

Our Story - June 2011

### A Footballer Friend

Brian Wood was a regular at the Food 'n' Friends Lunch Club along with carers, wife Carol and daughter Sara. Joy Walton, a neighbour of mine, helps organise the lunches and told me about Brian. She knew of my love of football and the fact that I commentate for Ipswich Hospital Radio at all Ipswich Town's home matches.

Joy also knew I'd like to meet Brian because he was once a professional footballer. I delved into the online player records and discovered Brian had started at West Bromwich Albion in 1958 and his other four clubs included Colchester and Crystal Palace before his career ended in 1976. I found a photo on ebay of Brian in his heyday and this led onto the owner of this photo sending some other pictures of Brian at Palace as a gift, as Brian was a boyhood hero of his. I also contacted a Palace hospital radio colleague who remembered Brian's Palace debut late in 1961 which ended in a 5 - 0 defeat. Obviously Brian hadn't settled in properly then!



Brian in his Crystal Palace kit circa 1962.

After Brian had finished playing he settled near to Debenham and was a scout (the player searching variety) for Preston North End as well as managing a sports club on the edge of Ipswich.

When I met Brian he was clearly pleased to hear someone chunter on about 'the beautiful game' and hopefully he was impressed by the knowledge I had built up, researching his career. Brian's good sense of humour came across and I lent him some old sixties football annuals to enable him to recall some ex-colleagues. Don't forget he played in an era when footballers didn't enjoy the huge salaries and the high profile they do today.

Then I had the idea of getting Brian along to see a live match at Portman Road. What could be a more appropriate game than Crystal Palace? With my contacts at Ipswich Town, I was able fix

up special access to a wheelchair area of the ground for him to watch the game and a pre-match visit to the Champions Lounge in the Britannia Stand.

So on April 9<sup>th</sup> 2011, his daughter Sara (a football fan too, unsurprisingly) accompanied Brian. I met them both, but the real bonus was some special guests who talked to him before the game.

One person Brian knew well was Charlie Woods who played with him at Palace in the mid-sixties. Charlie was also part of Sir Bobby Robson's back room staff during that Ipswich Town period of FA and UEFA Cup glory. Phone numbers were exchanged for a future meet up. Pat Godbold then came for a chat. She was Bobby Robson's secretary for many years whilst Bobby was at Ipswich and also when he managed abroad and is now the club's archivist. After a brief conversation with her, kick off time quickly arrived.

The game was very entertaining - end to end as they say. The result was 2-1 to Ipswich, but that was immaterial to Brian. He had enjoyed a great day out and was I'm sure able to have some special memories triggered. Brian was a well respected and long serving professional footballer and he shouldn't be allowed to forget it. There are plenty of older fans around the country who haven't forgotten him either.

Steve Robbins