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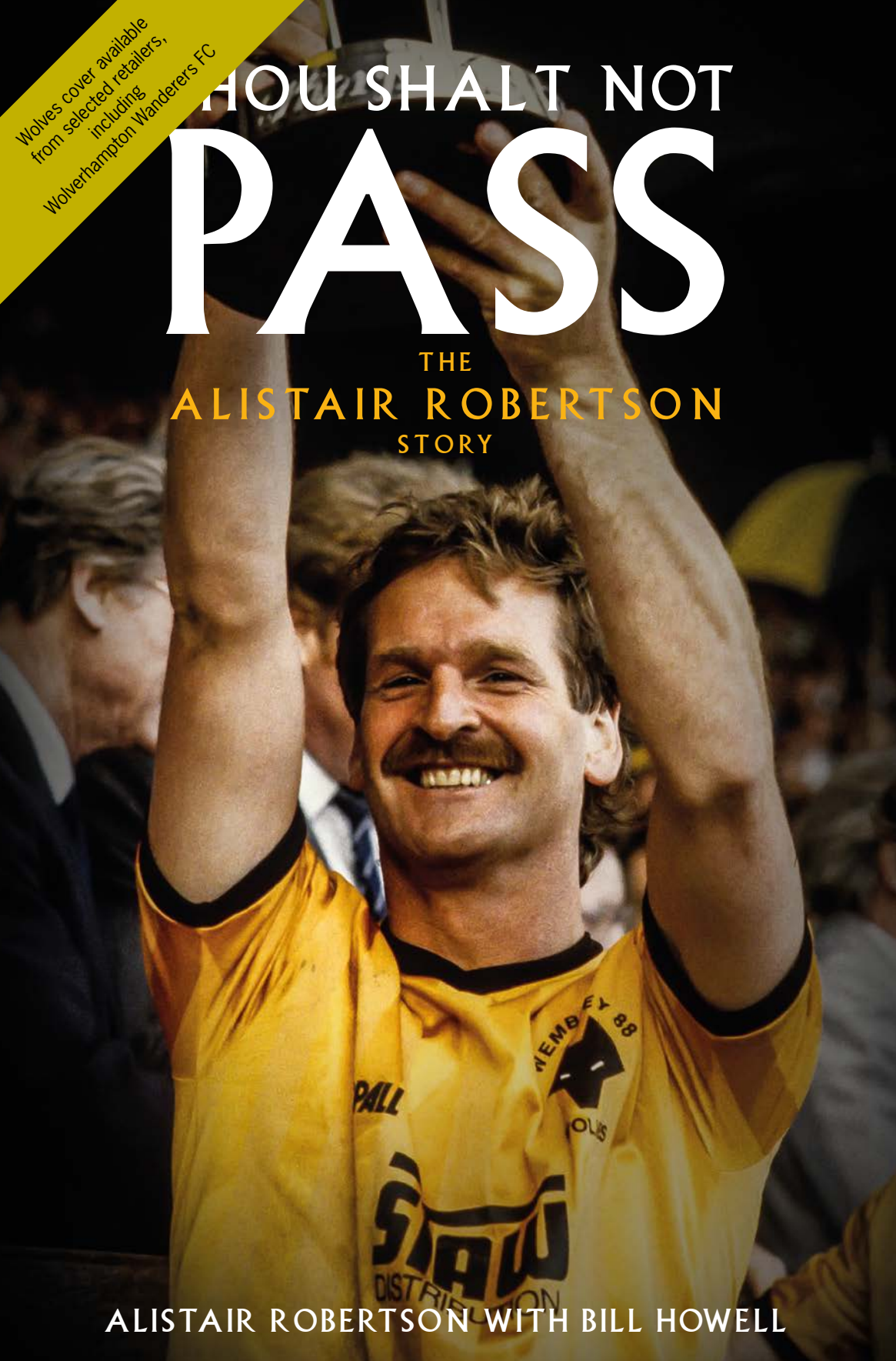
THE ALISTAIR ROBERTSON STORY

ALISTAIR ROBERTSON WITH BILL HOWELL

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Introduction

I MAY not have won anything, and I didn't play for Scotland. I've spent more time in car finance than I did on the football pitch. But for 22 years between 4 July 1968, when I joined Albion as an apprentice – turning professional on 10 September 1969 – and 1990, I enjoyed some hugely memorable times at West Brom and Wolves.

Now, at the age where retirement and a free bus pass are just around the corner, it is finally time to commit pen to paper. It has been a life of huge highs and the odd low, not just on the pitch. A case of 'close but no cigar'. But there are some things I have always taken with me: the great friendships I forged in the dressing rooms of two great Black Country rivals, and the support of the fans who stayed with me throughout my career.

There is some anger within these pages. I was angry when I left Albion – I felt shell-shocked and cheated; and a few years later, after leaving Wolves, I threw my boots and kit into a plastic bag and chucked them in the bin. A new life began. I had to pay the mortgage.

I started 504 league games, with a further two as a sub, for Albion, making 622 senior starts in total with another four off the bench. That was seven more than my partner at the back, John Wile, not that I like reminding him of that! Only Tony Brown played more matches for Albion.

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Bomber IS the Albion, so I'm happy and I'm proud of that.

It was 729 games if you include friendlies. I was their youngest captain when I led them out at 20 against Norwich in November 1972. But two FA Cup semi-final defeats saw us as the bridesmaids, never the brides.

Few captains have lifted silverware for Wolves at Wembley, but I managed that too. Jimmy Mullen went within a few months of it, and Kenny Hibbitt might have managed it had it not been for injury. Agonisingly, I went within a single appearance of the same accomplishment in 1990 – that of playing league football in four different decades.

I played against Manchester United in 1969, and played for the Baggies throughout the 1970s and for more than half of the 1980s before crossing the Black Country divide.

I was a regular in Graham Turner's defence for three years, only to suffer the frustration of not playing in the senior side again following a 4–2 home defeat against Brighton in September 1989. I asked Turner if I could be given the briefest of run-outs on the final day of my professional career – a 4–0 defeat at West Ham just before Italia '90. I wanted a couple of minutes, that's all.

It would have been lovely to reach the landmark, as so few players achieve it. Only those who make their debut at the end of a decade, as I did, have any chance. But it wasn't to be.

This is for Will and Hannah, my mum and dad, looking down on me from up on high. They may not have approved of everything I did, but I know they were proud of my footballing exploits and my two children, Laura and Andrew. Without the love and support of my parents, none of this would ever have happened.

I had such a good career. I had the loveliest time of my life out on that football pitch. I've been so lucky. I was never great, but I was rarely bad.

Johnny Giles, Big Ron Atkinson – they called me 'Mr Consistent'. I made few mistakes, but every time I did make one

it always seemed to be in the big games. I can't ever stop thinking about those big games and my huge mistakes. In the same way Tony Brown or Cyrille Regis might remember great goals, I remember errors. Defenders rarely remember the great tackles they make, and it is the mistakes I remember: Red Star Belgrade, when we were left one-on-one and I tackled only for the ball to rebound and put their player clean through to score; or Tottenham in the League Cup semi-final, when I went for a header which I shouldn't have gone for and Micky Hazard scored. And QPR, when I cleared the ball against Clive Allen's leg. It was the same in the UEFA Cup quarter-final against Belgrade: Slavoljub Muslin played a pass to Milos Sestic. No danger. I made a half-tackle, it rebounded back to Sestic and he went through and scored.

I blame myself against Tottenham in the League Cup too. I went up for a header – and I knew I wasn't going to get it and I shouldn't have gone for it, but I thought if I whacked Steve Archibald he wouldn't get the sort of contact that he wanted. So I jumped up and whacked him, and it skidded off his head and Hazard scored the only goal.

That seemed to be the way. I was always the one. In all the big games, I would do something stupid. I couldn't even watch TV highlights of that QPR semi-final until a year or so ago.

Albion had a couple of years under Johnny Giles where we'd expect to win at home and would hope to pick up at least a point away. Then we had Big Ron and it was all bish, bash, bosh, 'up and at 'em'.

We should have played in the FA Cup Final and blazed a trail in Europe, but Albion endured a bit of a dip after losing Laurie Cunningham and Len Cantello. We could have won the league in 1978/79, but the weather bit, and in truth Liverpool were so bloody good, conceding 16 goals in 42 games.

Albion were arguably even closer in 1980/81, but we lost four of our last five away games by the odd goal at Manchester City, Middlesbrough, Villa and Manchester United and then drew at

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Leeds on the final day. Win three of those – including at Villa Park – and we'd have been champions.

I remind my good friend Brendon Batson of his back pass at Villa Park from time to time, and he'll throw the QPR goal in 1982 back at me. Brendon, I may have lost a cup semi-final, but it wasn't me that handed the league title to our bitterest rivals.

As for the reasons behind this book, as you get older, you do tend to look back more, over the ups and downs of your life, trying to make sense of how you ended up where you are. We've all got our turning points, sliding doors moments they call them now – times when your life might have gone one way or the other. Inevitably, most of mine involve football. The game was what defined the first half of my life, the time when you are making your way in the world.

But in March 1975, I thought I might never play for the Albion again, about 140 games into my career. We'd had a lousy start to the season and, as managers do, Don Howe had been making changes to try to put things right. I had fallen out of favour, and he had broken up my partnership with John, with Dave Rushbury playing instead.

That's just part of the game. Managers come and go, and they all have players they like and others they don't. You get used to it – it's an occupational hazard, and you can't hold it against them.

So, for about five months, I was stuck in the reserves, only getting a couple of games when John was injured or suspended. It started to look like my days at the Albion were numbered, and I was waiting for the summer and thinking about getting away.

And then Don got the sack.

Funny enough, I'd played his last couple of games because Ray Wilson was out and we had a bit of a reshuffle, with Rushbury moving to left-back. I played the last six games of the season altogether, and suddenly everything was different.

That summer, John Giles came in as player/manager and it was a completely different world. Don, God rest him, was a

great coach, years ahead of his time. The problem was, some of us weren't! He was trying to make us do things that we just weren't ready for. Today's players would lap it up, but back then it was the early days for that kind of coaching, and players struggled to adapt.

Gilesy took to me pretty quickly, I'm pleased to say. He'd played with the likes of Jack Charlton and Norman Hunter at Leeds, and I was the same kind of 'tackle first and ask questions later' player as they were. There weren't many frills there, but if the ball was there to be won, I was having it, and that was the kind of simple approach John liked.

The other big benefit he brought with him was that he always wanted the ball. John Wile always says it made him a better player playing with John Giles: 'John was always just in front of us, always asking for the ball, so he was easy to find. You do that once or twice and your confidence grows; you make angles for a return pass and suddenly you're knocking the ball about. Do that for a few games and you're a different player.' I felt the same.

I remember in pre-season, July 1975 I suppose, Gilesy took me to one side and said, 'How on earth are you not in the team?'

For the next 450 games or so, I was always in it. And then, when that ended, I had a great time at Wolves as well. Yet if Don Howe had stayed, maybe it would have been a completely different life, then and now. But this is the one I've lived, and it's been one I could never have dreamt of when I was growing up back in Scotland. But that's another story ...

Chapter One

Early Beginnings And So Much Love

WHEN I went off and made my way as a footballer, I was used to being in a dressing room full of people – that was pretty much how I'd grown up as a kid.

The Robertsons were a big family, 12 of us kids, all growing up in the tiny village of Philpstoun, about 14 miles west of Edinburgh and a mile away from the larger town of Linlithgow where I would go to school.

I had five brothers and six sisters, so you can imagine what a strain that put on the household budget – not that you ever noticed that kind of thing as a kid. Money didn't matter to us because we were lucky: we grew up in a household where we all loved one another. I couldn't have had a better childhood – I certainly can't remember a bad time in the family home at 7 Pardovan Crescent.

I went back there in July 2015, just to have a look around after plenty of years away. I always had a memory of it being a huge place, but when I got there I found this tiny three-bedroom, semi-detached house, now home to a lovely Swiss lady. I met her

daughter and two grandchildren, and they had heard some tales of a family of ten once living there. I put them right. 'No, that's just nonsense. There were 14 of us!'

I knew she was Swiss because of the flag hanging proudly above the front door. This was the very front door I'd drenched my poor sister Morag from with a bucket of water after she had spent hours getting dressed to the nines. Her hair was matted to her skull and she burst into tears. The reason? Simply because she was going out with a young chap called Peter who was clearly a Catholic. He's now her long-time husband and a lovely chap. A real union man and, no surprise, a Celtic supporter. I would make it up to Morag by driving her out in my beloved Morris 1100, registration KOC 15E.

In terms of oldest to youngest there was John, then Betty, who died when she was 36, Ella, Tommy, Nan, sadly gone too, Billy, Jean, gone now as well, Brenda, David, Morag, me and Derek.

There were no divides amongst us – we all got on great – but, because of the ages, I spent most time with David, Morag and Derek. Derek should have made it as a footballer. He got signed on by Dumbarton, but couldn't stand the training and gave it up. He was a good player, and definitely could have made the grade, but there's more to being a professional footballer than Saturday afternoon, and he didn't like the other part so he chucked it in. He's got his own business now.

I was the minder of the youngest three. There'd be the odd occasion Derek would get into a spot of bother with some of the older kids when larking around, and my dad would ask me to step in and have a quiet word. It wasn't bad training for what I used to do on the pitch much later on, looking out for my team-mates and handing out the occasional bit of retribution!

Derek had the ability to get into all sorts of scrapes. Whenever there was any mischief flying around at school, it was usually Derek at the heart of it. Not a bad lad, just mischievous. As the youngest of so many brothers and sisters, he just wanted to act

older all the time. When he was ten, he wanted to be 15, and he ended up getting himself in trouble because of it.

That happened for many a year. He was always knocking around with older boys and I'd be putting out some of his proverbial fires, in those early days before I moved to England.

Fortunately, I'd grown up by that time, because a few years earlier, I was tiny – a little fat, stumpy thing. Then, after I got to ten, over three years, I grew about nine inches. I grew so quick I was pulling muscles left, right and centre.

It was a fantastic childhood; we never stopped laughing. We used to hurtle down the stairs on a tray and somehow miss the cupboard by the front door. It's amazing we never killed ourselves.

On a Sunday night at home, we had to do a trick to get our supper. Derek would play the guitar and sing and I'd keep the ball up. Morag would place our budgie Billy on a pair of knitting needles and spin him around and around! And the budgie thought it was great!

Typical of the time, my dad ruled the roost. He was a miner for 42 years, who would work hard for precious little financial reward. When I got paid £10 a week at the Albion, I used to send £5 of it back home. I didn't have to, but that's what you did. It was paying my dues.

Money was always tight, not that we felt the pinch, but anything you could do to bring in a bit of money was always handy. In the autumn, us kids would pick potatoes for a week. We used to get paid a fiver and would give our mum £4 and keep a quid.

Pigeons were my dad's thing. He always wanted to win the huge French race, the Reims, and I would drive down to Newcastle just to release his birds for training flights. How he loved them.

And how he loved our mother, Hannah McMullen, as she was born, who sadly passed in 1986. She was an incredible woman who worked so hard to raise us all. She never, ever raised her voice to us. She was clearly too busy to ever shout! She was a saint. 'Your dad will be coming home shortly,' that's all she would ever need to

say. That was enough to make us behave because we knew what we'd get otherwise.

Everything was done for us. We never had to do a thing. From 6am until bed at 10pm, she would work her socks off cooking, washing and cleaning. There was a time she went out the back, doing the coal run, slipped on the snow and ice, broke her leg, crawled back in and just waited there for somebody to come home. She remained on that floor until we discovered her.

Because there were so many of us, mealtimes were like running a canteen: it need military precision to get everybody served. We were in fours for Sunday dinners, which used to come in three lots: top, middle and bottom.

The older four were married off and would come with their husbands and wives, then the middle group would be the teenagers ready to go out, and then us four younger ones last: Derek, myself, Morag and David. We'd be looking at the food being served on to the plates of our elder siblings, as they were always served first, and we'd be saying, 'Mum, there'll be nothing left!'

John, the eldest, shared the same birthday as me – 9 September – but was 17 years older. He's still with us at 82. We call him the Godfather because he rules. He was my dad's favourite, at least until I started playing football. He's done ever so well. When I came to England in 1968, he went to Saudi Arabia and made his fortune.

There was my big sister Betty. She was the life and soul until cancer took her from us in her prime, at 36. Jean and Nan also died of cancer, but in their forties. My father died of cancer too.

Tommy, probably the best footballer out of all of us when we were young, and Billy have both done well, and Brenda and Morag remain young at heart. Morag and Peter live in Bo'ness, just a few miles from where we used to live. Peter worked for ICI for 40 years from the age of 15.

Morag had to run away from home to marry Peter because of his religion. They moved to Wales to begin with, along with my

sister Nan. Then they moved on to Kendal in Cumbria, and I used to drive my sisters down to nearby Windermere to see them. They had three kids of their own and are now happy grandparents. What a lovely life.

Morag arranged for all the family to attend what I, and everybody, believed would be my final game for Wolves, away at Preston in May 1989, because I thought I wasn't getting a new contract. We had just got promotion to the Second Division. I was four months away from 38 by then, and no one had said anything.

I couldn't believe it when the 'Tartan Army' were there outside Deepdale as the Wolves team coach pulled in.

They were standing there with banners saying 'Ally's Tartan Army', 'Good luck Ally' and so forth. I just thought Preston had got an Ally too! Then it dawned on me. All my family were there – there must have been 20 or more of them.

We stayed in a hotel the night after that game, a 3–3 draw, and I've never laughed so much in all my life. Out came this red book of memories sprayed gold which Morag had put together, and she proceeded to run through an episode of *This Is Your Life* as if she were Eamonn Andrews.

And then it turned out it wasn't my last game after all. The pity for Graham Turner was that he handed me a new contract that summer – which he soon regretted as my fitness restricted me to just the opening five games.

Morag was always the joker. The truth is I have never ever had a middle name. But read all the books and there it is. It says Peter, but Morag was up to her tricks. She just blurted it out as a wind-up to Tony Matthews, the Albion author, who had asked me my full name in the Halfords Lane players' lounge after a game back in the early 1980s, and it has stuck ever since.

'He's got a middle name, Peter, but he doesn't like to mention it,' Morag told Tony, who just wrote it down. Andrew, my lad, would have been just one or two at the time, because I can see him now, kicking paper cups though people's legs. So 'Alistair Peter

Robertson' I became, and if you see the framed picture of me in the East Stand at The Hawthorns, that's what it says. Morag called me 'Peter' after her husband, of course.

What a lovely family we were. All I remember is happiness. A childhood of laughs and giggles in our little village. And plenty of football, of course.

My father, Will, played for Newtongrange Star – a huge junior side in the 1920s, winning eight successive league championships and 14 trophies, including the Scottish Junior Cup in 1930. As a football fan, he followed Scotland but never really followed a club side – unlike Billy, Derek, David and myself. The four of us all followed Rangers as kids simply because we were a Protestant family.

Colin Stein, who went on to have quite a career with Hibs and Rangers, also came from Philpstoun. In the early 1970s, after Willie Johnston had come to Albion, we played Coventry. Stein was five years older than me, and because of this you could never get the football off him, no matter how hard you tried. He was rougher and tougher than anyone because of his age.

So, that day, I remember telling my team-mates, 'I'm marking Stein!' After I whacked him a few times he turned to me and said, 'You're not that little kid in the village any more, are you?'

My sister Brenda's husband, Brian, was football-mad and was a gambler. The folk from the village would all go off playing cards in the woods and I would be the banker.

I always remember one night Brian winning about £50 from Stein. He didn't have the money with him, so I was sent up to Stein's house to knock on his door for this money. I returned with it, and Brian gave me a tenner. That was huge for a kid with no money. I got the taste for it because years later I used to be Jeff Astle's banker in the card school at the Albion.

Ella's husband was Eddie Armett, and he took a shine to me right from the off. Together they would take me everywhere when I was a kid. Eddie used to run a business in Bo'ness and lived in a

big house with all the trimmings. Sometimes I'd work alongside him as he would drive all over Scotland, examining the quality of grain used for whisky.

It was exciting for us all to have one of our clan marry into such a good family. When I broke through into the Scotland Schoolboys team, it was Eddie who took me into Edinburgh to get me my blazer, trousers and shirt from Austin Reed. My reward for doing so well with Scotland. Understandably, we became very close.

Ella and Eddie had a son, Eddie junior, who was a golf professional and came to live with me for a few months. He was set to marry into a nice family in Walsall. Everything was arranged, but on the day he didn't show, not that I can point the finger.

Eddie senior hired a huge, black American Pontiac to bring nine members of the family to see me in a schoolboy international in Wales on 6 April 1968. My mum, dad, brothers and sisters all travelled in style, though poor brother Derek and nephew Eddie had to sit on the floor. 'It ate up the petrol like nobody's business, but this was a great day for us,' my father said in my testimonial programme that sits before me now. 'We all wanted to see Ally playing for his country and we decked the car out in blue and white and roared down to south Wales as proud as punch.'

As for the game, it was a 2-0 win in Swansea in front of 8,000 fans. I was paired alongside Bobby Gray from Glasgow, but it didn't all go to plan. I was knocked spark out after 25 minutes, and I remember lying there without a clue what day of the week it was. Then I heard my dad's voice bellowing, 'Alistair, Alistair, are you all right?' I survived. They weren't getting me out of football that easy.

I'd started making a bit of a name for myself by that stage – people had heard of me beyond Philpstoun and Linlithgow. I got some early county recognition when I got called up to captain the West Lothian Boys team, which beat Armadale 1-0 in the final of the Junior Cup for under-14s. I scored the goal and vivid memories of that day remain. It was my first footballing honour.

The following day, Hibernian asked me for a trial. I wasn't too fussed – I was only 12 – but I signed up with them.

At that time you could only sign as an amateur. I actually wanted to sign for Rangers, and when my local team, the Uphall Saints, started to do well, I started to get a few clubs interested in me as a centre-half. When I got picked for Scotland Schoolboys, I found that pretty much everybody showed an interest.

Scotland Schoolboys played three trial games at Stenhousemuir: the Possibles versus the Probables, played in 20-minute segments. I started in the Possibles and graduated to the Probables for the second and third games.

My confidence went through the roof, and, from being a so-so player, I was suddenly not so bad. My dad never forgot that. He kept throwing it back my way in times of struggle: 'Do you remember when you weren't picked as a kid and you battled through?'

I started taking it all a lot more seriously. I always remember one practice match that had a big impact on me. My first touch was crap. And from that day it was embedded into my mind. I started to focus on it. That's your main one. Get that right and you'll be fine. I never stopped thinking about it all the way through my career.

Either side of that game in Wales when I got whacked, I played a couple of games against England, one at White Hart Lane on 16 March 1968 in front of 15,000, including my mum and dad, and the other at Ibrox on 11 May. We won them both 1–0.

Tottenham manager Bill Nicholson and one of the directors invited me and Graeme Souness upstairs into the boardroom afterwards, individually – we didn't walk in together – and asked the pair of us who we were signing for. Of course, Graeme went and signed for Tottenham. All eyes were on Souness at the time.

Graeme was far more streetwise than I was. He was from Edinburgh, a big city, I was from the sticks. We never kept in touch, but we would always have a word before Albion–Liverpool

games as our careers took off in very different directions – him in the limelight at Anfield and me only occasionally in it with Albion.

Graeme was big, strong, oozing confidence. Like the time when he was given the number 8 bib in training by the coach, with the number 4 going to Dougie Devlin, who ended up at Wolves. Souness said, ‘I always wear 4.’ He argued his case and stormed off the pitch, and we didn’t see him for a time.

You have to look at what Graeme achieved in the game with great admiration. But was he a better player than my pal Bryan Robson? Definitely not! I shall never forget Remi Moses leaving Graeme on the seat of his pants after a drop-ball at The Hawthorns in February 1981, after Brendon Batson had given Graeme an almighty shove in the chest. Brave lad, Brendon! I missed that game through injury, part of three months on the sidelines that season. More’s the pity, as it remains a fairly memorable victory in Albion folklore because we won 2–0.

Souness went to Spurs, and I could have joined him – but when Bill Nicholson started talking, I just kept my mouth shut. I used to be so quiet it was untrue. I didn’t want to know. London frightened me. I was a boy from a Scottish village. Had I known that Birmingham was as big as it is, I’d have gone somewhere other than Albion!

That was some youth team we had, though the daft thing is that I played centre-half and Kenny Dalglish played sweeper. That’s mad looking back. Goalkeeper Tom Livingstone played against England and was immediately signed by Celtic. The skipper, our right-back, Tommy Sinclair, went to Rangers but sadly died of leukaemia in his teens – a tragic loss.

At White Hart Lane, John Robertson, soon to join Nottingham Forest, crossed for Brian Laing, set to join Liverpool without quite making it, to head home.

After we beat Wales, we lost in Londonderry to Northern Ireland in front of 5,000 fans but then beat England 1–0 in that

return game for the Victory Shield at Ibrox, John Robertson again crossing for Laing to head the winner. Scouts were aplenty at Ibrox that day: Hearts, Hibs, Partick Thistle, Celtic, Aberdeen, Forest, Chelsea and Sheffield United joined Albion, gazing at us lads in the shop window. I was voted player of the season by Uphall Saints in 1968, getting my trophy from Celtic legend Willie Wallace.

Around this time, I'd been at home with my brothers amongst the 134,461 watching Scotland take on England in the 1968 European Championship qualifiers. This is when goalkeeper Ronnie Simpson threw the ball straight to Alan Ball and England scored through Martin Peters. John Hughes equalised, but it wasn't enough, and England went on to face and beat holders Spain in the quarter-finals.

I was in love with football and football was in love with me. I was lucky. I could have gone to Celtic, Rangers, Hibs, Tottenham, Liverpool, Manchester United, Manchester City, Charlton or Wolves. I actually went to Chelsea for two weeks' training, but I didn't want to go to London. Arsenal's scout was my dad's friend. The Gunners were desperate to sign me, but again I said, 'No, I'm not going to London.'

I went to Hibs to train, where Bob Shankly, Bill's brother, was manager. They tried to get me to sign, but for some reason I wouldn't – I don't really remember why I didn't. I used to go there for training on Tuesday and Thursday nights at a time when Alex Copley, 18 months older than me, was pushing for the first team.

Quite why I chose West Brom? To this day I do not really know. It was just a feeling I got from the place. It broke my dad's heart, really, because he wanted me to go to Rangers.

There were a load of Scots in the dressing room at Albion at the time. Bobby Hope, Jim Holton, Dougie Fraser, Asa Hartford, Hughie Reed, Hughie MacLean, Dennis Martin, Ray Wilson, David Hogg, Doug Findlater (more on him in the next chapter), Eddie Colquhoun and Mark Cowan. There were 14 of us and it became quite a home from home.

It was just so easy for me to sign for the Albion because of all of those Scottish lads. When we were all trying to break through, Hughie Reed was the one that everybody was talking about as the brightest talent. A tiny, 5ft 5in outside-right with bags of pace. He sadly committed suicide in 1992 at the age of just 42.

Hugh Bailey, the Albion scout, played a key role in getting me to join Albion. He said to me, 'We'll give you all the bits that you need and if you listen and progress you'll make it ... and if you don't listen and progress it doesn't matter what we have, you'll get nowhere.'

He was the only one who used to speak to me truthfully. Everyone else was offering all sorts. Rangers were offering a few grand and all of the 'we'll do this and we'll do that for you' stuff.

But in fairness to my dad, even though money was tight, anyone who came offering money, he'd throw them out of the door. 'Don't bribe my son!'

In 1968 Charlton Athletic came calling. They were telling him, 'We know that Arsenal, Tottenham and Chelsea want Alistair and we'll sell him to them when he's 18. We'll make money and you'll make money.' My dad was clear: 'Get out!'

How could a working-class man turn that amount of money down? That would have bought him a house and a car, everything. But he wouldn't be bribed.

My dad actually knew the manager of Rangers, William Waddell. They came from the same village, Winchburgh, and had played together at junior level.

Waddell was a sports journalist at the time, before going back to Rangers, where he had played for many years either side of the Second World War. He'd keep saying to me, 'Willie Waddell will look after you.' But at the time Rangers had just stopped their youth team and only kept their reserves. All the youth players were being put out to junior sides, and I said I wasn't going there for that to happen. Dad thought I'd be above that, but I knew I wouldn't, not at 15.

A transfer to Rangers would have made my dad ecstatic, but I didn't think I was good enough and I thought I'd have more chance at West Brom. So it broke his heart – but then, to see the joy on his face when I made my Albion debut against Manchester United, that made everything right.

To see the pride in his eyes that day gave me a feeling that is indescribable. There was a big thing in the *News of the World* at the time about under-the-counter payments to kids and parents. Albion actually paid my dad £2.50 a week to be a scout for 12 months until I became a professional. He never saw a match! To my mum and dad, that £2.50 was a fortune. It was a sweetener to the deal, not great money nowadays but back then it put food on the table.

Would my dad be proud of how the last 30-odd years have gone for me since he passed away? He was proud of my footballing career. His own father had not allowed him to be a footballer when the chance arose. He was a good player for Newtongrange Star, but his dad had wanted him to get a 'proper' job down the pits.

My father, like my eldest brother, was Mr Perfect in everything he did, and there was little chance of me measuring up on that count. I am the only one of his children to get divorced. He will have been disappointed in me for allowing not one but two marriages to slip away. One? Careless. Two? Reckless. And yet he would have been proud of my children, Andrew and Laura. God knows I'm not as close to them as I should be. My failings, not theirs.

My dad passed away in 1979, at the age of 71, during my heyday. The sad thing was that Rangers tried to buy me at this time. John Greig spoke to me on the phone, and I thought I was going there. I was saying to myself, 'Please let me go there, please let my dad see me playing for Rangers.' But it petered out. Whatever they offered, Ron Atkinson wanted more, which I don't blame him for. To this day Big Ron denies that Rangers ever came in. But ask Bobby Hope! Greig was his mate and Bobby said to me at the

time, 'John Greig wants you,' and I told him, 'Good, tell him I'm ready to go!'

I would have gone there for my dad more than anything. When he died, we had a game at Crystal Palace and I wasn't allowed time off, so I flew up to Scotland for the funeral in the morning. And today's players think they have it tough?