

## Travelling in Style

Keith Sladen

Barry Kilby's piece in September's magazine is straight from my era of memory. I can bring the same images immediately to mind, especially going to matches with dads and their mates, most of whom tolerated youngsters tagging along provided, of course, they were "seen and not heard" and were prepared to wait patiently cramped in the back of the van outside the Fighting Cocks on Red Lees Road with kick-off time creeping ever closer!

An away match was an adventure indeed and, like Barry, we knew instinctively what not to divulge to mums on our return home! Barry made the journey to Aston Villa by coach, but many away venues had railway stations close by, often with the quirkiest names – Wadsley Bridge, Kirkdale, Mill Hill, Witton.\* Where were these places?

Until the early 1960s they were the destinations for supporters' "specials", advertised by British Railways in the previous week's Turf Moor programme, but to my young mind they showed no resemblance or connection to the town or city bearing the name of the club or the venue of their ground. What's more, they left Burnley from stations mysteriously named "Barracks" and "Manchester Road" and hardly ever picked up at Todmorden.

By the mid-sixties, vandalism had put paid to supporters' "specials" so a rail journey to an away match meant quite a pricey scheduled service. Nevertheless, a train trip seemed somehow quite stylish and independent, occasionally allowing us to follow in the slipstream of some of Burnley's most dedicated supporters. They traversed the country by train and, quite incredibly, they never missed a match, home or away. Their knowledge of timetables and the geography of away venues was encyclopaedic. To add to the thrill, they always seemed to be privy to often astonishing and occasionally lurid "behind-the-scenes" information about players and club which, of course, never reached the public prints!

Sadly, hooliganism cursed football as the sixties progressed. I first became aware of it at Elland Road in September 1967 when, towards the end of the game, our small band realised that a group of Leeds "supporters" had exited their notorious "scratching shed" at the opposite end and re-entered the ground behind us on the steep cinder-banking (you could hardly call it terracing) – Elland Road's shabby version of Anfield's Kop. With the match in full swing, they brazenly attacked us with kicks and punches, thankfully nothing more. We escaped unscathed but it was a quite frightening and unnerving experience, sadly the sign of a much more serious trend and something for which we (and probably Burnley fans in general) were quite unprepared.

After the FA Cup Final in 1962, I had to wait until November 1968 for my next visit to London. This was the game at QPR, at the end of that famous sequence of wins when a group of younger players were given the opportunity to shine. They did it in some style, and the highlight, the 5–1 victory over Leeds United in October, has never faded from the memory and will always find its way into those "Matches to Remember".

I funded the trip to London through paper-round earnings and by selling an unwanted train set, which in retrospect should have been cherished and passed down the generations. Nevertheless, at the time

I was well satisfied with the deal as it bought me a ticket on the rather plush and futuristic Inter-City express from Manchester Piccadilly to London Euston, covering the distance in a mind-boggling two hours and forty minutes. Can we say the present-day service (55 years later) is much of an improvement?

Incredibly, this left time for sight-seeing before the 3pm kick-off and I can distinctly remember sauntering along Downing Street right up to the door of No. 10 freely and unchallenged. With a Yorkshire-born Prime Minister in office (Harold Wilson) I felt strangely proud. Again, this is where the split loyalty kicked in. I never had the slightest problem supporting a Lancashire football team, much to the confusion of friends, acquaintances, colleagues right down the years, but when the occasion demanded I could (and still can) switch without embarrassment to the white rose!

Burnley won the match at Loftus Road that day, but it was the end of the winning sequence. They struggled against Swindon Town in the semi-final of the League Cup, and even before Christmas 1968 suffered heavily at Maine Road (0–7) and Elland Road (1–6), both of which I was unfortunate enough to see.

Loftus Road was then and is still a tight, compact stadium with the terraces hugging the pitch and the stands rising vertically on all sides. Matches there seem to have that extra edge, and woe betide a visiting team which allows the hosts dominate with their raucous support right behind them.

In those days the ground was almost literally next door to the BBC Television Centre. I quickly realised why “Grandstand” always seemed to carry a studio match report on every QPR home game! White City Stadium was close by as well, a surprising venue used during the 1966 World Cup only a couple of years earlier.

Looking at the run of results just before the sequence, there were some notable victories – home wins against Chelsea and Manchester United (in their European Cup winning year) – but maybe a more perceptive Harry Potts saw the need to refresh. He took the plunge against West Ham United early in October. Derek Wallis in the *Daily Mirror* was maybe as taken aback as the rest of us, as was West Ham’s usual classy line-up, including Martin Peters, Bobby Moore, Trevor Brooking and Geoff Hurst (to name but four) but also Billy Bonds and Harry Redknapp as well!

*“West Ham from the upper reaches of the First Division were trampled underfoot by a Burnley team more at home amid the anonymity of the Central League. Eight first-team players, including Brian O’Neil, Andy Lochhead and Ralph Coates ... missed the match. Yet the young and comparatively inexperienced Burnley lads produced football of such high quality that West Ham’s shortcomings were cruelly exposed. It certainly showed that experience isn’t everything. Courage and a willingness to run can sometimes prove a good substitute. Burnley gained confidence from an eighth minute lead given them by a sharp header from John Murray, 20, from a Frank Casper header.”*

**Derek Wallis – Daily Mirror, 9th October 1968**

Around this time, my dad worked in Burnley, not a stone’s throw from Turf Moor, for a family firm specialising in re-fitting hotels and pubs in and around Burnley – for him a dream job, with landlords

generous in their hospitality. It also brought him into contact with certain players who liked to relax after training with a quiet glass of lager. He became especially pally with John Murray. Murray was a decent player who played a leading part in that magical spell, scoring eight League and League Cup goals, including that one against West Ham, another in the humbling of Leeds United and the opening goal at Loftus Road:

*“Blant pushed the ball sideways to Waldron who hit a long ball forward to the right of the penalty area where Madeley failed to tackle and Murray swung to hit a low shot into the net. Sprake, too far out of his goal, seemed as badly at fault as Madeley...”*

**Granville Shackleton – Evening Telegraph (Last Sports), 19th October 1968**

*“...a perfect right-wing corner from Dave Thomas was headed on by Colin Blant and John Murray, with tremendous skill and purpose, speedily manoeuvred a position from which he was able to fire into the net, a hazardous operation in a packed penalty area. Since the Clarets began their winning run, the 20 year old Newcastle lad has missed scoring in only one match. His display (here) was easily his best ever away from Turf Moor.”*

**Keith McNee – Burnley Express, 12th November 1968**



***The Clarets at Loftus Road in November 1968. Some decent players? John Murray is on the front row with the ball, between Freddie Smith and Ralph Coates.***

After Loftus Road, Murray’s first-team appearances for Burnley were limited. In fact, he made fewer

than 30 appearances in all. Perhaps it is odd that a less-heralded player sticks in the memory so strongly, but goal-machine Murray played a full part in that remarkable sequence in the autumn of 1968 which supporters of a certain vintage will never forget!

To round off this piece, perhaps I can return to Barry Kilby's reminiscences? The week after Barry's trip to Villa Park in March 1962, Burnley returned to the same venue for that knife-edge FA Cup semi-final against Fulham when they were rather fortunate to escape with a draw and grab a replay. Wembley did beckon that year, of course, and the route to get there and the day itself have been well-documented so maybe there are other cup memories from that era? There are many but for now here are just a couple!

Seeing Frank Casper in the line-up at Loftus Road reminded me that he first came to our attention in January 1964 when Rotherham United came to Turf Moor for a Third Round tie. He stood out and scored the goal for the visitors which deservedly took the tie to a replay back at Millmoor. Casper had just turned 19 the previous month and his talent was clear. We didn't know that he would eventually earn his place as a true Clarets legend.

The sad passing away of the Queen in September was marked impeccably by clubs, players and supporters at all levels, and her funeral triggered memories of other sombre state events. Late in January 1965, the funeral of Sir Winston Churchill was held on a Saturday morning. It was a solemn occasion indeed on a cold day, made even more so through the misty transmission on our tiny black and white TV set. Yet it didn't stop the Fourth Round of the FA Cup going ahead later that afternoon when Burnley scraped a draw at Elm Park, Reading's old ground next to the railway line which took us on so many family holidays to the south coast.

I well remember the replay the following Tuesday. It was one of those freezing winter nights at Turf Moor, memories of which I doubt I will ever shake off! The pitch played like a skating rink, with the Clarets winning far from convincingly after a single Andy Lochhead goal late in the game. All our goals in that season's FA Cup run were shared between Lochhead and Wille Irvine, a clear sign of the times. Burnley went to Old Trafford in the next round only to be bamboozled by George Best in his stocking-feet – but that's another story!

\* Wadsley Bridge – Sheffield Weds; Kirkdale – Everton; Mill Hill – Blackburn; Witton – Aston Villa.

## **MILLWALL vs BURNLEY**

**Tuesday 21 February, 2023, 7.45pm kick off**

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via our mailing list closer to the day. We hope to see you there.**