

WHO SAYS

FOOTBALL

DOESN'T DO FAIRYTALES?

A vibrant, high-energy photograph capturing a moment of triumph. In the center, Burnley manager Sean Dyche, dressed in a white shirt and a red and blue striped tie, is being hoisted into the air by a crowd of fans. He has a wide, joyful smile and his right arm is raised in a fist pump. To his left and right are two Burnley players, also wearing their red home kit, which features the Premier League logo and the website 'PREMIERLIGUE.CO.UK'. They are both cheering with open mouths. The background is a dense crowd of supporters, all sharing in the excitement. The overall color palette is dominated by the red of the Burnley kit and the warm tones of the celebration.

How Burnley Defied
the Odds to Join the Elite

Dave Thomas

Foreword by Alastair Campbell

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INTRODUCTION

BY SEAN DYCHE

WHAT a marvellous season we have just enjoyed. This club has a rich history and I am delighted that we have been able to add another chapter to our remarkable story. I remember saying very early on that I couldn't promise results, but I could certainly guarantee we had a team that was competitive and would give everything.

The entire team has certainly done that; both the footballers on the field and my staff behind the scenes.

It's good to see that the story of the season has been recorded. Dave Thomas tells me that he only received confirmation that it would be put in print after the Wigan game, when promotion was assured, which left a month to meet the publisher's deadline.

These are diaries collated from the beginning of the season, in a non-serious kind of way. As the season progressed, Dave sniffed something special might be happening, the focus increased and the writing intensified.

I know that Dave has written other Burnley books, but he says this one has given him huge joy and satisfaction.

Now a memorable season is over and the next chapter begins as we look forward to the Premier League.

Everyone has enjoyed the collective success we've achieved, but football waits for no man. Having said that, I hope this book helps you and future fans to relive the season – ONE GAME AT A TIME.

Sean Dyche
May 2014

MOVING ON UP...

BURNLEY'S POST-WAR PROMOTION PARADES

1946/47

BURNLEY'S restoration to the First Division began one year after Second World War hostilities were concluded. These were the austerity years with Britain reeling from an Allied victory; battered, barren and bankrupt. The common cry was, 'We're so short of everything,' as food, fuel and clothing were rationed in order to feed a national export market needed to reduce the nation's wincing £3bn war debt.

According to Labour's monastic Chancellor, Sir Stafford Cripps, it was a time of self-denial. It was a message picked up by the popular 1946 film, *Brief Encounter*, in suggesting that family duty should take precedence over affairs of the heart.

It was perhaps apt then that the promotion-winning Burnley side of 1946/47 should be managed by the dour, censorious and ascetically-minded Cliff Britton, and captained by a highly principled ex-policeman, Alan Brown. Brown was a member of the international Moral Re-Armament League which maintained that moral recovery was a prerequisite for economic improvement. He was an authoritative, sturdy centre-half, who organised his team's 'Iron Curtain' defence with unstinting rigour.

In that arctic winter of 1946/47 when production halted, homes iced up, and the shivering British residents took to their beds in balaclavas and heavy woollens, Mr Brown's boys froze out their opponents, conceding a miserly 29 goals in their 42

league games. Burnley proved equally resilient in the FA Cup in progressing to an unseemly sun-drenched final at Wembley, where they lost narrowly, in extra time, to Charlton Athletic after a gallant, if attritional, display.

Britton never relaxed his disciplinary standards on or off the pitch. With his team 5-0 in the lead at West Ham, and with promotion assured, he surprised one appreciative Burnley director by berating a Burnley player for a sloppy pass. Realising the importance of sport in raising the morale of those afflicted most by these lean times, Britton insisted that each of his players had 'a duty to entertain the hard-working men and women of Burnley', often taking a new apprentice to the top of a hill overlooking the smog-filled town, where, with a biblical-like sweep of his arm, he would demonstrate the intensity of his conviction.

Britton frowned at smoking, abhorred the consumption of alcohol and was apoplectic if he found any of his players inhabiting what he considered to be 'ne'er-do-well' snooker hall haunts. Despite the flair of his flying amateur winger Peter Kippax, the deftness of inside-forwards Harry Potts and Billy Morris, and the explosive shooting of Jackie Chew, it seemed entirely appropriate that Burnley's 1946/47 promotion campaign should be achieved parsimoniously.

Burnley's promotion ushered in a 'Golden Age' in the club's history in which the groundwork undertaken by Alan Brown, on his return to Turf Moor in 1954, as a far-sighted, innovative coach and manager, paved the way for the Clarets' First Division championship under Brown's successor and former team-mate, Harry Potts, in 1960.

1972/73

Like his former mentor Alan Brown, Jimmy Adamson was a highly gifted coach. In fact, he was so good he was offered the England job before Alf Ramsey in 1962. Adamson refused, preferring to extend his playing career, which had culminated in a Football Writers' Association Player of the Year award in 1962. Like Brown, Adamson also captained a victorious Burnley side, guiding his team to the Football League championship in 1960.

Burnley's blunt and outspoken chairman, Bob Lord, was concerned about losing Adamson after the internationally-acclaimed coach ended his playing career in 1964. Lord hoped he might tie Adamson to the club permanently by assigning him a coaching role alongside Burnley's championship-winning manager, Harry Potts. But it was not long before the pair fell out over training drills, tactics and team selection. The club atmosphere soured with players unsure who was in charge.

In February 1970, Lord felt compelled to act. He replaced the kindly but tactically naive Potts as team manager with the solemn, studious Adamson. Potts was 'pushed upstairs' as general manager, where he remained unhappily for two more years before leaving the club in June 1972.

Whether coincidental or not, it was then when Adamson's Burnley players began to spread their wings. They reached top spot in September 1972 and remained there for most of the season. Enjoying better luck with injuries, Adamson could regularly play his strongest side. The defence was strengthened by the acquisition of classy England full-back Keith Newton and by the inclusion of Jim Thomson in central defence, allowing the elegant Martin Dobson to operate as a roving turret in midfield.

Deft playmaker Doug Collins came into his own as did the scrapping, fetching and carrying workhorse Billy Ingham, and the versatile Geoff Nulty. Up front, Paul Fletcher and Frank Casper formed a potent partnership, assisted by Leighton James's scorching pace, deadly crossing and powerful shooting.

In seizing the Second Division championship just ahead of Queens Park Rangers, Adamson's team secured 24 victories in their 42 league fixtures, losing only four games.

Alas, the cost of replacing an obsolete stand and keeping Burnley competitive at the highest level proved ruinous. Despite netting over £1m in transfer receipts from outgoing young talent, including Dobson and James, Burnley were relegated in 1976 saddled with debts of around £400,000 (around £12m-£15m today) with approximately £40,000 being lost each week. Following a stormy 1-0 FA Cup defeat by Harry Potts's Second Division Blackpool in January 1976, Adamson paid

for this failure with his job. Despite Potts's briefly successful return to Turf Moor a year later, without Adamson's attention to detail professional standards fell, as did fitness levels and tactical awareness.

After the abolition of the maximum wage in 1961, the club's 'sell to survive' policy could not be relied upon to guarantee solvency. Once that artificially levelled playing field was removed, Burnley were less able to compete with the bigger, richer city clubs in attracting gifted youngsters. With the local economy continuing to languish, by 1980 Burnley found themselves down, if not yet out, in the Third Division.

1981/82

At the top of the singles charts, UB40 ('One in Ten') and The Specials ('Ghost Town') railed against the economic and social malaise gripping Great Britain. In Burnley, its last deep coal mine at Hapton had closed in February, and its last steam-powered mill, in Briercliffe, was destined to shut shortly. Unemployment levels were between 18 and 20 per cent. Although it was once the world's leading producer of cotton cloth, Burnley had become less like the cradle of English industrial revolution as its casket.

This was a valedictory occasion at Turf Moor, too, with the final flowering of its once famous youth policy. It was fitting then that a former product of that proud process should be in charge – local lad Brian Miller, another star of the glorious class of 1959/60.

Three of Burnley's Third Division championship-winning side of 1981/82 went on to play regularly in the First Division – full-back Brian Laws, centre-back or midfielder Michael Phelan and flanking midfielder Trevor Steven, who was also capped by England.

Meanwhile, apprentice Lee Dixon was waiting in the wings hoping that a big club might recognise his immense promise. Other former youth team graduates played leading roles or bit parts in Burnley's promotion success too, including full-back Andy Wharton, strapping centre-half Vince Overson, penetrative midfielder Kevin Young, and nippy winger Phil Caverer.

However, after a dismal home defeat by Swindon on 3 October 1981, watched by a meagre crowd of 3,377, Burnley seemed destined to exit the Third Division via the trap door rather than as champions. But a startling reversal of fortune began a week later.

Manager Brian Miller was indisposed with appendicitis, but his deputy, Frank Casper, came up with a winning plan. It involved deploying the regal if veteran Martin Dobson as a sweeper, allowing progressive full-backs Laws and Wharton a licence to advance.

The new system worked like a dream. Burnley defended redoubtably and broke quickly. Wharton and Young scored in a stunning 2-1 victory. While six out of the next seven games were drawn, a 3-2 win at Bristol City in late November revealed how good this young side was.

Here, the undoubted star of this switchback game was 18-year-old Trevor Steven. Seemingly oblivious to the frenetic tackling and heavy surface, Steven oozed precocious class. Always composed and precise in his passing, he nonchalantly freed himself of any trouble with a feint here, a drop of the shoulder there, and a dab on the accelerator. He continually changed the direction of play, twisting one way, and then another, looking for runners, rolling out inch-perfect passes to the Burnley wide men and prodding teasing passes through a thicket of City legs. It was obvious then that this Berwick boy was destined for the very top.

Northern Ireland international Billy Hamilton and Steve Taylor scored the crucial goals, but at contrasting ends of the age continuum, Dobson and Steven epitomised Burnley's irrefutable class.

Not even the horrific events of the Falklands War disturbed Burnley's relentless acquisition of points as the club raced to the line, seizing the Third Division championship ahead of rivals Fulham, Lincoln City and Carlisle United. And yet within 12 months it all went horribly wrong. Despite reaching the League Cup semi-final and the quarter-final round of the FA Cup, Burnley's 1982/83 league form was wretched, resulting in their immediate relegation. Miller and his successor Casper

were held culpable as the club turned to an outsider, John Bond, to revive its fortunes

1991/92

However, Bond's appointment proved disastrous. True, he was unlucky with injuries but he was guilty of discarding the talented youngsters too quickly. Meanwhile the board allowed the cost of their replacements to spiral out of control. There seemed far too many cheques and not nearly enough balances. The club became almost bankrupt, forcing a fire sale of its remaining young assets, and leaving it to face the traumatic 1986/87 season with just 13 professionals, comprising the lame, the grey and the green.

The embattled club board turned once again to its stoical, ever-faithful servant, Brian Miller, to avoid the looming rocks. But by 9 May 1987, Burnley faced relegation to the Conference, and possible liquidation. Only a desperately tense victory in the final game of the season, plus Swansea's defeat of Lincoln, saved Burnley's bacon.

However, the near-death experience galvanised both town and club. Attendances rose and the TSB rediscovered its capacity to say 'yes', enabling Miller to strengthen his hand. Incredibly, just 12 months after confronting oblivion, Burnley progressed to the final of the Sherpa Van Trophy at an almost packed Wembley. It seemed inconceivable that the club would ever play again in front of an immense crowd of 81,000, with 30,000 supporting Burnley.

However, the recovery momentum stuttered thereafter. Miller was once again replaced as manager by Frank Casper, but, apart from guiding Burnley to a Fourth Division play-off place in 1991, Casper was unable to deliver promotion. After a hapless defeat by ten-man Scarborough on 28 September 1991, Casper resigned to be replaced by his deputy, Jimmy Mullen. Mullen's impact was immediate and astounding as Burnley won their next nine league games. By Christmas his reinvigorated Burnley side was top.

The secret of Mullen's success was his employment of a more direct style of play which capitalised on his players' pace, power

and potency. His wide men, John Francis and Steve Harper, frequently broke at lightning speed, setting up copious chances for the mobile and marauding strikers Mike Conroy, Roger Eli and young Graham Lancashire.

Meanwhile, Burnley's robust back four, in which centre-backs Steve Davis and John Pender were outstanding, authoritatively barred the door, assisted by the more defensively-minded Andy Farrell and the box-to-box raider John Deary in central midfield.

On 2 May 1992, a Turf Moor crowd of over 21,000 acclaimed Burnley as the Fourth Division champions, the title having been secured at a crammed Bootham Crescent, York, four days before. Burnley, like Wolves, had achieved the rare distinction of winning all four divisional titles.

The 1991/92 championship season remains as a treasured memory for many long-standing Burnley supporters. After the bleak times which had preceded it, this was the ultimate restorative victory. The country had been racked by rising unemployment, record bankruptcies and resulting civil strife with hooded joy-riders 'burning rubber', with apparent impunity, on the mean streets of Cardiff, Birmingham, Oxford and Tyneside, but in equally troubled Burnley, the long-awaited ascension of the Clarets granted a welcome distraction, and a sense of hope.

1993/94

After a season of consolidation in the Third Division, manager Jimmy Mullen looked to progress further, signing creative strikers David Eyres and Kevin 'Rooster' Russell, and industrious midfielder Warren Joyce, son of former Claret Walter. Former Everton and Stoke star Adrian Heath led the line, having been recruited a year before, as had inspirational goalkeeper Marlon Beresford. With ex-Aldershot man Adrian Randall also beginning to demonstrate his undoubted ability as an attacking midfielder, Mullen's team was attractive and dangerous pushing forward.

However, it was less convincing when under the cosh, notably when playing away. One supporter commented, 'The contrast between home and away performances has been

startling; at home, confidence abounds, the ball is passed to feet, space found, superb crosses put in and wonderful goals scored. Away, there is no space; long balls are hoofed out of defence to our isolated forwards, while the opposing strikers are allowed glaring gaps.'

With Eyres, Francis and later Ted McMinn largely hugging the flanks, and Randall proving little help to an oppressed defence, the under-populated central midfield was frequently overrun. Nevertheless, Burnley's impressive home record garnered enough points to scrape a play-off spot, resulting in a two-legged semi-final tie with a free-scoring Plymouth team which had completed its fixtures 12 points ahead of Burnley, having thrashed Hartlepool 8-1 away in their final game, while Burnley were losing 4-1 at already-relegated Exeter.

There was little doubt that Peter Shilton's men were expected to reach Wembley. After securing a dour 0-0 draw in the first leg at Turf Moor, it seemed as if the Pilgrims thought that the result was a foregone conclusion. The Devon club had even arranged their Wembley trip before Burnley arrived at Home Park.

To add deplorable insult to insufferable complacency, Burnley's black winger, John Francis, became a target of venomous racial abuse. It was perfect justice, then, that his immense speed and assured finishing should turn the tie in Burnley's favour after Plymouth had taken an early lead. After Warren Joyce had scored Burnley's decisive late third goal, a Wembley final against Stockport beckoned.

The play-off final proved to be a stormy affair with Stockport having two of their players dismissed for violent conduct. Thanks to a sublimely-struck goal from David Eyres and a scuffed one by right-back Gary Parkinson, Burnley made their numerical advantage count, but there was considerable uncertainty as to whether the club would be strong enough to retain its place in the second tier.

And despite 12 additions to the squad, including four loans, Burnley were relegated 12 months later. Although Jimmy Mullen hung on to his post for much of the following season, a poor New Year run resulted in his resignation, whereupon he was replaced by Adrian Heath.

In the four seasons which followed relegation in 1995, Burnley faced the prospect of relegation in three of these, with the closest call coming at the end of the 1997/98 campaign when former England international Chris Waddle was in charge. Only a home victory over Plymouth in the final game rescued them although, as in May 1987, Burnley were indebted to a result elsewhere in making their narrow win count.

1999/2000

With Waddle resigning a few days after the 1997/98 season ended, former Claret Stan Ternent was chosen to succeed him. Ternent had impressive coaching experience at Sunderland, Crystal Palace and Chelsea and had helped guide modest Bury into the second tier. However, Andy Payton apart, Ternent was unimpressed with Waddle's signings and set about making sweeping changes.

Having been granted a larger transfer kitty by new club chairman Barry Kilby, who took over at the end of 1998, Ternent paid substantial fees to acquire former Burnley centre-half Steve Davis and dynamic midfielder Micky Mellon. Other notable signings included goalkeeper Paul Crichton, creative midfielder Paul Cook, scrapping combatants Lenny Johnrose and Ronnie Jepson, and the versatile Graham Branch and Gordon Armstrong.

However, shocking consecutive home defeats by Gillingham (5-0) and Manchester City (6-0) in late February and early March 1999 seemed to threaten Burnley's third-tier status and Ternent's tenure. Fortunately, Ternent retained his pugnacious resolve, while chairman Kilby kept his head.

Both were duly rewarded as Burnley completed this difficult season with a ten-match unbeaten run with prestigious victories at Stoke (4-1) and at home against Premier League-bound Fulham (1-0).

The momentum this late run created was then carried forward into the following season. In Steve Davis, Mitchell Thomas and Ian Cox (signed from Bournemouth in January 2000), Ternent assembled one of the strongest defensive partnerships in the division. He had two tough-tackling but

progressive full-backs at his disposal in West and Armstrong, enabling him to play three or five at the back.

Blessed with a selection of forceful, energetic box-to-box midfielders, including Mellon, Johnrose, Branch and youth team graduate John Mullin, Ternent could accommodate the wing wizardry of Glen Little and the assured playmaking of Paul Cook to increase his attacking options.

Up front, Ternent continued with the successful pairing of Andy Cooke as target man with the ultra-predatory Andy Payton, although the ex-Palace, Arsenal and England star Ian Wright was signed in February 2000 to boost Burnley's goal-power, helping the club to secure automatic promotion behind Preston North End. At Turf Moor, the frenzy of Wright adoration bit much harder than the so-called 'Millennium bug'.

Sustained by his trio of burly defenders and a fearsome ball-winner in Kevin Ball, Ternent's Burnley narrowly missed out on play-off places in the ensuing two seasons. By then a new striking partnership had been established between Gareth Taylor and Burnley's first £1m signing, Ian Moore, prompted briefly by Paul Gascoigne during the final games of the 2001/02 season.

However, the financial collapse of ITV Digital hit the club's resources badly forcing it to make severe economies, including the sale and lease-back of Turf Moor and the Gawthorpe training ground. Thereafter, the club was more concerned about hanging on to its second tier status than in progressing to the higher division. Consequently, Ternent's contract was not renewed at the end of the 2003/04 season, after the Clarets had narrowly escaped relegation. Instead, the Burnley board of directors turned to Steve Cotterill, a young, promising manager who was accustomed to performing well with slender resources. Cotterill did well in ensuring that Burnley became hard to beat, trading frugally in the transfer market, but he seemed to be drained by the constant effort of beating the retreat. After a dire home defeat to Hull in the autumn of 2007, Cotterill left the club by mutual consent to be replaced by St Johnstone's enthusiastic manager Owen Coyle.

2008/2009

Helped considerably by additional investment, Coyle was able to strengthen the club's attacking prowess, bringing in Scunthorpe striker Martin Paterson, Manchester United's wide midfielder Chris Eagles, and Cardiff's target man Steven Thompson, alongside promising Dundee United central midfielder Kevin McDonald.

But arguably Coyle's greatest contribution to Burnley's success was his indefatigable positivity which inspired a good team to both believe in, and play above, itself. Coyle's enthusiasm and inspiration was so infectious that his players became convinced that they could beat anybody, including the best opposition in the land, as they did in the 2008/09 cup competitions when eliminating Fulham, Chelsea, Arsenal and West Bromwich Albion, and in almost overturning a 4-1 deficit against Spurs in a pulsating League Cup semi-final second leg at Turf Moor.

Coyle led by example, choosing to play alongside his rising stars, such as Jay Rodriguez, in reserve team games, providing them with a constant stream of encouragement and occasional advice. Tactically, he made a crucial change, too, by moving veteran right-back Graham Alexander into a holding central midfield position to help shore up Burnley's sometimes suspect back line and in enabling defence to be turned into attack quickly.

Thompson's job was to hold the ball up in advanced positions allowing his rapidly advancing midfield colleagues, such as Robbie Blake, Wade Elliott, Chris Eagles, Joey Gudjonsson, Kevin McDonald or Martin Paterson, to inflict damage with their quick feet and powerful shooting.

A late surge in form saw Burnley reach the play-offs, having thumped Bristol City 4-0 in their final game. One of the division's front runners, Reading, were beaten in both semi-final legs, with spectacular strikes from Paterson and Thompson at the Madejski Stadium. Elliott then produced another stunning shot to defeat Sheffield United at Wembley.

Despite registering a 1-0 victory over Manchester United in their opening Premier League home game, brought about

with a blistering volley from Robbie Blake, Burnley were far too vulnerable on their travels.

Up until Christmas, only their excellent home form kept them in with an outside chance of survival. But early in the New Year, their charismatic leader Coyle decided to jump ship in favour of relegation rivals Bolton Wanderers. The effect on the players' morale was devastating. Having been encouraged by Coyle to believe in themselves, his departure seemed to signal that they were not good enough. Coyle's replacement, Brian Laws, seemed powerless to stop the slide. Successive home defeats to Blackburn (1-0) and Manchester City (6-1) at Easter emphasised the hopelessness of their chances.

Back in the Championship, Burnley found themselves well behind the leading clubs, Queens Park Rangers and Norwich City, although still in with a chance of reaching the play-offs. But the prospect of achieving this took a nosedive after a diabolical home defeat by Scunthorpe during the festive period. It spelt the end of Brian Laws's period in charge.

Eddie Howe, the bright, young Bournemouth manager was appointed as his successor. Despite making a number of important signings, including striker Charlie Austin, central defender Jason Shackell and full-backs Kieran Trippier and Ben Mee, Howe was unable to improve Burnley's prospects of promotion. Meanwhile the Premier League booty was slipping away, requiring the club to plan increasing economies in order to break even, meaning a lower player wage bill and a smaller squad.

For the 2012/13 season, the 'parachute payment' was halved, reducing from £16m to £8m. Despite an uplifting start with a 2-0 victory over Coyle's recently-relegated Bolton, results fell away quickly with Burnley shipping far too many goals. However, it was something of a surprise when Howe requested a release from his contract only a few months into the season, citing family reasons. Little did anyone realise, then, that with Howe's departure and Sean Dyche's subsequent appointment, history was about to be made.

Tim Quelch
May 2014

July

ALL ABOARD THE PENSIONER SPECIAL

THESE were the usual thoughts. The new season almost upon us; here we go again. The addiction continues. This season none of us expect anything of note. Survival maybe and retain the Championship status and we can count ourselves fortunate. That'll do for us.

The last of the parachute payments and after that what's to come, slow decline? The experts and the bookies have us down maybe even for the bottom three and the dreaded drop. It's an unfair world, little Burnley, penniless, David versus Goliath. McCann and Paterson gone, Jensen released, heroes of Wembley 2009 and that magical promotion.

We have our season tickets again. You do what you can.

It was a first ever trip to the south-west coast of Ireland for me and Mrs T. Prior to this there'd been a fleeting visit to Carrickfergus and Belfast up in the north; and many years before that to Dublin when me and a pal went. That pal was John Helliwell, he of Supertramp.

In our youth, we used to scour the market stalls of Manchester for jazz records on Saturday mornings. There was a little band at school, he played saxophone and I played piano. He practised and practised and I didn't. He stuck to his lessons and I gave up. He became a millionaire and megastar of the 1970s and I became a poor teacher and writer of football books that make no money. There's a moral in there somewhere.

It was a 6.30am start from Turf Moor – with the usual crowd and some new faces as well. Zimmer frames, bus passes, walking sticks and things with wheels were in plentiful supply. I'm not mocking – I'll be 70 myself next year.

We see some of the crowd just the once a year and you just pick up where you left off. Thirty-three people made the trip and had the hotel had spare rooms there might have been more. We'd left Leeds at 5am and drove over the tops on a gorgeous morning to see the moorland covered with cotton grass. Pendle Hill poked out of the mist that covered the vale and Burnley below. None of us began that journey with anything other than a good few days in prospect. None of us had any idea that this would be a season that would develop into a monumental journey with magical stops along the way.

The talk as we progressed along the motorways (along with Rocky shouting down the coach 'When's the next brew?') was of what happens next at this football club. The ground buy-back was a plus; the exit of key players a worry. Pato and McCann gone and other players, of lesser value tis true, had been told they could clear off. Charlie Austin had been on the verge of signing for Hull City but then the deal was called off when the medical showed problems with his knee according to Steve Bruce.

In truth it produced a no-gain situation for everyone, leaving Burnley with a player who could walk free in a year's time even if he stayed and ran his socks off and scored 30 goals. Then no doubt, dodgy knee or not, the offers to him would come flooding in. Or, it gave Austin a tricky decision as to whether to play safe and sign the new contract offered by Burnley. And for Burnley – £4.5m would not be heading their way.

While we were in Ireland, Championship clubs like Reading and QPR were allegedly sniffing round trying to sign him on the cheap for £2.5m. Minus the pay-out to Swindon it would leave Burnley with a paltry amount that would barely last a couple of months. Didn't the directors say at one stage we did not need to sell? At that price we hoped not.

The first pre-season friendly ended in a 1-0 defeat at Morecambe. Opinions varied as to whether it was a tad

disappointing; or it didn't matter because it was just a glorified workout and fitness session in the evening heat. Maybe I'm old-fashioned but Burnley 1 Morecambe 0 looks better than the other way round, and wins breed confidence. The inevitable questions were asked about the manager. There had been times during his first months at the club when things had seemed uncertain and lacking in promise. With just a handful of games to go the bottom three beckoned.

Replacements for departed players had been hard to spot other than four new goalkeepers. Then there was the mystery of full-back Joseph Mills signing permanently with the surprising news that it had been part of the loan deal a year earlier. And yet with Dyche he had hardly figured in the first team. A hero of the promotion year, Brian Jensen, was another to depart, muttering (allegedly) that there had been little interest in his testimonial year. There had been talk of a testimonial game – it seemed to be following the same path as the proposed Jimmy Mac testimonial game some time earlier; nothing happening, until Jensen tweeted that things might be in the offing.

Through the preceding weeks we'd worried or grumbled about this and that; membership of the EU, the euro, Syria, the vacuum that is Nick Clegg, the bloomin' cold spring, the state of Nigella Lawson's marriage. For anybody heading to Egypt for a holiday in the sun it wasn't just the Germans who might be snaffling the sunbeds – now you had to watch out for the Muslim Brotherhood getting there first.

A couple of things were never off the news – the royal baby and Wayne Rooney, would he or would he not stay at Manchester United? Frankly I didn't give a jot. And then there was that wonderful sporting weekend when the Lions stuffed Australia in Sydney and then Murray won the Wimbledon final. That was truly mint. I had a tear in my eye and a lump in my throat and the last time that happened was Wembley 2009 at the final whistle.

Nobody grumbled on the coach at the wonderful weather. It was brilliant from start to finish other than a few clouds appearing from time to time. We saw Ireland at its glorious

best; green, verdant and largely empty until you reached a small town here and there. The Irish Sea was flat and still; the journey to Cork on largely vacant roads.

From our hotel bedroom window we could see Blarney Castle poking up through the trees. We climbed up the hundreds of winding stone stairs on the morning of the game against Cork to get to the top and the famed Blarney Stone. Up and up and round and round this narrow staircase we went inside the walls hanging on to the safety rope; the same steps where men in tights swashed and buckled, and years ago one guy killed his brother and then he himself was murdered by his son in order to inherit the castle. They didn't mess about in them days. Little tiny rooms lead off from the stairway where evil deeds and skulduggery took place, when pillaging was a respectable profession.

When you get to the top you skirt round the battlements and because the roof caved in years ago it's now an awfully long drop to the ground floor. At the stone you lie down on your back and twist and bend and end up half upside down with your head over this drop of hundreds of feet down below. A guy hangs on to you and then you kiss the stone. Mrs T couldn't quite reach it and kissed it with her nose. It hasn't increased her gift of the eloquence, but she says she can smell things a lot better. This stone is supposed to be one half of the Stone of Scone; or the other tale is that a local vicar years ago thought, 'Now here's a way to make some money, bring on the tourists.'

Blarney is a nice little place with a few brightly-coloured shops and bars dotted round the village green. On one side of that there's the enormous old Woollen Mills now converted into a huge three-floor shop, and other parts of the mill are now a pub, a vast stone-floored restaurant and then the hotel. On the other side of the green are the castle and the gardens.

Coaches pile in; people pile off, all through the day in both mill and castle. When we wound our way up the castle stairs there were Americans in front of us and Australians behind. Blarney is big business, but trust me, all done in the best possible picturesque taste and somehow it still seems unspoiled.

It was the weather for shorts and a whole range of chubby knees were on show. John Smith and Barrie Oliver revealed knees that hadn't been seen since the Coronation. The chef came out of the kitchen and I could see him totting up the chops he could get out of them.

We took a stroll round the village after breakfast on the first day. A few Garda were lolling about waiting for a café to open or a crime to avoid. The castle has a Poison Garden filled with stuff like hemlock, cannabis, heroin, opium, wolfsbane, belladonna and birthwort. Poisoning the neighbours was a popular sport in medieval days. It needs special permission to grow some of this stuff in there today but the Garda raided it one night and took a few plants away.

As we strolled round the street one guy sitting on a wall bid us good morning – at least I think that's what he said – it was almost unintelligible. A little further on was a small chap with an orange beard, in a green suit and sitting on a mushroom. He grinned and nodded so I smiled back. I never gave it a thought but then quickly realised: hey that's odd, green suit, orange beard, surely not. But when I turned round just seconds later he'd vanished. Now then: I'm not one for making things up but I thought the way he suddenly disappeared was pretty spooky and left me wondering...

The coach left for Dingle at 10am for a day out. The Dingles in Dingle on the Dingle Peninsula, we had to make the pilgrimage. The journey took us through Ireland at its best. Eric demonstrated that it is indeed possible to drive a ten-foot wide coach down an eight-foot wide country lane. The roads wended and weaved this way and that, up hill and down dale, through mile after mile of fields and farmland. Sometimes a view of the sea, creeks, rivers and estuaries opened up.

Through the villages we went; Tralee, Trala and Traladiddle, Ballybunion and Ballyawful. Signposts pointed to Kilkenny, Killarney and Kilwilly. Macroon was the biggest that we passed through, a long main street lined with bars and shops and cottages. They have the habit over there of painting every building they can in the brightest, most garish colours possible, so gaudy you need sunglasses. Blues, crimsons, purples, yellows,

reds, you name it and then the window frames are painted in something else, usually the opposite, but equally psychedelic. It's like driving through a technicolour cloud of LSD. It's as if people find a shed filled with old paint tins that need using up and think, 'Jaysus Paddy, this'll look grand.' Do this at home and you'd have the town council jobsworths telling you to cover it up or demolish the house.

'Grand' is the word everyone uses. 'How are yer this mornin'?'

'Ah oi'm grand.'

'Good mornin' Seamus, 'tis a lovely day 'n all.'

'Ah ter be sure, 'tis grand alroight.'

'Good mornin' sor and would yer loik the full breakfast?'

'Ah yes that'll be grand.'

Dingle on a rainy day no thanks, but this was a day of warm sun and blue skies. It was grand. It was packed, the place doing a roaring trade. On a normal day it's just a quiet fishing harbour. We took a boat trip round the bay to see Fungie the local dolphin who has lived there for 30 years. For an hour this creature, as big as a Mini, swam, dived, leapt and plunged for our entertainment. He'd come alongside the boat and then disappear. I swear he puts on a deliberate act and a performance and has done this for years. The bugger knows though, just when you're about to click the camera, he vanishes to pop up on the other side of the boat. It was the first time I'd heard a dolphin blow a raspberry.

In the evening back at the hotel there was old-time dancing and familiar Irish songs with Finbar O'Shuffle and the McHooligans. Rocky Mills, one of Burnley's most colourful supporters – and loudest (on his best behaviour most of the time) – and Rockette did some fine gliding around. A few of the elderly locals turn up every Sunday for this musical treat. Young folk on our trip were hard to spot and before anyone says, 'Oi cheeky sod just watch what yer saying', I'm a pensioner myself.

Anyway we fitted in quite well on this musical evening. The night before, after dinner, we'd sat out in the warm, balmy air putting the world to rights and wondering what the season would bring. Bottom half of the table was the general consensus.

Matchday was Monday and a chance to wander round Cork after some shopping in the Woollen Mill in the morning for those who had any money. I'm cross because I decided not to buy another claret and blue scarf. Plenty more in the club shop you might think, but this one was rather swish and superior in cashmere, and reduced from some fancy high price.

On yet another blazing day there was a temperature of 30.5 in the city. Cork is a kind of mini-Dublin and the open-top bus tour took some of us round the city's narrow streets and along the riverside. Others headed for the Guinness dispensaries. From the upper deck of the bus we could look down on claret shirts and travelling fans congregating outside the pubs. It made you remember there was a game that evening.

These pre-season trips are special. For me the game is not the priority; it's the 'holiday', the meeting-up with old chums, meeting new ones, the big breakfasts, seeing new places and then if there's a win it's a bonus. The weather made it all totally special.

There was indeed a win. We were dropped at the ground, Turners Cross, at 5.30pm. Turners Cross is the home of Cork City, sponsored by Clonakilty Black Puddings. Some went to the pub for the free drink provided by co-chairman John B; some went in early to read the programme and eat our sandwiches. The players were out warming up in the still-blistering sun and we, knowing no different and with ageing eyesight, and they being on the far side, thought it was Burnley.

'Yes that's Wallace,' said Mrs T. 'There's Austin.' We watched approvingly as the goalkeepers went through their routines thinking they were our new ones that we'd never seen before. 'Looks good,' I said as one of them made some smart saves. And then Burnley came out.

Having discovered that these were the Cork guys that we'd been admiring, one of their goalkeepers came over clad in black and with black tights to our touchline with the job of lobbing crosses over for his buddy to catch. Behind us sat Lynne Barkess and her gang, the golden girls, all of them pensioners. We were only a few seats away from the poor lad in tights. It's not long since Cork were penniless and the lad's tights still had holes in

them. This loud voice belted out from behind us, a voice that could fell trees a hundred yards away.

'D' yer know yer've gor 'oles in yer tights?' He didn't hear or pretended not to. The voice yelled out again.

'D' YER KNOW YER'VE GOR 'OLES IN YER TIGHTS?'

This time he heard and turned round sheepishly. A Burnley accent at 10,000 decibels would sink a battleship. He rubbed his ears. Suddenly he had a migraine. The golden girls mocked him shamelessly and offered to mend them for him. Craftily he shifted his position so that he was ten yards further down the pitch out of harm's way.

Lynne was with her father who was also on the trip, 90-year-old Harvey O'Hara. What a fantastic fella. He's watched Burnley since before he can remember. He saw Tommy Lawton. He worked down the mines in Burnley as a boy. He joined the Army in the Second World War and became a commando. He jokes he knows exactly where he was on the beach on D-Day, 'Sixth from the end on the left.' These guys are heroes.

The squads went in; the Cork goalie presumably making a mental note to raid his girlfriend's tights drawer. Burnley came back out with new man David Jones. Trialist Scott Arfield played the whole game and in the second half in the middle of the park had a storming game. Danny Ings was in little genius mode. Ross Wallace pinged over the crosses. Austin looked classy. Shackell, with Kevin Long and then Michael Duff, looked solid. Mee joined Mills on the injured list after coming off worse in a 50-50 tackle. Treacy showed again that somewhere in there is a damned good player who could run a game commandingly if he wanted to. Hewitt didn't do much wrong and looked a bit meatier than he was.

Chris Gibson, Burnley FC's catering director, after he had stuffed himself on chips and gravy at half-time, fell asleep for the second half. All in all we looked a class act for long spells and then found out afterwards this was only the Cork City second team.

What was impressive was the number of Irish Clarets there. One of them lived just 20 minutes from the ground and three or four times a year comes over to stay in Harrogate and then

gets to a match. Another guy from Longford was staying in the hotel.

It was a 7am breakfast on day four and an 8am departure. I guess most of us could have stayed longer. There have been some memorable pre-season trips. This was one of them. The sea was still like glass and the return ferry journey smooth and calm. If it's Cork again next year, put our names down now Joyce please. The whole trip was just – grand.

Truth is we saw nothing to make us think, 'Hey we got a team here that might do something.' Our thoughts remained the same. This will be a season to cling on and hang tight. 'And after this season,' we worried, 'there's no more parachute money, so gawd 'elp us.'