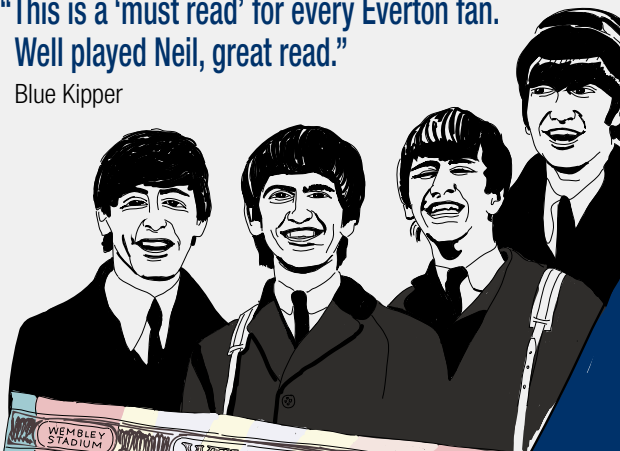


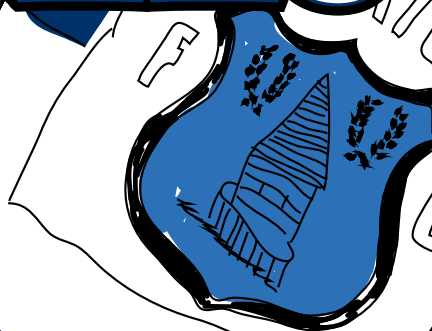
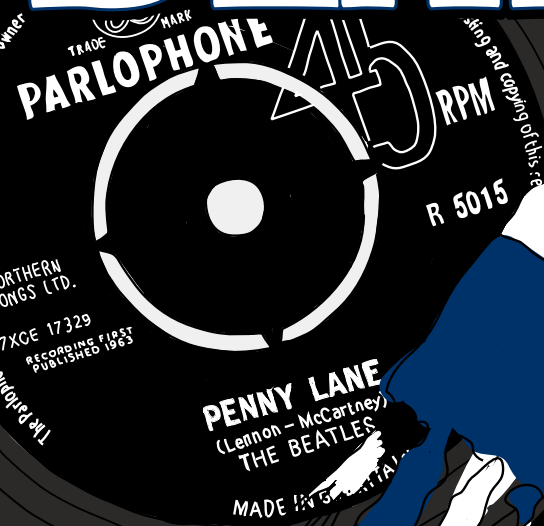


"This is a 'must read' for every Everton fan.
Well played Neil, great read."

Blue Kipper



BLUES & BEATLES



NEIL ROBERTS

BLUES & BEATLES

NEIL ROBERTS



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The School Of Science

‘Evertonians are born, not manufactured.
We do not choose, we are chosen.
Those who understand need no explanation.
Those who don’t, don’t matter.’

Young, Labone and Beamish

I was born with Everton in my blood. It is a source of great pride to me. And it forges my identity more than anything else. In fact, there is a saying in Goodison Park folklore:

Evertonians are born, not manufactured.
We do not choose, we are chosen.
Those who understand need no explanation.
Those who don’t, don’t matter.

They are four sentences which have a particular resonance for me as I was born 200 miles from Liverpool. And for long periods of my early awareness, I resented the fact that I was not a natural born Scouser – so proud was I to be a True Blue. My connection to the club, and to Merseyside, comes from my father. He was born and bred in Bromborough, a village on the Wirral peninsula. And it is in Bromborough that my genetic love for Everton, my birthright, was nurtured and reinforced.

I have never really thought of myself as having a ‘home town’, another source of early resentment. But my geographical home town is St Albans, Hertfordshire. The problem is that I have no fondness for that area, no real knowledge of it and no connection with it apart from the fact that I was born there and it was my home for the first six years of my life, before I emigrated to Bermuda with my family. So a geographical home town it may be. But an emotional home town it is not.

BLUES & BEATLES

Throughout my early years moving home was a common occurrence for me, my younger sister and my parents. So it is perhaps only natural that I found the most comfort in my grandparents' house at 48 Valley Road, Bromborough. It was always 'my home'.

I remember the click of the gate before heading up the garden path. The front door. The shrill bell. The 1970s wallpaper. I remember the sideboard. I remember the ticking clock in the warm living room. The old-fashioned telly always on in the corner. I remember the smell of my nanna's bacon butties. I remember her kitchen. Her pantry. Her 'hand-washer'. I remember our drives up the M1 and M6 in my dad's orange Morris Marina, usually on a Friday night after my dad had got home from work. I remember waking from a deep, car-induced sleep. Three years old and in my father's arms, being carried across the threshold of the small council house into the warmest of Cheshire welcomes.

I remember the card games. The bowl on the table, always full of sweets. The carpet. The cuckoo clock on the wall. The barometer from the hallway, which I salvaged and still keep now, in my grandparents' memory. I remember old-fashioned furniture. The old mirror, getting frayed around the edges, already probably fifty years old in the early seventies. The Victorian photograph of my great-grandmother. The cosy, homely smell of the place, the feel of it, the sense that here was all my family's history.

I remember the back garden. The smell of freshly-cut grass. I remember kicking a cheap plastic ball in the side alley and in the backyard, for hours on end, to the annoyance of the neighbours and staying out there until the sun had gone down. Practising my headers. Deck chairs my nanna used to sunbathe in. Clothes pegs on the line. Cut flowers. The hedge. Even the pigeon loft just over the other side of the fence at the bottom of the garden. My memory of 48 Valley Road, Bromborough, is so vivid I could probably draw a diagram pinpointing the drains. And of course, I'll never forget the unfinished Brian Labone that my dad Colin had painted on to the shed door as a teenager. Some of my earliest memories are locked up in that house. And as my love of Everton

grew and grew, that painting of Labone – with no right arm – was imprinted as much on my mind as it was on those old wood panels.

Colin Roberts showed promise as a footballer from an early age, in boys' brigade and school teams. One of his boyhood friends, Kenny Beamish, forged his own professional career. Kenny graduated from Bromborough to Tranmere Rovers, Blackburn Rovers and Brighton under Brian Clough. He played more than 500 times in the Football League, scoring more than 150 goals. And he made my dad insanely jealous. Colin and Kenny were pals. Born ten days apart, they were as thick as thieves from their early days together at Woodslee Primary School. Classmates. Team-mates. Just mates. Both of them had talent with a ball at their feet. Only one of them had the required dedication to make it.

My dad still has the letter he wrote to his idol, Alex Young, at the age of 13. 'How do I improve my ball skills?' 'How can I work on my dribbling?' 'How can I be good enough to play for Everton, like you?' It seems almost incredible now, half a century later, to think that a top-flight footballer, a superstar, would write back. But he did.

Young was known as the 'Golden Vision'. An Everton hero, a legend in the truest sense. A talisman for the entire club. Someone with sublime skills. A footballer ANYONE would pay to watch. Just to see him with the ball glued to his foot, outrageously humiliating defenders and deftly jinking through the opposition before planting the ball into the Gwladys Street net. And in some style. Sadly for me, the Golden Vision finished at Everton three years before I was born and 12 years before my own 'debut' as a spectator at Goodison Park. But I feel I grew up with him all the same. Dad has shown me the letter he got back from Young, several times. I've asked him the stories, several times. I've watched the BBC play about him directed by Ken Loach, several times. I even fulfilled one of my father's own ambitions – I met him and interviewed him in 1995. To this day, I kick myself that my dad wasn't with me. That I didn't get an autograph, or some personal message from the Golden Vision to the erstwhile 13-year-old schoolboy he'd written to back in the early 1960s.

When dad penned that letter, little did he know that one day he'd forego the chance of his own football career. At 16, he was given a trial by Liverpool and he failed the test. Played out of position, perhaps. Overcome by the occasion, perhaps. Heart not really in it in a red shirt, perhaps. But so devastated was he by this failure, that he didn't even turn up for his trial at Everton only weeks later. Now that's what you call a missed opportunity for a dyed-in-the-wool Evertonian. Instead, dad was a spectator, five years later, when Ken Beamish played for Tranmere against Everton. He felt what it was like to play on the pitch at Goodison Park. To cross those thick white lines at the 'School of Science'. He felt what it was like to play in front of 60,000 people.

So dad never played professionally but he did at least grow up supporting Everton and watching some glorious football. The fifties was a particularly low period for the club but when he started watching, at least Liverpool were in the Second Division. And Everton still had heroes like Dave Hickson and Brian Labone, the man my dad carved and painted into the shed.

By the time he did that, the doldrums of the fifties had passed and there was a bright blue new era at Goodison Park. Dad got his paints out in the school holidays of 1963. Everton were the champions of England and Labone was a blue-blooded hero. An England international, a classy defender and a proper Evertonian. And Everton's love for Labone was matched by Labone's love for Everton. At the end of his interview for the BBC's official history of the club, he clarified the relationship in his own words:

Don't forget, lads – one Evertonian is worth 20
Liverpudlians.

And so it is. Brian Labone is another of those 'School of Science' icons I had the privilege to meet in my later life as a journalist. 'Footballer, Gentleman, Evertonian' is a moniker applied to the greatest Everton legend of all, Dixie Dean. But it could equally be applied to Labone, a one-club man, a loyal servant and a graceful footballer. Like me, Everton's chairman Bill Kenwright drew that comparison between those two giants of Goodison Park. Our

most successful captain, Kevin Ratcliffe, gave BBC News another fitting tribute to Brian after his death in 2006:

Brian was Everton. If you could put together a team of every player that has ever captained Everton, every one of us would turn to Brian to lead us out. He will always be known as the captain of Everton.

Years after Labone was immortalised on that common garden shed in Bromborough, dad and I were at Goodison Park for the first Everton home match after he died. It also happened to be the last match in a royal blue shirt for Duncan Ferguson, who was captain for the occasion. And he capped the occasion. He scored a last-minute equaliser against West Brom, tapping in the follow-up after poetically missing from the penalty spot in front of the Gwladys Street End. There wasn't a dry eye in the house when Duncan took that final lap of honour, his children in tow, around the Goodison Park pitch. But there hadn't been a dry eye in the house all day. Most notably from my dad, a man I have seldom seen give shows of emotion. The prolonged, loud applause in tribute to Labby before kick-off summed up all that is great about Everton – all that is great about Evertonians– all that makes us proud. As we like to say, 'We know our history'. For my father, that match on 7 May 2006 was the end of an era. The closing of a chapter in his own life. His tears at the start, and at the end, were for Brian Labone.

Band on the Run

My dad never finished painting Brian Labone on to the shed door, he said, because he didn't know how to. He didn't want to ruin that statuesque, imposing figure. So there he was, Everton's captain, resplendent in his royal blue jersey, with his crop of jet black hair. Long white shorts with a blue stripe down the side. White socks almost to the knee. And one arm. It was nearly perfect, this image of football from a bygone era. This painting that so embodied Everton. Almost perfect, but not quite. The letters *E V E R T O N*, in italic, had been transferred and painted on to the door, to go with the portrait. I loved looking at it. Kicking

that plastic ball against it, imagining Brian was passing back to me. But still, Labone had the air of a broken Subbuteo player. Just one arm. Dad didn't know how to finish it so why spoil it trying? It was an image of beautiful football. Don't paint a player scuffing the ball into the net off his shin. Paint style. Paint grace. Paint 'School of Science' football, the Everton way. And that's what he did. But teenage Colin didn't finish it. He didn't want anything to spoil the aesthetic.

There's no getting away from it, though. As much as my dad was besotted with Everton, he was just short of his 16th birthday and it was the summer of 1963. Beatlemania had swept the country and the origin of it all, the city of Liverpool, was just seven miles away to the north. So never mind any fear that completion may have led to a blemish. Dad probably didn't finish that painting because he was too busy wearing out his copy of *Please Please Me*.

Just as I inherited football and Everton from my father, I inherited music and the Beatles. From a very early age, I had a fascination for music. I remember the record player at 48 Valley Road. My grandad gave it to me on one of my birthdays, probably my sixth. It was like a small, red box and I was captivated by it. By how it worked. By the needle, the crackle, the fact that the turntable went at 45 revolutions per minute unless you flipped a lever to make it go slower. Bigger records had to be played at 33 rpm. They said so on the back. And I read every single word on a record sleeve.

Jack Roberts wasn't a pop music man. But he was a music man. He'd been a bandsman in the Royal Marines, and there were pictures all over the house to prove his past life as a drummer and bugler, after which he was a boys' brigade leader. He was the man who taught my father to play the bugle. But it was that image of my grandad the Royal Marine that I loved. He looked handsome in his uniform, I always thought. His medals from both world wars were around somewhere and there was a big photograph of him on board HMS *Repulse* in 1925. It was a group photo of everyone on deck, around the time of the royal tour when the Prince of Wales was also on board. My grandad met the future king. And my family were proud royalists, just as

most people were back then. In fact, all round, he was a proud man, my grandad. And we were all proud of him. So it was with real pride that I accepted his gift of a record player.

That wasn't the only musical present he gave me, either. A while later, my grandad bought me my first guitar from a shop in Liverpool. He took me on the bus, one of the old, green Crosville buses, and we sat upstairs, right at the front, as we used to do. Buses stand out in my memory from those early days on the Wirral. The rattle of the conductor's ticket machine. The paper tickets themselves, with HALF written across the middle. The smell of stale ash and smoke as soon as you boarded, and cigarette butts trodden into the wooden decking. The spiral staircase leading up from just behind the driver's cabin. The torn seating with foam poking through the tears. The graffiti, either in felt pen on the seats themselves or scratched into the back of the seat in front. The cold metal bars across the tops of the seating. (I don't know why, but I always used to lean forward and bite it.) The mirror right in the corner which not only allowed the driver to see the top deck, but allowed you to see the top of his head. Not always something you'd want to see, but you'd have to look anyway.

I remember the journey that day we went to get my guitar. Well, the bus part of it anyway. Turn right on to Bromborough Rake, past Bromborough Cross, left on to the New Chester Road on the A41 into Birkenhead. Past Port Sunlight. Past New Ferry and Rock Ferry until those dark, dominating, haunting sheds of Cammell Laird shipyard appear in the distance. Past the broken road sign that says TRANMERE, right outside the yard. And up Argyle Street until you get to Hamilton Square. That immaculately manicured lawn. The war memorial and the wreaths. The grid pattern of streets like a mini-Manhattan. Nearby Birkenhead Park, which itself was the model for New York's Central Park. Nanna and Grandad Roberts, me and my sister. School holidays and bus rides. We must have done that route dozens and dozens of times. And sitting right at the front on the top deck meant you could map the route perfectly, and plot every landmark along the way. Us, these two kids from the south of England, with our genial northern grandparents who

said hello to everybody en route. Said 'ta ra' to everybody en route. Seemed to KNOW everybody en route, even though they didn't of course. They were just friendly. And so were the people.

This particular day, though, it was just me and my grandad who made the trip. I can't remember whether we got the train or the ferry from Birkenhead into Liverpool. But let's say it was the boat, because ferry rides across that brown choppy water were also very much a part of my childhood. Us Evertonians call it the Royal Blue Mersey. But it's only Royal Blue in spirit, I promise you. The world's greatest river, yes. Blue, no.

We'd walk down the wide gangplank at Woodside ferry terminal and wait to see if it was the *Mountwood*, the *Woodchurch* or the *Overchurch* which pulled up against the tyres. Stand outside the main cabin, feel the air in our faces. Watch as the Liverpool waterfront pulled nearer and nearer, loomed larger and larger, until we banged against the dock wall at Pier Head. My present that day was a Fender acoustic, model F-65, and it cost a lot of money even then. Certainly more than a hundred pounds. Sadly I never became as proficient as my grandad's generosity would have deserved. But nevertheless, it was one of those key moments in my life. My first guitar, bought by my grandad in the latter years of his life. A rare moment between just me and him. He died when I was nine, so there weren't many.

I know we went to a music shop in Whitechapel but I don't remember what it was called. Was it Hessy's, where John Lennon's Aunt Mimi famously bought him a guitar? Was it the old NEMS shop at number 12, which had been owned by the Beatles manager Brian Epstein? Or was it just an ordinary music shop with no claims to fame? Rushworth & Dreapers, perhaps. My grandad's favourite. I can't actually remember. I don't know for sure and I'll never know now, because my grandad isn't around to ask and neither is my nanna. Of course it doesn't matter. But just as football allows you to dream impossible dreams, so too does music. And as much as I'll always love Kevin Sheedy, the foremost of several Everton heroes, I've only really ever idolised two people – John Lennon and Paul McCartney. If my guitar had come from the same shop as John's ... Well. Somehow I'd be proud of that. Perhaps it's best not to know.

When nanna and grandad weren't taking us on bus rides or ferry trips, we'd be walking around parks, eating ice creams, sitting on benches. They were such simple pleasures when I think back to them. But they were always glorious days. And they were also the days when bandstands in public parks weren't just relics or architectural anachronisms. This was still only one generation after the Second World War and bandstands were still used, mostly for the military music which my grandad had played and always loved so much. It was on one such trip to the park, to hear a band playing, that my precocious love of music first became evident to my grandparents. And I think I was only three years old.

'Band on the Run, Band on the Run,' I said in some state of heightened excitement. The kind you can only get from a toddler. Grandad was perplexed. 'What the bloody hell's he talking about, Band on the Run,' he asked my nanna. She didn't have the answer.

But even back then, when I'd only just started forming the language and stringing my first sentences together, I knew which music I liked. And I recognised the non-military arrangement that brass band was playing. Now, jailer man and sailor Sam and rabbits on the run would all have been lyrics I'd have been able to associate with at three years old. But it was more than that. I loved the jangly intro, the electric guitar. The organ bit, the handclaps; the acoustic bit and the orchestral bit. It seemed like several songs in one and I could relate to it. I'm sure it wasn't written for such young ears. Maybe Paul McCartney was hoping for a more musically-educated appreciation. But the song has stayed with me all my life. And it took me years to work out that Paul wasn't really talking about milk when he sang that all he needed was a pint a day.

Edgar Chadwick

It's not just buses and ferries, bandstands and ice creams that I remember from the early part of my childhood. I remember sounds. Sayings. Mannerisms and clothing. Like the way my grandad always prodded his false teeth out, halfway out of his mouth, just to make me laugh. Like the royal blue V-neck jumper that he always wore, in honour of Everton.

He'd been born in the shadow of the Royal Marines barracks at Eastney, Portsmouth in 1904 and his life was a hard one. His father, Charles, was a colour sergeant and a notoriously tough man with a devilish look and a neatly-trimmed, Victorian-style moustache. A man who meant business.

But he was also a football man. He was the trainer at Portsmouth FC, in the days when a 'trainer' was a coach, a kit-man, a guy who did the paperwork and who ran on with a bucket. My grandad was a regular mascot at Fratton Park. And Charles Roberts, my great-grandfather, would take him along – regularly – to the matches. For some reason, Portsmouth's rivals – the Southampton players – were regular visitors to the family home on Highland Road. Charles obviously knew more than just how to handle a bucket. He was connected in footballing circles. And he could obviously handle a team, too. Because three months before my grandad was born, Sgt Chas Roberts trained the Royal Marine Artillery team which won the Army Cup Final against the Royal Engineers at Aldershot.

It was a big day. More than 10,000 people were there. And, as befits a team playing in blue like the Royal Marines did that day, there was a grandstand finish. The match report from the *Globe & Laurel*, dated 4 April 1904, summed up the drama in the dying seconds. It even sounded like a flukey winner:

Then the Marines got up on the right, and Maclean made a capital centre, but it was not utilised, a throw-in only resulting. There was a pretty dash in the centre of the field, and Smith sent the ball outside. There was a scrimmage in the Engineers' goal during the last minute of the game, and Maclean scored with a cross shot. There was only time for his colleagues to congratulate him and time was called.

Even though he was enlisted as a Royal Marine, Charles Roberts began to become involved in even more serious football. Portsmouth had only been founded in 1898 and they were scratching around in the Southern League. But back in the early part of the 20th century, the Southern League was almost

equivalent to the Football League, except that it was in the south of the country. Portsmouth's league battles would see them lock horns with their bitter south coast neighbours Southampton, as well as modern-day Premier Leaguers like Fulham, West Ham and even Tottenham Hotspur. They also knocked Manchester United out of the FA Cup. So, more than a hundred years ago, grandad Jack and great-grandad Charles would have been party to some fascinating football occasions.

It also explains why my grandad grew up supporting Portsmouth and continued that, even after becoming estranged from his father. Sadly, it was a rift that was never healed and even now, the family does not know when or where Charles Roberts died.

They'd both moved to Merseyside, my grandfather had his own Royal Marines career and their lives took different directions. Grandad's brother Leo played football for Tranmere Rovers while Leo's son, also Leo, was on the books at Liverpool. A dreaded Red, who had the audacity to marry Dixie Dean's niece and even convert her to the dark side. He was a tall man who also boasted the less than graceful nickname of 'Dirty Leo' in amateur football circles. No wonder he was a Red not a Blue. My grandad had already been a true convert to the blue cause, though. And his Everton commitment was confirmed when he took my father to Goodison Park for the first time in 1958, to see a game against Portsmouth. Everton 2-0 down, but eventual 4-2 winners. Now that's a proper introduction to Evertonia.

They were still the days of Lonnie Donegan and Buddy Holly, of Frankie Laine and the Everly Brothers. Elvis was the main man on the scene but the Beatles were still the Quarrymen, just over the Mersey. And on Saturdays, father and son would make the trip to Goodison (always leaving a few minutes early to get the 44D bus back to Pier Head, ready to catch the ferry across the Mersey). Then, a few years later, dad would start going on his own. Think about painting the shed door. Start buying his Beatles records. And eventually I came along.

A few years later, in 1976, grandad, Leo Snr and my dad were lounging around, passing the time by chatting football at home in Bromborough. The FA Cup Final, between Southampton and

Manchester United, was just a few weeks away. As it turned out, a famous final and a famous upset with Second Division Southampton winning the cup. But for my family, it was the beginning of a journey.

‘Colin, have you got a bet on the cup final?’

The question came from Leo Snr. My dad didn’t gamble. Never really has. Not because of some kind of moral stance, but just because it’s not his thing.

‘No. Why would I have a bet on the cup final?’ he asked. After all, Everton hadn’t been in it for eight years.

‘Because the last time Southampton were in the cup final, your grandfather played.’

My dad was stunned. It couldn’t be true. His grandad played in a cup final? He went away. He pored over his *Rothmans Football Yearbook*. He returned to confront Leo.

‘You’re wrong,’ he said. ‘I’ve checked. No one called Roberts played in that final.’

Great Uncle Leo simply smiled and shook his head. He remembered his time at Tranmere, while being in the Navy. Servicemen were not allowed to play professional football. He, himself, had been spotted, disciplined and stopped.

‘Your grandfather didn’t play under his real name,’ he said. ‘He played under an assumed name. Chadwick.’

Dad went back to his *Rothmans*. Sure enough, in the 1902 FA Cup Final, Edgar Chadwick had played for Southampton against Sheffield United. He played in the first game at Crystal Palace, in front of nearly 77,000 fans. He played in the replay, too, which Southampton lost 2-1.

Stunned silence. Amazement. Charles Roberts, dad’s granddad and my great grandfather, played in the FA Cup Final. He must have been a good player, all right. Played under an assumed name. Forget the bucket.

Further research revealed just what a good player Edgar Chadwick was. An inside-forward who had played for Everton in the 1890s and won the league championship as well as appearing in two FA Cup Finals. A dazzling striker who was an England international and once held the record for scoring England’s fastest ever goal. A man who was a household name, like some

of those other Everton names such as Young, Latchford and Lineker. A player who was famous the length and breadth of the country, even in the days when news was delivered via telegrams or steam trains.

In 2009, *The Times* published their list of Everton's 50 greatest players. Edgar Chadwick, with 110 goals in 300 Everton appearances, was listed at number 17. He was ahead of Howard Kendall, Ray Wilson, Joe Royle, Trevor Steven and Andy Gray. And ahead of my own Everton hero, Kevin Sheedy. This is how they described him:

A pipsqueak at 5ft 6in, Chadwick was a huge name in football. He joined Everton in the inaugural Football League season of 1888–89, and went on to win the league in 1891 as Everton became the first champions to play at Anfield. Chadwick is also in the exclusive club of players to score over a century of goals for Everton. Seldom outfought by any opponent and a brilliant dribbler, his name proudly – and deservedly – sits high on this list.

Back in the late 1970s, dad still couldn't believe it. Too good to be true. And why hadn't his own father ever mentioned it? Everton's official history, published in the club's centenary year of 1978, shows a picture of Chadwick in an early Everton team. The team which won the first league championship for Everton, in the 1890–91 season. A season when Everton were still playing at Anfield, before setting up their proper home at Goodison Park. Dad got some paper and covered the names below the photo. He showed the open page to Leo and my grandad. And he asked them if they recognised anybody in the picture.

'There.'

They both pointed without hesitation, identifying the hard-looking man with an unmistakable Roberts face and that stern, Victorian moustache. So recognisable.

'That's my father.'

Well, that was it. Dad was convinced. Who wouldn't be able to identify their own father? So he set about assembling as

much information about Edgar Chadwick as possible. Not all of it was easy to get – fires had destroyed records, clubs and the Royal Marines had incomplete archives – the whole process was painstaking and laborious.

But Chadwick WAS a star footballer – a superstar, if such a person existed in the early 1900s – and Charles Roberts was not. Service records are easy to come by, though. And slowly, but surely, the penny dropped. Charles Roberts was out of the country half the time he was supposed to have been playing for Everton. Or England. Or any of the other teams Chadwick played for. And Edgar Chadwick was born in Blackburn, not Wrexham. In 1869, not 1868. He had his own life. His own relatives and ancestors, doubtless immensely proud of him.

Who knows what the mistake was. How could such an error have been made? Where did the story come from? My dad almost didn't want to know. He didn't know how or where Charles Roberts had died. His own father had become estranged from him, and told tales of a cruel, heartless man. What was the connection between Charles Roberts and Edgar Chadwick? We'll never know. Perhaps they were doubles for each other. Perhaps it was Charles' nickname at Portsmouth with the Royal Marines Artillery team. Maybe they joked and called him Edgar. Ribbed him that he might look like Chadwick but he'd never be as good as Chadwick. Who knows? It's all guesswork.

Leo said my great-grandfather played in Southampton's last FA Cup Final before 1976 under the assumed name of Chadwick. The 1902 final, Southampton's last for 74 years, did feature Edgar Chadwick. But he was no relative of mine.

Two years earlier, in 1900, Southampton lost 4-0 to Bury in the FA Cup Final. Arthur Chadwick, born in 1875 and from Church in Lancashire, played at centre-half for Southampton. Interestingly, he'd also played for Portsmouth between 1901 and 1904. And England. Could it be THIS Chadwick? Who knows. Doubt it. Don't think so. No. Can't have been. This Chadwick died in Exeter in 1936. So no, not him – definitely not. No way. No, no, no. But then, just like the music shop and John Lennon's guitar ... sometimes it's just better not to know.