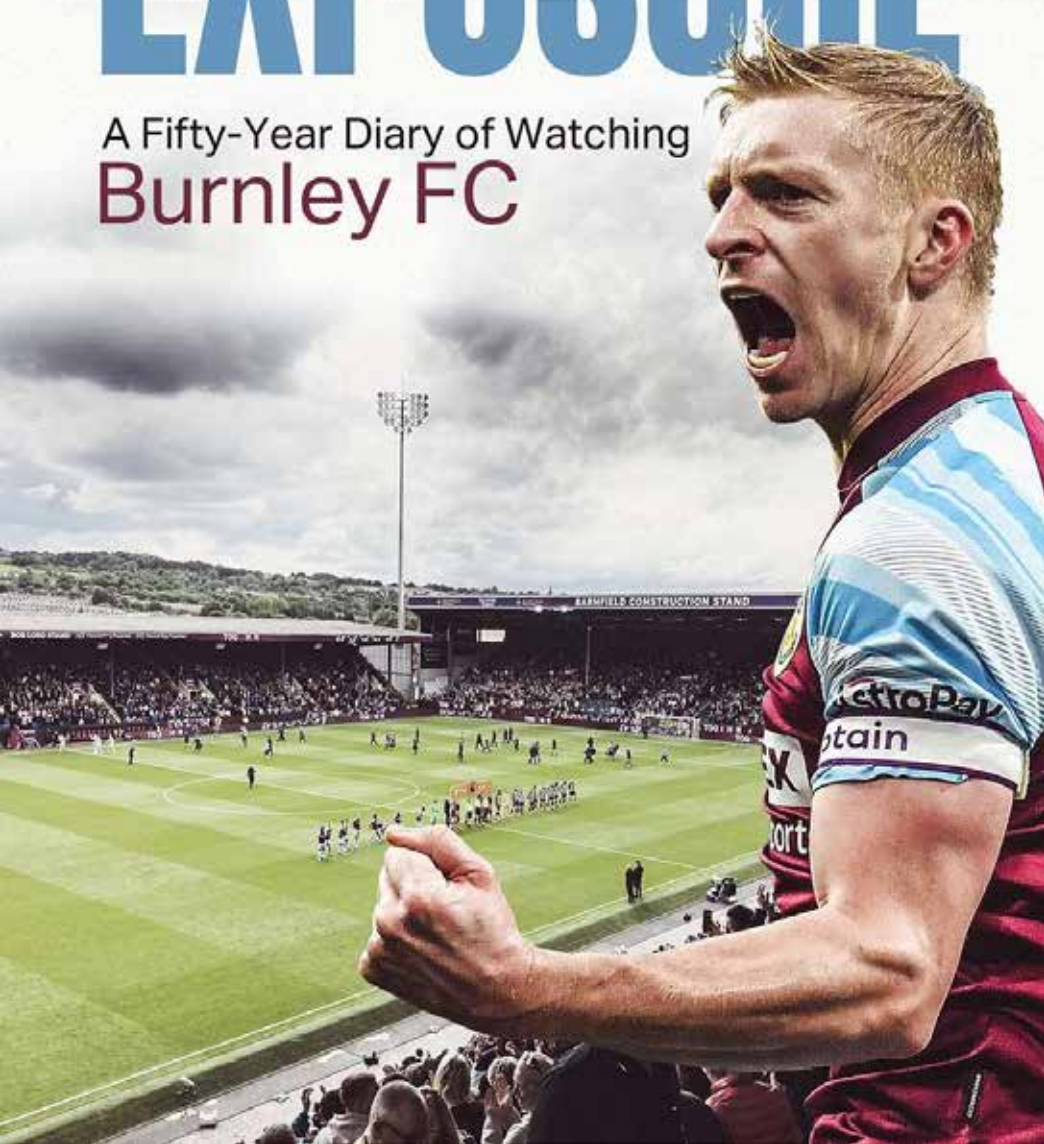


Tim Quelch

# NORTHERN EXPOSURE

A Fifty-Year Diary of Watching  
Burnley FC



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PART 1

WHATEVER HAPPENED  
TO ‘THE TEAM OF  
THE SEVENTIES’?

1970 to 1979

*‘Where Have All the Good Times Gone?’*

# 1. FIRST GAME: 1969/70 SEASON

## **Burnley 2 West Bromwich Albion 1** **21 March 1970**

*'In a Broken Dream'*

My first trip to Burnley seemed inauspicious. Stepping out of our car onto a greasy cobbled street, the gusting wind propelled icy rain into our screwed-up faces. We wondered whether we should have stayed in Lancaster. Burnley appeared broken. Around us were the scars of industrial blight: the derelict mills; the oily canal; the empty unwanted housing; and the rusted, weed-strewn marshalling yards. Yet overlooked by drab, rain-darkened moors, the occupied stone-terraced houses appeared snug and welcoming. Their flickering fires left an impression of homeliness. The packed pubs were inviting, too, with the Burnley fans amusing us with their sharp, ribald banter.

The football club, like its town, was a declining force. Frank Casper's £30,000 signing from Rotherham in 1967 marked the start of a new era when it was no longer possible for the club to rely upon an endless supply of youthful talent. With the bigger clubs turning the heads of bright, young players and their parents, proffering attractive enticements, Burnley found it harder to compete. Yet the club still attracted some gifted young players such as David Thomas, Steve Kindon, Mick Docherty, and Leighton James who thought there were earlier first-team opportunities here. But increasingly Burnley needed to recruit experienced players from other clubs, such as

Colin Waldron and Jim Thomson. To afford these purchased players and balance the books, one or more of the club's better players had to be sold each season. Their aged ground required urgent renovation too, placing further pressure on the bottom line. By the late sixties Burnley were no longer First Division heavyweights. In the four seasons leading to the start of the seventies, the Clarets became ensconced in 14th place. Heavy defeats were no longer a surprise although there were enough stirring victories to avoid the drop.

Meanwhile the local economy, once dominated by textile manufacturing and coal mining, was in sharp decline. Despite Prestige and Michelin offering replacement manufacturing, with Lucas still a local engineering giant, these businesses were undermined by the economic downturns of the sixties and early seventies, leaving them prey to ruthless takeovers. Because these businesses were subsidiaries of parent companies, they were more vulnerable to cost-saving restructuring, closures, and subsequent job losses. Rolls Royce at nearby Barnoldswick was more resilient, being specialist producers of aircraft engines and parts. Lest we forget, Britain led the world in aeronautics during the fifties before being overtaken by foreign competition, notably from America.

Unabashed, club chairman, Bob Lord, built an all-seated stand at the western end of Turf Moor, backing onto the Burnley cricket club. The original specification included oil-fired heated seats but with the sharply rising cost of oil after the Arab/Israeli Six-Day War, this idea was junked. Meanwhile, on the southern flank of the ground was an unsightly cordoned-off demolition site. The eastern end remained open to the elements, frequently bringing about over-crowding on the covered Longside in bad weather. Yet here there was often dripping water from its rusty girders. As for its toilet, this was utterly insanitary. In step with these austere surroundings, the local kids exuded nonchalant toughness. It was not so much their bovver boots or their scuffed

scarves, tied tightly to their wrists, that marked them out as hardy souls. None of them wore coats. They seemed oblivious to winter's late riposte.

Burnley's 1959/60 championship-winning manager, Harry Potts, was no longer in charge. He had been pushed 'upstairs' as general manager in February 1970, allowing former captain, coach, and favourite son, Jimmy Adamson, to take over team affairs. Harry's move was made by Lord to keep ambitious Adamson at the club. Adamson was well thought of as a coach. Bobby Charlton rated him highly having seen him in action during the 1962 World Cup in Chile. Adamson had been schooled for the England job, but turned it down, preferring to continue his playing career at Burnley.

Chairman Bob Lord thought that a Potts-Adamson partnership was his dream ticket, pairing Potts's impressive managerial track record with Adamson's vaunted coaching skills. Besides, as manager and skipper, they had complemented one another splendidly during the club's glory years. In 1963, Adamson even recommended Potts as a part-time adviser to new England manager, Alf Ramsey. But after Adamson was appointed as first-team coach one year later, their relationship became strained.

Adamson was steeped in modern tactical thinking. Potts was more of an old-school thinker, wedded to what had worked well for him in the past, not appreciating, perhaps, that he no longer had the surfeit of talent, which could make up for any tactical deficiencies. Whereas the excitable and enthusiastic Potts rarely gave detailed instruction about how he wanted his team to play, the ostensibly cooler Adamson was specific and demanding, using training-ground drills and blackboard diagrams to make his points.

But it was not just a clash of ideas that was the problem. The club's fortunes were fading as was its support. Ten years before, when Burnley were Football League champions, they



drew an average crowd of 26,869 for their home league games. But in 1969/70 this average figure had fallen by almost 11,000 to 16,072, the lowest in the top flight. There were only 12,801 diehards at the West Bromwich game, and 1,000 fewer for the ensuing midweek home fixture with Southampton. With Burnley compelled to sell their principal assets, the cracks in the Potts–Adamson relationship began to widen. Their differences in personality and style started to grate.

One-club man Brian Miller was a Potts fan. He based his future management style upon Potts's way, allowing his players to play according to their intuitions. Miller was aware of Harry's tactical limitations but warmed to Potts's freer style and his unrelenting care for his players.

Former left-back Les Latcham remembered the souring of the relationship between Potts and Adamson. He said, 'Adamson wanted sole control. This was not an unnatural ambition. He had his own theories, tactics, and aspirations but it led to a growing confusion about who was in charge. If there is one thing that footballers want it is clarity. But this was becoming blurred. This once happy club split into pro-Adamson and pro-Potts camps. Adamson once told ace midfielder Ralph Coates that he would start the next game, after playing well in a previous one. However, Potts over-ruled this. This divisive situation was damaging morale. In February 1970 Lord appointed Adamson as team manager and Potts was 'pushed upstairs'. The decision was made just after Burnley had thrashed Nottingham Forest 5-0 at home. It was Burnley's fourth win in a five-match unbeaten run. Without doubt this was a planned decision, although Potts had not been consulted. Potts graciously acknowledged Adamson's accession, saying, 'I could not hand over to a better fellow.' But he was devastated to be excluded from the Gawthorpe training ground. Potts never lost his love of the place, rubbing his hands on icy mornings, excitedly exclaiming, 'It's just like Switzerland.'

Potts found it hard to adjust to the role of general manager. He had been a father figure to many of his younger players, having rescued Steve Kindon when he was thrown out by his landlady, and comforting Ralph Coates during a family bereavement. Harry's wife Margaret harboured a grudge about the affair, feeling that her husband had been stabbed in the back. When she and Harry were denied a top-table place at the club's annual dinner, she had no hesitation in speaking her mind. What had been a happy, close-knit, family club began to fragment.

The team was changing markedly. Only full-back John Angus remained from the 1959/60 championship-winning side. Their title-winning goalkeeper Adam Blacklaw had moved on and central defender Brian Miller had retired through injury. But still young hearts ran free. Wingers Kindon and Dave Thomas were the newish kids in town, complementing established home-grown stars such as Coates, Brian O'Neil, and Martin Dobson. Kindon and Thomas had graduated from the youth team that had won the FA Youth Cup in 1968. In his programme notes for the Albion game, Potts purred about Adamson's gifted youngsters, who had performed so well in the 3-3 midweek draw at Old Trafford. Potts wrote, 'Congratulations to Jimmy Adamson and his team on a fine performance. We have a most promising set of players. Next season looks likely to be an important, exhilarating one for this club and its supporters. Two-up after five minutes and 3-1 ahead at the break, it certainly seemed to be our night. It was just our luck that Manchester United pulled one back midway through the second half and grabbed another in the final minutes.' Potts picked out Kindon and Thomas as his men of the match. Kindon drilled in the first goal from 25 yards while Thomas's quick feet accounted for the other two. 'Breathtaking footwork,' said Potts.

Not that Potts's pre-match euphoria inhibited West Bromwich. With Jeff Astle's probing runs pulling the Burnley defenders about, Tony 'Bomber' Brown broke free giving the

visitors a 21st-minute lead with a skidding strike. This was a nasty setback, for Burnley were still in relegation trouble in 18th position. That midweek point at Old Trafford had been a good result but did little to ease their worries about the drop. Stung by this early blow, Burnley set about wresting control from the Baggies, who were two points better off. Gradually, the collective industry of flitting Coates, twinkling Thomas, terrier-like O'Neil, and dogged Bellamy forced the visitors to concede the soggy centre ground as increasing pressure was placed upon Albion's suspect defence.

Kindon had been a hat-trick hero against Forest in February. He was in 'a runaway wardrobe' mode here too. Making light of the heavy conditions, he powered in from the left, uninhibited by surface water, squelching mud, and despairing tackles, launching muscular assaults on Osborne's goal. Warming to his efforts, the home crowd set aside their groaning and moaning, and threw themselves wholeheartedly into the fray. Belligerently bellowing their side on, they were suitably rewarded in the 36th minute when Kindon's powerful running enabled him to break through the left side of the Baggies' defence. Not slowing to take aim, from 18 yards out, Kindon lashed home a fierce, rising drive that screamed into the roof of the net. Albion goalie Osborne was left standing by the visceral force of the shot. This unleashed a leaping tumult on the Longside terracing as the sullen away supporters were treated to the home fans' jabbing derision.

The rain grew in intensity as a premature dusk descended. The glare of the floodlights flashed and twinkled in the muddy pools appearing all over the pitch. As the second half progressed, the game became, quite simply, a trial of strength. It was a challenge that Burnley's youngsters were determined to win. By the time that Bellamy's slithering long-range effort had evaded a thicket of legs and found goal, there were only five minutes left. Neat football had been abandoned. The objective was to propel the ball far forward and chase it in dogged pursuit. Hacking it clear

of the mud and puddles required Herculean power. We felt exhausted by association.

The 12,000 or so Burnley fans continued to urge their team forward, hurling encouragement and invective in equal measure, but the Clarets could not find another way through. It did not matter. By then, West Brom had lost their way. Little did I realise it then, but a claret and blue potion had been injected into my veins. From that sodden day onwards, my compass would automatically point north for I had winter in my blood. Although I was born and bred in Sussex the north became my spiritual home.

Burnley stayed up that season. The two points they took off West Bromwich meant that only two more were required from their final six fixtures. Two more victories over Newcastle (1-0) and Chelsea (3-1), plus a hat-trick of 1-1 draws, made that task a formality. Adamson crowed, 'We have a wonderful set of young players at Turf Moor and although we haven't won any senior honours we are soon going to. Mark my words. Our potential is better than that of all other clubs and I do mean all. Some First Division managers would give their right arms for our teenagers.'

Adamson was so confident about his young guns that he paraded all of them in the 1-1 Good Friday home draw with Stoke. Coates, at 23, was the oldest team member.