

RICHARD LUSMORE



# NOT ALL TICKET

FROM WITHERNSEA HIGH  
TO BOOTHFERRY PARK HALT



Foreword by Brian Horton

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Prologue:

## Hull, Hell and Happiness

### **Wembley Stadium: Saturday, 24 May 2008**

*At 5.01pm, referee Alan Wiley blows the full-time whistle and 40,000 fans bedecked in black-and-amber roar their approval. Hull City have reached the top flight of English football for the first time in their 104-year history. Dean Windass, local hero and scorer of the game's only goal, comes tearing out of the dugout and slides to his knees in joyous celebration at the City end. All around me, grown men and women are jumping up and down, hugging complete strangers and generally behaving in a manner that would be deemed unbecoming in almost any other circumstances. Meanwhile, supporters listening to BBC Radio Humberside are assured by match commentator Burnsy that 'it's alright to cry'. And I do.*

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For those unfamiliar with the story of Hull City Association Football Club, it is one that for the main part would struggle to set pulses racing. Certainly prior to *that* day at Wembley, they remained anonymous as far as most football pundits were concerned. Indeed, until the Tigers secured their place in 'the greatest league in the world', success in any tangible form had been hard to come by.

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The pre-war years were particularly barren, with the notable exception of the 1909/10 season when Ambrose Langley's team was denied promotion to the old First Division by 0.29 of a goal. In 1930 the Tigers reached the FA Cup semi-finals, losing controversially to Arsenal after a replay but it's the immediate post-war years that City fans tend to point to as the club's first 'golden era'. Under the stewardship of the great Horatio 'Raich' Carter, City won the Third Division North title in 1948/49, playing in front of magnificent crowds at their new Boothferry Park home. A club record attendance of 55,019 watched that season's FA Cup quarter-final in which visitors Manchester United progressed thanks to the game's only goal.

The mid-1960s was the next era recalled fondly by supporters, in particular 1965/66 when Cliff Britton's team clinched the Third Division championship and also enjoyed a wonderful run in the FA Cup. The Tigers took glamorous Chelsea to a sixth-round replay thanks to two late Ken Wagstaff goals at Stamford Bridge. The following Thursday over 45,000 fans descended on Boothferry Park to see the London side end hopes of a first semi-final appearance for 36 years. Five years later, Terry Neill's Hull would again reach the quarter-finals only to surrender a two-goal lead in defeat at home to Stoke. Combined with a tilt at promotion to the top flight, it signalled the last of the good times as the club fell into a period of decline. Hull City AFC reverted to the role of 'sleeping giant'.

In his 2016 book *Moving the Goalposts: A Yorkshire Tragedy*, Anthony Clavane says that Hull 'became a byword for soccer underachievement, notorious for being the biggest city in Europe never to have hosted top-flight football'. Indeed, at the time I began my regular attendance at matches, the city's football club was considered as being below not only both Hull

rugby league teams in the sporting pecking order but – for a fleeting period – even the local speedway outfit (with whom I also formed an allegiance, albeit a brief one). Struggling to garner so much as passing interest among the populace, the Tigers rarely roared. Exposure on the telly was hardly forthcoming, even via the regional highlights programme. Typically, when the club did make the headlines it was for all the wrong reasons. On 25 February 1982 Hull City AFC became the first Football League club to call in the official receiver. There was a distinct possibility that it could disappear forever.

Instead, the revival that followed brought with it a period of hitherto unprecedented success. Two promotions, separated in between by a heartbreaking near miss, were followed by a genuine flirtation with elevation to the First Division for the first time. It's a quite remarkable chapter in the Tigers' history, yet one that has been all too easily overlooked in the wake of Wembley. For those for whom 'big games' have become the norm over the past decade or so, the events of the 1980s disappeared with the demolition of Boothferry Park, to be filed alongside the club's previous fleeting glimpses of glory in a folder marked 'Ancient History'. City's post-receivership renaissance remained a story that required revisiting. Hopefully this book will go some way towards addressing that.

Helping my memories of the era is the fact that this was my coming-of-age period, a time when for nine months of the year the fortunes of 11 men in amber and black dictated my mood in a way nothing else could (for the other three, I relied on 11 men in flannels sporting a White Rose). Supporting City during the 1980s remains my most enjoyable period of an association with the club that began in September 1975 and now spans five decades. Like all relationships we've had our ups and downs, our fall-outs and, indeed, the occasional

bust-up. But even at times of estrangement, my love for the club remains a deeply held one, rendered so by those formative years. While those experiencing the same journey in recent times have seen the club dining at the game's top table, playing in front of sell-out crowds at a brand-new stadium and testing themselves against some of the finest players in the world, the Tigers I first fell in love with were a very different beast. The 'underachievement' referred to by Clavane was exemplified by relegation to the Football League basement and the very real threat of closure. Had you predicted to any of us travelling on a Simon Gray 'out-of-towners' coach back then that the club we supported would one day play in the FA Cup Final and the Europa League, we'd have guessed you'd been at the Clan Dew favoured by one of our more flamboyant passengers! Even the prediction of becoming 'the first team to play on the moon' (to be explained later in the book) seemed less fanciful. We'd have happily taken 14th place in the old Second Division.<sup>1</sup>

Football during the 1980s is also largely remembered as being a sport that was in desperate need of rescue. Although Dominic Sandbrook (quoting Lincoln Allison) describes it as 'the supreme expression of the "identity, the loyalty and solidarity" of countless working-class communities', by the 1980s it was in a 'wretched condition'. It certainly wasn't the glitzy, family-friendly affair it is portrayed as nowadays, watched by big crowds in modern all-seater stadia. By the end of the decade the beautiful game had been turned ugly by hooliganism and terminally scarred by tragedies such as Valley Parade, Heysel and Hillsborough. Attending games was a risky business, with a surrounding air of menace that is, thankfully, largely absent now. Saturday brought the prospect

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1 Later often referred to by fans as City's 'accustomed position'

of something beyond the football, even in the unlikeliest of places. It was a time to keep your wits about you. Pre-match in Hull I soon learned which pubs to avoid and even which route to take to the ground. For away trips, it soon became second nature to check the day's fixture list in advance to ascertain which – if any – rival supporters might be encountered along the motorway.<sup>2</sup>

It wasn't just rival hooligans that helped ensure away games were an unpleasant experience. Although Sandbrook was writing about the previous decade when describing football stadia, most of his observations still held true. Particularly for away supporters, grounds often offered the coldest of welcomes, 'grim, dilapidated places' complete with peeling paint, rusting stands and 'the terraces stained with urine, rainwater and even the blood of those supporters caught up in the game's growing culture of violence'. This lack of comfort was matched by food outlets and toilet facilities that were often unfit for purpose, along with a local constabulary that had little time for niceties with away supporters. The argument that football supporters in the 1980s were treated as second-class citizens was a particularly strong one. As the author Pete Davies told the *Vincerà* podcast in 2020, they were 'utterly uncared for and utterly uncatered for'. How different it all sounds to what awaits travelling fans in the 21st century. Regardless of all this the matchday experience was one that my mates and I came to live for. Clichéd it may be but following Hull City home and away really did become my religion, with Boothferry Park the regular place of worship.<sup>3</sup>

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2 Sandbrook, Dominic, *Who Dares Wins – Britain, 1979–1982* (London: Allen Lane, 2019) pp.212–213; George MacDonald Fraser's cowardly Victorian-era anti-hero

3 Sandbrook, Dominic, *State of Emergency – The Way We Were: Britain 1970–1974* (London: Allen Lane, 2010) p.557; *Vincerà! The Story of Italia 90* podcast, Episode 4: Quarantine

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Similar to its football club, the city of Kingston upon Hull (to give it the title bestowed upon it by King Edward I in 1299) has largely been overlooked for much of its history and, when national attention did come its way it usually wasn't via a good news story. In 2013 Andrew Dixon, director of the city's successful UK City of Culture bid said, 'Hull suffers from negative perceptions going back 400 years.' He may well have been referring to John Taylor's 1609 *Thieves Litany*, which listed Hull (along with Hell and Halifax) as a place to avoid at all costs on account of the Gibbet Laws.

Hull Gaol was reputed to be one of the most feared places in the north of England and the city suffered by association. Indeed, throughout its history, Hull has copped more than its fair share of flak, quite literally in the Second World War when it became the most bombed British city outside London. Before the slum clearances of the 1960s, Hull had more terraced houses than any other city in the country, many of which lacked running hot water or an inside toilet. In 2003 it was named the country's 'Crappest Town' in a magazine called *Idler*.

Along with the collapse of its two main industries – fishing and the commercial docks – Hull consistently ranked near the bottom of every indicator when it came to socio-economic wealth: property prices, wages, employment and education. Similarly, the only time it was highly placed in statistical tables was for those involving teenage pregnancies, obesity, crime rates and the claiming of benefits. No wonder then that Charlie English dubbed it 'Britain's poorest city' in a 2014 article for *The Guardian*. Two years later, in another piece for the same paper Rowan Moore described 'the hard knocks' that have blighted Hull, among them the 'misguided attempts to experiment with council housing construction' and the poor choices of redevelopment. Moore blamed those responsible for



succumbing to the ‘modern municipal belief that shopping centres are the answer to urban decline’. For his part English added, ‘Because of its isolation, Hull has had little sympathy. The common reaction from outside the city is scorn.’<sup>4</sup>

All this should have changed some five years on from *that* day at Wembley when Kingston upon Hull beat Leicester, Dundee and Swansea Bay to the title of UK City of Culture 2017. In announcing the award on 20 November 2013, Maria Miller MP, Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, described it as ‘brilliant news for Hull and everyone involved in the bid there’. She expressed hope that the city ‘will make the most of all that being UK City of Culture can bring’, while Hull City Council leader Stephen Brady said the award was ‘a real game-changer’. In Hull Truck Theatre, where those involved with the bid gathered to hear the announcement, there were ‘cheers, tears, and even a conga’ when Miller confirmed the decision. ‘No one in the city has any idea what she said next,’ said Hull Truck artistic director Mark Babych who added, ‘I feel 20 feet tall.’ He wasn’t alone.<sup>5</sup>

Hull made the most of its year in the limelight. The city was chosen to host events as diverse as the Turner Prize, the BBC Proms, the Royal Ballet and Radio 1’s Big Weekend. Each proved a success. The ‘Made in Hull’ light show that launched proceedings proved a huge visitor attraction, as perhaps more surprisingly did a 75-metre-long wind turbine rotor blade that was displayed in Queen Victoria Square. It wasn’t just a city centre thing either. The estates got in on the

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4 <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2014/sep/11/-sp-to-hull-and-back-the-rebirth-of-britains-poorest-city>, *The Guardian*, 11 September 2014; <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2016/feb/14/hull-uk-city-of-culture-2017-rowan-moore>, *The Guardian*, 14 February 2016

5 Trinder, Richard, <https://www.yorkshiretimes.co.uk/article/Hull-Is-City-Of-Culture>, *Yorkshire Times*, 20 November 2013; <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-humber-25014341>, BBC News, 20 November 2013

act, with Black Grape playing a gig in front of a frozen food store on Bransholme in north Hull and Badly Drawn Boy appearing at the Freedom Centre on Preston Road to the east of the city. The idea of Hull 'culture' was extending beyond the stereotypical pattie butty and chip spice.

In fairness, long before being awarded its culture title the city already boasted an impressive range of live music and arts festivals, as well as offering an eclectic mix of nighttime attractions, from traditional live music venues to a thriving café culture. Hull is also home to an award-winning local radio station and a burgeoning industry in crime writing, via the works of David Mark and Nick Quanttrill among others. The national award simply gave such things the chance to shine, as well as providing City fans with a chant with which to serenade visiting supporters: 'You're only here for the culture.'

It's not just culturally that Hull boasts a new confidence. The city is now established as the focal point of the so-called 'Energy Estuary' with aims to become 'the renewable capital of the UK' (the blade that was put on public display came from the huge Siemens development that has revitalised part of the old docks). The city centre continues to be transformed by multimillion-pound redevelopment. This has already yielded one of the country's biggest visitor attractions in The Deep and, at time of writing, includes plans for a proposed ocean-going cruise terminal and the £1.5bn Lagoon Hull waterfront project. Those in charge are determined to live up to their rebrand. For those familiar with the Hull portrayed in this book it's not before time.

Along with giving Hull a platform to help make it 'a prime visitor destination', Brady hoped that the City of Culture award would also transform perceptions. The immediate reaction of one of their beaten rivals suggested there's still some way to go. Swansea council leader David Phillips was quoted as

saying, ‘The residents of Hull had to have something to look forward to.’ It was obvious that the city’s standing among those too lazy to visit had improved little; even among fellow northerners who should know better. While Phil Redmond, Liverpoolian TV writer and chair of the independent expert advisory panel supported the argument that the city was ‘coming out of the shadows’, England cricket hero Andrew ‘Freddie’ Flintoff declared he thought the award ‘an April Fool’s joke’. It was indicative of the low esteem in which the city was held by those failing to look beyond the rusting trawlers and abandoned docks.<sup>6</sup>

Such sneering attitudes were especially prevalent during the 1980s. As with many industrial cities of the north, Hull was rarely home to good news. A city whose fortune was built on the back of its close proximity to the sea had been hit hard by the loss of fishing grounds in the wake of the Cod Wars of the 1970s. Then the deepest recession for half a century took its toll. Unemployment figures soared and social unrest simmered on the streets. Hull typified the desolate nature of much of Britain’s post-industrial and inner-city landscape. It was one of countless places for which The Specials’ smash hit ‘Ghost Town’ could have been written. In 2009 Nik Townend, founder member of 1970s Hull ska band The Akrylykz, painted a gloomy picture when looking back: ‘All in all, at that time Hull had the air of a depressed post-industrial city in decline, but unlike many other British cities struggling to recover from the trauma of the war and post-war hardships it didn’t seem to be receiving any treatment for its depression. London, Liverpool, Birmingham, Manchester and Sheffield had ... been reinvigorated by the swinging ’60s and the hard-rocking and punky ’70s. Hull, by comparison, was catatonic

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-25008856>, 20 November 2013

and barely bothering to breathe ... a dull, depressed, comatose, bomb site with docks full of rusting hulks of forgotten fishing fleets, and the kids of unemployed dockers and trawlermen drinking to excess in the pop discos and working men's clubs before throwing up their guts in the streets after bloody brawls.<sup>7</sup>

Along with Clavane and Townend, Vince Groak comes up with a similar image in *Last One Out*, his excellent account of the 1980 all-Hull Rugby League Challenge Cup Final. But despite such descriptions – and notwithstanding the fact that I'm not from the city (having been born in the 'leafy shires' of the East Riding) – I quickly came to love the place. Moreover, I would also come to defend it with the same sort of defiance that has been a Hullensian trait since the city Governor said no to Charles I at the start of the English Civil War! Even if to do so was often a thankless task. Much of Groak's grim depiction of things in the run-up to that momentous day out at Wembley still applied for the period that my story covers. The Hull of the 1980s had nothing like the sort of selling points that the City of Culture has. But who cared? It may well have been considered a shithole. But it was *our* shithole. Even for those of us from outside the city boundary.

Although 'county people' were and are often depicted as being aloof when dealing with our city-dwelling neighbours, it didn't prevent us from visiting Hull on a regular basis. As Charlie English (a resident of county town Beverley) writes, we went there to work and 'spend money ... to shop; watch films at the ABC and the Cecil; go to exotic Italian or Indian restaurants; pass a few hours at the bowling alley'. For my part, spending was largely restricted to Sydney Scarborough Records, Spiders and the Adelphi. Along with my mates, I also

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7 [marcoonthebass.blogspot.com/2009/01/exclusive-interview-with-nik-akrylyk.html](http://marcoonthebass.blogspot.com/2009/01/exclusive-interview-with-nik-akrylyk.html), 5 January 2009

chose Boothferry Park rather than the bowling alley to pass a few hours on a weekend, and as for those ‘exotic’ restaurants, I rarely ventured beyond Yankee Burger, Bun in the Oven or Bob Carver’s – although I did ‘fine dine’ at The Gainsboro fish restaurant once in a while! Nonetheless, Hull gave me my ‘Bright Lights, Big City’ calling and despite the image portrayed it was one I revelled in.

A big part of this ‘calling’ came courtesy of the pubs, clubs and fashion outlets. Although Townend says that what ‘very little night life [there was] in the city ... tended to be uninteresting and mainstream’, there were several notable exceptions and as we shall see, in Spiders Hull had a real jewel in the crown. Similarly, while Everything But The Girl singer Tracey Thorn bemoaned the fact that Hull was ‘forever left off the tour circuit’ and lacked live venues that boasted ‘any rock glamour’, I’d like to think my book paints a different picture, with the Welly, Dingwalls (fleetingly) and the Tower all capable of attracting the latest music press faves. Then there was the Adelphi, the ‘shabby chic’ Victorian-era terraced property on De Grey Street taken on by the legendary Paul Jackson in 1984. It soon became ‘the musical capital of Hull’, renowned for hosting some of the biggest up-and-coming names in the business along with the cream of the local crop. During the period I capture here, the Housemartins fell into both categories and became the flagship of a vibrant Hull scene. Sadly, despite *The Tube’s* 1983 special and plenty of exposure on Radio 1 many of the city’s other hopefuls fell by the wayside, failing to justify the optimism of ‘London 0 Hull 4’.<sup>8</sup>

However, even if what Jools Holland termed the ‘Humber Sound’ failed to emulate ‘Merseybeat’ or ‘Madchester’, there’s

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8 Clavane, Anthony, *Moving the Goalposts – A Yorkshire Tragedy* (London: Riverrun, 2017) pp.12–13; The title of the Housemartins’ debut LP

definite evidence that the region helped forge a collective identity, with many bands leaning heavily on their hometown for influences and ideas. In his *Melody Maker* review of Nyam Nyam's 1984 LP *Hope of Heaven*, Colin Irwin describes how 'Hull [played] its part in their grimly vivid sounds', '[Vocalist Paul] Trynka talks rather poetically of the big Victorian houses, cheap accommodation, military history and the pervading atmosphere of violence which shaped his songs. "It was a geographical cul-de-sac and felt very isolated," he reflects.'<sup>9</sup>

Sadly, the city also proved a musical cul-de-sac for most young hopefuls with Hull never deemed 'trendy' in the same way as many of its northern counterparts. Therefore it was perhaps fitting that when the first homegrown band made a big splash nationally, they did so while wearing 'two cardigans and a tank top'. As the UK found out in 2017, Hull doesn't do pretentious, never has done. As such the city forms the perfect backdrop for a story of an unfashionable young man following an unfashionable football team in what in many ways were unfashionable times.<sup>10</sup>

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9 Irwin, Colin for *Melody Maker* (1985), reproduced on <https://nyamnyamhopeofheaven.wordpress.com/2012/11/28/buried-treasure/comment-page-1/>

10 Wagg, Michael, <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2012/jan/26/old-music-housemartins-sheep>, *The Guardian*, 26 January 2012