

K LUCAS



TOTTENHAM

FROM THE LANE

THE STORY OF
SPURS IN N17



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Introduction

THE WHITE Cottage had fallen into disrepair. Squeezed inconspicuously into the spot of 7 White Hart Lane, the walls within had yellowed, weathered under a thick layer of dirt and swirls of navy graffiti. The garden was horribly overgrown. Japanese knotweed sprawled on to the pavement. Apart from the black bin bags piled precariously outside, today the building has been cleaned up considerably. It stands surprisingly pristine against its surroundings. Its white panels almost have a shine to them next to the dirtied brickwork of its neighbours. The cottage is but one emblem of how Tottenham has changed irrevocably, beyond all recognition, in almost a century and a half. A place first recorded in the Domesday Book of 1086, as William I cast an eye over a newly conquered England, 'Toteham' as it was then known was a district of serene greenery in this far-out stretch of London.

There is, as yet, no indication that this humble house claims an extraordinary place in the heritage of Tottenham

Hotspur Football Club. In fact, it is only to the most observant that a sign emerges. It's almost 138 years since the club was formed by three schoolboys – Bobby Buckle, John Anderson and Hamilton Casey – under a gas lamp on Tottenham High Road, diagonal to the corner of Park Lane. To celebrate that anniversary, a fresh piece of navy bunting waves in the wind from the very top-right corner of the house's front.

Not until the Industrial Revolution had the Tottenham of Buckle, Anderson and Casey really been lured into the capital. Before they had reached adulthood, their streets were becoming less green, the Tottenham Marshes one of the increasingly rare strips of land lying relatively untouched. Bearing few of the hallmarks of progress, Lea Valley was mainly occupied by the farmers who worked tirelessly to bring vegetables and fruits into London, with cartloads being taken into Covent Garden each day. Today, that same area is home to 300 languages, making it one of the most diverse boroughs of any city in Europe. It's a corner of London which, to the untrained, would be difficult to stumble on. Whether the journey is to White Hart Lane, or to the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium, it's a pilgrimage of choice to N17 0AP.

Pilgrimage is probably the most apt word for the rather lengthy walk from Seven Sisters station down the High Road, where a wise right leads to The Beehive. On matchdays, the pub is unmissable for a banner above the front door wielding the face of the stern-looking Spurs chairman, Daniel Levy. 'They have more ales than I have

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had managers,' it reads. Amid the unending barbers, vegetable stands and chicken shops, that banner is probably the first rumbling that just a mile further down the road lies one of the world's most famous footballing institutions. Yet there is nothing unobtrusive about the new stadium, which changed the landscape forever from the moment the diggers moved in on White Hart Lane in 2017. In the spot in which the Lane used to nestle neatly among the shadows cast by Love Lane's tower blocks, shoved in coarsely between Park Lane and Paxton Road, Spurs' presence was about to loom much larger. Though the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium would not host its inaugural first-team match until 3 April 2019, its skeleton eclipsed all around it long before that – even before it existed in the real world and was a mere far-off dream in Levy's imagination.

At first glance, it might appear that this is a book about that stadium, or at the very least a history of its football club. In fact, it owes its greatest debt to some of the raconteurs within it, the tales of the people of Tottenham, the supporters, and the families of legends who have made up the story of Spurs. Some of Tottenham's most famous days have traversed these streets, from the bus parades of the 1960s 'Glory Years' to the civil unrest of the 1980s and 2010s, all the way to the opening of the new ground. None of them can be entirely separated from one another, and nor should they be. This is not a comprehensive history of Tottenham Hotspur, nor does it profess to be a manifesto or a catalogue of solutions for an area which has faced so many challenges. Nevertheless, for generations, there have

been few feelings that match the giddiness of ascending the steps of the tube at Seven Sisters, emerging on to the High Road, and approaching the ‘world-famous home of the Spurs’.

The new ground has so often been described by locals as a spaceship and for many, there is indeed something very alien about a corporation worth an estimated £1.6bn taking pride of place on the Tottenham High Road. According to the Trust for London, in 2013/14 the percentage of individuals living in poverty in Haringey was as high as 34 per cent – more than one in three people. Haringey has only existed in its current form since 1965, when the boroughs of Tottenham, Hornsey and Wood Green merged, a move it was hoped would tackle housing shortages. It has never resolved many of the issues that amalgamation sought to address. The Trust for London’s ‘Poverty Profile’ on housing, work, unemployment and living standards revealed middle to high levels of homelessness in Haringey and surrounding areas like Enfield. An even higher number of families were living in temporary accommodation, so that is not even the full picture. The level of evictions and repossessions is abnormally high for London, while the borough recorded a low score for ‘housing affordability’. Put simply, many people don’t earn enough to afford the rent. Four in ten children are living in poverty – also higher than the London average – and six per cent of people are unemployed. That’s compared to 4.9 per cent in the rest of the city. Amid all of this, Northumberland Park, which happens to be the most deprived part of the entire borough,

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is the home of Tottenham Hotspur, one of the dozen richest clubs in the world.

These two parallel and often wildly conflicting worlds have intertwined since 1882, inspiring and intermingling with one another, on occasion fighting like siblings. From the beginning, Spurs have owed a tremendous debt to their local community and it is no exaggeration to say that without the local institutions, the churches, the schools and businesses, there would be no such entity as the Tottenham Hotspur of today, a team whose matches are watched by more than 226 million fans around the world. Every other weekend, tens of thousands of them have descended on Haringey to be infuriated and overjoyed, to feel both agony and ecstasy, often within the same 90 minutes. And for a few brief hours on matchdays, the dynamics of Tottenham change beyond recognition. Spurs shape the community around them, but the same also holds true the other way around. The identity of this distinctive part of London is inseparable from the football club at the end of its High Road, an institution which has helped to heal some of its divisions and proved a source of immense local pride.

The identity of Spurs in their historic home has become more important than ever, not least with the advent of the Premier League. Its frenzied gentrification of football into one giant, cinematic pantomime has tickled an area which was first acknowledged in print when it was documented after the Norman Conquest while under the rule of Waltheof, the Danish Earl of Northumberland and Huntingdon. The changing face of Tottenham took many

guises over the centuries that followed, falling under the medieval sovereignty of the Scottish royal family, which only ended when Robert the Bruce, crowned king of Scotland in 1306, lost his English lands during the fight for independence. For most of the 14th century, Tottenham predominantly became a place for peasants, until they were eventually replaced by merchants and tradesmen. Not until the relentless reach of London began to stretch outwards did Tottenham finally become more accessible, the introduction of the railway and improvements to the roads changing its landscape for good. Finally, Tottenham was not simply the gateway to the north, running along the Roman road of Ermine Street, but the home of taverns and proper industry. Only in the 19th century, Tottenham's agricultural economy traversed from its middle-class market gardens to the largely working-class area we know today.

There are elements of that historic character which remain, even where the ancient inns and public houses have closed. The Tottenham Hotspur Stadium is undoubtedly its most eye-catching landmark, but there are still several listed buildings nearby. St Ignatius Church, the 12th-century building designed by Father Benedict Williamson, stands intact, just as the pumping operations of the Markfield Beam Engine remain a testament to Victorian ingenuity.

Perhaps those often-forgotten elements of Haringey's character are not always in tune with popular views of the borough. Spurs' own mission statement embraces the new stadium's ability to 'change perceptions of north Tottenham', one which will bring 'new jobs, schools,

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homes and opportunities'. It seeks to 'build confidence in our community' and will bring an estimated two million visitors per year to the area. The aspiration is to make the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium not only the world's leading ground, the very benchmark of excellence, but one which will take its club to the next level, changing perceptions of Tottenham Hotspur as well as of Tottenham itself.

The need for change was never more apparent than in 2011. The stadium project had been dreamed up soon after the club's owners, ENIC (formerly the 'English National Investment Company'), bought the club in 2001, but in the years that followed, it was by no means a certainty that it would ever come to fruition. That was true even in 2003, when Spurs began buying up adjoining property. There were still countless stumbling blocks before the 62,062-seater ground finally opened in 2019. Businesses wouldn't sell. The costs were prohibitive. Levy had found that no matter how hard he tried, he could not wield the political influence needed to get a new stadium over the line until, as the 2011/12 season was dawning, Tottenham was set ablaze.

The civil unrest that unfolded on the streets of north London a decade after the club's takeover changed everything. Either way, Spurs were careering towards a departure from White Hart Lane which was divisive enough, regardless of where they might have ended up playing. There was a serious intent to move to Stratford's Olympic Stadium. Yet within a month of the riots across London, Haringey Council had signed an agreement.

The board had the go-ahead to build a new stadium, so long as they were willing to commit to financing local infrastructure and shoehorning the project as a force for good. Spurs were staying put, and they could hardly renege on their responsibilities when all along, the club had been shaped by the people of Tottenham, from local schoolboys to Bible class teachers and entrepreneurs. White Hart Lane had become the heart of the area and beyond the cherished symbolism of one of English football's most famous grounds, it was the biggest signpost of Spurs' presence. The Lane had a power in its own right.

For almost a century and a quarter, hundreds of thousands of fans have poured through the turnstiles, witnessing Spurs grow from an embryonic boys' team to the first non-league side to win the FA Cup, through title wins, relegations and even world wars. Though turbulent, those first decades set in motion the history of an utterly unique club. Elements of that history can never be taken away: the first 'Double' winners of the 20th century and the first British team to win a European trophy. Those feats have brought open-top buses on to the streets and at the same time, ushered in an unquenching desire for more glory. On occasion, that thirst has almost proved ruinous, both financially and for the fragile nerves of all who love Spurs. The inescapable fact is that Spurs as an institution off the pitch is only ever as strong as its success on it.

Moving grounds is never easy, but as the High Road morphed around a spectacular new stadium, nowhere

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has the sense of change been more apparent than within the walls of the club. The stadium is a statement of aspiration. It will one day see Spurs open its doors to international football once again and perhaps even host Champions League finals. From a more insular point of view, it is the most concrete nod possible to a fanbase that is growing and growing, in north London and beyond. The final capacity of White Hart Lane, 36,284, has nearly doubled at a stroke. On 15 May 2017, as Levy's outstretched arm vanquished the keys of the Lane to Mace, the construction company who had been given the contract for the new ground, it felt like a symbolic changing of the guard. The broad smile on the chairman's face spoke not so much of an era's sad end, but what is set to be a bright future.

As the curtain fell on White Hart Lane for the final time, Levy penned an emotional letter to the supporters. 'This is the day. This is the match,' he wrote. 'This is our last time at the Lane and the day on which we shall bid our grand old home a fond farewell.' He reminisced over his own half-century of taking in matches at the Lane, a ground which had staged 'some of the most amazing moments in the history of not just our club but in the history of football'. Crucially, he reminded, 'It is a humbling occasion too – this club and this stadium have been here longer than any of us and the club and new stadium will be here long after us all – we are merely the custodians of this great institution. It's our turn to look after it, grow it and support it.'

The story of Tottenham Hotspur cannot possibly be understood without its custodians, whether they have been found under the street lamps of the High Road or in the yachts of the Caribbean. Joe Lewis, Spurs' majority shareholder, who is rarely seen in public – he does not even like having his picture taken – was coaxed away from the equanimity of the Bahamas and back to London for the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium's first match on 3 April 2019. As the eyes of the world fell on Tottenham, so too did those of the boardroom as they surveyed their new creation. Here was the realisation of a two-decade project, and one which might have looked so different.

Of course, the story of Spurs does not only belong to a confined corner of north London. Tottenham has been shaped by its visitors, not just its residents, and much like its football club, has sometimes had to punch above its weight and fight for attention. Increasingly, despite establishing themselves among the 'big six' of English football, Spurs still have the status of the underdog attached to their name, bringing with it an unlikely heroism and much to live up to. And after all, the experience of following Spurs has always been about the triumph of hope over experience.