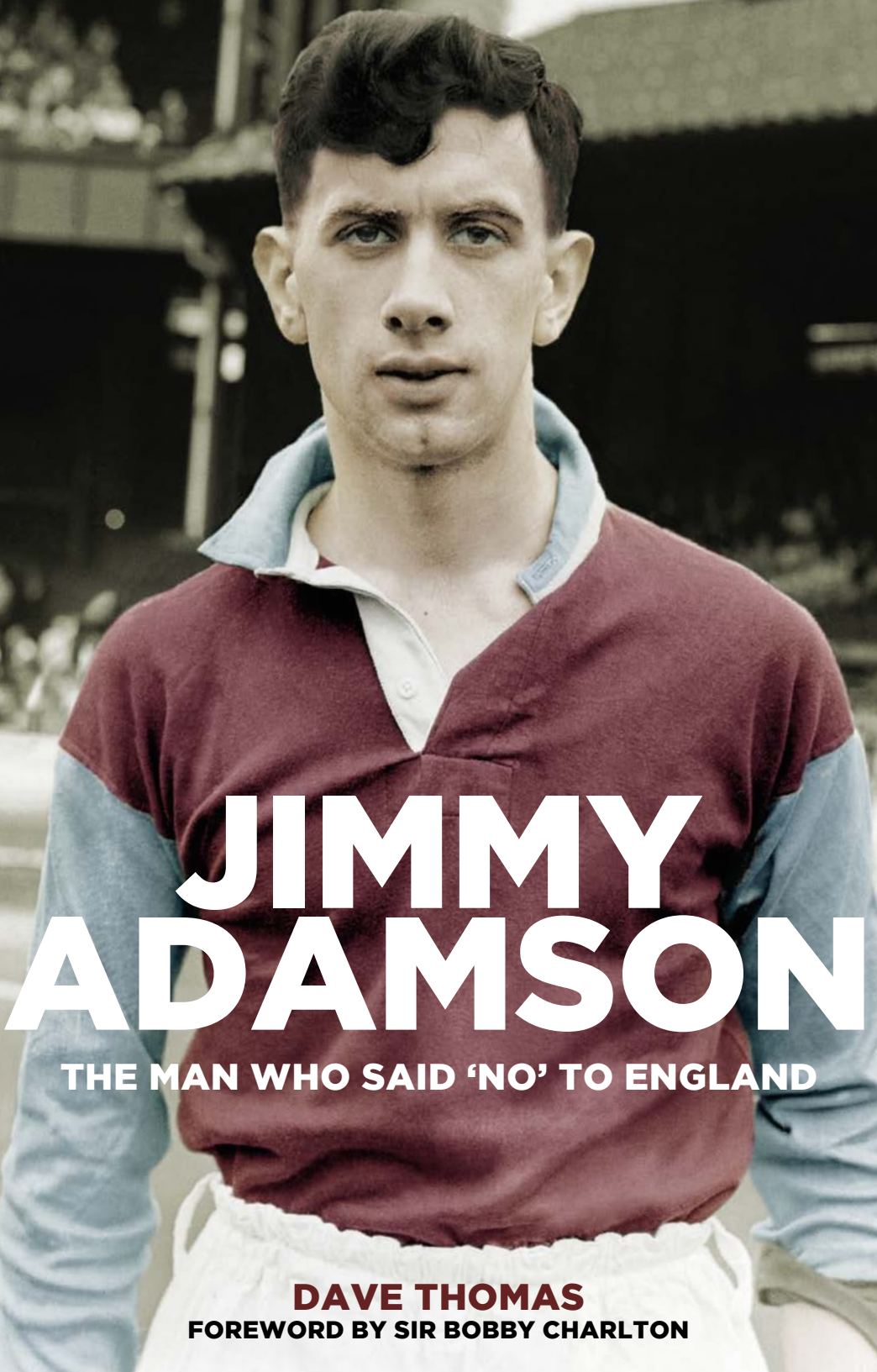

JIMMY ADAMSON

THE MAN WHO SAID 'NO' TO ENGLAND

DAVE THOMAS

FOREWORD BY SIR BOBBY CHARLTON

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pitch

Contents

Chapter 1

Fetch my luggage

I ONLY ever managed to speak to Jimmy Adamson once. It must have been sometime in 2005 and I knew that by then he rarely spoke to people about football. He'd had nothing to do with the game since the time he left Leeds United in 1980. They had joked there that he was the Yorkshire Ripper. The police used to go round the pubs of Leeds and play the infamous hoax tape of the Geordie voice belonging to the guy who claimed to be the Ripper. They would ask, 'Does anyone recognise this voice?' Voices would shout back, 'It's Jimmy bloody Adamson.' By 1980 he was none too popular at Elland Road.

The end for him came after yet another defeat when Leeds lost 3-0 to Stoke City on 6 September 1980. He'd had a year of abuse, 'Adamson out' chants, banners and demonstrations. The Stoke defeat was already the fourth of the new season in just five games. Each day he must have longed to return to the warmth and sanctuary of his home and the love of his wife, May. He kept his innermost thoughts to himself during this period and afterwards said nothing during all the years that he was out of the game. If he endured untold heartache, then he put on a brave front. If the pressure became intolerable a drink or two blurred the edges. As each Stoke goal went home he surely knew it was one more reason for the directors he could never trust to dismiss him.

The win against Norwich a couple of weeks earlier had given false hope as his arm punched the air in jubilation at the end of the game. Following that there was a home defeat against

Leicester City and more vicious fury from a seething, savage section of the crowd betraying their tribal Brigantes origins. The writing was on the wall; it was a matter of time before the curtain came down on what only a few years earlier at Burnley had seemed such a glittering managerial career following his golden years as a player.

A couple of drinks before the Stoke game would have eased his tensions, and made facing the intimidating crowd a little more bearable, but by the end he was under no illusions that this was it, the end of the line and a merciful release from an unmanageable job with its incessant demands and impossible directors. Leeds United was the Bermuda Triangle of football management and would remain so for some time to come.

He retired into a shell and avoided interviews; for consolation he enjoyed his holidays abroad, another drink or two, and he played crown green bowls. People still knocked at his door wanting to chat, or have things signed but he was frequently unavailable. Years later, by the time I decided to call it was usually his wife May who answered the door. His health was none too clever and she was protective. By this time they were almost reclusive.

It was funny the way I was asked inside. I didn't telephone first but was driving by one day while writing a book about Burnley hero Willie Irvine, and thought if I don't stop and call now, I never will. As I had been warned, it was indeed May who opened the door.

I smiled and spoke. 'I'm Dave Thomas, the guy who writes the Burnley books...'

I didn't get the chance to even finish the sentence before she broke into the biggest smile and clapped her hands. 'Ah Dave,' she spoke with clear affection, 'Come in, come in, Jimmy will be so surprised and pleased to see you.'

I knew immediately the mistake she had made. She thought I was THE Dave Thomas the footballer, the player who had joined Burnley as a young lad, and Jimmy had nurtured and coached in the late 1960s, a stunning player but had eventually been sold in 1972. Ironically, Dave had no reciprocal warm feelings for Jimmy but I kept quiet about that.

'Come in, come in,' May said again. In I went and not until I was in and the door had closed did I tell her that I wasn't THAT Dave Thomas, but only the one who wrote books and had

brought one as a present for Jimmy, the anthology that featured a number of his former players – Ralph Coates, Dave Thomas, Steve Kindon, Colin Waldron and Paul Fletcher.

Mistake explained, nevertheless I was welcomed and sat for an hour or more talking about Willie Irvine and then Martin Dobson. I explained I would love to do a book about the 'Team of the Seventies'. That was the label he gave to his certainty that he was developing a Burnley team that would dominate the 1970s, but it hung round his neck like an albatross as soon as the team was relegated in 1971. The club rose again but bad results resumed in the autumn of 1975 and once again he was mocked for the claim he had made that they would dominate the decade.

They agreed I should go again and talk more. But I never did. I telephoned some weeks later to arrange another visit to the house they had, not that far from Turf Moor, just a couple of miles up the road at Pike Hill on the way to Cliviger. Further away were the moorland hills over which I often drove, bleak and desolate on some days, beautiful on others when the sun shines and utterly stunning when the winter snows fall. It was a different May who answered. 'No sorry, Jimmy is not well. We don't want to see anyone.' I sighed; the chance was gone.

I have regretted that lost opportunity ever since. There was such a legion of questions to ask about his boyhood, him and Harry Potts, him and Bob Lord, the England job, his broken dreams; for his is certainly a story of unfulfilled ambitions and hopes. And ever since then, I have written other books saying to myself that much as I would like to try and fathom out the enigma that was Jimmy Adamson, it was something that seemed to pose so many difficulties.

I would finish one book, a year later finish another and then think, 'What next?' But the Adamson idea was always shelved. How could you begin to unravel the story and the changes over time of that complicated relationship between himself, Harry Potts and Bob Lord when all of them were gone? For different reasons these three men were giants in the history of the Burnley club over something like a 20-year period. Their paths were so intertwined, and their lives so inseparable, their bonds so close that it seems impossible to accept that by the time Lord died in 1981, neither Potts nor Adamson ever spoke to him until Potts, on finding out how ill Lord was, went to visit him right at the very end.

Worse still, Adamson and Potts did not speak to each other; and Harry's wife, Margaret, disliked Adamson intensely. In fact her feelings bordered on abhorrence for the way she perceived that Adamson had betrayed Harry and stabbed him in the back ten years earlier at the beginning of the 1970s. She wrote about this in her book *Harry Potts – Margaret's Story* with total candour and obvious hurt. With Jimmy having passed away we'll never know his side of things or the reality of Margaret's accusations.

So many mysteries to delve into: when did Bob Lord first begin to plan that one day Jimmy Adamson should have the Burnley manager's job? Why did some players revere him and others quite the opposite? Why did he turn down the England manager's job in 1962? Why did Bob Lord owe him a considerable sum of money? Why did his opinion of Harry Potts turn from what was once affection and comradeship to something that bordered on disdain? When and how did the change happen between him and Bob Lord so that a deep mutual bitterness developed? Why did that bitterness last so long and to such an intense degree, until he was persuaded to attend the opening of the suite named in his honour at the club, in 2011?

Ironically, persuaded by his former players Paul Fletcher and Colin Waldron, he had agreed to visit a few years earlier than that, but the game he was to attend was on a night of monsoon rains. He sat in the boardroom with them waiting for the directors to arrive but none did and the game was postponed. For over 20 years he had not set foot in the place. He felt shunned and unwanted, his achievements neglected.

Some questions will never be answered. We miss the opportunities to talk to people and try to solve the riddles; the answers go with them when they are no longer here and then we scold ourselves for missing the chances to ask.

For years he had refused to attend any function at Turf Moor, but when he did at last attend a game there, in January 2011, to open the corporate suite named in his honour in the Jimmy McIlroy Stand, he was a resident in a care home in Burnley. His wife May and both his daughters had died and his mind was going into that faraway place where lucidity and memory largely disappear, yet he could still remember games and results from the distant past.

Sadly his daughter Julie had died in 1998 aged only 44 and his other daughter Jayne in 2005 aged only 45. Tragedy thus visited Jimmy and his wife May so cruelly. The deaths of both his daughters must have come like hammer blows. May herself then died in August 2010. His own mother had committed suicide after he had brought her to live in Burnley near him more than 50 years earlier.

It was his former player Paul Fletcher who hosted his former boss on the occasion of the opening of the suite. Paul had become chief executive at the club and for him it was just as special as it was for Jimmy. Fletcher will forever pay Adamson the hugest compliment. 'I was a Second Division player. Then I came here. Jimmy changed my life.'

Jimmy arrived along with his grandchildren and was content to stay in the background as he sat talking to Jimmy McIlroy for half an hour by the large picture windows. As he seemed to edge closer to them it was then that he was asked to step outside. The Burnley fans were rapturous as he was introduced to the crowd before the game. Dementia is so cruel but he was in a good enough state of health to be aware of everything happening, including the reception he was given by the crowd when he appeared in front of them. The wounds that went back so many years were healed that day.

'At that moment,' remembers Paul Fletcher, 'all was forgiven and he realised how wrong he had been. The club had never disliked him; it loved him.'

The chairman of the club then was Barry Kilby and he too was present. Kilby had been a young lad at Turf Moor in his teens trying to make the grade as a footballer. 'He was in charge when I was in the A team,' said Kilby. 'I remember him coming over at the training ground one day to shake my hand and wish me well. When he left in 1976 he fell out of love with the club for a while. But the wounds healed.'

That suite today is a fitting tribute. Glass cabinets line the walls and are filled with pictures, mementoes and reminders of a long and glittering career. It was the way it all ended that is such a haunting story. I looked at one photograph in particular of Jimmy and his Scottie dog in the garden of their home and looking at it you could almost sense the person. He was a family man and he and May were inseparable.

Although he captained the title-winning side of 1959/60 and went on to play in the European Cup, the peak of his career was maybe later in 1962. He was Footballer of the Year, captain of the Wembley Cup Final side, went to Chile as assistant manager to Walter Winterbottom, and was then offered the post of England manager. His star was in the ascendancy. A long, long distinguished career was in prospect. The England job was turned down and for the next 14 years his involvement at Burnley was total before it ended so abruptly. It was a swift, unexpected termination and the start of the long and acrimonious feud with the dictatorial Bob Lord, and then a bitter period when he felt that the club did not give him the recognition he deserved.

We all have pivotal moments in our lives. Sometimes they are the result of our own decisions; sometimes they are the consequences of other peoples' actions. When Bob Lord sent a director to see Adamson on a cold, bleak, Monday morning in January 1976 to ask if he would resign in exchange for a generous settlement (dismissed and sweetened in the same sentence) his life was changed forever. What he had once thought, in fact had been told was a job for life, was finished. He poured out his feelings about Bob Lord in an unpublished article that must have been written sometime in 1976. It was among his possessions and collection of old paperwork found by his grandchildren:

> 'I lasted for six years under Lord after expecting to be Burnley manager for a lifetime. To be fair Lord treated me well until I started disagreeing with him. Then our relationship went sour. We lived almost in each other's pockets. I planned Burnley's future on the playing side and Lord did the rest. At one time I thought we were a great team. We both made mistakes but I thought our future was healthy until the day Lord retired from his butchery business and took up football as a full-time job.
>
> 'Then things started to go wrong. I spent more of my time filling in forms and listening to Lord rather than concentrating solely on the job I was paid for. Not that I'm blaming Lord entirely for the lowly position the club were in when I left last January. But his interference didn't help. I expect any chairman to be fully informed but I don't

think it's right to devote the majority of the working day to the chairman's whims.

'And he had many of those. He ruled the club with an iron fist demanding attention most of the time. My wife used to dread weekends especially when we were playing at home. Sometimes she just didn't feel like going to the game but it wasn't just a case of opting out. She had to ring the chairman's wife and report the fact that she wouldn't be there. Too many excuses were frowned upon.

'Even after a game, Lord needed his men around him – to play snooker.

'We'd troop down to the local Conservative Club, discuss the game, while Lord popped in the colours and got results that world snooker champion Ray Reardon would have been proud of. Most of us were reasonable players but somehow we always seemed to miss a crucial pot.

'That was only the start of the weekend activities. Most Sundays we were summoned to the Lord household for lunch and hours of chatter. I didn't mind the ritual but my wife hated it. But we kept going, kept eating the roast beef and Yorkshire pud, and swallowed the rest just to keep Lord happy.

'There's nothing worse than Lord when he's upset or angry. Conversation is restricted to a grunt or a sharp blast and he seems to surround everything with a deep, dark, depressive cloud. The consequences can be disastrous as I know to my cost. He starts with what I term his "pressure" system forcing people to the limit until he gets the results he wants.

'He started with me by picking up every point, scrutinising, and then trying to provoke an argument. This went on for months until our FA Cup defeat at Blackpool. Obviously this was the last straw in a disappointing season for Lord. Nobody likes going out of the Cup at the first attempt especially to a Second Division side. Burnley were no exception.

'Whilst I was out of the dressing room there were heated exchanges which finally exploded between skipper Colin Waldron and my chief coach Joe Brown. I eventually got into the dressing room and sorted out the row. It was

just one of those instant flare-ups and I knew there would be no recriminations. Lord missed the Saturday snooker match for the first time in 10 years and I spent the whole of Sunday in bed. I was shattered from working a 12-hour day and suffering from an overdose of Bob Lord. I was no better on the Monday morning and I decided to take the morning off – my first in 12 years.

'But I didn't get the sleep I needed. A director called, examined the facts and then said, "Would you be willing to resign if Mr Lord paid up your contract?" Lord had the final word of course. The following day he sent for me to sack me for not reporting the Blackpool incident and not turning up for work.

'The pay-off of £25,000 softened the blow somewhat as I became another of Lord's victims.

'I'd almost walked out on him 12 months earlier after an explosive bust-up at London Airport. The club's tour of Madeira had started off badly for him. Somebody had forgotten to pick up his luggage and he had to carry it to the taxi himself. The strain must have been too much. He was grumpy for the whole train journey down to London and didn't improve when another taxi spilled his luggage into a London street.

'I'd arranged to meet the party at London Airport and Lord was in vintage form even for him. The red cheeks had exploded into a deep crimson. The chest was heaving and the hat was tilted. Then old war-horse was ready for battle and London Airport suddenly inherited a new tannoy system.

'"It's your bloody fault that my luggage was forgotten. You ought to arrange things properly," he bellowed.

'I just turned and headed back for Burnley. I didn't get far. Another director stepped in and calmed me down. It took hours for Lord to regain his composure and grunt his apologies.

'Many troubles with Lord seemed to come from tours or holidays. A couple of years ago I was lying in the sun enjoying Majorca when I got a phone call from our groundsman. He was upset and complaining bitterly that Lord had ordered him to work from 8am until 6.30pm

with only an hour for lunch and no tea breaks. I didn't want to lose a highly qualified groundsman and asked him to hold on until I got back from holiday. I found that the groundsman had apparently upset the Lord family over the growing of tomatoes. In his spare time the groundsman was paid for looking after Lord's garden. On one of his weekly visits he found that two tomato plants had died through lack of water. The following day Lord informed the groundsman that he didn't want him at his home again.

'Whatever I said didn't matter. The groundsman eventually left and we had a real problem. It ended with me and my family manning the mowers at Turf Moor and the club's training ground at Gawthorpe. But we didn't mind; we thought Burnley was a family club, a place of spirit and warmth.

'It was until Bob Lord blew through and froze me out.'

Here was the man who had fashioned such a beautiful passing team in those golden seasons of the 1970s. The man who had been so elegant as a player, the captain of the title team, the 1962 Footballer of the Year, and the man who was even offered the England job and so much admired by Bobby Charlton. Yet here he was being spoken to and used as if he were some kind of lackey and lowly worker at Lord's meat factory.

There is so much angst and torment in that article. When I read it for the first time all I could think was if only I had been able to make those extra visits and spend long hours talking to him. But it was not to be.

One thing Adamson did do was to pen a few thoughts for a small booklet produced in the late 1980s to raise money for a by then financially stricken Burnley. When it was written Bob Lord had been dead for some years and the club was in an appalling state. A report in 1981 by Derek Gill into the financial and administrative state of the club was damning. In 1987 Burnley saved their league status only in the very last game of the season with a win and even then it was only preserved because Lincoln City lost. Jimmy Adamson watched all this happening and must have wondered just how the club had declined to such a desperate position, penniless and floundering in the depths of the Fourth Division. His finger pointed at Bob Lord:

'When I joined Burnley in the late 40s I had no idea I would be spending 27 years with the club; those years contained incredible happiness but also periods of great sadness, both as a player and manager. The downfall of this great club began with whoever made the decision to sell Jimmy McIlroy. There is no doubt in my mind that the disastrous decision was made by chairman Bob Lord, the club's megalomaniac dictator of the day. I do not want to say anything that sounds like sour grapes because the club has given me too much pleasure for that. But I think it is fair to say that Bob Lord helped to build up one of the finest club set-ups in British football; and then destroyed it.

'I joined the club before the Lord era just after the war when I was signed by Cliff Britton. He got the club on the road to success and was followed by the best manager the club has ever had in Alan Brown. He did more for the club as both a player and a manager than any other individual. He was the instigator of the Gawthorpe Hall training centre and was the inventive mind behind all the early coaching techniques which encouraged players to exploit their individual skills instead of stifling them.

'And then came Jimmy McIlroy. He was the finest player I have ever seen wearing a Burnley shirt. The whole club in those days was geared for success which eventually led us into the European Cup. The commercial side was under the guidance of Jack Butterfield with the scouting system under the eagle-eye of Dave Blakey. Young players started to come through the reserve side like Andy Lochhead and Willie Irvine.

'Whilst I was manager we had success in the early 70s, getting promotion to the First Division in 1973 built on a team of both ability and team spirit. A tragic injury to Frank Casper against Leeds United only a week before the FA Cup semi-final against Newcastle United could have been the reason why we didn't get all the way to Wembley. But the game itself when we thrashed Leeds United 4-1 at Elland Road whilst they were well clear at the top of Division One, I remember as a great victory with Collins, Nulty, Waldron and captain Martin Dobson all outstanding.

> 'I have had many wonderful experiences with Burnley Football Club. Looking back along the road I may have done a few things differently... but the trip itself... I wouldn't have missed it for the world.'

You wonder what he might have done differently. Hindsight is such a wonderful thing but you wonder if he ever regretted that 'Team of the Seventies' claim he made. Might he have regretted the sales of Brian O'Neil, Dave Thomas and Steve Kindon? Might he have handled Bob Lord differently? He must surely have rued the sale of Ralph Coates and was certainly distraught at the sale of Martin Dobson. Should he have opposed them more vigorously? Did he come to regret his eventual aloofness and indifference towards Harry Potts in the two years leading up to Harry's departure?

But the absence of any mention of Harry Potts in the article maybe answers that query. There is not one mention of him, the man acknowledged to have taken the club to the First Division title, to Wembley and into Europe – the latter not once but twice. The omission of his name and the praise heaped on Alan Brown is significant. Journalist Brian Glanville who had almost unlimited access to the team whenever they were in London is adamant that the success of Burnley Football Club was less to do with Potts, and much more to do with the foundations laid by Alan Brown, and then the outstanding presence of two players in particular – Jimmy McIlroy and Jimmy Adamson. Glanville in fact once wrote sketches for that early 1960s satire show, *That Was the Week That Was*, hosted by David Frost late on Saturday nights on BBC TV. The sketch he wrote about the tyrannical Bob Lord and the cap-doffing, subservient Harry Potts was never shown.

Twelve years after Lord had got rid of him, Adamson's bitterness was unabated. His reference to him as the megalomaniac dictator that destroyed the club is a testimony to that. It became a mutual dislike. Lord admitted to Margaret Potts while she was out walking one day, and he was driving by in his car, that he had made wrong choices. He stopped beside her and she always felt that he was about to say more, but then he stopped, bade her farewell and drove away. He commented to former player Les Latcham, when they met several years later, that Adamson was 'his problem'.

In 1963 Adamson still respected and admired his boss Potts, and even wrote that he did. He made it clear in a newspaper piece.

He suggested that the new England manager, Alf Ramsey, needed regional advisers to assist him (Ramsey probably thought 'that's the last thing I need'). He proposed Bill Nicholson in the south, Stan Cullis in the midlands, Alan Brown in the north-east, and Harry Potts in the north-west. 'Potts, Burnley's ex-player manages the club so well,' he wrote. 'To run a First Division club on a tight purse is a task in itself, but to do it and keep the club among the best in the land says a lot for his shrewdness and judgement.'

But as the years went by Adamson changed his opinions and had little time for Harry Potts. While Potts was manager with Adamson his chief coach, and presumably in Bob Lord's head manager-in-waiting, there was certainly an undercurrent that some players noticed. The more time that passed by, the more Adamson wanted full control. Potts was from the old era, tactically limited, and Adamson was from the new with a visionary mind. Potts was a manager who simply put out his best players week after week with never a thought of a change. If they could walk, they played. That was the game in the 1950s and even into the early 1960s.

Adamson, however, was from the new era, with an imaginative mind brimming with ideas and thoughts, many of them based on the Alan Brown training sessions and others on coaching courses at Lilleshall. Once Adamson became manager and Harry was pushed 'upstairs' into a vague general manager role, the rift was unconcealed.

If Jimmy Adamson was the subject of a four-part drama, you might have the playing career as part one, then the coaching career, part three the managerial time at Burnley, and then the final act of broken dreams and the sadness of failure at Leeds United. The drama of the final years at Leeds is clear. The personal and family heartbreaks border on tragedy.

Or, you could simplify his life into two distinct eras: pre-January 1976 and post-January 1976, for this was the date that was a real and life-changing watershed.

But, whichever way you look at it, one question dominates; just how did it all go wrong for Jimmy Adamson? One character undoubtedly involved in the answer is Bob Lord. There are always two sides to everything and although this book looks at Jimmy Adamson's story, the problem is that there was no one to turn to in order to investigate how Lord himself felt about Adamson and how he viewed the change in their relationship.

I met with his daughter Barbara many times in connection with other books and it was whenever Adamson's name was mentioned she bridled and it became evident that her opinions of him were none too complimentary. I do remember her saying of her father one day, 'He did so much for that man.' It was clear from the way she emphasised and pronounced '*that man*' that she had a poor opinion of Adamson. Barbara died some time ago.

His daughter Margaret, when I telephoned and who still lives in the Burnley area, straightaway answered that she had no wish to talk about him. That is not a criticism of her in any way and I immediately respected her response and pursued it no further. But, what it meant was that there was no one to speak on her father's behalf and maybe her response illustrated the depth of feeling that remains regarding these old wounds.

From previous conversations with her I do know that as Bob lay desperately ill in the final week of his life, Margaret spent a great deal of time by his bedside talking about the past and the club that meant so much to him. They talked about good times, great games, great players, celebrations and banquets, and tellingly 'the people who had stabbed him in the back'. Did he feel that Adamson was one of them?

Maybe Bob Lord's side of things lay in the letters and documents that he had kept at his home, but Barbara told me that on his instructions she spent a week burning them all. Despite his wonderful achievements at Burnley Football Club, in the final years things fell apart, so that it is now all too easy to be critical of him and the general perception of Bob Lord is that yes he was forthright, hard-working, visionary and proud, but he was also irascible, belligerent, cantankerous, bloody-minded, ill-mannered, dismissive and despotic. What tends to be remembered is his legendary rudeness along with the chaos and near bankruptcy at the club in the final years of his chairmanship. All of that is unfortunate for he was the man who created the greatness in the first place.

There is all of that, plus the question of interpretation and how easy it is to see Lord as the villain. Paul Fletcher told me a lovely story about him. Prior to one game Lord left gifts for one of his favourite referees in his changing room – various cuts of meat and succulent sausages. The referee however had a stinker of a game with a number of decisions going against Burnley

leaving Lord none too pleased. When the referee returned to his changing room at half-time the meats and sausages had been removed. Perception: was this Bob Lord being vindictive, or was it Bob Lord displaying a sense of humour? Or was it even his wife Hilda?

If there was a frustration in the writing of this book it therefore came from the lack of first-hand source material showing Bob Lord's 'other side'. At the end of chapter eight, however, is one of his letters to Jimmy Adamson, the only one that surfaced, and from this a different picture emerges; a man of kindness, thoughtfulness and compassion, not to mention intense loyalty. One or two more that I was told existed couldn't be found, including the key letter from Lord to Adamson about the money Lord had borrowed.

I knew the whereabouts of another cache of Bob Lord documents. Again the person in whose house it lay, someone who knew him well, wanted nothing to do with this book, save for the comment, 'Jimmy Adamson – not my favourite person.' Again, there is no criticism on my part, only disappointment; that Lord's perspective would remain untold.

Nevertheless, this is primarily a Jimmy Adamson book and if things began to go wrong at Burnley for him in the year leading up to his dismissal, his decline accelerated after he left Sunderland and joined Leeds United. By October 1980, he had simply had enough of the whole football business; of malicious fans, working under the shadow of Don Revie, unsupportive directors, and the sheer, never-ending, day-to-day demands of running a football club.

It all ended with the ignominy and stress of a libel action he took against Leeds, a number of newspapers and the man who replaced him, Allan Clarke. He was only 51. He retreated into the shell of his family and the love of his wife May. The man who could have been England manager in 1962 reached a point in the mid-1970s when his reputation was still immense; he had the football world at his fingertips and might have become one of the most influential football thinkers and managers of the age. At the end of the decade he turned his back on all of that and retreated into privacy.

This book attempts to chart the ultimately unhappy story, one of failed hopes and broken dreams.