



“you just don’t
seem to understand”

BAGGIE SHORTS

ISSUE 9 - SEASON 2016/17
WEST BROMWICH ALBION LONDON SUPPORTERS CLUB

Welcome...

...to the latest edition of Baggie Shorts. At the time of writing, we have reached the magic 40 points and have arrived at that point in the season when Sam Field gets to play for three minutes and the usual doubts set in.

In an effort to illuminate those doubts, we've commissioned Albion-nut and statistician Jon Want to analyse the empirical data (see The Pulis Effect: What the Stats Say). Jon's appearance in these pages is thanks largely to the dogged determination of Glenn Hess, for it was Glenn's plan to lure Jon to The Exmouth Arms and thence to cause his inebriation by the liberal application of ales, the better to secure his cooperation. In the event, such extreme measures were redundant, as Jon was more than happy to share his work with London Baggies. We hope to carry many more of his articles and you can check out all of his stuff on his website at: jonwant.com

Jon's piece, like everything else here, was written before the crushing of Arsenal, so appropriate celebrations of that wondrous performance will have to await the next issue (please let us have your contributions). There is, however, a bit of an Arsenal flavour, with Aidan Rose's bitter-sweet reminiscences (I mean his Emirates match report) and Peter Thursfield's Q&A. Among other things, Aidan remembers the chastening 5-2 defeat at Highbury (27 August 2002) and, as I was there, I can't resist adding my own abiding memory. As we waited for Wenger's magnificent physical specimens to take the field, we were treated, on the massive screen, to a run down of the entire Gunners squad: "Goalkeeper, David Seaman" [Highbury Library style subdued acclamation]; "Ashley Cole" [HLSSA]; "Martin Keown" [HLSSA]' etc., etc., through all six reserves, then the entire coaching staff, the medical

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department and the dietician. Having celebrated virtually every member of Arsenal Inc., the announcer said "and a big welcome to our guests, West Bromwich Albion" and then the referee blew the whistle and the carnage commenced. Happy Days!

Happy Days also for Patrick Fahey (The story of an Executive Steward), who tells us how he secured his dream match day job and for Anthony Nash (Football Through The Ages: In search of the Golden Age) who shares his memories of his first Albion away day and reflects on what's happened since.

Another development too late for this edition is the shock departure of Jonas Olsson. The significance of Jonas' contribution to the establishment of Albion as a Premiership Club is universally accepted, but London Baggies have particularly fond memories of his courage, warmth and all-round greatness and these will be shared in the next issue.

For the moment, enjoy and, please, let us have your: feedback; brickbats; articles; photos; and anything else you think should be here.

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A DAY IN THE LIFE OF AN ALBION FAN AGED 13 AND A HALF

by **Anthony Nash**

November 26th 1955 is a typical dull Saturday morning in the Black Country. But on the upside I am off to the back of beyond - Huddersfield. Why you may ask?

Well the Baggies are playing there. My very first away match. Wow! So it's up early, scoff one of mum's fantastic breakfasts and away I go.

Twenty minutes later after a brisk walk I arrive at the haven of train-spectators and Baggies alike; Rolfe Street, on the LMS line, was the gateway to everywhere (Hawthorns Halt and West Bromwich were GMR). Ticket in hand I boarded the train and found a seat very easily in one of the eight carriages. All the fans were off with a blast of the whistle.

A new experience for this young boy travelling through the Black Country; Tipton, Dudley Port, Wolverhampton - excuse the expletive - and on to Stafford, Crewe and beyond, Cheshire and Outer Manchester, Stockport and eventually through the long tunnel into Huddersfield.

The weather is now a lot better so the walk to the Leeds Road ground doesn't take long. A number of yellow buses pass us carrying local supporters waving their blue and white scarves. The ground is open on one corner, giving a panoramic view of the nearby hills, covered in fans walking to the game. I have never forgotten this sight.

So, back to the game. Of course there was a clash of colours, so all

change for us. White shirts, black shorts. Our team was:

Jim Sanders, Stuart Williams, Len Millard, Jimmy Dudley, Joe Kennedy, Ray Barlow, Frank Griffin, Maurice Setters, Graham Williams, Ronnie Allen, Johnny Nicholls.

What a line-up! Attendance 18,731!

A cracking game ensues, with both teams giving their all and chances missed all round. Then it happens. Baggies concede a penalty. Vic Metcalf puts the ball in the back of the net. Jim Sanders is beaten. We never recover. The Terriers hold out for a 1-0 win. Captain Bill McGarry is well pleased. (The Terriers also won the return game on April 7 1956 2-1. Roy Horobin scored our goal. The crowd was 16,141.)

Though they played well that day Terriers were relegated to Division 2 at the end of the season coming second bottom on 35 points. The Villa just stayed up on the same points but more goals.

So it is a somewhat subdued journey home, but a very enjoyable day for me even if the result wasn't what we hoped for. My mood im-

proves when I get home; mum has a lovely hot meal waiting. No microwaves in those days just on a plate, over a saucepan of water, lid on, keep it warm, what more can you ask for, thanks mum, God bless yer.

The following home match makes up for it! We beat Portsmouth 4-0 with two goals from bandy-legged Maurice Setters, and one each for Frank Griffin and George Lee.

But it isn't a particularly good period for the Baggies. Between November 5 and December 31 we lose 7, win 3, draw 1. Against Villa we draw one and lose one. Same against Wolves. We lose both matches against Blues. We finish the season in 13th place, but climb the table over the next few years.

More than half a century on, I still follow the Baggies, albeit from afar. Quite how far? Well, I live about 8 miles from the Huddersfield ground! Went back there a couple of years ago to see us win 2-0 in the FA Cup Third Round. So, you see, we can win at Huddersfield!

ARSENAL 1 WEST BROMWICH ALBION 0 26TH DECEMBER 2016

by **Aidan Rose**

My lifelong relationship with The Arsenal began wonderfully at Wembley in 1969. Third division Swindon Town tore soon to be double winners Arsenal to shreds with Don Rogers ripping their defence apart on the ploughed up pitch.

Then came my introduction to Highbury. Those two Art Deco stands were probably the finest examples of football stadium architecture and remain there as part of a luxury flat development occupied by their nouveau riche supporters. But that ground evoked dreadful memories of those FA Cup semi-finals. The first, against Bobby Robson's Ipswich, was drama but the second against QPR was unforgivable.

In 1994 I moved to London and bought a flat on the top of a hill, only to find that, out of the corner of the bedroom window, I could see Highbury. I swore not to go there until The Albion got promoted.

We did, of course. But they were The Invincibles. They played The Blues the game before us and I watched the highlights before spending two days on the toilet. They ripped us apart scoring five but we got two back. OK, they were brilliant at that time but their supporters were so

arrogant and continued to be so as they started their decline from winners to also rans.

One highlight was Darren Carter's 76th minute belter at The Hawthorns in 2005, another was Earnshaw's late equaliser in 2004. But the highlight of my Albion watching was the 3-2 win at Ashburton Gove in 2012. Away supporting does not get any better.

We have also seen the dreadful cynicism of Arsenal players. Remember the Santi Carzola drop poleaxed in the box when Stephen Reid was nowhere near him - an injustice which was all over the press the next day. Also the League Cup tie when a red card was given to Jonathon Thomas in a League Cup and to cap that night off at the final whistle they played The Who's 'The Kids Are Alright'. Did I not like that.

So, we played Arsenal at their place on Boxing Day sandwiched by capital fixtures at Chelsea and Tottenham. We lost one-nil to a team of superstars that didn't seem to have much of a Plan A let alone a Plan B. Ok, they were better than us but if they want to watch better football I suggest they take a ride east on the W3.

THE STORY OF AN EXECUTIVE STEWARD

Patrick Fahey tells us how he got the gig at
the **Tony Brown suite**

Born in the year 1960, my late primary school years were filled with The Albion being at or close to Wembley on a regular basis, which led to an easy choice of team to follow as I discovered the world around me.

By 1996, when I married, I had shared in the suffering of our worst decline, although, by this time, resurgence was in the air. Unfortunately, the financial commitments of marriage, mortgage and kids meant that I could not justify going to the games. So I had to make do with TV and press coverage.

The return to the big time in the early part of this century was just too much. I had to be more closely involved, so I wrote to the club in the close season prior to our return to the top flight asking for a job - any job, on a match day, which would get me a glimpse of play, a whiff of the turf, anything just to be there.

I was asked to attend a recruitment event, one Wednesday evening, in one of the suites in the Handsworth stand. I travelled in my business suit (from the orange hell-hole where I had had to spend the day) and made

my way past walls adorned with former glories (some of which I had seen in person). I reached the suite in something of a misty-eyed blur, but pulled myself back together when I was asked: 'Are you here for the match day job interviews?' 'I am' was my eager reply. I could see that my tie and general demeanour were under scrutiny and I was pleased I hadn't ditched the suit. 'Have you considered an Executive Steward role, £5 a match more and a pie!' Where do I sign I replied and I have been working in that capacity in the Halfords Lane ever since. The pie and £5 are ok but putting on the club blazer is the best reward!

The mortgage has now almost gone - so have the kids come to that and finance for a season ticket could be easily found especially given the very reasonable prices we charge. Maybe something for the future but for now I am happy doing my bit to help the club project a positive image to everyone who comes through the door to collect tickets, access the lounges or pull on the shirt!

COYB!

FOOTBALL THROUGH THE AGES

Anthony Nash goes in search of the Golden Age

One of the most enjoyable aspects of retirement and return to my native Black Country has been my re-acquaintance with friends with whom I had lost touch over the decades, particularly one group whose commonality was a shared love of the Albion. On our reunion the conversation naturally turned to our favourite football club and our respective watching habits. Two continue to be season ticket holders; another couple attend, like myself, only sporadically; while the remaining three haven't been to the Hawthorns in twenty years or more, as they think the modern game compares unfavourably with the football of their youth.

It's a common gripe among many of the older generation that football was better in days gone by. Memory is notoriously selective, so my aim here is to be as subjective as possible in a quest to dis-

cover why some fans so disparage the modern game. Nostalgia plays an enormous part of course. We are naturally inclined to find the version of what first captured our affection, be it football or music, or whatever to be the best. But this still fails to explain why some fans, who may have once lived and breathed the game, at some point hit the off switch to spend their Saturdays at the shopping mall. Has football declined over the years? Let us attempt to find some hard facts. Athletics records have been broken exponentially over those years, so it would be unrealistic to suggest that the fitness and stamina of professional footballers has not grown commensurately, particularly as people tended to be stronger in Victorian and Edwardian times. So, attaining today's fitness levels would not have been a problem and, of course, athletic prowess does not necessarily make for a more skil-

ful player. Unfortunately, we have little visual record of the game our great-grandfathers watched; the fragments of newsreel from pre-war days inadequate for any deep insight into style and tactics. Footage from my youth is also thin on the ground. Highlights are inconclusive, a full ninety minutes is required to gain a comprehensive picture. The snag here is that any unabridged match record that survives will almost invariably be of one of the two major fixtures on the calendar, namely England v Scotland and the FA Cup Final, where Wembley's unique playing surface and big occasion nerves often had an adverse effect on the quality of play.

I recently watched a CD of the 1954 cup final and thought the pace of the game was a little quicker than I expected while the frequency with which possession changed sides would have exasperated today's coaches. I was also surprised that the 1970 World Cup between England and Brazil was not nearly as enthralling as I remembered. Such is the fallibility of memory. Hard evidence that does exist comes in the form of many old photographs of matches played on appalling pitches. These gluepots, the norm on most grounds for around three

months of the season, would have meant even the most gifted players would have needed to give it some welly most of the time. Undoubtedly the sodden leather case-ball would have spent more time airborne.

What of the players' views? Consider these words of a former England goalkeeper.

"It's been more than 20 years since I finished my playing career but I am not however, one of the old school who believe that the game was better in my time than it is today. How often have we heard the grumble that football isn't what it used to be. Take it from me that just isn't true. People were complaining about the standard of play when I started 42 years ago. I think our international sides of today play more as a team than they did in my day. Then there were too many individualists playing for themselves, for their own personal reputations. On the other hand I don't think the present day players train as hard as we did. I don't think they put as much effort into the game." These are the words of Dick Pym, who appeared in three Cup Finals in the 1920s, which appeared in an interview published in 1955.

Now consider the reminiscences of a then 82 year old Jack Hillman, (quite a character and worthy of a google search) speaking in 1952. *"Today's game is a long way behind the quality of before the First World War. The alteration of the offside law and the adoption of the centre-half as a third full back has completely robbed the game of the forwards' dribbling ability."* His opinion is endorsed by contemporary and fellow international Frank Forman, who began his playing career in 1894 and must have been familiar with the organised game from its infancy. He writes: *"We used to make a fetish of ball control. Nowadays too many teams are in a hurry to get rid of the ball. Defence is different. I always played as an attacking centre-half with the wing-halves behind me. They used to take care of the wingers while the full-backs controlled mid-field. Unlike today's centre-halves I used to get plenty of goals. We old 'uns are told we lacked speed but I don't believe that. On the whole our style of play was more attractive."*

While the views of Billy Wedlock, who appeared in the 1909 Cup Final, are strangely prescient: *"Nowadays it seems to me the team plan comes first, and all the time. The young player is allowed*

to develop his own individuality only if it conforms to the general plan."

Trawling through the archives reveals reams of such material from footballers, either already deceased or in their dotage while I was still teething and the only conclusion to be drawn is that nearly all would have been wearing glasses tinted with varying shades of rose. However, I've little doubt that the better players from any era would prosper in today's game, only the lack of natural pace a hindrance to any adaptability.

So what of the media past and present? Drawing on articles pulled from the 1950s reveals a scathing criticism of the game. The England team comes in for particular vitriol, as it dawned on people that our pre-eminence in the game had been challenged by humiliation at the hands of the USA, a chastening tour of South America and evisceration by the Hungarians. The domestic game also came under fire. One noted commentator, himself a former international, moaned that Arsenal's winning of the 1952-53 title was so dull, because there were no outstanding teams that season. (Strangely, a complete reversal of

the current claim that the Premiership is dominated year in year out by the same moneyed elite.) One headline from the same author screamed "Where have all the stars gone?" This, in a time when Stanley Matthews and Tom Finney were in their pomp (that's the same Tom Finney of whom Bill Shankly proclaimed "could play today with his overcoat on". In fairness, both Matthews and Finney would later write (in their respective autobiographies) of being spellbound by the Brazilians at the 1950 World Cup, where everything about their hosts' playing style, training, technique and even their kit, seemed "miles ahead of us".

So, despite all the dewy-eyed nostalgia, contemporary writing would seem to undermine the very idea of a golden age of soccer in the post war boom years and I tend to go along with this notion. My own personal favourite recollections span the decades and the continents from Real Madrid flickering in their monochrome pomp on our tiny TV, Clodoaldo's dance hall shimmy, total Cryuff, the best engine room of all time in Platini, Tigana, Giresse and Fernandez to Maradona's slalom through the English defence. Wondrous stuff indeed.

And yet I will readily admit that the present is well capable of creating moments one feels privileged to have witnessed. Zlatan Ibrahimovich's opener for Manchester United at the Hawthorns this season was a strike of such perfection in both approach and execution, that, if the footage had been converted to linear form it would have graced any Roy of the Rovers storyboard. But I must temper such praise with the view that I find the Premiership unremittably dull. With such massive improvements to playing kit, boots, ball and pitches, professional football should be better than ever. That it is not nearly as exciting as it could be can be attributed to over-cautious coaching that has reduced the game to the artistic equivalent of painting by numbers. We are desperately missing maverick entertainers such as Cantona and Gascoigne. While a compilation of a season's offerings will throw up some absolute gems, the bottom line is that too many of those expensively purchased minutes are taken up by mind-numbing interchanges of unproductive passing. It's why I now choose to get my jollies from the non-league game where players are not sufficiently capable of closing a game down

or “parking the bus” and tend to play more expansively because livelihoods are not dependent on results. Conversely professional coaches and players alike make much of “keeping a clean sheet”, a phrase I have come to equate with the sound of fingernails on a blackboard. Gentlemen, the ob-

ject of the game is not primarily to prevent the other team scoring. It is to score at least one more goal than the opposition. If we ever achieve this paradigm shift then I think we may well indeed look forward to a golden age of soccer, but don’t hold your breath.

- Foot(y) Notes -

THE FURTHER ADVENTURES OF TIM SCHADENFREUDE

Our Karma Korrespondent, Glenn Hess, reports that Mr Timothy Sherwood (formerly a top, top manager at a top, top club) has latterly been earning his crust as Director of Football at Swindon Town.

Things have not been going well and, alas, Tim’s renowned self-control was recently tested beyond destruction by referee Mark Brown and, in consequence, Mr Sherbert received a two-match ban. The good news for the ailing Robins, who have lost seven of their last ten games, is that they won in Mr Tim’s absence, on both occasions!

Mr Hess invites further scurrilous anecdotes that reflect poorly upon persons or entities that have, at any stage in living memory, offended against the Albion. Indeed, he (and all of us at Baggies Towers) would welcome any vaguely relevant stories you might have – please send them to Toby Grainger (toby.grainger@hotmail.com).

THE PULIS EFFECT: WHAT DO THE STATS SAY?

by **Jon Want**

West Bromwich Albion and, consequently, the reputation of Tony Pulis amongst many Albion fans, have undergone a dramatic turnaround in the last six months. But how do the stats bear this out?

For me, the lowest point of the Pulis reign came on 23rd January when a dire performance saw Albion throw away the opportunity to record a first league double over our nearest and, for those of my generation, bitterest rivals, since 1964. And to finish the season with nine winless games was another indication that all was not well, and the signs of discontent from the terraces were becoming more apparent with many opting not to renew season tickets last summer.

Eight months later, things could not be more different. Pulis’s name is being sung around the stadium as the Baggies have reached the 40-point mark before the end of February, with a full 12 games to go, and the football has been entertaining!

So what has changed?

In my opinion, one of the key differences between this season and last has been the speed of transition of Albion’s play from defence to attack. The introduction of Nacer Chadli and Matt Phillips to the team has made a massive difference to the pace of the Baggies’ attack, and their ability to get the ball forward quickly.

The statistics don’t really bear out this dramatic change, although the fact that the average number of short passes has dropped slightly, and the average number of long passes increased, could indicate a slightly more direct approach.

	2015-16	2016-17
Average passes per game (successful)	322.6 (70.1%)	308.9 (70.0%)
Average long passes per game (successful)	70.0 (39.7%)	71.5 (40.6%)
Average short passes per game (successful)	252.6 (78.5%)	237.3 (78.9%)

Another stark contrast this season is Albion's goal tally - this stands at 36 from 26 games so far this term as compared to 34 for the whole of last season. However, their average number of shots per game is broadly similar to 2015/16 indicating that the Baggies have become more clinical in their finishing - their goals to shots conversion rate has risen from 8.7% last season to 13.3% in 2016/17. In fact, only Chelsea and Arsenal have a better shot conversion rate in the Premier League this season.

One of the most remarkable statistics of this season is that Albion have not lost to a team below them in the table since mid-September and only one of their forty points this sea-

Team	Goals	Shots	Conversion Rate
Chelsea	55	372	14.8%
Arsenal	54	389	13.9%
Baggies	36	271	13.3%
Man City	51	402	12.7%
Liverpool	55	445	12.4%

son has come against a team in the top six - the draw against Spurs at the Hawthorns.

Compared to the results in the equivalent fixtures last season, Albion's points per game average was not that different between the top six and the rest, whereas this season, we are averaging more than two points per game against "the rest", which is nothing short of remarkable.

	Pld	W	D	L	F	A	Pts	PPG
2016-17 Record (as at end Feb)	26	11	7	8	36	32	40	1.54
2016-17 Record vs Top Six	7	0	1	6	2	16	1	0.14
2016-17 Record vs The Rest	19	11	6	2	34	16	39	2.05

2015-16 Equivalent Fixtures ¹	26	7	10	9	22	32	31	1.19
2015-16 Equivalent vs Top Six ²	7	1	4	2	5	11	7	1.00
2015-16 Equivalent vs The Rest	19	6	6	7	17	21	24	1.26

¹Fixtures against relegated clubs from last season compared to those against promoted clubs this season.

²These are the equivalent fixtures against this season's top six.

So why are the results against the top sides this season so poor in comparison to 2015/16?

One statistic that sheds some light on this is that the average shots per game in the matches against last season's top six were similar to the season average whereas, this season, they are markedly lower.

	2015-16	2016-17
Average shots per game - all matches	10.2	10.4
Average shots on target per game - all matches	2.8	3.3
Average shots per game - vs top six	9.7	6.6
Average shots on target per game - vs top six	2.3	1.3

This suggests that Albion are taking a much more cautious approach against the top sides this season, and that it isn't working, whereas the performances and results against the top sides last season were some of the most encouraging. To me, the statistics are too compelling to be insignificant - there is a definite change in approach to these games. I always had a sense of frustration last season when I saw Albion show their quality by taking a positive approach against the top sides, while sitting back against the weaker opposition. This season, Pulis seems to have reversed that approach which has resulted in a fantastic set of results against "the rest" but a dismal return from the matches with the top six.

Given Albion's improved finishing ability that the statistics above demonstrate, surely a more positive approach against the top sides will lead to an upturn in those results, and maybe that European qualification spot could be in reach.

MEMORABLE AWAY DAYS: MIDDLESBROUGH 1981

by Paul Probyn

There are many away trips that are a great experience at the time, but after a while they merge with all the rest. But others stick in the memory, down to the last detail, for the rest of your life - usually for all the wrong reasons. Let me tell you about Middlesbrough v West Brom, March 28th 1981.

I went to the game with my best mate. He is now the senior partner in a major West Midlands law firm, so I will refer to him simply as "Pete" to save

him professional embarrassment. We met up recently and shared reminiscences of a day - actually two days - that started unremarkably, boarding the Sealadair coach in Carters Green. One more stop, at the then-infamous public toilets in Walsall, and then non-stop to Middlesbrough, by which time we were all pissed and bursting. I should explain, for the benefit of younger readers, that alcohol was not banned on football coaches, in fact we were expected to carry at least a four-pack on board.

We arrived at Ayresome Park early, before the turnstiles opened. As we walked down Ayresome Park Road from the chippie, past the home turnstiles, we were welcomed by a Boro fan with the witty enquiry "Think you can wear that f*****g scarf round here?" We were so pissed that we laughed in response and threw him a few chips. He must have concluded we were dangerously mad and didn't pursue the argument.

The game itself was memorable mostly for Brendan Batson scoring a rare goal, but unfortunately his header put Boro in front. Despite having a stellar line-up, Albion lost two-one, with Cyrille Regis wandering around aimlessly, and Bryan Robson scoring our only goal in a 2-1 defeat. My only other memory of the game was the Albion fans turning towards our ever-menacing Boro counterparts and singing "We're gonna get our f*****g heads kicked in".

Back on the coach after the game, we were warned to crouch down as the Boro fans had a penchant for heaving bricks through the windows of opposition coaches, but a police motorcycle escort saw us safely out of town. So far, a pretty routine away trip of that era, but then the coach broke down somewhere in the wasteland that is Yorkshire. We imagined naively that Sealadair would arrange for a local coach firm to rescue us, but when the driver eventually found a phone (this was long before mobile phones of course) he gave us the

news that a replacement coach was being sent from West Bromwich and would be with us in four hours.

This meant arriving back home long after closing time, so Pete had a "bright idea". His sister lived in Leeds: we could hitch there, have an evening on the town, and borrow money from her to get the train home on Sunday morning. A flawless plan! And it started well, as a Huddersfield fan soon gave us a lift into Leeds. (Again, for the benefit of younger readers, hitch-hiking was considered normal and pretty safe in those days. I had hitched to places like Glasgow and Scarborough and back, without either me or the generous drivers being raped or murdered).

When we arrived at Pete's sister's in Headingley she was out with her boyfriend, but her flatmate made us welcome and we headed out to blow most of our remaining cash on a Chinese meal and a few beers. Sadly for us, though, his sis didn't come back home that night, and with no way of contacting her, and still hundreds of miles from home, we had to change our plans the next morning. We walked into the city centre, stopping to look for cash in every phone box that we passed (remember when there were no cashpoints, debit cards or credit cards?) but this yielded only a few pennies. We headed to the railway station anyway, as I'd read somewhere that you could write a cheque on any piece of paper and it would be as legal as one torn from a cheque

book. The clerk in the booking office looked at us as if we were mad and sent us off with a flea in our ear. Plan B was to hitch back to West Brom, but there were no friendly Huddersfield fans this time. Our belief that Leeds was full of w*****s was confirmed by two fruitless hours spent, thumbs out, at the start of the M1. By now it was afternoon, and we had to think about getting to work the next morning. Plan C saw us heading to the coach station. Coaches were a lot cheaper than trains, but we didn't have enough money to get all the way home on one. So we pooled our remaining resources and bought two tickets to Burton-on-Trent. My ruse was to pretend we were asleep when the coach got to Burton, and stay on it to Birmingham. But Pete was worried that such dishonestly could get him struck off by the Law Society, so we disembarked in Burton, a pretty depressing place, stinking like a brewery, late on a Sunday afternoon.

Back to hitching, and we were soon heading down the A38 with a friendly old man. But he wasn't going all the way to Brum, and dropped us off in Barton-under-Needwood, a name that will be forever seared on my memory. It's the Hotel California of the West Midlands, a place you can never leave. It was getting dark, and after a while we realised that none of the few passing drivers was going to pick us up. In desperation, we phoned Pete's parents in Birmingham, asking for a lift. This, though, was not an era when parents molly-

coddled their offspring into middle age, and Pete's mum told us in no uncertain terms that they were busy watching Poldark and if we had no money we should borrow some from a police station (another urban myth, like being able to write a cheque on any scrap of paper).

Our last resort was to call a minicab. One duly turned up, and we continued down our Via Dolorosa, the A38. In the course of conversation we casually asked the driver if passengers ever ran off without paying. "I had one last week. I ran after him and kicked the s**t out of him." He looked as if he meant it, so when we arrived in Black Lake, 36 hours after setting off, Pete had to remain a hostage in the cab while I went up to my flat to get a cheque book.

We still look back on it as the best away trip of our lives. In the era before mobile phones, credit cards and all the other aspects of progress that make our lives so much easier now, we were never too far from some crisis or other, but life had an exhilarating rawness that we took for granted.

For the record, our team that day was:

Godden	Robson
Batson	Mills
Statham	Barnes
Bennett	Deehan
Wile	Regis
Moses	



Peter Thursfield

Brighton based Peter still keeps the faith despite temptations round the corner and Burton.

Why The Baggies?

Well nearly all my family are Villa fans. Fortunately my Dad started working for Salter Springs in West Bromwich, and as their social club was close to the ground we could go there on a Saturday lunch time and I was taken to see the Albion for my first game, and I was hooked! Have since converted my Dad!

First ever game?

27.03.1971 v Manchester City - finished 0-0. Second game 10.04.1971 v Coventry City - finished 0-0! It took me over 40 years before I saw two consecutive 0-0 draws again. [He must be an accountant, Eds]

Worst tat from the club shop?

I must admit I am the proud own-

er of a red and yellow bar code shirt, and I also own a West Brom Park Drive Cigarette Box!

Worst away pie?

Fulham - their special pie was a tasteless potato covered monstrosity. [It was brilliantly name The Cottage Pie but was as bad as Newcastle's Mag Pie. Eds]

Best Albion away strip?

I am a huge fan of green and yellow stripes.

Favourite away trip?

I love Goodison Park - the last large old fashioned proper football ground in my opinion. I went to Everton a few years back with Chris Wallett and Shane Harper. We flew to the game on British Airways from Gatwick to



Best visitors to The Hawthorns?

Man Utd fans sing all through the game and know more than one song.

Most Memorable Away Game?

3-2 Away win against Arsenal at the Emirates. We missed a penalty in the first half, but for the first 20 minutes of the second half we played some of the best football I have ever seen! They even agreed on Match of the Day!

Manchester return. Then had a scouse cabbie look after us all day. Fantastic hospitality. And we drew 2-2.

Best ever game at The Hawthorns?

Three come to mind, the 2-0 win over Palace to get us promotion for the first time to the Premier League, the 2-0 win over Portsmouth for the great escape, or the 5-5 against Man United.

Best ever Albion chant?

Artim Sakiri he scores from corner kicks,
Artim Sakiri he thinks that Beckham's shit
Artim Sakiri
Lobbing Seaman all day