

## YOUR AUTHOR

My father was a Birkenhead man, working on aircraft repair and maintenance at Feltham and Redhill during the war, when business matters brought him to Tollerton, near Nottingham. A meeting with my mother at the local Palais de Dance led to their marriage in 1942 and my arrival in 1944. Life was not particularly easy for anyone in the 1940s, but after a few years living with my grandparents, my parents were able to buy a house of their own in Nottingham.

My father took me to my first match at the City Ground in 1955. I don't remember him going to many games, though he always kept an eye on Tranmere Rovers' results. My grandfather Wilfred Blythe was a regular on the terraces of Meadow Lane and the City Ground but late in life he found the match-day crowds crossing Trent Bridge difficult to contend with and settled for the games at the County Ground, since it was the nearer of the two. When I started cycling or walking the three miles to the grounds on my own, I followed grandfather's example and would watch County one week and Forest the next. I believe many other people also supported both clubs in those days; I don't think there were as many one-club-only supporters as there are today.



With Forest's rise and County's decline in the late 1950s I found myself at the City Ground most of the time. I saw many of the games in Forest's 1959 FA Cup run; luckily my school was not far away for catching the last few minutes of mid-week afternoon replay action! My four entries in the club's ballot for Wembley tickets were unsuccessful, but luckily a friend in the Scouts was a cousin of Forest reserve winger John Rowlands and tickets were eventually acquired for both of us. Here we are at Victoria Station, about to catch our 12/6d special to the match. I'm in the middle, waving a rattle, which is still up in the attic somewhere. Do they allow them in grounds these days, or are they classed as offensive weapons?

My efforts at playing the game were not of the highest standards – I usually played at full-back, where my height and weight might have been effective if it wasn't for the fact that short sight made it difficult for me to see the rest of the players. My only claim to fame is appearing once in the same Mundella school team as the young David Pleat, later the manager of Luton Town, Spurs and Leicester City. As far as I know, I'm not related to Tony Brown of West Bromwich Albion and England fame.

I had something of a culture shock in 1962 when I left the bright lights and heady heights of Nottingham and Division One football for university in Bangor, North Wales. However, adjustments were soon made and I was able to enjoy the delights of Cheshire League football. Most clubs in this league had a star player on their books, usually well past their best, but still able to show flashes of former skills. In Bangor City's case, it was Tommy Banks, once of Bolton Wanderers. Tommy was by then as wide as he was tall; since many opposing right-wingers were callow youths of 17 or so, I expect Tommy took great delight in shepherding them into touch (or the stands) every now and then.

Armed with degrees in Physics and Pure Mathematics I went south to London in 1966 to join a new computer programming team set up by International Computers and Tabulators, later ICL. In London I was fortunate to see the Chelsea team of Osgood, Cooke and others, playing the sort of football that I believe Mr Abramovich is looking for today. My football watching declined to a few games a year in the next decade, as marriage, young children and life in Dorking took priority. There was short-lived excitement in the Surrey town when Guildford City arrived to play as Guildford and Dorking United. Great ambitions for the new club soon turned to dust.

In 1981 I was still at ICL, working in office automation, a business area we now call information technology. The opportunity arose to move back to Nottingham and work in the same field for a telecoms company, Plessey. It seemed a good idea for all sorts of reasons, personal as well as professional. Living down south, I hadn't seen much of Forest's great European Cup years under Brian Clough, but he was still the man in charge when I returned to Nottingham. I was able to persuade my eldest son that he was not really a Liverpool fan and we settled back into a City Ground much changed in appearance since I was a boy. Annual visits to Wembley became the norm. Watching Des Walker and Stuart Pearce in their pomp was a real treat.

By the early 1990s, Plessey had become part of Lord Weinstock's GEC and their dreams of cracking the IT market had faded. Redundancy followed, though my severance terms were so miserly that they only just covered the costs of a short holiday for my partner and me. I needed a regular income; however 50 counts as old age in computing companies and the litany of "you are not too old to work here, Mr Brown" meant just the opposite. I grew tired of the interview rounds and tried to work out if I could survive self-employed.

A digression. My background in software meant that when a benchmark was needed for a new computer at Plessey, I thought something football-orientated might be suitable. A benchmark is a set of routines that are run repeatedly to test some aspect of the hardware. On this occasion we needed to test the low-level disc handling routines, so I typed in a season's worth of Division One results and wrote a program to calculate the league table. We timed the calculation program and used it as the benchmark; when we needed more data I added a few more seasons. Later on, the data acquisition bug really caught hold of me and I finished off what I imagine was the first complete database of Football League results.



*1998: Yours truly gets to grips with two trophies. Notts County were Third Division champions that year and Nottingham Forest won the First Division.*

After the lack of success in finding what my family would call 'a proper job' I set out to see if I could make a living from a business based on the football databases. There was some initial success with licensing them to media groups but it rapidly became apparent that the business could not survive on data sales alone. The databases represent a valuable business asset and I knew they could help in producing books. At the time I was working closely with the Association of Football Statisticians; as a first step into publishing I took over production of their Annuals for the 1930s. The next step was to publish complete record books. Breedon Books had been pioneers in this field but had more or less run out of steam by then, leaving Dave Twydell's Yore Publications as the most active publisher of such titles. At that time (the mid-1990s) there were still a couple of dozen League clubs without a complete record, so I started the 'definitive' series to try to fill in the remaining gaps.

The business today is far more active in book publishing than I envisaged at the start. Nevertheless, I have maintained a focus on the databases and the range and content of them continues to expand. The next big step for the data is to compile 'the ultimate database' of English football, which will contain every result, attendance, and line-up since 1888. The raw data is already on the computer, but the task of turning into a usable product and making it available on the internet remains

only a plan at this stage. As for my publications, the "Match by Match" series of season-by-season results and line-ups books has reached 1962/63. With 1969/70 planned as the final edition (to overlap the first Rothmans Yearbook) I have a few year's work left on them, and some gaps to fill between 1893 and 1939. There are plans for more definitives and my catalogue of general books on football continues to increase.

The fact you are reading this paragraph probably means I owe you my thanks for buying the book. Many others have been helpful in supporting my efforts over the years. If you don't get a mention below and feel you deserve one, you will have to excuse my fading memory! Don Starr and Ray Spiller were supportive of my early efforts to get underway. Phil Heady and more than a hundred others helped the major project to document the qualifying rounds of the FA Cup and were thanked in the book that followed. Among the 400 regular customers on the mailing list, a dozen of you seem to have bought nearly every title. I won't embarrass you here by naming you, but thanks! Fred Lee, Eddie Stubbings and others keep me entertained on the phone from time to time. Fellow publishers Dave Twydell and John Robinson are quick to offer advice and support. Thanks go to all my authors, with apologies if I caused you extra work. John Nagle at the Football League asks me odd questions but I seem able to answer most of them. Keith Warsop proffers advice when I need it. Kit Bartlett spends time at Colindale for me. John Brodie must find my coffee to his taste and I drink Ken Smales' tea. Michael Joyce's player database is a work of art and I am fortunate to have the use of it. Thanks of course to my immediate family of Claire, Duncan, Helen, Hilary, Howard, Jenny, Jessica, Terri and Tabitha, all of whom have to put up with the slightly unconventional me. Finally, I must not forget to say thanks to my father Alec, still going strong at 91, and still enquiring after Tranmere Rovers.

Tony Brown  
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