, possibly best not to save it to the end of the season in case things go pear-shaped and you feel like chucking yourself out.....

Dave Scriven, with the assistance of software superman Kevin Feasey, has now got the new Trust website UP AND RUNNING. To ogle the new site, and even in its infancy it is looking good, set your search engine to rustle up www.shrimperstrust.co.uk Any comments to dave@shrimperzone.com By the time the new season kicks off, everything should be bang up to date – including the committee pen pix and archive material.

It is hoped that Garry Nelson will be the guest at our first planned social evening. For anyone who does not remember Garry, he was a languid and lanky winger with Blues from 1979-83 before moving on to give good service with Swindon, Plymouth, Brighton, Charlton and Torquay. But his main claim to fame were his books about his soccer career, which became best-sellers of the sporting genre as the majority of readers took to the tongue-in-cheek style of writing that Garry employed. I repeat, however, that his views on the media were risible as far as I was concerned and my first tome of his ended up heading for the nearest landfill. But you can't have everything and I am sure his efforts gave a lot of pleasure to many.

Paul Yeomanson reported that the SUSCT polo shirts and mugs have been ordered and should be available for general distribution in the not too distant future. Paul's e-mail contact address follows shortly.

DON'T forget our leg waxers. Their big day should be against Bury on August 30. Anyone who wishes to sponsor one of our fuzzies should contact Alan Perry at his Hotmail address (more than £500 guaranteed so far) or Joe Elliott on sufcjoe@aol.com (£150). I can see their eyes watering now, along with those of fellow sufferers Bashers and Ben Herbert.

Additionally on the fund-raising front, the next Quiz Night is planned for September – though as Gordon Harrold now wants several hundred pounds to have it staged at Boots and Laces you can take it as read that we are actively seeking an alternative venue. Brian Wheeler has already said that the Far Post / Shrimpers Bar should be available. Gordon also looks like missing out on a possible planned six-a-side event next month, which will now be *minus* barbecue. Details on that, as well as the location, are currently under discussion.

Meanwhile Terry Jeffreys is preparing to put his plates of meat to the ultimate test on February 21 by walking from Roots Hall to Brisbane Road for the good of the Trust, arriving at Orient's ground in time to be acclaimed by the waiting Blue throng. Another definite 'give generously' occasion. Anyone who would care to join Terry on his perambulation should contact him at the e-mail address or telephone number given earlier. Terry also attended the Supporters Direct National Conference at Highbury on June 20 and I joined him at the same venue for the Football Supporters Federation 'Parliament' the next day. A report on that later.

Kathy Jeffreys is doing her bit as well and writing to all our lady members to see what sort of fund-raising events they would be prepared to take part in (within reason) and the suggestions they may have.

In a bid to keep the profile of the Trust as high as possible it seems we have secured the Evening Echo's OK for a column of Trust info, fax and figures every Thursday from shortly before the forthcoming campaign gets under way. Paul Napper will be taking this on and we can only wish him the best of luck.

Oliver Trigg is resting easier now that his grave has been fully restored to its former glory. The plan next is to get a little rededication organised, involving Trust members and SUFC gentry, plus some more good publicity. United once had a chaplain, believed since to have been defrocked for some unspecified hanky-panky, so that leaves us scouring our minimal contacts in the clergy to do the necessary.

Membership has taken the expected tumble following the latest Paul Yeomanson cull of those who have not rejoined as requested. The Hon. Mem. Sec. reported that our current number stands at 691, plus 115 SJS, making a total of 806. If you want to join the Trust, know anyone who does or just want information about how to join, contact Paul on p.yeomanson@bluevonder.co.uk and he will fill you in (non-violently). Also contact him if you are not getting your newsletter and, consequently, suffering the onset of depression.

A date for the AGM is presently being mulled over and, I am afraid, one item on the agenda that needs trailing is that there will almost certainly be a proposed increase in the £5 membership fee. I mean, what other price has stood still since 1998?! However, to ease the pain, we will be endeavouring to get Wiggers and John Stannard along for a post-meeting Q & A session.

Paul Napper contributed three interesting little snippets, starting with the fact that Graham Jolley is producing a polo shirt for all beer and cider-drinking Blues fans with every penny of the profits going to the Trust. Sounds like a Jolley jape that gets a 'Cheers' from us all. Next came news that Shrimperzone, that esteemed independent website, are forming a football team – with only Trust members eligible to play. So what an incentive to join! Paul will also try to invite Matthew Holt of Supporters Direct down to our first home game, where we hope he will give a talk.

An early warning for all travellers. Chris Berry will be away at the time of our first coach trip to Doncaster, so Brian Cotgrove will be the point of contact on 01702-512557. Further reminders closer to the time. Bashers has written to an assortment of coach companies asking them to tender for 2003-04.

Paul Fitz's letters to shareholders have elicited some interesting responses, none more so than from the Clenshaw brothers, Charles and David, now living in Preston and Bexhill. These two fine gentlemen, who have each offered to donate their shareholdings of more than 100 each to the Trust and also join our merry band, are the sons of the late Charles W Clenshaw who helped set up the old Southend United Supporters Club before the last war and which evolved into one of the most successful bodies of its kind ever. It oversaw the move to and funding for the Hall. He was chairman from 1932 until 1956 and then offered a seat on the football club board which he accepted. and served for another five years. However, in typical United fashion, all his entirely voluntary efforts were eventually forgotten by the club – to his eternal disappointment. He died in 1977, aged 86. Peter Bushell, who used to do a lot of supporter-based work back in the 60s and 70s, has also become a Trust member.

The lucky recipient of SUSCT player sponsorship next season is Mark Warren. Do us proud in that home shirt.

So we failed in our bid to sign England Under-21 keeper Rhys Evans from Chelsea. But while one door shut, another one opened. That surely meant we could have moved in for Paul Robinson! Instead, we have settled for Carl Emberson, a C** U reject, who I am afraid I have witnessed drop more than one clanger during televised highlights over past seasons. And Joe Kinnear hardly gave him a glowing vote of confidence at Luton. Let us pray..... As for big Drewe Broughton, we will need to get the maximum out of him that we can in between what, judging by 2002-03, should be a few weeks off suspended. And this was the verdict on £25,000 midfield new boy Mark Gower from my deluded Barnet contact: "May look like butter would not melt in his mouth, but among his extra-curricular activities has been a broken cheekbone in a random pub attack while England were thrashing Germany 5-1. If he was a racehorse he would have been found guilty under the non-triers rule on numerous occasions, especially when the going got heavy or it was dark and cold. But every Barnet fan will admit we have lost our best player. The way he can drift past defenders on a nice, sunny August day can make you catch your breath. Takes a good free-kick and very skilful, but doesn't do tackling. At least he is a lot better than Tony Richards." Well that's a relief!

BARRINGTON B has moved on to Farnborough and I feel Stuart Thurgood has done us a favour by opting to try his luck elsewhere. Game trier but, I am afraid, that is as good as it got. Orient allegedly wanted Kevin Maher. Luckily, he didn't want them. Steven Clark was going to sign – 'I have got to get my head down now, work hard and put in the performances' – then got a whiff that possibly Grimsby might be interested and made us sweat a bit before finally putting pen to paper. But the biggest scandal, of course, was Mark Rawle verbally agreeing to re-sign for us and then scratching his 'X' on the dotted line at Oxford after his oily rag agent had continued to tout him around. This was a Philby level of treachery and I would not want to be in his shoes when he returns to the Hall – if he dares. I also now have one unworn signed Rawle first-team shirt going cheap, as snapped up in the last Trust Quiz Night auction. Any offers for it or suggestions, no matter how vile, as to what I should do with it to my usual address. At least with Rawle gone, Tes can see his first-team slot is virtually guaranteed – and has sensibly agreed to honour us with his presence for another two seasons. Just as long as he opts not to go back behind the wheel.

Nice to see that major corporations are flocking to get themselves associated with the Blues brand name – most notably the philanthropists from Nike. I presume one of their sweatshops has been put on red alert to dispense this season's match garment at suitably knockdown rates – well, at least until they hit the club shop. The Office of Fair Trading has recently decreed that shirts which cost about '£7' to make (I thought it was £2 max) and are then sold at £39.99 (just like ours!) are, in fact, a rip-off and in a report due out shortly they are expected to announce the size of the fines – alleged to be more than £100million – to be imposed on the likes of Umbro, M***** U***** etc. Yet, despite that, why am I not holding my breath waiting for a nationwide bout of 'prices slashed' notices? The nonsense supposed to have been spoken by Leon Cort and Drewe Broughton on the club website about the quality and comfort of their new garb was cringe-making.

The new outfit will greet our first league opponents of the new season – Cheltenham at the Hall on August 9. A tricky fixture, as the Robins had bucked up considerably following Bobby Gould's arrival as boss last season, but left themselves with just too much to do to avoid the Second Division drop. That is followed by a Carling Cup date against Swindon on Tuesday August 12, with the first away game – and a free trip for our top 20 travellers as listed in NUMBER 48 – to up-from-the-Conference Doncaster. The fuss the League make about not reproducing the copyrighted fixtures en masse is pathetic. What exactly do they think they are protecting?

Spotted an old Blues face on the box the other day playing in one of the nation's most revered competitions – Mick Gooding in the English Masters 5-A-Side tournament. Mick, in Wolves' colours, now sports a bizarre-looking goatee which, in close-up, looks as if it is occasionally left sadly unattended for a period of some days.

Talking of old faces, did you spot this lot among the 527 released at the end of the season? Mooney (Birmingham), Royce (Leicester), Selley (Wimbledon), Beadle (Bristol C), Booty (Chesterfield), Rapley (C** U), Jason Lee (Peterborough), Angell (QPR), Hutchings, Harris (Leyton Orient), Carruthers (Scunthorpe) and Nogan (York). Spot the connection? Roycey, returning to Charlton, is the only one I would have had back.

And guess who is 'working on his fitness' in the hope of landing a contract for the new season with Carlisle. None other than Churchill's legend Paul Byrne. Byrne, still only 30, has played for Glenavon, Shelbourne, Bohemians (twice), St Patrick's Athletic, Kilkenny City and Dundalk since leaving us – and doubtless frequented the fast-food emporia in each town on numerous occasions.

REMEMBER the fuss about Fossetts Farm and its alleged Iron Age man six feet under? Norwich have just copped the same problem. Work has been held up on their new 3,000-seater stand extension after some flint tools from the Palaeolithic era around 12,000 years ago were dug up. This prehistoric Black and Decker could now delay the project for months.

On the subject of Fossetts, the rumour-mongers have been working overtime again. Ron says new plans and options are in the air. Lansbury claim we are staying at the Hall. Then Fossetts is still on, but the access road plans are not up to scratch. Meanwhile costs to the club are rising all the time. Hang on, though, here's Tesco with some development land and they will have the Hall. Oops, non-starter. And all the time the key plans gather mould in the offices of Two Jags, with the B & Q application not now due to be considered until January. Oh dear, more debt. That doom and gloom feeling is gathering pace again and, as a consequence, Terry Jeffreys

is working on a contingency plan should we need to act in an emergency e.g. turning up at the Hall one day to find the gates padlocked! Season ticket sales may be up 4% on the equivalent stage last year, but that is hardly going to keep us in clover. Oh that we could be certain of ending up with something resembling Hull's new Kingston Communications Stadium, already hosting international fixtures and containing 24,004 for the recent England Under-21 v Serbia Under-21 clash.

Congratulations to Raoul Simons of the Evening Standard for revealing on June 13 that the FA were considering introducing a 'fit and proper person' test for anyone in future wanting to become a football club director. Had Raoul been a newsletter reader he could have done this story weeks ago, because I told you all in NUMBER 46, back in March, that this was due to happen. I think someone dared to muse that Ron might struggle for a pass mark.

This issue has become more relevant following the continuing farcical goings-on at Luton. Their new chief executive John Gurney – or John Smith as he is known when thinking about buying Peterborough – makes Ron look like the Angel Gabriel. Hatters fans have had to put up with an intimated name change to London Luton, mystery board members, resignations, the sacking of Joe Kinnear and his replacement by 'ballot' with Mike Newell, a potential merger with Milton Keynes Wimbledon and an idea for locating a possible new ground under an airport runway. The lunatics really are running the asylum.

Meanwhile in 2001-02, the turnover of the top 20 clubs in England burst through the £1BILLION mark. That exceeds the gross domestic product of nations like Samoa, Burundi and Moldova. Taking in the whole of English football, the figure reached £1.5BILLION – twice the 2001 GDP of Mongolia! Now for the bad news. Two-thirds of that money went on staff costs alone – i.e. nest-feathering in the main. Hence the recent efforts with regard to future salary caps to try to redress the balance, though we'll believe that when we see it. Amazingly, in that season SUFC's staff costs as a percentage of turnover were 61.72% against a Third Division average of 69.9. We were third-best behind Plymouth (43.09) and Rushden and Diamonds (59.63). Worst was York with 150.75. Worst in the league were Wigan (192.02) and, surprise, surprise, Wimbledon (187.76). Crisis? What crisis?

Nice to see, too, that levels of co-operation are working as well as ever between the Premiership and the Nationwide League. The Nationwide wanted an end to the transfer windows, which are costing clubs like ours a fortune in leaving them unable to do business in times when income has never been lower. But the Prem disagreed. Outcome – transfer windows stay. Then the Nationwide went for an extension of the play-offs to include more clubs. M***** U***** and their acolytes again voiced 'concern'. Outcome – the extension plans are put on hold. Still wondering who runs football in this country these days?

About six people have complained to the Hall that they have received e-mails of a pornographic nature which they feel are down to their e-mail addresses being lifted from United files. The powers that be deny all knowledge. Meanwhile, more complaints are expected – from those NOT receiving the porn!

AND, finally, Becks. Thank God he has gone. The mind-numbing drivel written and talked about this semi-literate Beau Brummel of the 21st century and the class-free ego that is Mrs B has been 'doin' my 'ead in'. Sadly, I fear out of sight will not be out of mind. Stand by for a further avalanche of unadulterated tosh over the coming months as he goes mincing round Madrid. Personally, I hope La Liga will prove Beckham is nowhere near the player he is so too often cracked up to be. Or is that being cruel on the alice-banded, nail-varnished fop? As for him learning Spanish, shouldn't he get conversant with English first?

Right, having got that off my chest we can start to wind down other than for the FSF communique. Any comments, be they queries, praise or scorn, send them to the usual address – nigel.rickard@the-sun.co.uk

NR (7/7)

PS 1. Cracking headline on the Sky Sports website recently – Keegan Fills Schmeichel's Gap With Seaman. I think whoever let that through will have had a gentle word in his ear next morning.

2. Shrimpers soothsayer Mr G has spoken. Following his uncanny prediction of 16th spot last season, he has gazed into his crystal ball – OK, the bottom of the glass containing his pint of IPA – and predicted a considerable improvement in the offing for the coming campaign. To 12th! Oh ye of little faith.

3. What it's like to be loved. Secretary Terry Jeffreys returned from his holidays to find more than 1,000 e-mails waiting for him.

4. Welcome aboard to probably the most intellectual of our true Blue signings to the Trust faithful – Professor Alan Golding Phd, Professor of American Poetry at the University of Louisville in Kentucky. This is a man, though, whose first awareness of poetry came as he watched the likes of Mel Slack, Ray Smith, Bill Garner and Derek Woodley in motion in the 60s and early 70s. Still jinking down the wing as he tries to prove to the Yanks that there really is only one type of football. But maybe not quite as nippy as when we first went head to head in a fixture between the now defunct Hamlet Court School and mighty West Leigh one cold Saturday morning back in 1963. I can also recommend Alan's last book, 'From Outlaw to Classic (Canons in American Poetry)'. Sadly, like me, once you get past the introduction you are unlikely to have a clue what he is talking about.....

5. Situations Vacant. United need a website match report written for away games and would like a Trust member who regularly travels on our coaches to do it. They would provide a laptop computer and a mobile phone connector so your report could be sent from the coach to Jon Child and then put up in lights. Any takers? Speaking personally I would say this is a great opportunity for a 16 to 18 year old who sees themselves as a potential journalist to get some experience. But it is also a big responsibility – and you need to be literate with good grammar and spelling. You might prefer to have a go at writing a piece for the 'My away matchday' section of the programme i.e. the pies, venue, our support etc. If you fancy either role, contact Terry Jeffreys via the e-mail or phone listings given earlier and take it from there.

6. Apology. To Suzanne Feasey for forgetting her heroic efforts involving late extension lead purchases and other selfless acts which enabled Kevin's big film show to go ahead at the Player of the Year night. The great news for next season is that Kevin has United's permission to do his own filming at the ground, so stand by for a blockbuster CD to be available detailing what we hope will have been a promotion campaign come next May.

7. Would you believe it. About three years ago, way back in NUMBER 17, I asked 'Whatever happened to John Piekalnetis?' John was in the squad photo of the legendary 1971-72 promotion side, but made just one Blues appearance in a 14-month stint at the club before departing. He also had a weird name. Anyway, on June 15 I had an e-mail from Becky Piekalnetis to tell me that John is her dad and she had found the mention of him in that old newsletter while doing some research on Google with her uncle into the family tree. John himself is away at present, but when he returns I hope he will get back to me and let us know where his career led him.

8. Graham Bean, the FA's Compliance Officer tasked with tracking down bungsters, fraudsters, corruption and crookedness within the game, has just been paid off. Premier League 1 Football 0.

FOOTBALL SUPPORTERS FEDERATION

'PARLIAMENT' – Highbury, 21/6/03

EGG, bacon, sausage, baked beans, two rounds of toast and a strong cup of tea. The football fan's staple fare and very welcome at the Arsenal Café about 400 yards from Highbury as half-time arrived during the first FSF annual meeting.

If nothing else it further aided my recovery from having to catch a train from Leigh-on-Sea at the unearthly hour of 7.52am, meeting Terry Jeffreys at Pitsea and then journeying on to our illustrious venue in time for a 9.30 start.

BUSINESS was conducted under Highbury's relatively new North Stand. After ID distribution, coffee and biscuits, a visit to a toilet about the size of the Hall's East Stand, stunning myself by buying a book on Premier League greed written by a member of what was once known as Militant and finding neither of your Shrimpers Trust delegates was required for a Sky TV interview, it was down to business. Joining the other 150 or so representatives from clubs as diverse as Worksop Town and Northampton, Dover and W*** H** for what was the first FSF annual conference (parliament) following the merger of the Football Supporters Association and National Federation of Football Supporters Clubs.

The first impression was that it was encouraging to see so many fellow fans all clearly keen to act in liaison to ensure that we have a powerful future voice in the direction that football is going and to show that we do not intend, if we can help it, to have our game taken away from us by interests whose concerns are purely either financial or commercial. We are not alone!

Officers were elected, accounts approved and then it was on to a few words from Lord Falconer. Luckily, this was not the inept Lord Dome, now bewigged and warming his buttocks on the woosack as our new Tony's crony Lord Chancellor. In fact, this was Lord Richard Falconer, former vice-chairman of the old Football Task Force, a member of the current all-party Parliamentary Football Group and a member of the Wimbledon Independent Supporters Club. He stressed his backing for the work of Trusts like ours, declaring: "That is the future of football – and it works." He then echoed my recent NUMBER 46 slating of the toothless Independent Football Commission, which, for example, has done nothing to halt the disastrous setting up of Franchise FC. M'lord believes that statutory regulation of the game is almost certain at some time in the future – though the Premier League for one will fight that tooth and nail. He insisted: "The people in charge of most clubs are there as purely temporary guardians of that club's assets." Maybe, but what concerns Trusts like ours is when those temporary guardians (SEL? Delancey?) suddenly decide those assets are fit for nothing else but stripping. Dickie feared that at least three League clubs might not make it to kick-off and roared: "This crisis has been caused by greed, inequality of income and the concentration of power in the hands of a selfish elite." Within seconds it seemed we would be manning the barricades. Instead, the honourable Richard wound up without saying exactly how we were going to escape the current downward spiral. A pity.

We could all have empathised with the next item – the FSF Services to Supporters Award. It went to the York City Supporters Trust, now running the show at Bootham Crescent after the club almost bit the dust just a few short weeks ago. Steve Beck, their Trust and now FC chairman, said those who sought to see City fold 'underestimated the power of the supporters'.

The FSF Football Writer of the Year award went to an old SunSport colleague of mine – Martin Samuel, now of The Times and News of the World. An ardent H**ster, Martin has especially slated the goings-on at Franchise FC and various other ne'er-do-wells within the game. A pity more national newspaper journalists either cannot or will not be more critical of the way football is being dragged under. But these days one wrong word can have unfortunate consequences – such as no one will speak to you.

Next came some motions, starting with Police Charges. Police plans to charge for policing outside grounds as well as inside were unanimously opposed. This was regarded as another form of extra income to go with speed camera cash and rated no more than a tax on the law-abiding supporter.

Independent regulation. A vote was passed that the Parliament had no confidence in those authorities currently running the professional and semi-professional games. Remember the Chesterfield and Boston fiascos?

FA disciplinary procedures: 'Agreed' to a vote which urged an end to the way clubs and players can play the current suspension system to suit themselves, especially near the end of the season.

THEN it was on to the issue of Safe Standing at football grounds. Phil Gatenby, the officer in charge of this issue, reported virtually no movement whatsoever on this hot potato after more than three years with no open debate. Polls show fans want it, yet Tony and Co in the shape of the utterly hopeless Tessa Jowell and Richard Caborn have no interest in discussions. Personally, as I have said before and without wishing to denigrate his immense loss in any way, I am fed up with the viewpoint of Trevor Hicks being

regarded as the only one that counts when it comes to this matter. Germany will have 10 new stadia for the World Cup in 2006 WITH standing areas. UEFA and the German government are quite happy. Schalke 04's new state-of-the-art arena, due to host next season's Champions League Final, will have 15,000 standing places for home fans, 2,000 for away – and costs £5 to get in. Let me repeat that. £5. £5. £5. But the view here is we are happy being ripped off to sit, so why change? And how can we cut prices when all our clubs are skint? Well that's not our fault and I feel we should still continue to press forcefully for safe standing areas at any new Blues ground on offer.

The afternoon session was delayed by a 20-minute fire alarm, but then it was on to Away Fans. It was agreed to push the need to outlaw the practice of clubs like Swindon, who have shut regular away sections of ground and herded visitors into much more expensive stand areas. The Millwall 'ban' experience of last season was also declared an expensive disaster. Funnily enough, the Lions will not be repeating it.

Football and TV. The next Premiership TV deal is to be based round various packages – Gold is 38 games kicking off at 4pm on a Sunday, Silver 38 at 8pm on a Monday and Bronze 62 on Saturday in the 1pm and 5.30pm slots. These should be arranged as in the past along 'free collective bargaining' lines. Favourite at present is a Sky-BBC link-up – exactly as they have just done for FA Cup and England coverage in a deal that should be worth around £330m. At least that would guarantee some cash filtering down to our level, even if not as much as we would like. The downside is it would mean more on-screen appearances from Mark Lawrenson. But the EU want clubs to be free to negotiate their own TV contracts – meaning the small clubs and grass roots can go hang! A House of Commons motion has picked up on this and opposes it – encouragingly featuring the name of David Amess. We will inquiring of Sir Teddy if he will be signing up – and if not, why not. Feel free to write to your own MP with a wake-up call. To end with, I actually have to sympathise with M***** U***** fans. Imagine this was us. Last season of 41 League and Cup games they played, only 10 took place at 3pm on a Saturday afternoon. United's response on their behalf? Not a peep.

Ticket prices. Lucky us at the Hall being 'entertained' for a mere £15 in the East Greens. Premier League prices in 2003-04 will regularly *average* around the £40 mark. Wolves season tickets are up by 70 per cent! There is more money in the game than ever before – and prices have never been higher. Well, well. Taylor back in '92, showing once again his vast knowledge of the game as he sucked up to Mrs T by backing all-seater stadia, said he reckoned the cost per-head to attend matches with everyone seated should be about £6. That ought to put the price today at about £8. What a joke. The fight goes on, but who is listening?

Former PFA executive Brendan Batson was then due to speak. But as he had just been given the tin tuck by West Brom as vice-chairman, Brendan could not be present. So it was on to Supporter Organisation and Financing with Andy Burnham MP. Andy, chairman of Supporters Direct, reported there are now 93 Supporters Trust like our own, with seven currently owning clubs. He regarded this as a major move forward in a key time for change and added: "Football clubs are community entities, not vehicles for private greed and the plundering of assets." Terry will be remembering that one for the next Liaison Meeting. Andy also won approval for branding agents 'a corrupting influence' who need reining in and calling for wholesale redistribution of finances within the game to benefit the whole structure. Trouble is, Andy, your boss and the current powers in the game are not taking any notice of you.

2012 Olympics. A motion welcoming London's bid was clearly defeated. Does anyone seriously believe we have the calibre of people needed to make a Sydney-style success of the event? The politicians won't be able to keep their noses out, costs will sky-rocket and we will be paying for it in 2042 – just like Montreal.

THE final motion was then put – and unanimously passed – to adopt the FSF's 'Fans' Blueprint for Football' covering just about all the issues of concern to fans, many mentioned above, and upon which we want action, not talk, from government and the football authorities. FSF Development Officer Steve Powell declared: "The time has come to get angry. The battle to save our game, the people's game, has only just begun." I think we would drink to that and, as far as I can see, a far more bolshie approach than that taken in the past is what we are going to need to achieve many of the goals that ordinary fans want to come to fruition.

Terry and I rounded off with a tour of Highbury, led by Simon Inglis of football stadia books fame. Very interesting and enjoyable, though the 'Marble Hall' is barely big enough to swing a cat in and the present Arsenal dressing-rooms are incredibly shabby for a club of their stature. No wonder they want to move. Which gives us a link to the Gunners straight away..... All in all, an enjoyable and informative day well worth attending on the Trust's behalf.

NR