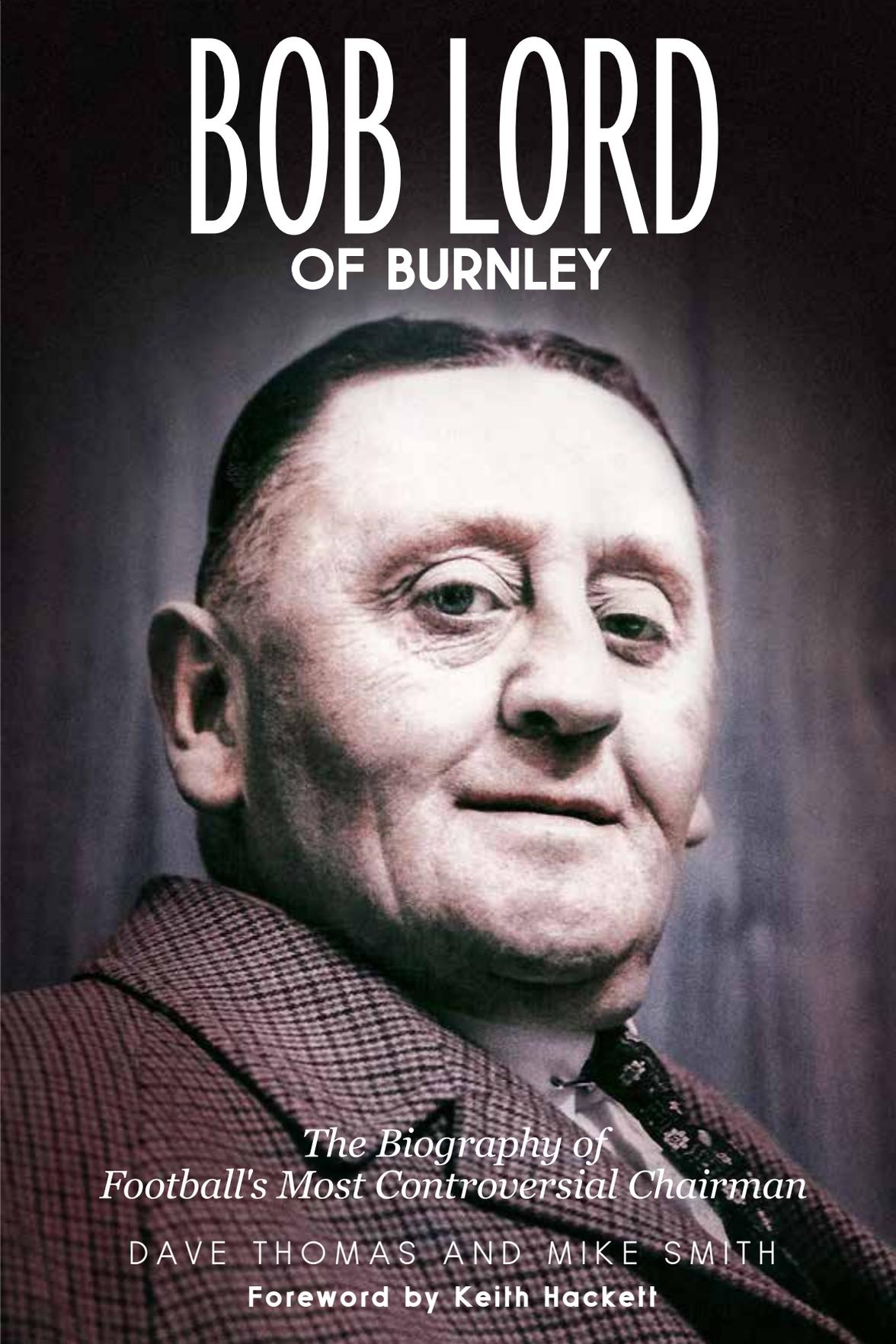


# BOB LORD

## OF BURNLEY

A close-up portrait of Bob Lord, an older man with a serious expression, wearing a dark, patterned jacket. The background is dark and out of focus.

*The Biography of  
Football's Most Controversial Chairman*

DAVE THOMAS AND MIKE SMITH

Foreword by Keith Hackett

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Part One  
**MEAT**

*'Upon what meat doth this great Caesar feed  
that he is grown so great?'*

**William Shakespeare**

*'A thick-set man, his years spent shouldering sides of beef, chopping, cutting, giving him a tough upper body strength; 5ft 9in in his brogues, a ruddy face borne from standing for hours in cold shops and refrigerators for up to 12 hours a day. He made a formidable sight in a blood-covered butcher's coat swinging a nickel-plated cleaver in one hand... Lord's days were long. The meat business came first before the running of the football club and his other interests combined to make it all a six to seven days-a-week commitment. Lord rarely saw life at home.'*

**Norman Smith**

CHAPTER 1  
SEPTEMBER 1981

*It's a pleasure to see everyone back at Turf Moor.*

*Today, we welcome Plymouth Argyle for our first home game of the season. And to get things started, here's Shakin' Stevens and "Green Door".'*

**Turf Moor DJ**

SATURDAY, 5 September, 2pm. Burnley, a northern outpost in Thatcher's Britain. A nation now divided. Two years into a Tory government and it's North versus South and the haves versus the have nots. Those with jobs and those increasingly without. The traditional northern industries of shipbuilding, steel, car manufacturing and mining are all in decline. Soon, most of them will be gone. Almost three million workers are now on the dole, a quarter of them school-leavers who have never had a job. In Northern Ireland overnight, a fourth IRA hunger striker has died in The Maze prison. After a summer of inner-city riots, across the country there is a burning anger and deep resentment at a government that doesn't care.

But it's not all bad news. Peter Sutcliffe, the Yorkshire Ripper who murdered 13 women and frequented the café near Turf Moor while out on his deliveries, is finally behind bars. Charles and Diana are expecting their first baby next summer. On tonight's telly, 20 million will tune in to watch Larry Grayson's *Generation Game*. On Radio One in the afternoon, Steve Wright told his ten million listeners on Friday that Soft Cell's 'Tainted Love' will be Britain's new number one.

League football is back and for Burnley supporters, it's a return to Turf Moor for the first home game of the season. But after a century in football's top two divisions playing the likes of Manchester United, Leeds and Liverpool, Burnley have started a second successive season in Division Three.

The Turf Moor turnstiles open and early-bird fans trickle through into the vacant stadium to find their regular spots. Meanwhile, for those who need a stiff drink or two before the match, the topic of conversation in the pubs and clubs around Burnley is the manager's team selection and if the Clarets can beat today's visitors, Plymouth Argyle.

At 2.40pm, glasses are drained and the fans all head off towards Turf Moor, passing by the programme sellers while breathing in the smell of fried onions from the burger vans. On past the chanting 'Lord Out' protesters gathered outside the Bob Lord stand on Brunshaw Road and dodging around the raffle ticket sellers and piles of police horse shit.

The atmosphere inside the ground was sombre, almost funereal. Where was everybody? It was hard for Burnley fans to contemplate how bad things had got. Those who had bothered to turn out were now paying £1.90 to watch Third Division football. At First Division Manchester City, it was £1.80. Only 20 seasons before, in 1960, Burnley were champions of England. The following year, the club had reached the quarter-finals of the European Cup. Burnley were then among the top teams in the world. But the glory days were long gone. From a Burnley supporter's perspective, the blame for the club's decline lay squarely at the door of one man. The same man who had been in charge through the past four decades, the Burnley chairman Bob Lord.

In the smoky confines of the oak-panelled boardroom, Burnley directors and their wives, along with visiting directors from Plymouth Argyle, chatted in small huddles, draining their glasses and finishing off the vol-au-vents. In the corner, at a table furthest from the bar, sat the old man taking it all in. The hooded, hawkish eyes missed nothing; watching, scrutinising, weighing them all up. This was his manor. Over 25 years, he'd run this place. He was part of the fabric, part of the history and, for many, now part of the problem.

Lord had arrived at Burnley Football Club in 1951, in his early forties. The ruddy-faced local butcher blew in like a whirlwind, bursting

with ideas. The board of directors didn't want him. The chairman, Ernie Kay, stated publicly that they would 'just have to put up with him'. But that didn't dampen Lord's spirit. He drew strength from it.

Bob Lord was now 73. His flat nose and jowls gave him the appearance of an old bare-knuckle fighter. As always, he was as smartly turned out. He wore a standard three-piece suit in Prince of Wales check. His trousers had razor-sharp creases. The starched white collar on his shirt and gold tie-pin held down his claret and blue club tie. A gold pocket watch and chain hung from the breast pocket of his waistcoat. His black Oxford shoes were polished to a mirror shine.

Lord pulled on his watch chain and prised open the watch. It was 2.47pm. He sighed and snapped the watch cover shut. He didn't want to keep *them* waiting. Best get it over with. He slowly levered himself upwards out of his chair but as he attempted to stand, a pain in his midriff stopped him in his tracks. He struggled to pull on his overcoat. Barbara, his eldest daughter, draped the Paisley silk scarf around his neck and handed him his trilby. Steadying himself on her arm, Bob knew it was time to face the music.

The pair made their way slowly up the carpeted steps to the same seats in the stand that bore his name. Once of a day, he'd have bounded the steps two at a time but since the summer things had changed. He nodded back at the few smiling faces around who looked concerned but were pleased to see him, but beyond the perimeter of the director's box not many other people were smiling.

Like Caesar entering the Circus Maximus, Lord's arrival in the stand sparked a section of the crowd into life. It wasn't ever difficult to miss him in his trademark black trilby and overcoat, but if it was cheers and applause he was expecting, he was out of luck. After season ticket price increases, no wins, no new players signed and the club in debt to the tune of over £300,000, the mood in the ground was a far-from-happy one.

On cue, as usual, the main vocal dissent came from the covered terrace opposite, The Longside, home to the hardcore Burnley fans who now struck up their welcoming overture in perfect rhythm, plus an encore, just to get the party started,

Bob Lord's a bastard – [clap clap, clap, clap]  
Bob Lord's a bastard...  
[REPEAT]

The targeted hate and abuse had gone on for years. On and off through the good years and the bad. The chanting, the 'Lord Out' banners, the letters in the newspapers and the protests. The graffiti, the hate mail, stories of dog shit through the letterbox, on and on it had gone, ever since that February day in 1963 when Lord sold Burnley's favourite son, Jimmy McIlroy, to Stoke City. Ever since that day, a rebellion had started and he had become a hate figure. Like Caesar, he waited for the knife between the shoulder blades. He knew it wouldn't be long in coming.

It had become a form of local entertainment, like bear-baiting or pig-sticking. Let's see if we can get the old man to change his ways, they thought. He hadn't. He wouldn't. The fans' choir turned up the heat, 'We all fucking hate Lord... Lord Out'. He'd heard the songs so many times down the years; he knew which was coming next.

Barbara gripped his hand. 'Just ignore them, dad.' He tried to raise a smile in return but deep inside, it hurt. The rejection, the cat-calls, the barrage of hate. It hurt. It never showed on his face but it cut deep. It hurt more than the pain he felt inside. Once of a day, he'd have sorted them out good and proper. Banned them for bloody life. But those who are about to depart this world can't muster the energy any longer.

If it wasn't them sticking the knife in, it was the shareholders demanding he stand down or the bloody newspapers. If not them, it was the BBC, the Football League or the Fulham chairman who had issued him with a high-court writ. There was the impending Football Association inquiry into his finances and a growing number of other people demanding money off him. The Inland Revenue, the VAT man and the growing line of local businesses who had not been paid. The telephone that constantly rang; the growing pile of unopened brown envelopes and bills left unpaid. There seemed to be no escape from the avalanche of problems that had crashed down on him. He wanted so much to fight back but he couldn't.

Bob Lord was dying. A cancerous tumour was gathering in strength and momentum in its mission to finish him. Where many had tried

to destroy him and failed, the ruthless cancer would not. In May, he'd asked the top consultant in his usual blunt way. 'What was wrong?' He'd been given the blunt result. Terminal cancer, three to six months. The final answer to the final question. No appeal, the referee's decision is final. Just go home and put your affairs in order.

In January, he'd been fine and in May he had represented the Football Association at Wembley. In June, he had celebrated his 73rd birthday. Now he'd never see another cup final or rub shoulders with the great and the good again. That was all history now. Finished.

After accepting the prognosis, a constant stream of questions ran through his mind. Questions with no answers. What would they all do without him? Who would take over the club and how many more meetings would he be able to attend? He'd been part of the fabric of this place, the chairman for a quarter of the football club's very existence. Mr Burnley. How would Hilda cope without him after he'd gone? Their golden wedding anniversary was just a few weeks away. All the times he'd been away from home on business, attending meetings of this, that and the other, and she'd been there in the background, running the home front, bringing up the girls. She had been his absolute rock down the years.

His thoughts were interrupted by the sight of the Burnley and Plymouth teams entering the arena. As the team captains met in the middle, another 'Lord Out' chant rang out from the terraces. The referee whistled for the match to begin and the noise from the crowd intensified. Lord tried to focus on the game and ignore the backstabbers and the hecklers, but they constantly groaned each time Burnley lost possession.

'Division Three football, Lord, Division fucking Three,' came amid the more polite calls for him to *resign*. On and on and on it went. Relentless. It was always his fault. Him. His fault. 'We all fucking hate Lord. Lord Out.'

It was him and his policy of selling the best players. Running the place as he had done like a meat market. The conveyor belt that had rolled on and on, decade after decade, churning out talent like the *Larry Grayson Show*. The chairmen from the big-time clubs queuing up with their big, fat chequebooks to buy the prime cuts: Willie Morgan, Ralph Coates, Dave Thomas, Leighton James and all the others in between. 'Thank you, gentlemen, – now if you'd kindly give the secretary your

cheque on your way out.' Surviving again for another season. Bloody good business. Then, two or three years later, buying the same surplus players back at knock-down prices.

Yet, despite all the banners, the hate and the problems, he was still here. Still on the Burnley board. Still the bloody chairman. Still the biggest bloody shareholder and still in charge, so sod them. Sod them all. What did they know about running a football club anyway? Nothing.

The cocktail of drugs Lord was taking dulled the pain but didn't help his concentration on the game. His mind flitted back and forward. Down the decades. Back to the 1920s, the 1930s and the 1940s. The war years and the ration. The glory days. In his prime, fighting fit and healthy, sleeves rolled up, building the business, churning out the profits and inventing the slogans. His army of white-overalled troops, cutting up the sides of beef and filling up the sausages with God knows what. Making a fortune.

The referee's whistle sounded to end an eventless first half. Nil-nil. Light applause from the directors as they slipped off their tartan rugs and shuffled past Lord to quaff their free half-time drinks. A chorus of boos and whistles rang out from the terrace opposite as the hardcore fans trudged off for their half-time beers.

Lord waited for them all to leave before slowly making a move to stand up. It was a sober boardroom that greeted him. The topic of conversation was mainly about the West Bromwich Albion midfielder Bryan Robson and his proposed move to Manchester United for two million quid. Two million quid, they were saying. Two million for a footballer who had suffered three broken legs. They must be bloody crackers.

He took in the surroundings of what had been his baronial home for the past quarter of a century. He'd spent half his adult life here. It might be the last time he would see the place. The honours board and the trophy cabinet. The pictures of the players, many of whom he'd signed as teenagers and then later sold. His boys. Their youthful faces looking out, full of energy, full of hope. The league championship, won during his tenure. The European Cup and Inter-Cities Fairs Cup runs. The victories over the big-name teams: Spurs, Wolves, Manchester United and Sheffield Wednesday. What fantastic times. So many happy memories. The places around the world he'd seen his boys play: London,

Paris, Frankfurt, New York, Naples. Travelling in comfort and staying in the best hotels. Eating the best food. Only the best for his boys. The good times, only 20 years ago.

Albert Maddox, the club secretary, came over and gingerly handed him a folded typewritten sheet with the day's gate figures. Lord opened it and shook his head in disbelief. Four thousand and twenty-two. 'The lowest figure for a first home game in living memory,' said the *Burnley Express's* Peter Higgs the following week. Twenty years ago, Burnley's home crowds were ten times that. More people played bingo in Burnley these days than followed its football team. Burnley's population had fallen to 80,000 and nobody wanted to watch Third Division football, when you could see Leeds, Manchester United, Liverpool and Everton just an hour away by car.

He remembered the first time he'd come to watch a match on his own as a young nipper. How he'd scraped together sixpence for the entrance fee from collecting empty beer bottles. Standing in the Brunshaw Road enclosure and seeing the great Burnley team win the Football League in 1921. Jerry Dawson in goal, defenders Cliff Jones and Len Smelt. The half-back line of Halley, Boyle and Watson. The forward line of Nesbitt, Kelly, Anderson, Weaver and little Eddie Mossdrop, the schoolteacher. Thirty games unbeaten in a season. Still a Division One league record. Some of the players turning up after the match to his father's barber shop for a haircut and a shave. He could remember it as if it was only yesterday.

His eyes moved further down the next wall. Another team. The team he helped build. His boys. The 1959/60 league championship-winning side. Blacklaw, Elder, Angus, Miller, Adamson, Cummings, Robson, McIlroy, Pointer, Pilkington, Connelly, Meredith. The dream they had all shared that had come true that night at Maine Road in May 1960. Their handsome, smiling faces beamed back at him. The team that had ruled the football world back in the glory days when he had everything in front of him and could have done anything. It seemed like only yesterday.

Yesterday, when he had dreams and ambitions to fulfil.

Yesterday, when he made his plans.

Yesterday, when he was loved.