



## A SCOTTISH LAD'S ADVENTURE: ALEX DUCHART



On 2nd September 2022 on a sunny afternoon in Falkirk, as a result of a bit of SUEPA investigating, two old friends met up to talk about times at Roots Hall in the 1950's. One did so with a happy tear in his eye.

Let's scroll back a little first. We'd been revisiting (mid-2022) our player database and going through it season by season, revisiting cases which had for whatever reason drawn a blank as far as player tracing was concerned. Our records go back to the 1955/56 season, a campaign when sadly the previously only two surviving players who we had tracked and joined up to SUEPA have since passed away. The 1956/57 campaign was not looking much better - of the 22 Shrimpers that played that season we knew that 18 had passed away and some further exploring sadly added another two to that total. That left just Alex Duchart and Jimmy Thomson.

Some internet trawling led us to a relatively recent article by a Falkirk FC historian, Michael White, which seemed to imply that Alex was still alive. An email to Mike (to whom we are indebted for his wonderful efforts) revealed indeed that Alex was, that he was in good spirits, and also that Mike was friends with him. Mike added that Alex was always talking about his happy memories from his time as a Shrimper, and promptly called him and he was totally bowled over by our contact. Mike arranged to meet him at his house where he was to be found with old pictures of his Southend days strewn across the table. We arranged to call whilst they were both there.

Alex started his playing career at Hibs, back then in the early 1950's a real powerhouse in Scottish football challenging head-on the dominance of the Glasgow big-two. During his time there he made just six appearances for the first team, but it was a great time punctuated by two years National Service with the RAF (*"which was like a holiday camp!"*) and running in conjunction with it a five-year apprenticeship earning a trade as a painter and decorator. He had a spell on loan with the now defunct Third Lanark playing at the iconic Cathkin Park, and the 'Thirds' wanted to sign him. But Southend manager Harry Warren got a tip-off about the left-sided winger and, at a time when there was a bit of a Scottish influx to Southend, brought Alex back with him to a then shiny new Roots Hall for the start of the 1956/57 season.

A pre-season tour in Germany and France kicked things off nicely for Alex in a team that contained the likes of Harry Threadgold (*"what a character"*), the record-breaking Arthur Williamson (most consecutive games over a six-season spell) and our record goal-machine Roy Hollis. *"Sammy McCrory was our best player, but my best mate was Crichton Lockhart and that season I was his best man as he got married at Prittlewell Church on a match day Saturday – after the wedding we went to Roots Hall to play the game and then had the reception in the evening!"* Alex recalls.

Alex made his debut on 15<sup>th</sup> September 1956 away at Exeter. It was not a great start (we lost 6-1) but he kept his place for the home game four days later v Reading and we promptly won 4-0. Three days after that we were at home again and, in front of a crowd of 14,000, Alex scored in our 1-1 draw v Crystal Palace. His chances in the first team though under new manager Eddie Perry proved to be infrequent, the in-form John McGuigan mostly making the No. 11 jersey his own, and Alex's season with us was limited to eight games and two goals. *"I played a lot for the reserves though at some wonderful grounds, including Highbury, and also Upton Park where I was awarded some golden cufflinks for my performance against a team containing John Bond and many other big names."*

*"We used to train at Priory Park, a short walk from my digs in Westcliff, and after training I often went for 'cribbage sessions' with my good friend Len Pond and some teammates. I also took up golf, with lessons being exchanged for match tickets. My wage at the time was £12 a week, just below the then maximum of £15 but still quite decent compared to average industry wages."*

*"At the end of the season I received an offer from East Fife and, wanting regular first team football I took it. I travelled back to Southend to pick up my things and Eddie made me an offer to stay. It was so frustrating, I didn't want to leave but I had made a promise to East Fife and I couldn't go back on that, so off I went."*

Alex went on to be leading scorer for East Fife, a feat he also achieved with his subsequent clubs Dumbarton and Falkirk. It was at the latter that he suffered a bad injury but came back to score four goals at the end of the season. He then made the move briefly south again to play for a team near Hayes before going back up to Scotland to end his career with Inverness Caledonian Thistle - where an injury sustained in a car crash at the age of 32 sadly put an end to his playing days. After football Alex took up his painting and decorating trade, *"I was never short of work, trading on my name as a footballer."*

A few years ago, his old Southend teammate Jimmy Thomson called him saying he was in Falkirk, and they met up for a good reminiscing session but have not stayed in touch. It is our SUEPA task now to do what we can to see what happened to Jimmy, a couple of years older than Alex, but for now at least Alex, at age 89, is newly installed as our oldest member (just pipping recent joiner Eddie Firmani). He is also now as far as we know the former Shrimper who played for the club the longest time ago.

Andy Leeder, August 2022

Postscript: we did indeed in the end trace Jimmy Thomson, who at the time of updating this article for the Trust website (September 2025), is the oldest SUEPA member. Sadly, however, by then Alex had passed away (in December 2022 after a short illness) although shortly after contacting Alex we did managed to find and send to him an original match programme from his SUFC Roots Hall debut.