

SUSCT NEWSLETTER 65

(Valedictory Edition)

RING out the old, ring in the new. And never has that been more true than regards the SUSCT Newsletter for 2005. Because, and please try to restrain the weeping and a-wailing, after six years at the helm this, sadly, is the last newsletter that I shall be writing for my devoted, if long-suffering, readership.

And why is that you ask? Frankly, I simply feel I am written out and it is time to hand over the baton. Never fear that my enthusiasm for either Blues or the Trust is on the wane. With the current government seemingly determined to ensure that very soon no one will be able to look forward to retiring at 65, I am simply getting in quick to call it quits conveniently now I have reached Newsletter 65.

A quick calculation shows that, by my reckoning, since the first newsletter appeared in February 1999 I have penned around 300,000 words. I heard former England rugby scrum-half Kyren Bracken on the radio recently talking about his new biography. That, in hardback, was 60,000 words, so there you can see the extent of my toil down the months. Even after my small argument with that Mercedes back in November 2001, I am pleased to say the newsletter still appeared to its four to five-week schedule and I am sure it will continue to do so under the stewardship of my replacement as newsletter publisher, Robert Craven.

It's a bit of a sombre time for me, a time for reflection, and even my faithful printer has come out in sympathy – packing up for the first time when I least needed it and meaning I could not get in a mention of how we did in the LDV Vans semi-final against Swindon before the deadline. Let's hope we are still Cardiff-bound. If not, it has to be full steam ahead for promotion. We can still make it automatically.

FELLOW committee member Robert, of course, is already probably most famous for his Little Gazette website, as well as being present at just about every fixture United play of whatever hue, writing an assortment of programme material and standing in when needed as an away coach oberfuhrer. He has his finger on the Blue pulse, is a fanatical fan, more than half the age of this 'old fart' and I am sure will do the Trust proud in his new role in whatever shape or form the newsletter continues. I wish him all the best.

I certainly hope he will not hesitate, as I never have, to be critical of United should it be necessary – particularly as we approach the denouement of the Fossetts Farm saga in the coming months. I have no doubt Ron and Geoffrey will be breaking open the vintage bubbly on discovering my newsletter reign is coming to an end, as they feel I have had some unjustified goes in the past and been rather too 'personal' in certain instances. But no malice was intended. The club is moving forward far more imaginatively and things like the Family Fun Days, Kids For A Quid etc are innovative ways of trying to attract new support. And the more supporters there are in our present home venue, obviously the better. We cannot ignore even the simple fact that United are still alive, for which we must be truly grateful. And although our financial situation can still not be classed as ideal, it at least looks on the surface somewhat better than that of many other clubs in this dodgy day and age. And for that Ron and Geoffrey must take their share of the credit. What is below the surface, only time will tell. But where they and we will always digress is in the fact that, while they think of themselves as United supporters and we take it as read they genuinely do have our best interests at heart, they are businessmen first and fans second. The Trust faithful are fans first, second, third and every other number you care to think of, many of us with

decades of devotion to a cause that demands unswerving loyalty in the face of frequent bouts of consistently dire failure. So conflict with the upper echelons, while unwanted, is always possible. In fact, I feel a spot of farewell friction coming on at this very moment.....

INVITATION

Dear Ron or Geoffrey.

Please join me at my seat in the East Stand green section before the next home game and indulge in the 'pleasure' that I and those around me are now sick of enduring of being deafened by the ear-splitting volume of the sound system as it pumps out those same old awful pre-match and half-time dirges. This problem raised its ugly head early in the season, but following discussion at a liaison meeting the volume did appear to be reduced. Now it seems to have been pumped up again to levels bordering on the dangerous, with the reason seemingly being the speakers positioned in the stand roof pointed directly down at the spectators below. To enable me to converse with a female guest I brought to the Rushden game, we had no option but to leave the stand. It is impossible to talk when the row is blaring out, which is what most people want to do, and enough is enough. We cannot all head for the sanctuary of the boardroom. The options are: 1) Come and suffer with the regulars and see what I mean. 2) Ignore that and just tell the utterly thoughtless system operator to turn the sound level down NOW. 3) I reluctantly request that someone from Southend Council's health and safety department visit to take a surprise decibel level reading at a future home game with all that could entail if the reading is as loud as I and many others in my seating area know it to be. Best wishes. Yours sincerely.

Nigel Rickard.

Right, that has got that off my chest. Now on to an administration issue. However the newsletter continues, from a financial point of view it is imperative we get as many readers as possible to receive it by e-mail rather than through the post. If you are currently a postal recipient, but have access to the Internet, please do us a favour and change methods. All you need do is get in contact with secretary Terry Jeffreys on 01268-523974 or terry.jeffreys@btinternet.com and he will do the rest, including informing membership secretary Paul Yeomanson. This is a case of the more the merrier, so please do your best to help us out.

Not that anyone should think the Trust is on its uppers. Far from it. But keeping an eye on expenditure is part and parcel of the modus operandi, just as is trying to generate income. And when it comes to the latter, no Trust venture is more successful at raising cash than the SUSCT Christmas Draw. Once again, this has done very nicely for us in 2004.

THE draw was made at half-time during the Mansfield game on December 28, under the watchful eyes of Robert Craven and our treasurer Darren Posnack. The tickets were pulled out by 'celebrity guest' Michael Husbands, who had originally strolled on to the pitch thinking he was simply going to get a closer look at the Blue Belles. Anyway, he did his bit, most kind, and the lucky winners were:

1. £1,000, No. 9303, JOY FIDDMAN of Kings Lynn, Norfolk.
2. £500, No. 6180 Ms LORNA McCANN, Southend-on-Sea.
3. £250, No. 2048 Mrs G TUCK, Leigh-on-Sea.
4. Signed United shirt, No. 6137 P. K. JONES, Rayleigh.
5. Signed United ball, No. 2151 BRIAN MARIGOLD, Wickford.
6. Bottle of champagne, No. 1911 JOAN MAYES, Pitsea. Joan has very graciously suggested that we raffle her prize and donate the proceeds to the DEC Tsunami Earthquake appeal and the plan is to do this during the trip to Swansea on Friday, February 4.

So yet again the first prize went 'out of town', while the rest ended up in the hands of locals or near locals. Our profit on the venture was more than £3,000, which would not have been possible but for the efforts of all those of you who took the time and trouble to sell your tickets and all those who put their hands in their pockets to buy them. The Trust is grateful to each and every one of you. It was another great overall effort, though we cannot

rely every year on Steve Stone and Alan Perry in particular to offload the volume of tickets that they do. Alan, Terry Jeffreys, Paul Yeomanson and Richard Coxell pulled the whole thing together to ensure its success.

Even though Christmas was coming up, my East Greens compadre and Trust life member Matthew Marsh also chipped in with a £100 donation to the Trust. Most generous. In fact, the Trust salutes all those who chip in much more than their fair share without even being asked.

A huge amount of effort from the usual suspects went into making the Trust's Race Night on January 15 a major smash hit, with a follow-up already in the pipeline for later in the year. The Shrimpers may not have been looking its best in the absence of a club Hoover and some decent chairs, but Brian Dear and his staff did the event proud. I am only sorry I could not be present, as Brian's winning nag in the first race, Rickard III, would obviously have had heavy family backing. Paul Yeomanson was delighted to announce a profit on the night of £835.50, which was an amazing achievement.

Remember to start sharpening those brains as the next Trust Quiz Night is scheduled for Saturday, February 26 in the Shrimpers Bar. That is the day we entertain Bury. Info regarding booking tables, food etc can be had from Alan Perry on 01702-476458 / alanperry4@hotmail.com or Paul Yeomanson on 01702-302373 / p.yeomanson@bluevonder.co.uk

The committee met last on December 20 and January 17, with a Liaison Committee in between. Here are the best bits, starting with the LC gathering.

Helen Giles revealed enquiries had been made to try to get a televised link from Brisbane Road for the Orient game because of the ticket restrictions imposed on us. Sadly, Sky wanted £12,000 for the link, Orient wanted a cut (Hearn is such an oily git) and the Football League wanted 3% of the gate! So it was regarded as not cost effective to go ahead and, once again, our innocent supporters suffered.

Geoffrey King reported the limit had been reached on what could be done with away fans standing in the North Bank. The Trust view is that the club has to be stricter to get better co-operation from those United followers unhappy with having to stay seated.

Yeovil, it seems, have been most apologetic about the treatment our fans received there back in November, especially remembering the acknowledged excellent welcome their visitors were given at the Hall last season. It seems their safety officers went into panic mode, not a new phenomenon. Anyway issues like searching minors and the lack of cover offered when the skies opened has now been reviewed. Helen Giles has asked that any Trust members or other fans who write letters of complaint to rival clubs might like to send copies to United.

Ron's Centre of Excellence funding seems to be on the 'tardy' side to put it mildly, so the Trust may yet get re-involved in this issue.

The Shrimpers Trust Army Fund for helping in the purchase of players is being considered by the board, but appears to have received a generally favourable initial response.

IT was reported that the board will also be investigating the low level of merchandise available in the club shop at Christmas, just the time when United should be looking to maximise their income with a Mr S Claus likely to be making a substantial bulk purchase. There have been a number of recent concerns expressed about the shop of late, particularly regarding stock and opening hours, and it has to be in the club's best interests to address them sooner rather than later. We will be monitoring the situation closely.

The Trust committee get-togethers heard membership secretary Paul Yeomanson reveal that membership of the England Fans Club was now £10 a year cheaper for those on-line and wondered if this was a path the Trust might have to tread eventually. So if you do not yet have a computer, rush to the sales now.

Alan Perry reported that Quid A Goal is roaring ahead, with the take up to £2,368.05 in the wake of the Mansfield jaunt. Physio John Stannard has selected a 'cross-trainer' costing £1,500 as the next item he would

select to benefit the players and we will be arranging purchase when John lets us have all the details. What it means, of course, is we will need all the pledges made paid up at the end of the season as swiftly as possible.

Latest lucky winners of the weekly prize in the 100 (73) Club have been Valerie Frane, Geoff Manning, Gill Manning (talk about keeping it in the family!), Gordon Harvey, Paul Clancy and Gordon Harvey (again!), who are all now £36 better off or £72 in Gordon's case. But the big beneficiary has been the man who not only scooped the £350 prize in the bumper Christmas draw, but also won £36 on January 22. The jammy devil in question was Phil Cox, though, surely, there could not be a more deserving winner. Phil has spent a small fortune following United round the country over the years and, typically, received news of his good fortune over the holiday spell at the service station stop-off on the way to Kidderminster for his 805th consecutive match. That is one true Blue. All enquiries about signing up for the 100 Club at the paltry fee of £5 a month (payable by standing order) should contact AP at the locations given above.

THERE have been requests for our travel operation to start doing London pick-ups. Regrettably this is simply not going to happen, the chief reason being the hassle involved for such a small number is just too great to countenance. Remember, most clubs' travel organisations do ONE pick-up – usually at the ground. So you have to think yourself lucky that the Berry Buses stop as frequently as they do.

Concern was expressed that United were not one of those angelic clubs who have had nothing to do with agents in the second half of 2004. Our pay-out, it appears, was £35,530 on 19 transactions over the past six months, compared to zip when the previous report appeared. Personally, I loathe these parasites. But unless all footballers suddenly become possessed of far greater financial competence than I would say the majority can currently muster, then little is going to change and they and the clubs in both the Football League and Premiership will continue to be bled. Bashers also made a very interesting point. "You never see an agent on a creditors' list." Think about it.

Terry Jeffreys will be producing 200 badges to mark the Supporters Club's 75th anniversary and distributing them through the usual channels.

Following discussions with Frankie Banks, our Football in the Community sponsorship is to continue and we will not be moving funds to the Senior Shrimpers.

Bernard Riley has donated 180 shares to the Trust, which is incredibly munificent. We now have 428 in total. Mr G remembers joining the Riley family on a memorable train trip to Rotherham for a 3-2 FA Cup third round defeat back in January 1966. Our goals came from Frankie Banks and Tony Bentley, with the Millers' winner in a pea-souper a spectacular headed own-goal from Terry Bradbury.

TREASURER Darren Posnack is happy with our current financial position, while secretary Terry Jeffreys has been battling computer problems to keep well on top of his assorted duties in his usual highly efficient and inimitable style. Chris Berry's travel report also showed us in solid shape, but with one or two provisos that will become evident in the match reports to come shortly.

PY announced a membership total of 1,213 (another record), comprising 1,019 adults (70 life members) and 194 SJS. Our new life members include little Alfie Jeeves, signed up on the day of his birth earlier this month.

NEW LIFE MEMBERS: Chris Chapman, Vic Copping, Alison Crowe, Mark Ellis, Alfie Jeeves, Paul McKenzie, James Mutimer, Duncan Sheekey, Alan Smith.

WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS SINCE NEWSLETTER 64: Glenn Armstrong, Darren, Katie and Roger Boddy, Mr. D. Compton, Dan Cuddy, Sean Doggett, Martyn Dunsford, Lee Edwards, Chris Fisher, Peter Fox, Hilary Galvin, Alan Gifford, Peter Jones, Chris & Gary MacKenzie, Jennifer McIntosh, Graham Milbank, Tom Neville, Betty Palmer, Brad Pierce, Craig Rowland, Mike Smith, James Wakeling, Aron Wallis, Mark and Miriam Christine Warner, Brian Wilson, Peter Woodfield, Doug Yates.

FINAL REMINDERS: Richard Austin, Craig Bowen, Lee Clarke, Andrew Coles, Barry Coles, James Dalgarno, Chris Demetriou, Ben Duncan, Jon Moltino, Andrew Page, Dave Patten, Nigel Stuart.

We aim to approach Ron again regarding a Q & A. It is definitely time for an official one and there is no time better than the present.

Now congratulations are in order. United's club secretary Helen Giles is on the brink of getting wed, so the Trust will be sending her a card to express our very best wishes to her and her beau for the future.

OK, moving swiftly on. The lads have been busy doing their best to keep us in the promotion frame with the following performances:

SOUTHEND 1 CHESTER 0 (H, LEAGUE TWO, 17/12/04): The Shrimpers Bar was buzzing with festive cheer as Terry Jeffreys handed out his Christmas cards. Chester, though, were not in such a giving mood and it was a disappointment that a team managed by one of the game's great strikers, Ian Rush, should be so negative. Old boy Andy Harris promptly reminded us of his quality with a booking before Mark Gower thundered a great shot against a post. But that was a rare gem on a night where the lads appeared to have their minds on the coming jaunt to the nightspots of Dublin's fair city. Fredy Eastwood was sporting new silver boots, which is always a bad sign as the likes of Ben Abbey can testify. Once he went silver, the goals dried up completely and where is he now? Last I heard, mighty Gravesend and Northfleet. Fredy has been a superb acquisition for us, but a slight increase in his work rate at times would not go amiss if he wants to keep clubs like Norwich interested. Credit to the Blue Belles for going skimpy on such a bitter evening, while the threadbare nature of our attacks was revealed as we got caught offside too often and Kevin Maher had a rare nightmare with his corners. MG departed worryingly early again and Fredy followed soon after to be replaced by Dudders. We then had the longest walk off in football history by Chester's substituted Ben Davies, before the visitors got their just desserts with only three minutes to go. Harris helpfully whacked an attempted clearance into orbit and, before it could land, Dudders controlled it superbly with his right foot before tucking it into the bottom left corner from 10 yards with his left. An explosion of relief greeted a fine strike – and no wonder. Bart gave another solid performance between the sticks and collected the November SUSCT Player of the Month award. The trophy was presented by Kurtiss and Lorren Rayner and the £50 charity donation went to Cancer Research.

WYCOMBE 0 SOUTHEND 1 (A, LEAGUE TWO, 26/12/04): Fun and games for the Trust's coach travellers and just about every other Blues fan on the road thanks to familiar accident chaos on the M25. But around 1,600 of the faithful made it to a match that the two clubs wanted called off because the failure of the Wycombe undersoil heating had left the pitch a tad icy. Fortunately, the ref said 'Play On' and Fredy hammered in the only goal of the game – a left-foot corker from 18 yards – to give us the points in a contest expected to be our toughest of the holiday period. As well as enjoying a great three points, our merry Trust band were treated to a £2 fare refund each. What generosity. Pity about the disgraceful SEVEN no-shows, while three prospective trippers had to be turned away after they had tried to book by text when our coaches were already full. How many more times do I need to say it – and I have done with tedious regularity – Chris Berry does NOT take bookings by text. It is phone only!!! Drewe, now on loan at Wycombe, was denied the opportunity to face us – which was possibly worse news for us than them.

SOUTHEND 0 MANSFIELD 1 (H, LEAGUE TWO, 28/12/04): Not the greatest advert for Blues for an esteemed visitor from the Emerald Isle making a Roots Hall debut. Mansfield had been struggling and pre-match victory bets on 3-1 and 2-0 had been confidently placed. Wrong again. Less than five minutes had gone when Bart had to shine with a fine block from the dangerous and speedy Derek Asamoah. We were badly missing the invention of Mark Gower, with Tes, despite never giving up, showing he really is no left-sided midfielder. Hopes of a £1,000 bonus from the Trust's Christmas Draw swiftly evaporated and there was something horribly inevitable about the Stags' 80th-minute winner, stroked past Bart from 10 yards by Paul Warne after Andy Edwards had kept backing off challenging Simon Brown in the area. As it turned out, a fatal mistake. There was last-gasp drama as a Dudders 'equaliser' was ruled out on the say-so of a linesman. But that is three below-par home performances on the trot and maybe we should see that flag as a punishment.

SOUTHEND 3 RUSHDEN & DIAMONDS 0 (H, LEAGUE TWO, 1/1/05): With the professor over from the States and the Irish ambassador in her regular seat, it was the ideal time for Blues to get right back on track. And they did not disappoint. Luckily for us, the Diamonds were the same old Diamonds from when we drubbed them up at Nene Park in the September sunshine and we could have had six or seven. But there was a cloud over this game, as a superbly observed minute's silence was held pre-match in memory of the South-East Asia tsunami victims. When Che Wilson deservedly collected the SUSCT Player of the Month award for December from little Alfie Wall, it was revealed that he was making his charity donation to the DEC Appeal and that on this occasion the Trust was quite rightly upping the sum from the usual £50 to £200. Even the Echo approved and gave us a little write-up. Trevor Parkes, another of Blues' old sparring partners, was a late change as referee. But fortunately the proceedings were one-sided enough for him to have no chance to make his usual impact. Messrs Eastwood and Gray were 'rested', giving Tes and Dudders a chance to start up front, while Nicky Nicolau got an opportunity to make the most of Mark Gower's continued absence on the left side of midfield. Tes had missed a sitter and Mark Bentley seen an effort cleared off the line before the skipper rifled a left-foot drive into the bottom left corner of the Diamonds net on 18 minutes for his first goal of the season. Mr Maher then sent over the free-kick that saw a Dudders flick saved and Andy Edwards strike from two yards for his season's duck-buster. Mark Bentley got on the end of a Nicolau cross in the last minute to complete the scoring and keep us rolling in fourth spot. United's Tsunami disaster collection pre-match raised £2,218.46. Most meritorious. NB: Jerry Moss is alive and well!

KIDDERMINSTER 1 SOUTHEND 3 (A, LEAGUE TWO, 3/1/05): Fredy was a man on a mission after his stint on the bench and responded with a vital double to the delight of the travelling Trust faithful. Struggling Kiddie are the sort of side that has to be swept aside by promotion hopefuls and the lads did the bizzo, despite leaving it somewhat late. I was on my way to work when Fredy curled in the 20-yard opener from a free-kick. Unfortunately, I had arrived by the time the equaliser went in and the usual sad jibes began flying around SunSport from followers of lesser beings. But I was feeling much boosted three minutes later, after Nicky Nicolau had rifled in his first goal for the club. So much so that, in throwing my arms in the air on seeing the score come up on the Sky results programme, I gave myself so much backwards impetus I fell off my chair to the hilarity of all around me. Thanks to Fredy's little header, though, I had the last laugh. Another victory that, thanks to Northampton losing at Bristol Rovers, strengthened our fourth spot and kept alive the belief that that top three place is nowhere near out of reach. Nine points out of 12 over the holiday spell and we would probably have settled for that.

Regrettably, the same travel problems afflicted us as against Wycombe, with people booking seats and then selfishly not fronting. That meant Chris Berry was left turning people away when they could have joined us. Sadly, this yet again means that in future: Anyone who fails to turn up to fill a booked seat without cancelling will receive a letter informing them of a £5 fine to be paid BEFORE they can travel again. Should they repeat this action during the season, they will only be allowed to travel if they pay their fare at the time of booking. The gang of Dean Allum, Howard Banks, Arron Bloxham, Nicky Keyes, Matt Richardson and James Wakeling are already in the latter category.

BOSTON 2 SOUTHEND 0 (A, LEAGUE TWO, 12/1/05): Blues should have been well rested for this one, having had no game on the Saturday while the Pilgrims were wrestling with Hartlepool in the FA Cup and hanging on thanks to a missed injury-time penalty. A £1 on 2-2 at 14-1 seemed a shrewd wager. But maybe we were too relaxed against a side still unbeaten at home in the league or too depressed after the Cobblers' win at Grimsby the previous evening, because apparently this was Blues far from at their best. Even most of his teammates held their heads in their hands as Andy Edwards squandered a golden chance to give us the lead from just two yards out after a keeper fumble. But that was about as good as it got on a beach-like playing surface, with two second-half strikes from Boston's Andy Kirk sinking us without trace. A rare bad'un.

SOUTHEND 0 NOTTS COUNTY 0 (H, LEAGUE TWO, 15/1/05): Our recent run of home matches against teams struggling near the foot of the table has seen Blues left frequently frustrated. Let's hope we get back in the groove when the bigger fish start rolling into town in the next month. From the moment Dudders and Mark Bentley were foiled in the third minute, we just could not find that decisive, clear-cut chance. And when Adam Barrett did head home on 79 minutes, the referee spotted a foul. County's Gavin Gordon hit a post on one rare breakout, but otherwise the visitors once again had hanging on uppermost in their minds. We need

to keep possession better and we need more threat down the right flank. That means Mark Gower, with Tilly then having to decide on Carl Pettefer or Mark Bentley as Kevin Maher's central midfield partner. To cap it all we lost Bart, the PFA Player of the Month for December. At least if he is out for a week he will have time to polish his trophy. A Saturday gate of 5,304. Need I say more?

MANSFIELD 1 SOUTHEND 1 (A, LEAGUE TWO, 22/1/05): To stop for fish and chips or stick with the revolting fare on offer at Grantham Services was the big pre-trip SUSCT travel debate. I would have been in the cod camp without question had I been amongst the travelling throng. Instead I was sweating at the NoW in front of the Sky Sports results programme and not happy as we fell behind on 53 minutes. But Mark Gower, making his first start since Boxing Day, tucked in an equaliser six minutes later and we had another precious point in the locker – a good one. Credit to Darryl, standing in again and making some fine saves in what one NoW report described as 'a pulsating clash'. Not, sadly, that we got any closer to the top three as old Pineapple Head, Jason Lee, conceded the penalty that gifted Swansea a last-minute win at Boston and Yeovil scored their 21st goal of the season to come in the last 15 minutes to dispose of rock-bottom Cambridge. We've got big matches looming – and must come up trumps.

Next trips for our Trusty band of travellers take in Swansea (Fri Feb 4 – a Ron-subsidised jaunt) and Northampton (Sat Feb 19). Usual rules apply. Contact the boy Berry on 01702-558978 or 07703-898698 to book your coach seat. NO TEXTS. And remember what happens if you book and fail to appear.....

The Buy.at portal on the Shrimpers Trust website – www.shrimperstrust.co.uk - has so far raised over £120 in commission for Trust funds. If you have any purchases to make, e.g. books, CDs, electrical goods, signing up for a credit card, joining the RAC etc, have a look at our on-line shop containing entry into over 80 other connected set-ups. If you make a purchase, the Trust gets commission that will go into our Fighting Fund – the fund we hope we will never have to use. A word here too for PY, who has done a magnificent job in revamping our website and keeping it bang up to date in all the relevant areas.

I reckon even Steve Thompson knows he made a major blunder when he snubbed the chance to take over as Blues boss back in the late 90s. But while he may have shot his bolt with us, he has just landed the job of trying to haul Cambridge United out of the mire. It should make for an even more interesting visit to the Abbey Stadium on March 28 than usual – especially as the No.2 installed by said Thommo is none other than.....a certain Rob Newman.

Talking of ex-bosses, Wiggers has finally been paid off. Better late than never seemed to be the verdict on the final outcome. He should really have paid us for all the strife he caused. Oh, and Stewart Robson's lustre continues to fade, with Rushden & Diremonds' 'technical director' getting his marching orders along with poor old Ernie Tippett.

NOT that some of our old playing staff are doing much better. MARK 'THE TRAITOR' RAWLE scored the other day. Only problem for the man who thought the grass would be greener at Oxford than the Hall was it was for Tamworth v Accrington in the Conference, where he has been farmed out on loan. And who could forget ANDY WOODMAN, never the most reliable of net custodians. Playing for Stevenage, he had a clause in his contract that said he was due a renegotiated deal after 25 games. Match 24 was the recent clash at overrated Conference leaders Barnet. A Bees free-kick two minutes from the end was sailing wide when Woody decided to turn it for a corner with no home player within 25 yards of him. His defensive colleagues, apparently, were not best pleased – even less so when the resultant corner ended up in the onion bag for the only goal of the game. The result? Woody did not get his new deal and was hustled on his way by the Borough manager, who declared: "He didn't have the physical shape or the mental attitude to deserve another contract at this club." Borough replaced him with a youngster from Tottenham, who lasted nine minutes of his debut before suffering a knee injury that put him out for the season. Old defensive favourite PAT SCULLY has washed up as manager of Kilkenny City back in his native Republic of Ireland. And, finally, a recent poll taken among Premiership fans saw BRETT ANGELL voted the worst player ever to don an Everton shirt and BAZZA rated the biggest duffer ever signed by Bolton. The fat one scored on his debut against Cardiff in 1963 and made such an impression he was released on a free transfer two games later.

And so that, for me, is nearly it. It only seems like yesterday that I penned my first jottings 72 months ago, after Tony Hall, first chairman of the Southend United Independent Supporters Club formed in October 1997, asked me to do a bit of an overview for the AGM at which he then quit. The first newsletter followed and has been appearing ever since. Only Bashers, elected treasurer at that 1997 gathering, is still part of the now Trust as an official. The committee elected on February 3 1999 was: Chairman and treasurer – Bashers. Vice-chairman – Richard Coxell. Secretary and press officer – Clare Crammond. Membership secretary: Kathryn Medcalf. Committee: Chris Berry, John Campbell, Alan Caulfield, Martin Cranmer, Jerry ‘The Legend’ Moss and me, Nigel Rickard. Key topic of the evening was the removal of the ‘Independent’ from our title as we became simply the Southend United Supporters Club.

EXAMINING the issues to be faced early in 1999, many were as mundane as ever. A key bone of contention was the plumbing in the West Stand ladies toilets. Membership stood at 260, now it is not far off 1,260 – a tremendous effort for a support base of our size. Social events were just as hard to get backed. Quiz nights and Q and As were popular, but no one fancied a trip to Romford dogs. The player we sponsored was keeper Tony Henriksen, a nice lad who never quite made it. John Main was in charge of the United show then – a man who expressed amazement that we had members who actually wanted to travel to places like Carlisle, Darlington, Hartlepool etc. Again, it shows how little such people, though well meaning, understand the psyche of the genuine football supporter. While our fund-raising was nowhere near what it is today in the safe hands of Alan Perry, we cobbled together £350 to try to help keep Chester alive – and it must have worked. Our independent coach travel, now under the Berry banner, began and two members had to be disciplined for mooning at Ipswich fans on the M6. Swearing and racial abuse were reported at the Hall, as, unfortunately, they probably always will be.

Looking back through the newsletter archive it is incredible what has happened in the last six years: Alvin Martin went in March 99 and still cannot let it rest. We welcomed Alan Little and he was a duffer as well. Fans were moaning about stewards (impossible) and John Main sacked the security firm. John Adams left Blues, presumably to start on a new patio, and Peter Storrie turned up. Luckily, not for long. Anyone remember Yemi Abiodun? Newsletter Number 8 was the first to come with a stapled corner. Richard Coxell inspired the plaque erected early in 2000 on the Blue Boar and unveiled by our president Sir Teddy Taylor. Our first website was born. Terry Alderton was awarded his SUSC honorary membership. I wrote in Number 11.....‘our travel plans and costings have been hampered by a small band of selfish members who books seats on the coach to away trips and then decide they will simply not bother to turn up’. Nothing changes, Chris. Paul FitzGerald joins the committee. February 2000 and Ron Martin says there are ‘no problems’ with the new stadium plans!!! Colin Murphy quits as Burma coach (?) Newsletter 13 is the first done on my new computer. SUSC-sponsored Neville Roach plays a World Cup qualifier for.....the Cayman Islands. Blues go 10hr 20 min without an away goal. John Main describes some of the players as ‘overpaid under-achievers’. Nathan Jones is the first SUSC Player of the Season – and leaves for Brighton. The board are not happy with the content of Newsletter 14. Hurrah!

JOHN Main exits shortly before the SUSC becomes the Southend United Supporters Club Trust at an EGM on July 11 2000. Ron reveals the first Fossetts Farm drawings. Little out, Dave Webb in and Ron sponsors 10 coaches to Blackpool. Seven Trust braves, led by Craig Fillary, dive out of a plane over Oxford to raise £2,000 for funds. Donna Fillary organises our first Christmas draw. The SUSCT sponsors its first Blues fixture v Halifax in February 2001. Planning application No: SOS/00/00700/OUT FOSSETTS FARM hits Southend Council and the Save Our Southend campaign kicks off. Paul Fitz starts serious share collecting. Jerry Moss is appointed our ambassador to the Sopotians. Tragedy as referee Mike North collapses and dies in our fixture v Mansfield. Ron dislikes something in Newsletter 27 and the club refuse to print it. We go elsewhere. The first liaison meeting is held in July 2001. More tragedy as Darryl Flahavan’s brother dies in a car accident. The Trust takes on the old Junior Blues. We start Player of the Month. ‘Health’ problems see off Webby and Rob Newman takes over. The SJS is born to the Berrys. Terry Jeffreys produces his first badge. I get run over. The committee loses Jeff Allen / Cox, but gains Paul Yeomanson. Kevin Feasey shows his first Player of the Year Blue movie. Tony Richards leaves by mutual consent. Ron declares: “Supporters may not have trusted previous management, but they can trust me!” Dave Scriven kicks off Quid A Goal. February 2003 and membership under PY is at 842.

Exit Rob Newman, enter Steve Wignall. Helen Allen wins our first End of Season Draw. The Trust stand appears in the Shrimpers courtesy of PY. Tilly’s testimonial sees Sir Stanley back at the Hall. Newsletter 50,

August 2003. Rob Craven raises £270 by having his head shaved. Paul Napper's Echo column begins. Oliver Trigg's grave is rededicated in Sutton Cemetery thanks to the hard work of Richard Coxell. Bashers and Alan Perry lead the Trust gang leg waxed on the pitch to raise £1,000. We take over the Shrimpers Bar on match days. Goodbye Wiggers, hello again Webby temporarily and then Tilly and Paul Brush. The first Trust curry night is a big success. Alan Perry starts work on the 100 Club. The one and only newsletter apology appears in Number 54 after I inadvertently drop Dickie Spooner in it. Sir Stanley is caught 'dogging'. Terry Jeffreys leads our four walkers to Orient and they net the Trust £1,500. The Trust passes 1,000 members. LDV Vans Final at Cardiff, highlighted by a brilliant Trust travel operation spearheaded by CB and PY. Fossetts gets the go-ahead from Two Jags. PY introduces Trust life membership. United invite three Trust members to join the Centenary Committee. PY brings 'PayPal' to our website. Sir Stanley joins the Trust. He celebrates by getting duffed up in Dublin. Ron Martin is still saying there are 'no problems' with the new stadium plans.

SO, as you can see, the SUSCT in whatever guise has not exactly been sitting on its backside all this time. And Trusts are now so vital to the futures of so many clubs, not just SUFC. Someone has to keep an eye on the antics of the fast-buck merchants who have tried to make a quick killing in so many football towns and had to be either repelled or replaced. There is plenty of talk of League gates going up, but that alone will not keep outfits like SUFC breathing pain-free.

Exeter enjoyed their recent FA Cup days in the sun against M***** U*****, yet they would probably be in their grave but for the Grecians' Trust. *They have also showed what having some fans on the board can do!* Wrexham have faced financial catastrophe this season, via a £500,000 Inland Revenue bill, and are staring at relegation thanks to their 10-point administration deduction. Their Trust has had the begging bowl out with the usual enthusiastic response from their lower league peers and the likes of nearby big guns Liverpool. Yeovil, with whom we have already had a run-in this season, stood out like a sore thumb as being the one club who actually said they would not help by providing a signed shirt to be auctioned. Incredible for a side that has fought its way out of non-league football. Wrexham will be the focus of a 'Clubs In Crisis' mass fans' get-together at the Racecourse Ground on January 29. Brighton, Burnley, Bury, Cambridge Utd, Derby, Oxford, Grimsby (they owe the Revenue £700,000) and Rotherham are just a selection of those battling to keep their heads above water and there is no room for complacency anywhere outside about the top 10 of the Premiership. Personally, I believe a national day of action is required. The Government is said to be 'concerned'. But considering they are even less use than the proverbial chocolate fireguard when it comes to sport (Jowell, Caborn etc), I would not put too much faith in that shower.

WHILE I can say it, I want to say that United and its supporters owe a huge debt to that small number of committed fans who have nurtured our Trust into what it is today. My contribution has been pretty much restricted to these monthly outpourings. But others are engaged in some sort of Trust business seven days a week. And not for personal aggrandisement, as that familiar miniscule band of bitter and twisted snipers that every club has to endure would have you believe. But because they want to see their team, Southend United, rising above adversity and thriving as best it can in the current sea of sharks. Building up the Trust fan base and doing their utmost to push the Trust name and brand and boost its finances so it can be seen as a viable bastion against any evil intent has to be the best way of doing that, while all the time trying to work in concert with the club's powers that be for the good of SUFC. When it comes to pondering over the names to be placed on any eventual roll of honour board at Fossetts Farm, I certainly hope room will be found for the likes of Trevor Bashford, Paul FitzGerald, Terry Jeffreys, Paul Yeomanson, Alan Perry and Chris Berry, the true driving force behind the SUSCT and who have done most to see it thriving as it is now.

Plus, I cannot exit without thanking Richard Coxell, my faithful fellow envelope filler for many moons, Paul Fitz and his family for their superb stamping and envelope preparation every month and my brother, Guy Rickard, whose many quiz nights have done so much to boost the Trust coffers.

Robert, it's all yours.

Nigel Rickard (26/1/05)