LOOK BACK IN ANGER
The Rock and Dole Years - 1947 to 1960
Ken Brown
Editorial Note

Throughout the 20+ years of true faith’s life we have been fortunate to publish some absolutely outstanding material. There are indeed some talented people in the stands supporting Newcastle United and we’ve been privileged they have chosen us to be the platform to give voice to their experiences, recollections and opinions.

One of the most popular series of articles we have published (so far) was the long running Look Back In Anger, the Rock & Dole Years which covered the club in various sections from the post-war period right up to modern times. We covered the history of the club as a season by season review and they were written separately by people who were there, watching from the stands and variously following United home and away, clicking through the turnstiles when football and society was very different to what it is now.

The series involved a whole range of supporters from different generations and were real fan-view, on the spot accounts of Newcastle United, stripped of the myths and other rubbish. These season by season accounts in full detail are how it felt to be following our club in those years.

It was a privilege to read them and feature them in the pages of this fanzine. A passage of time has now passed and we are sure there are plenty of you who want to read them again. There will be plenty who never caught them the first time round.

So, here is the first series we have put back together for you. From 1946/47 to 1959/60, Ken Brown, formerly of the Big Lamp, a 10 minute walk away from St James’ Park, provided these superbly detailed and personal accounts of his time following the club and a bit more over what was an incredible period for Newcastle United in the post-war period.

As ever, we thank Ken for his time writing these brilliant pieces and sharing them with us.

We would like to dedicate this publication to all of the players and supporters at Newcastle United over this period.

Alex Hurst - Editor
Michael Martin - Founder.
After the bleakness of the war years, official football returned for the season 1946/1947. We were in the second division, having been relegated there at the end of season 33/34. Although the war had ended almost a year earlier, the effects were still apparent, with food and clothing rationing and shortages of just about everything. Life was stumbling back together but times were certainly hard.

**Look Back In Anger**

**The rock and dole years - 1946/47**

However, there was the football to look forward to once again and United played their first match away to Millwall which ended in a 4-1 win. Goal scorers were Roy Bentley with 2, Jackie Milburn and Albert Stubbin. Three legendary strikers who would become icons for United, Chelsea and Liverpool. All in our first post War line up. There then followed an away win at Notts Forest 2-0. Before the first home game of the season there were letters to the Chronicle complaining of the high prices being charged by the Club.2/- in the Gallowgate and Leazes Ends and 1/3d on The Popular Side. That’s about 10pence and 7 pence in today’s dosh. Then came 6 games featuring a series of draws and wins, with one defeat only, at Burnley by 1-2. So in the first 8 games the record stood at 3 wins, 4 draws and 1 defeat with the team sitting in 3rd place in the league, 14 goals for, 8 against.

The next game however saw 52,137 spectators witness an astonishing match at home to Newport County on the 5th October. This will rank amongst the all time great matches at SJF. Scorers that day were Roy Bentley with 1, Jackie Milburn 2, Charlie Wayman 4 and Len Shackleton 6 adding up to an almighty 13-0 scoreline. It was 7-0 at half time! This was the home debut of “Shack” who would go on to become one of the most controversial figures in football. Known as the Clown Prince of Soccer he would play 38 league and cup games that season, scoring 22 goals. A great player, and very controversial, he was one we lost to the Mackers after a fall out with the United hierarchy.

He was also the one who wrote a chapter in his autobiography headed “What the average Director knows about football” and then left the page entirely blank.

Opposite the Gallowgate End in Strawberry Lane those days was St. James’ Hall which featured boxing and wrestling bouts most weekends. It is doubtful any of the wrestlers on the card that night would have had such a mauing as the Newport players suffered that afternoon.

Southampton away 1-1 and Bradford Park Avenue away 1-2 were followed by Man City at home. We won this one 3-0 with a hat trick from Charlie Wayman. Charlie was one of many very good centre forwards we have had over the years and it was typical of United they would fall out with him and he would leave early the following season for Southampton.

Next up was an away win at West Ham 2-0 and then a 4-0 thumping of Sheff Wed at home with Wayman scoring all four! By the end of this season he would score 34 goals in league and cup. In total he played in 52 games for us, scoring 36 times. Fulham away 3-0, Bury at home 1-1, Luton away 3-4 (we were leading 3-0 at half time), Plymouth at home 3-2 (we were losing 0-2 at half time, a Bentley hat trick with three headers securing the win) and Leicester City away 4-2 followed. In these 5 games we notched 14 goals scored by Wayman 4, Bentley 7, Shack 2 and one from Tommy Pearson.

It was now coming up to Christmas 1946. Just about everything was rationed and everything was in short supply. Whatever was manufactured in the UK be it ships, cars, locos, tractors etc. was destined for export as the country was bankrupt after the massive cost of the war. This included toys, and those that were available were hugely expensive. Forget turkey, chocolates, cakes and other goodies. Chicken if you could get one was a luxury item and would remain so for a few more years to come.

Nevertheless, there was always the Christmas panto to cheer us up which included such “big stars” as Dave Willis at the Theatre Royal, Jimmy James and Jackson Earle at The Empire and The Grand Theatre in Byker was showing The Pied Piper of Hamelin starring Billy Whittaker and Joan Rohan.

After a home win over Chesterfield 2-0 (Wayman 2) on the 21st, we were at home again a few days later. On Christmas day we entertained West Brom who had a good side in those days and a crowd of 44,722 saw us beaten 2-4 with goals from Shack and George Stobart. Next day (Boxing day) the return at the Hawthorns saw us lose 2-3, Wayman (who else), getting both goals. It was usual to play matches on Christmas Day and this continued up until the 57/58 season no doubt causing severe aggravation on the part of ”wor lasses” throughout the region. Because it got dark early the kick off times during the winter months would be around the 12.30p.m.mark, gradually getting later as the year progressed. No floodlights in those days.

Millwall away saw them gain some revenge for our opening day win at their place when we lost 0-2. After three straight defeats there were 5 letters from
irate fans to the Evening Chronicle in the Jan 1st edition blaming the defence and the directors of the club. Two of the letters castigated some of the fans in a “certain section of the ground” for mercilessly barracking a defender (not named). However, on New Years Day order was restored when we beat Notts Forest at home 3-0 (Bentley, Wayman, Woodburn). Also on New Years day 1947 saw the newly formed National Coal Board officially take over all the pits in the country. On 2nd Jan it was reported in both the Northumberland and Durham coalfields there was an estimated 65/70% absentee rate. Perhaps the lads thought now they owned the pits they only needed to show up when they felt like it.

More likely they were suffering from New Year’s Eve hangovers. At that time there was a serious shortage of fuel which caused some industries to work short time and the loss of productivity was keenly felt.

Next up were Swansea Town, who in those days were a town, not a city, which we won 2-1 thanks to goals from Shack & Wayman.

Then, on Jan 11th came the FA Cup which began with a 6-2 thumping of Crystal Palace at SJP. We would go on to reach the semi-final this season, losing out on a Wembley date by getting duffed up 0-4 by Charlton Athletic, then a first division side. Unlike today the FA Cup was the tournament in England, better by far than winning the First Division. It was a big day out in the capital and was recognised as a major prize throughout the entire football playing world.

62,873 fans would turn up for our next league game at SJP for Tottenham Hotspur and they would see a 1-0 win thanks to a Shack goal. On the 25th we beat Southampton at home 3-1 in the 4th round of the FAC. At the end of Jan we lost away to Burnley 0-3 who would go on to gain promotion to the First Division at the end of the season. Two league games only in Feb of 1947. On the 1st we thumped Barnsley 4-2 at home, goals from Bentley, Shack, Stobart and Wayman and then on the 15th we lost 1-3 at home to Southampton, our lone goal courtesy of Tommy Pearson. In the FA Cup that month we drew with Leicester City 1-1 at home and then beat them 2-1 away in the replay. On March 1st we then won away at Sheff Utd 2-0 in the 6th round.

There would be no more football played until the 22nd of March due to the exceptionally severe winter weather which saw the entire country under several feet of snow and brought practically to a standstill. In those days, needless to say, teachers and children were still expected to find their way to school and did!

Eventually things got under way again with home games against Fulham (1-3), Birmingham City (2-2) and Luton Town who were given a 7-2 pasting, with goals from Wayman, Stobart and Shackleton, Milburn and Joe Harvey. Joe was an exceptionally good right half and captain and would look after his teammates if any trouble arose. He was a tough ex sergeant-major and did not go looking for trouble, but if any started he would finish it. At this stage we were 5th top of the league and would remain there for the rest of the season.

The season then more or less drifted to a close which included a notable 2-0 away win at Man City. Goals came from Tommy Walker and Charlie Wayman. The win was notable because at the end of the Season City were promoted as Champions with 62 points from 42 games. We would finish with 48. In those days it was 2 points for a win and 1 for a draw. They would score 78 goals and concede 35. Our record was 95 and 62.

On March 29th we met Charlton Athletic in the semi-final of the cup at Elland Rd and were fancied to win. Charlton were near the bottom of the first division and fighting relegation. In front of 47,821 they whacked us 0-4. Charlie Wayman was mysteriously dropped for this match and replaced by George Stobart. It was a huge shock and left thousands upon thousands Geordies who crammed the terraces at Elland Road hugely disappointed.

On June the 7th the season ended with a 2-4 defeat at the hands of Newport County with Shack and Tommy Pearson scoring. Our average home attendance that season was 49,435.

At this time ALL sports were seeing huge gates with the likes of Greyhounds at Gosforth and both Greyhounds and Speedway at Brough Park (attendances in the 13,000s). Senior Rugby was played at Gosforth and Northern, Horse Racing at Gosforth Park and Boxing/Wrestling at St. James’s Hall. Cinemas and Theatres (4 in Newcastle, 1 in Gateshead) were all booming.

The Marx Bros, Errol Flynn, Charles Laughton, Barbara Stanwyck, Chips Rafferty, Betty Davis and Stewart Granger were amongst those whose films were showing at the time.

Big players for us that season were Shackleton (signed for £13,000 from Bradford Park Avenue), Wayman, Bentley (signed from Bristol City for £8,500 without being watched), big Frank Brennan, a tremendous centre half – probably the best we had had from post war to the present day. He was excellent in every department and could run the 100yds in 10.2 seconds. Joe Harvey, a great captain and later a good manager who suffered from “useless directors syndrome”. Wor Jackie was beginning to make a name for himself although he played that season as a right winger wearing the No. 7 shirt. Unlike nowadays shirt numbers corresponded to the position the players played in. He, like Brennan, was also very fast and regularly competed in the annual Powderhall sprint in Edinburgh which attracted the fastest runners from all sports. JET by name, JET by nature!

At the end of the season the league table showed Man City and Burnley promoted, followed by Birmingham City, Chesterfield and then us in 5th. The following season would see some player upheavals and a bid for promotion.

Ken Brown
out of threadbare trousers? Of course not. The welfare state and Primark (amongst others) saw to that.

globe. We have supermarkets the size of Leazes Park stocked to the ceiling with every known product, most of them available at
owns our Football Club. There are hundreds of restaurants and of fatties is what! Everywhere is the same. The Fat Controller
T ake a walk around our splendid city and what do you see? Hordes
farm labourers were POWs who were now due for going to do the work in future.
there would be more margarine available. Ugh! Most rations had been halved, butter rations reduced, but
rations had been halved, butter rations reduced, but rationing, petrol shortages, electricity and gas supplies
were unreliable and there was an organisation known as the International Emergency Food Council. Bacon rations had been halved, butter rations reduced, but there would be more margarine available. Ugh! Most farm labourers were POWs who were now due for repatriation and there was concern as to who was going to do the work in future.

Despite all this, the summer was gloriously long, hot and sunny which went some way to compensating for the severest winter the country had suffered for many years.

So it was that on a fine warm August Saturday in 1947 the season began, with high hopes for the future of United. They began their long march to promotion with a home game against Plymouth Argyle. Nevertheless before the season was through there would be the all the usual shenanigans we associate with our beloved club.

There was a new manager, name of George Martin, who had joined the club in May and it was he who was instrumental in moving Jackie Milburn from the right wing to centre forward. An inspired decision. However on this very day (Aug 23rd) the Louise Old Pit in Annfield Plain was hit by an underground explosion and 19 miners lost their lives with others suffering severe injuries and rushed to the R.V. I.

The game went ahead and a 6-1 win was recorded with the usual suspects scoring (Bentley, Pearson, Shackleton 2, Tommy Walker and Wayman). A 1-0 win away to Chesterfield followed, Wayman scoring, and then a loss to Luton Town, 1-2. This game marked the return to Luton of United’s manager George Martin who had been there for 14 years as player and coach. He was very highly regarded and presented with a gold watch in appreciation of his services to the Hatters. Over 25,000 turned up - Luton’s biggest home gate. We lost 1-2. The next game was at home to Chesterfield in which 58,334 saw us lose 2-3 (having led 2-0) and was followed by a 1-0 home win over Brentford (56,622).

At about this time C & A in Northumberland Street were advertising their 25th anniversary and as a special treat they were offering the ladies a "Black Coat trimmed with Personelle, a rich silky fabric resembling Persian Lamb, and Yours For Only 89/11 (£4.50) plus 15 coupons" The coupons were of course clothing ration coupons. Also two men were hanged in Pentonville Prison after being found guilty of murder, and Johnny Walker Black Label was yours for 25/9 (£1.30) a bottle. A recent chum of ours was also advertising in the papers, none other than W. F. Shepherd – Scrap Metal Merchant of Brewery Bank in Byker, urgently wanting Brass, Copper, Lead, Heavy Steel, Cast Iron, and all classes of bottles and jars. Spot cash paid and they would collect. I wonder what little Frederick was doing at this time? The shipyards were absolutely booming with record tonnages being launched from all the Tyne. A shortage of steel was proving a hindrance though.

After the first five games we were 9th in the table and taking some severe stick from the Chronicle’s football writer Will Lowes. The result against Brentford was “lucky” and the standard of football in all these games was “simply not good enough with only Brennan, Bentley and Duggie Graham showing well. The forwards showed little or no fight for the cause”. He could well be writing about season 2008/2009.

We then travelled to Birmingham City who would take first place at the end of the season, and got a creditable 0-0- draw. At home next, to Leicester City, ending 2-2 after being 2-0 up.

There then followed a run of games which would take us up to 2nd in the table. At home to Birmingham we won 1-0 (George Hair), home to Leeds winning 4-2, (Hair, Shack 2, Stobbart), Fulham away 0-3, Coventry at home, 0-0, West Ham at home 1-0 (Jackie Milburn), Bury away 5-3 (Milburn 3, Shack and an o.g) Southampton at home winning 5-0 (Milburn, Pearson, Stobbart, Walker 2) and Doncaster away 3-0 (Harvey, Milburn 2). It was the home game against Coventry in which Wayman played his last game for us.
From Chilton in Co. Durham, Charlie played in 52 games and scored 36 goals for us, an incredible success ratio of 69%. He was transferred to Southampton and later played for Preston N.E., Boro and Darlington. For these teams he played 335 games and scored 223 goals, a 66% scoring rate. Surprisingly (or maybe not) he was never capped. He had basically fallen out with the club due to being left out of the previous season’s FAC semi final. Luckily for us his leaving meant that Wor Jackie was switched from the right wing to centre forward and carried on scoring from where Wayman left off. Milburn of course would become one of United’s greatest ever players. This season he would play 40 games and finish as top scorer with 20 goals.

Despite this lofty league position all was far from well at the club. The headline in the Chronicle’s sports section on 13th Oct read “Internal Troubles of United”. There followed an article in which several players were submitting transfer requests and Wayman, having stated his following was the envy of the country. Furthermore, following Shacks departure, Will Lowes wrote that “It is not a ‘star-studded’ side that we want (I am sick of reading this in every football programme I pick up at away matches), so much as a sound team and team spirit”. The “star” is an unfortunate label and one or two in the team do not guarantee promotion”. Remind you of anything?

Where did “The Baggies” come from? This time we won both games, 1-0 away and 3-1 at home. £61,003 saw the two sides clash at SJP on Jan 1st 1948. This day also saw the nationalisation of the railways, making British Rail the biggest transport, hotel owners, caterers, farmers, and dock owners in the country. 64,931 saw the next match at home to Luton in which we gained revenge for the loss at their place earlier in the season with a 4-1 victory with goals from Milburn,3 and Bill Dodgin. Milburn in this game was “outstanding, with a bewildering unorthodoxy” wrote Will Lowes.

Meanwhile, Domestos, which was a Newcastle company in those days, was frantic for bottles. “No bottles, No Domestos – you MUST return your bottles’ ran the advert in the newspapers. New bottles were simply not available. Maybe the Shepherds had them all!

January 10th saw the first and only match we played in this years FA Cup. Once again Charlton Athletic beat us, this time 1-2 at the Valley in front of 33,248. Afterwards a London supporter living in West Ham wrote to the E.C. saying that he had never seen a more entertaining team than Newcastle and that they should have won 8-0 at least!

On the 24th Jan we played away at Leeds who had been newly relegated from the first division and lost 1-3 (Milburn) but this game was significant because it was the last game Len Shackleton played for us. He was sold to the Mackers (we didn’t call them that then though) for the sum of £20,050. The extra £50 was paid to create a new transfer record. He had played 64 games for us, scoring 29 goals (45%) and left because he had been dropped for the next game at home to Leicester and was selected to play for the reserves at Burnley. He immediately slapped in a transfer request and after frantic horse trading between Bolton, Liverpool and Sunderland, the Mackers got their man. It was widely rumoured United had reneged on a promise to Shackleton and he appeared bitter about leaving the club for the rest of his life.

The season then moved on to its climax, with the home game against Sheff Wed on April 17th proving crucial.66,483 watched. Win this one and we would go up. We duly did, 4-2 with Joe Harvey, Frank Houghton, (a recent buy from Ballymena) scoring two and Stubbart the other. Houghton broke his leg whilst stopping a certain Wednesday goal in this game and was out until well into the following season. At the end we would go up in second place with 56 pts and goals for 72, against 41. Birmingham City were champions. Our average attendance for this season was an astonishing 56,299 - a record that would last until it was beaten by the Man Utd of Best, Charlton and Law fame playing in the first division in 1967/1968 with an average of 57,573. It took winning the European Cup to exceed a record we’d set in the Second Division.

Ken Brown
People say; “There is nothing new”. “The Wheel turns full circle”. “What goes around comes around”. Let us then compare and contrast supporting NUFC between the present day and the olden days. Nowadays, for example, in our magnificent Stadium, the “choir” in the Curva Nord in the Leazes End turn, as one, towards the opposition supporters and remind them, in song, that their support is akin to the Curva Nord in the Leazes End turn, as one, towards the opposition.“What goes around comes around”. Let us then compare and contrast

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The rock and dole years - 1948/49

Then, the opposition supporters would arrive in Newcastle, go into a pub and mix freely with Geordies. Not only that but both sets of fans would go up to a semi derelict SJP, go into the same part of the ground, fighting their way in past police horses, rusty turnstiles, etc., and all the while mixing happily. Once inside getting a spot on the terracing was a free for all and by the time the fans fought their way out again they’d suffered a harder match than the players. Even harder to imagine is that if the opposition team scored a goal there would be a polite ripple of applause around the ground from all the fans, ditto even if the opposition simply put together a good move. This was known quaintly as “sportsmanship” and it showed an appreciation of good quality football irrespective of who played it. And yet at the away game at Plymouth last season as we clinched the Div.2 title we were not treated to equally sportsmanlike behaviour from their fans and club?

Prior to the season opening things were happening. The Government were discussing whether to abolish hanging, Newcastle City Council were contemplating allowing cinemas to open on Sundays, on July 19th the Olympic games opening ceremony took place at Wembley Stadium, there was a heatwave in Newcastle – 80°F at noon – the Grand Theatre in Byker was showing “Strictly Saucy” starring the Neapolitan Models, bread rationing was to end, there were now more in Gaol than for forty years and the under 30’s were “idle, uncooperative and undisciplined”. New laws in the game were introduced to penalise players who “crowd the ref and linesman demanding consultation”. They would be sent off for such actions.

United returned to the First Division and opened their season with an away game at Everton, 3-3, and then their first division home game for 14 years, against Chelsea in front of 59,020, drawing 2-2. The next game was also at home when 63,549 saw us blitzed 2-5 by Preston N.E. who would be relegated at the season’s end. We were missing five key players including Milburn and Brennan. However the following seven games saw us win 4 and draw 3 in front of home crowds well over $5,000 and up to fifth in the table. On Oct 2nd we lost away to Portsmouth 0-1. Pompey had a great side, containing amongst others Jimmy Scouler. He was a barrel shaped Scottish right half and was as tough and as fearless as they make them as well as being an exceptionally good footballer. As a Pompey player he was a “filthy little bugger”. He would eventually sign for us and become “hard but fair”.

Then, on Oct 9th the first derby for 14 years, away to the Mackems, resulting in a 1-1 draw with our goal scored by George Hair. Extra trains ran from the Central, (one every three minutes), the Band of the Royal Hussars entertained, the Mackems were undefeated at home, yet only 51,399 turned up to see it. Both the Chronicle, and the Journal ran articles saying so many people wanted to see the match they feared Roker Park was not big enough. Consequently thousands were put off going. Jackie Milburn missed this one having been selected to play for England v. N. Ireland in Belfast. As for the game, Joe Harvey completely snuffed out the Shack threat and at the end it was the home side desperately holding on for a point. Our forwards were dominant.

A few days later and a bombshell! Milburn submitted a transfer request to the club because his Scottish wife Laura, 20, was expecting a baby and was living with her father and stepmother in London. Milburn said “I have tried to get my wife to live in the N.E. but she says while she likes the people the climate does not agree with her”.

Pathetic or what? He went on to say that “he was 100% happy at Newcastle but that any club in the south would do for him”. There followed 6 letters to the Chronicle in which all agreed that he should go. One writer suggested that if Milburn got another England cap it should be a larger size. Another asked what is wrong at SJP when players come here, spend a couple of seasons, make their names, and then go on elsewhere? We had tried to sign Bobby Langton from Blackburn earlier but his lass wouldn’t come because she wouldn’t leave her Mam!

When you see how fabulous SJP is nowadays on the last game of last season, the grass on the pitches by mid October in 1948 would be dead or...
dying and into November practically non-existent except for a few tufts around the corner flags. Over the winter and spring it would be little more than a quagmire. With the case balls made of leather which soaked up the moisture it is amazing how the players could move it more than a few inches. Also, transfer fees were now causing concern amongst the games administrators. When Len Shackleton went to the mackems for a record £20,050 there were shock waves, with one leading light at the Football League exclaiming “Has football finance gone mad? Football is our National sport – don’t let’s spoil it”

Whilst football today is played at an incredibly fast pace the game in the olden days would probably have the modern day supporter slack jawed in disbelief at how slow it was. However the players themselves were no slouches. John Edward Thompson Milburn was aptly hailed JET. He was at one time a professional sprinter and was timed at 19.7 seconds over 200yards (182.8 metres). Also Frank Brennan, a 6ft.2ins centre half, could do the 100yards (91.4m) in 10.2 seconds. Training methods were primitive consisting mainly of running around the pitch and kick-abouts on the club car park. Players were given cigarettes as part of their bonus and travelled to the game by public transport. Some would maybe pop into their local for a couple before going to the ground. However by the standards of the day their pay was good. They got £12 per week, with bonuses of £2 for a win and £1 for a draw. This compared favourably with the average wage of around £4. Some players also got club owned houses to live in, usually those with wives and bairns.

New years day arrived with transport strikes and gales lashing the south coast. The Theatre Royal pantomime was Sleeping Beauty starring Wilson, Keppel and Betty (ask your Granddadd) and Eddie Reindeer (honest!), and the quietest Newcastle had been in living memory. It seems people were staying around the doors with the police and the pubs reporting a deathly hush. There was to be a giant petition to the Home Secretary to lift restrictions on rations. No bacon, very little meat and the bread was described as “inedible”. At this time both blue and white collar jobs were plentiful Every day the city centre would see monstrous traffic congestion as buses came into town from unheard of places such as Clara Vale, Philadelphia, Camboids and Sleekburn. There was a Stock Exchange, loads of banks, insurance companies, shipping companies, NCB offices etc. The Union Rooms was a Business Club where the glitterati of the local business scene gathered. There were huge factories employing skilled, semi skilled and labourers. The pubs benefited hugely as did the back street bookies. Every back lane had one. Gambling was illegal.

After the derby we would go on to win six games on the trot culminating at Arsenal on Nov 20th. We won 1-0, deservedly. The Gunners played robust (dirty) football injuring Jackie Milburn in the process. On 18th Dec we beat Everton 1-0 unconvincingly at home to go top of the table. Then on Xmas day we lost 0-1 away to Birmingham, which put us second, and we would stay there until the last two games of the season. Over the next seven games we won two, drew two and lost three (one of which was a shock home FA Cup 3rd round tie against second division Bradford Park Avenue 0-2) which brought us to the return fixture against our bitterest rivals.

It is fair to say the hatred between the two sets of supporters was nowhere near as vitriolic as it is today. Nevertheless there was little love lost.

On 5th March 1949, SJP saw a 2-1 win in front of 58,250 with goals from Milburn and George Robledo. The latter had joined from Barnsley for £26,500 in January and became an immensely popular player for United, playing 164 games and scoring 91 goals (55%). He was a Chilean national and played for his country in the 1950 World Cup. Bobby Mitchell made his debut in this game and would go on to become one of the best loved players of all time for the Mags. Not until the arrival of David Ginola would we see a left winger to compare. The conditions were atrocious with a biting wind and sleet but it was one of the best games of the season. Our star men were Robledo and Tommy Walker with Milburn typically missing easy opportunities but scoring the more difficult chances (a trait he would eventually lose). Shack and Broads were well for them.

The three remaining games saw us draw at Liverpool 1-1, lose at home to Man U, 0-1 and end up drawing away at Sheff Utd. 0-0 to finish in 4th place (52 pts). The league winners were Pompey (58 pts) followed by Man Utd and Derby County. All in all a very creditable position for our return to the top flight. The Mackems finished 8th and the smogs 4th bottom. Milburn would be top scorer with 19 goals from 35 games (54%) and our average home attendance was 53,702. Ken Brown
Before the start of season 49/50 a newspaper report had it that "Football had a grip on the Nation. Over a million people every week paid to watch it". There was a First Division, a Second Division, a Third division (North) and a Third Division (South). Last season a total of 41,271,424 watched, with the best in the country being Newcastle United with an average gate of 53,702. Not Man Utd. Not Liverpool. Newcastle United - the club with the largest following in England. And not just a one off either. The Football League held a meeting at which it was concluded that this would not last and that contingency plans must be considered. They would be proved right. One idea was to raise the minimum admission to 1/6 (8p) but this was overruled by 2 votes.

Look Back In Anger
The rock and dole years - 1949/50

Tragically it was announced that Septimus Donaldson had died aged 72. He was known as "The King of Mascots" and for over forty years Sep had followed United all over the country dressed in Black & White hat, coat, trousers, (sometimes a kilt), crooked walking stick and so popular was he that postcards of him and his brooches were sold throughout the country.

Following a successful 5 match tour of Canada and America with a goals tally of 31 for and 9 against, this season for United would be a season of consolidation, exciting in parts but with some inconsistent performances.

It opened with a home game, in a heat-wave, against Champions, Portsmouth, and perhaps predictably we lost 1-3 (George Robledo scoring). Pompey played hard (dirty) but were a quality side and the scoreline could have been worse. We then lost away to Everton 1-2, and next away to Wolves by the same score. Lowrie, our No.10, tangled with Smyth who reacted by reeling with his hands clutching his face. The ref hadn’t seen it but the linesman had. Lowrie was booked then sent off. It was the last game he would play for us. Revenge at home to Everton and a 4-0 result, with goals from Milburn, Robledo, Mitchell and Walker. These players were part of a good forward line which would include “little” Ernie Taylor. They would get better.

Astonishingly, a director of United was hailed as “Footballs Greatest Scout”. Nowadays club Directors are generally as knowledgeable about football and their own team as Fat Boy Ashley is about Quantum Physics, or, in his case, football. Stan Seymour, born in Kelloe, Co. Durham had played for the team and was now responsible for finding and signing new players. He was rarely seen at SJP, travelling, mainly to Scotland, on scouting missions. The players he signed are too many to list but Stan introduced Jackie Milburn, Frank Brennan, Bobby Mitchell, Alf McMichael and many more who would be top players for United.

There then followed 4 wins, 1 draw and 2 losses bringing us to October 15th and our home derby with the Mackeryns. After 32 minutes we were 2-0 up with goals from Robledo and Walker but we succeeded in snatching defeat from the jaws of victory by giving away two soft goals against 10 men. Milburn was missing on International duty busily scoring a hat-trick against Wales. The game was not a classic by any means but if we had taken even a few of the chances we created we would have tripled the score. 57,979 watched.

At this time there were no teams that dominated the league or the Cup like we see today. There was a maximum wage structure in place which basically meant that every club had good players. There was no point in going anywhere else if the wages were the same. It did not stop the constant demands from players asking for a transfer, usually because of personality clashes (or wives). However, the players were chaitels of the clubs and could be refused point blank if the directors so decided. Tom Finney for example, who was a truly great player for Preston and England, was offered riches beyond belief to go and play in Italy for Napoli but when he requested a transfer was simply told by the P.N.E. chairman to forget it! And he had to!

We were now 10th in the league and would remain there until Dec 17th and our return match at Portsmouth which we lost 0-1. The weather was bad with a strong end to end wind, the ref was poor and the Pompey tackling was “crude” but despite this we dominated the game. Our next game was at home on Christmas Eve to Wolves which we won 2-0 in which George Hannah and Ernie Taylor excelled. Hannah and
Alf McMichael, a left back, had been signed earlier this season from Linfield by Stan Seymour and McMichael would prove an excellent signing. Wolves would finish the season as runners-up.

Christmas arrived, very mild with the temp at 48F in Newcastle. The nurses at the General sang carols to the patients, there were more goods in the shops this year including Brosn, in Market street, with a Dual Purpose Handbag available in tan, black, ivory, grey and nigger (gasp!) brown for £7/6 (E3.80). You could travel in comfort to London with United Buses (nothing to do with NUFC) for 38/- (£1.90) and the North Eastern Electricity Board thanked everyone for helping to keep cuts to a minimum. People splashed out on cigarettes, sweets and bread, whilst if you were looking forward to the summer then Butlins were tempting you with quarter page adverts.

On Boxing day we were at home to the Smogs and lost 0-1 in front of 61,184. On the very next day, in the return, exactly the same result! This put us down to 15th at the turn of the year but on New Years Eve we managed a 1-0 win at Villa. Hannah scoring, moving us up slightly to finish the year in 12th spot. We had played 5 matches in the space of 17 days. Celebrations this year were very different to last with the city packed to overflowing. Thousands danced and sang outside St Nicholas’ Cathedral and the dance halls, pubs and cinemas announced a roaring trade. The Police reported no problems!

Unlike today there was no undersoil heating and if a frost was imminent then straw was spread over the pitch. On the morning of the match the straw would be moved to the red shale track around the edge where thousands of youngsters usually sat to watch the game. They sat there because they were too little to stand on the packed terraces and see. The straw would be wet and would stick in various orifices but whenever we scored the thousands of lads and lasses would leap up shouting in glee and throwing the straw up into the air, the while calling out such well known phrases as “well played” and “jolly good show” and “fine goal Jackie” (or George or Bobby or Tommy, or whoever) - or words to that effect. Just such a lad was Jim Rising. Now in those days the National Health Service was in it’s infancy and, unlike now when you can get anything you like from Aphrodias (Viagra) to Zocor (ask your Doctor), then, you were rationed, and in Jim’s case to one pair of spectacles a year.

Consequently when the straw came down and the pandemonium had subsided Jim’s glasses were nowhere to be seen, (well, he couldn’t see them ’cos he had no specs). Panic ensued! These were his one and only pair! For the year! How was he to go home and tell his Mum and Dad? What would they say? Jim decided a return home straight after the match would probably result in a good thrashing, with the belt. A practice not unheard of in those days, but ultimately harmless. He decided to stay out, but fortunately was found late that night, near his home, safe but freezing cold, following a neighbourhood search. Result, no thrashing and a second free new pair of NHS specs.

Jim Rising remains a season ticket holder to this day.

Oldham Athletic were a mid table team playing in the Third Division (North) when they were drawn at home to Newcastle United in the third round of the cup and 41,706 packed Boundary Park to see the game. We were 2-0 up after 6 minutes but then it was all Oldham. Charlie Crowe and George Hannah played blinders for us yet despite Oldham pulling a goal back we eventually finished 7-2 winners (Milburn 3, Mitchell, Walker 2 and an own goal). All was undone in the next round away to Chelsea, losing 0-3. According to Ken McKenzie writing in the Sunday Sun "United were pathetic, completely out-skilled, out-thought and outplayed. Chelsea deserved at least 6-0".

Our home gates had now dropped from an average 54,025 to 49,652 due to the fact that we were having a patchy season performance wise. At home to Burnley we drew 0-0 and on March the 4th we found ourselves at Joker park where they recorded their biggest ever home league attendance of 68,004 and in which we were the more impressive team on show. This game lived up to expectations and we were ahead through Houghton after 11 minutes. Shack equalised on 27 mins but we regained the lead through Ernie Taylor (a Sunderland lad) 3 minutes later. Broadis scored the final goal after 52 minutes but we were easily the better of the two sides on the day.

In our last 14 league games of the season we would lose only once. One of the best games of the season was at 5PF versus Liverpool who were top of the league. We whipped them 5-1 and they were lucky it wasn’t more. Liverpool had reached the cup final and were going for the double. They would get neither!

On April 15th we were at Highbury for our one and only defeat, 2-4, in which Arsenal were deemed to be lucky. We were 0-2 down but came back to 2-2 (Hannah, Robledo) but our keeper Lowery who was in for the injured Fairbrother was, in modern parlance, “a dodgy keeper” and the game finished 2-4.

In this game Bobby Mitchell gave the Arsenal full back Wally Barnes the run-around, something which would repeat itself with dramatic results in the future. On the same day England beat Scotland 1-0 at Hampden Park in front of 138,000 producing gate receipts of £30,000.

So to the last 3 games of the season with a 2-1 home success over Man U, in which we were comprehensively outplayed, an away victory 3-1 at Chelsea which was described as our best football of the season and a final great game at home to Blackpool including the legendary Stanley Mathews, who was comfortably contained by Alf McMichael. We won 3-0. Blackpool had the best defensive record in the league.

The final league table saw us in 5th only 3 points behind the champions Portsmouth, with Wolves runners-up. Jackie Milburn was our top scorer with 21 goals from 32 games (65%). Not bad eh? Our average attendance was 46,456. In the Amateur Cup final Willington beat Bishop Auckland 4-0 in front of 77,000 at Wembley. Arsenal beat Liverpool 2-0 in the Cup final. Ken Brown
It was the World Cup! It was England v. USA! It was England 0 USA 1! It was in Belo Horizonte! In Brazil! In the summer of 1950!

It was the first time England had deigned to enter this competition having snootily declared in the past our Home Nations Championships were vastly superior. Jules Rimet, a French equivalent of Sepp Blatter, had introduced this tournament in 1930 and it was very much a haphazard type of competition until 1954 when it was properly structured. Scotland declined an invitation to Brazil because they had finished second in the Home Nations (played at the end of every season between England, Scotland, Wales and N. Ireland) and France declined because of the distance and expense (as did other European associations). We had been installed as favourites to win. In the first game we beat Chile 2-0 with George Robledo the ONLY professional in the Chilean side. In the second game we lost to the Yanks. To be fair we did everything but score - hitting the woodwork several times and missing numerous sitters. On one of their rare forays the Yankees scored from a deflected shot (said England goalie Bert Williams). This meant we had to beat Spain to continue. However the Spaniards played a dirty game with several handballs and two stonewall penalty claims ignored by the partially sighted Italian ref. We lost 1-0.

It would be up to United to show them how to win a cup.

In our first eleven games we were unbeaten and were top of the league after 5 wins and 6 draws. In our next eleven we lost only 3 matches and were in third spot. Typically we then lost the next three successive league games including Everton, who would be relegated, and Chelsea who finished 20th, one place above a relegation place (only the bottom two clubs went down back then). Perhaps in mitigation these 3 games were all away. Notable games during this period were a 6-0 thrashing of Huddersfield Town, and a brilliant 2-1 win against Arsenal at Highbury in front of 66,952. Arsenal were 1st, we were 2nd and we played them off the park despite going a goal down. We went top after this result. A 4-2 win over Blackpool and a 4-2 win away at Liverpool followed, these latter two games back to back and both of them great games with a hat-trick in each from George Robledo.

However, the outstanding match took place on Nov 18th at White Hart Lane. Spurs had easily won the second division the previous season (including pasting the Mackems 5-1 in the 4th round of the Cup) and were going well in the first division this season. All of us at 5 o’clock on that Saturday afternoon sat around the wireless (radio) to get the football results. In those days no-one knew any of the scores until they were given on Sports Report at 5 pm. The introductory music finished, the headlines were announced and without further ado the results were read out. When the reader announced.....“Tottenham Hotspurs seven, Newcastle United nil!” There was pandemonium! It wasn’t true! There’d been some ghastly mistake! He’d mistaken the seven for a one perhaps! The following day the Sunday Sun’s headline was: “The White Hart Lane Massacre”. Sure enough we had been slaughtered even though we had hit the post twice and had fought well. Tottenham’s football was modelled on the played on the continent - pace allied to quick pass and move. At 5-0 up Spurs spurned chances galore to score in order that their centre forward Len Duquemin could get on the score sheet. He couldn’t.

Order was restored with a home win, 3-2, against Charlton and a deserved 2-1 away win at Man U. It was the Mancs first home defeat of the season. Then away on Christmas Day to The Smuggles which we lost 1-2. Bob Stokoe scored our goal. In the meantime our manager George Martin had departed for Aston Villa and Stan Seymour took over as “acting manager”.

We didn’t play again until Jan 6th 1951 when we were at home in the third round of the Cup against Bury. They were a struggling second division team and were duly cuffed with a comfy 4-1 win. Our goals came in an eight minute rush between the 11th and 19th minutes.

James Maughan, an aged miner from Sherburn was the guest of honour at the match having supported the Mags for 63 years only missing games because of service in the Boer and First World Wars. He recalled the West End years and us playing Bury in a cup tie in 1896. The fourth round saw us at home on 27th Jan in front of 67,596, to a much more formidable opponent in Bolton Wanderers. They had a strong side with the outstanding Nat Lofthouse at centre

look back in anger the rock and dole years - 1950/51

Frank Brennan, who, from the resumption of football after the war up to the present day is the best centre half EVER! to wear the B&W shirt - BAR NONE!
Huddersfield then saw us go a goal down but hit back with two inside 40 seconds to take the tie 2-1. We were simply too good for them. Newspapers now had us as favourites for the Cup. Up to now our league form was good and we were capable of doing the double. But from the moment this game finished, out of the next 11 league matches leading up to the final, we would win only one, draw 5 and lose 5. This included a home draw with the Mackems 2-2 (62,173) and an away defeat to them 1-2 (55,150) neither match having anything noteworthy about them. It has been mentioned before that the FA Cup was the big deal and it seemed as if the club and players had decided that the league wasn’t worth the candle. Certainly some players, most notably Bobby Mitchell, avoided all contact with the opposition in order to escape injury which would keep them out of the final.

The final was played on April 28th in front of 100,000 spectators at Wembley against Blackpool. However each club was allocated only 12,000 tickets so there developed a roaring black market trade. Spivs made up to a reported 2,800% mark up. One enterprising Newcastle factory worker raffled his ticket for 1/- (10p) a go and made £13. The winner however wasn’t that bothered about going to the game so sold it back to the raffer for £6. George Robledo posted two tickets to a relative in Lancashire only for the envelope to be opened by the postman and the tickets pilfered. This practice was rife.

The players stayed several days at Buxton before the match and a typical day was: 1) an intense work-out. 2) A quick bath then a sherry and egg concoction all round. 3) Special treatment at the Spa. 4) An easy deck chair afternoon. 5) An evening at the cinema. The players were described as in a “serene” mood. Elsewhere, meanwhile, serenity was at a premium. The clamour for tickets was incredible with those available rocketing in price. A 10/6d (53p) ticket was selling for £12.

Seventeen trains left the Central and several aeroplanes left Woolston, all bound for London to see a match in which Blackpool’s repeated off-side tactics in the first half made it a frustrating game to watch. After nine minutes Milburn had the ball in the net only to be ruled off-side. Bobby Cowell then headed the ball off the line from under the cross bar with Blackpool players claiming a goal. A half time team talk by Stan Seymour however settled the lads down and in the second half they began to play good football. On 50 minutes Jackie Milburn beat the off-side, raced through and rolled the ball inside the post. All hell broke loose but it was even more manic 5 minutes later when a lovely passing move saw Tommy Walker beat his man, slip the ball inside to Ernie Taylor who back heeled it to Milburn who slammed it from 25 yards into the net. George Farm the Blackpool keeper later said that it was hit so hard he didn’t see it. The Blaydon Races reverberated around Wembley as United saw the match out. The King and Queen presented the Cup to Joe Harvey. Sportingly the Blackpool players remained and applauded The Toon. The entire country outside of Newcastle had been wanting a Blackpool victory so Stanley Mathews, a truly great player, would have a winners medal. He would get one two years later. The West End of London rang with The Blaydon Races as thousands thronged the streets. The Blackpool press were unhappy at the result claiming Milburn’s first goal was off-side and the “rules should be changed or the manner in which the game is controlled” i.e. the Ref is to blame! After the match we dined at the Savoy Hotel followed by a few days at Brighton followed by the penultimate game of the season - away to Wolves.
We won comfortably 1-0.

And so to the homecoming. At 6.30pm on a Thursday evening the train rolled into The Central to be met by a giant banner reading “WELCOME HYEM CANNY LADS”. An ecstatic crowd estimated at 250,000 filled NE1 from Central Station up to SJP, and later the Chief Constable would praise the crowds for their good humour. Inside the ground a further 50,000 saw the Cup paraded round the pitch. When Jackie Milburn stepped forward to speak he was drowned out with the crowd singing “For He’s A Jolly Good Fellow”. He was the man!

Frank Brennan, who, from the resumption of football after the war up to the present day is the best centre half EVER! to wear the B&W shirt – BAR NONE! rather unusually for him missed some matches through injury. Also due to injuries Alf McMichael and Bobby Corbett shared the left back position (23 and 25 respectively). Thus out of the entire season, apart from rare enforced changes, virtually only 12 players played for the team.

The last league game of the season saw a 1-0 win at home over the smogs - this latter result putting us into 4th place and pushing them down to 6th. Tottenham won the League followed by Man U and Blackpool. Our average home attendance was 47,693, we had 49 points and scored 62 for 53 against. Unfortunately Pegasus beat Bishop Auckland 2-1 in front of 100,000 at Wembley in the Amateur Cup final to deny a North East double.

Ken Brown

Possibly the key to United’s success was a very settled team. Out of a total of 50 league and cup games, the team was largely:
So, there we were, back in the summer of 1951, basking in the glow of an FA Cup win. Not only that but also relishing the fact we had a good team of footballers dishing up some really entertaining football. And it would continue throughout this coming season.

Nevertheless, during that summer we had to put up with some pretty terrible developments off the park. For example there was a severe shortage of Pepsi Cola. This new must have drink had recently arrived from America and such was the demand the suppliers/distributors took out a quarter page advert to tell us not to panic – they were buying more lorries to deliver the nectar. Coca Cola had not yet hit our shores. There was a new Tory government telling us the harsh truth of Britain’s desperate economic situation. “The country is bankrupt” says Winston Churchill. Sound familiar (part one)?

The season kicked off on the 18th August with a 6-0 thrashing of Stoke City which included a Jackie Milburn hat-trick. Nils away to Bolton and then to Old Trafford for a 1-2 defeat. In this match our goalie Jack Fairbrother broke his collar bone in a collision with Bobby Cowell. George Robledo went in goal for the last 36 minutes. A home defeat, 0-1 by Bolton was followed by a sensational game at home to Spurs.

Tottenham had beaten us 7-0 the previous season at their place but this time we whacked them 7-2 at ours. The Sunday Sun headlines were “UNITED DAZZLED THE CHAMPIONS” and “SPURS SHATTERED BY BRILLIANT TEAM DISPLAY” And it was! Robledo helped himself to a hat-trick, Frank Brennan was immense and Bobby Mitchell completely dominated Alf Ramsay (yes, that Alf Ramsay). Our new keeper Ronnie Simpson was superb. He was a very agile goalie, somewhat unusual in those days. Milburn was missing, injured. Other scorers were Mitch (2), Taylor and Walker. Two away games followed and then at the next home game Burnley were dismantled 7-1. This time Robledo scored four along with Hannah (2) and Mitchell.

Some commentators were asking “what is wrong with English football?” Their conclusions were:

1) greedy players; 2) board room interference with the manager; 3) results dominated, i.e. clubs scared of losing First Division status and attendant loss of revenue; 4) players only interested in their pay packets; 5) players demanding such things as fridges, theatre tickets etc.; 6) forgetting it’s only a game. Sound familiar (part two)?

The season moved on to November 10th and away to Blackpool. We had been scoring freely and had played some good football. Newcomers to the team included Reg Davies and Bill Foulkes. Ernie Taylor had been sold to Blackpool. In front of 28,611 we lost 3-6 in what was billed as one of the greatest games ever seen in English football. Both sides played extremely well and the score could have been doubled. Milburn and Robledo (2) got our goals. Also Milburn, who had been in great form, was overlooked by the England selectors. Typical!

Next up were Arsenal at home. The Gunners were top of the league but we won 2-0 (Robledo and an own goal). It could, and should, have been more with Milburn, Walker and new signing Bill Foulkes in great form in front of a massive 61,192 packing SJF.

In this era before floodlights, on a particularly dim and gloomy day, Wolves played in bright yellow luminous shirts and Arsenal put fluorescent painted strips of wood behind each goal. Nothing much stopped a game in those days. Coming up to Christmas it was announced United’s players would put on a show in response to the fans who travelled on trains to away matches and had heard the players singing. Brennan, Fairbrother, Cowell, Mitchell and McMichael all had good voices. It would be billed as “The Merry Magpies Christmas Party” singing along with the “Stan Dixon Band”. We’d drawn away to Villa 2-2, beaten Stoke 5-4, also away, in a great game which saw Robledo reach 100 league goals, and draw at home to Man U. 2-2. This brought us to Christmas day and the short hop to Sunderland where we twanked them 4-1 in front of 52,274. In truth we were not that good on the day but still too good for them. Sound familiar (part three)? They were currently 5th bottom of the
In the FAC 4th round we were drawn to Spurs away. Before that we lost away to Burnley 1-2 and thumped Charlton 6-0 at home. We then set off for Brighton to prepare for the Spurs clash. Tottenham had won the league the season before and would finish as runners-up this season. On 3/feb/52 with an estimated 10,000 Geordies in London and a similar number locked out before kick-off, we beat them 3-0 in front of 69,009 on a glue pot of a pitch. The headlines the next day were “UNITED WERE RUTHLESS.” Robledo with two goals (13 & 63 mins) and Mitchell (28 mins) outflapped and outplayed Spurs. After the game Alf Ramsey waited outside United’s dressing room to shake Mitch’s hand. The fans were ecstatic and later all over London’s West End the Geordies sang their anthem “The Blaydon Races” until the last trains left just after midnight for Newcastle. It was a sensational result.

Away to Swansea in the 5th round, not an easy game even though they were a struggling second division side, but a superb Bobby Mitchell goal gave us the win 1-0. This was a giant killing in the making and for much of the game Swansea played more like all in wrestlers but our style and class prevailed.

The 6th round draw saw us away to Portsmouth. This was as hard a draw as Tottenham at White Hart Lane. The bookies had Pompey 7/12 and us 9/2 for the Cup. Tickets were at a premium and first in the queue at SJP was 70-year old Robert Green of Scotswood and his blind son Robert Jnr. The old feller was getting a ticket for his other son who was fighting in the Middle East with the army but was due back home after 3 years away. We warmed up for the game with a 6-2 thrashing of Huddersfield at SJP. Then, on March 8th 44,699 were at Fratton Park and we were up against one of the best half back lines in English football including a certain Jimmy Scoular who would later join us. This was another great match with us playing some brilliant football. Jackie Milburn was unstoppable and scored a hat-trick and could have had six. Robledo got the other one. That night Blaydon Races rocked the centre of Portsmouth as 5000 fans celebrated. The players needed an escort to their bus to take them to Portsmouth station for the train home and on the train back up North fans invaded the players coach and asked for, and got, autographs. Our football was described as “Sheer class with outstanding teamwork” by the press. A week later we drew at home with them 3-3 in another excellent game.

At the end of March we met Blackburn Rovers in the semi-final at Hillsborough. Conditions in the south of England were atrocious with snow cancelling the other semi between Arsenal and Chelsea. Ours went ahead but there was severe criticism afterwards about dangerous overcrowding inside the ground with many spectators complaining of the crush. 65,000 were there and saw an under par United fairly fortunate to escape with a 0-0 draw against loyally second division Rovers. On 78 minutes a Rovers shot from only 3 yards out was the winner but, from absolutely nowhere, Ronnie Simpson, unsighted, flung himself to save shockingly. However, Rovers best equalised our worst and so we went on to the replay on the following Wednesday at Elland Rd. Unfortunately there was no further serious crowd problems with thousands leaving the ground because they were unable to see the game such was the crush. The lads had been to Boston to prepare and on a good pitch we won 2-1. It was a terrific battle. We had gone 1-0 up with a Robledo header (57m) but Rovers equalised through Quigley (78m). Then…drama. Four minutes to go and we get a penalty but our regular taker, Milburn, is hurt. No one seems keen to take it. Suddenly Bobby Mitchell steps up. There is absolute silence and then an explosion of noise as he calmly puts it in the
Two minutes later Robledo heads against the bar. What a finish! After the game the Blackburn manager Jackie Bestall said “well done Newcastle, now go on and win the Cup for the North” and Kelly the Blackburn centre half said “may I pay tribute to Jackie Milburn, the best centre forward I have played against and a great sportsman”. Blackburn were the last team to win the Cup in successive seasons, 1989/91.

Of the remaining eight league games we lost four, including Middlesbrough twice, 0-2 (h) and 1-2 (a), drew one and won three. The penultimate game we lost at home to the Throstles 1-4, and then our last game, at home, to Villa, which we won 6-1. This game saw the return of Mitchell after six games out through injury.

Thus on to Wembley for the F.A. Cup Final for a successive season, this time against Arsenal. Arsenal had lost their last league game 1-6 at Man U giving them the title but reported a serious injury list before the final a week later. Meanwhile Joe Harvey was telling us: “We can do it thanks to our team spirit. We are the happiest side in soccer”. Also the scramble for tickets was in full swing. £4.10/£4.50 for a 3s (15p) standing ticket and £8 for a 10s (£2.12p) seat. Batches were going for £250 for 50 and £35 for 10. A barber in Fenham agreed to give a fan free haircuts and shaves for the rest of his life in exchange for his ticket. And did so! Trains and buses would take 15,000 at least down to London. The team were spending time in Sussex in preparation and four players would play in this final that didn’t in the last one, namely Ronnie Simpson (goalie), Alf McMichael (left back), Ted Robledo (left half) and Bill Foulske (inside right). Stan Seymour, a Director, was in charge of all team matters and was held in high esteem by the players.

It was one of the worst ever Cup Finals. Arsenal were marginally the better side but had Wally Barnes, their right back, injured for most of the game. He had gone to tackle Milburn and his studs had caught in the excellent Wembley turf causing him to displace his knee ligament in the 19th minute and 5 minutes later with George Robledo dribbling his way into the box Barnes tackled him and did exactly the same again. He played the rest of the game as a passenger. The London press claimed later this was why Arsenal lost the FAC. The winner came with five minutes to go when Bobby Mitchell shaped to dribble his way into the Arsenal area but suddenly whipped a cross to the far post where Robledo headed the ball through a narrow gap and in off the post. The Gunners defence had gone towards Mitch expecting a near post cross. Milburn had a quiet game not getting the service he needed. Brennan was immense at centre half. That night the streets of London rang loud with the anthem – The Blaydon Races. Again. The cockneys were learning the words.

I believe that Newcastle United is the ONLY football Club in England which has its own TRUE anthem, “The Blaydon Races”. This song is about THIS CITY and about a particular part of TYNESIDE, and its PEOPLE and its CHARACTERS. And when sung as it was back in those glorious cup days, it was sensational. It was inspirational. It was hair-raising. It was sung as an anthem - which of course it was – and the sound of it sung by 50 to 60 thousand voices was incredibly emotional.

Home then to an ecstatic welcome before an estimated 250,000 revellers plus a further 45,000 in SJ. In the official party was Peter Anderson from Stephen St. in Byker. He was the club’s mascot and was kitted out in a Black & White suit with matching topper, bow tie and rolled umbrella. A huge banner in The Central, decked out in Black & White flags and bunting, proclaimed “WELL DONE LADS – IT’S STILL WORK”. Down Mosley Street and up Grey Street the confetti poured from high office windows giving a very passable imitation of New York.

We had seen some great matches played by a very good United side. We finished 8th top of the league with Man U winners followed by Spurs and Arsenal. We scored 98 goals, conceded 73 and once again with a largely regular team. A truly memorable season.

Ken Brown. 

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It was little Bobby Dylan who wrote the song “The Times They Are a-Changin’” and this was certainly the case during the summer of 1952 (not that he wrote it then – he was only 9). We’d had a Labour Government and now it was the Tories turn to poke things up. It was almost seven years since the end of WW2 and people were getting a taste for consumer goods such as t.v. sets and cars. At the Haymarket cinema Gene Kelly and Debbie Reynolds were “Singin’ in the Rain”, the Grand Theatre at Byker was starring Bobby Thompson in “The Merry Magpies” revue and the players had returned from a tour of South Africa having played 16 games (winning 15) and travelled over 21,000 miles. Every last one of them complained that it was far too long, far too tiring and they were downright homesick to boot. The death of Eva Peron, aged 33, was announced and the Olympic Games opened in Helsinki.

Our beloved team was changing as well. Such players as Tom Casey, George Hannah, Reg Davies, Vic Keeble, Bob Stokoe and Tommy Mulgrew would become regulars and a certain Len White (of whom more later) would make his debut. This season would see the final games of both Joe Harvey and George Robledo.

It started on August 23rd with away games at Sheff Wed (2-2) where according to Stan Seymour “at 2-0 we swanked and threw it away,” and W.B. Albion (1-2). On 30th Sept we saw our first home game - against Tottenham Hotspurs in front of 59,610 which finished 1-1. Following was another away game, this time to Burnley who would prove to be a strong side this season. We lost 1-2 and were easily beaten which left us second bottom of the league. Then to our first “derby” at home to the mackems which was a dirty match and a poor game played in the evening before 60,750. We’d gone a goal down against the run of play but came back to equalise with an own goal and then take a deserved 2-1 lead. Unfortunately they levelled to go home with a 2-2 draw. This moved us up to the giddy heights of 4th bottom.

Next up was Preston N.E. at home and in a sensational game we came from 2-3 down with ten minutes left to win 4-3. Davies (2) and Robledo (2) got the goals. P.N.E. were also a very good side and would finish runners up at the end of the season. The return “derby” game (59,655) was a much better match in all respects. It was a thriller almost from start to finish with pace, all-out battling and good play from both sides. On 20 minutes Robledo put us 1-nil up and after Mitchell added a second on 75 mins we strolled it. This was only our seventh game of the season and already the derbies were over.

Stoke, 0-1 away and Man City 2-0 at home, both forgettable, brought us up against Liverpool away which we lost 3-5. At this stage they were top of the league but would fade to finish 6th bottom. A certain Bob Paisley scored their fifth goal but noteable for us was the debut of Ken Prior who was 19 yrs old and the previous day had finished his shift at Ashington Colliery at six a.m. Instead of turning out for our third team he was playing a blinder at Anfield. He was in for Bobby Mitchell but would only play one more game for the first team despite his heroic fight to the finish display. Then, the news broke that Jackie Milburn would be out with a cartilage problem for up to three months. Elsewhere, Derek Dooley, a prolific goalscorer for Sheff Wed., had collided with the P.N.E. goalie and broke his leg. Gangrene set in and it was amputated. William Boaden, a goalie for Welfare Athletic in a game against Hirst Athletic (both Ashington clubs) died on the pitch after a collision with two other players.

Away to Wolves 0-2 and home to Charlton (41,520) in which Vic Keeble made his debut and scored twice...
in a 3-2 win. He would play 19 games scoring 8 goals this season. Vic was a big shambler sort of player who was great with his head but pedestrian with the ball on the deck. On Oct 25th we were at Highbury and got off lightly 0-3. Only Tom Casey and Frank Brennan played well this day.

At the beginning of November, the Mackens were second top of the league, we played in one of the worst games ever seen at SJP beating Derby County 1-0 and the team were banking solely on team spirit rather than good football to see them through matches. We were now sixth bottom. Our only enjoyment was “Gone With the Wind” starring Clarke Gable, Vivien Leigh and Olivia de Havilland at the Stoll cinema.

Perversely our next game away to Blackpool (also going strong this year and eventual Cup winners) would see us play some great football and win 2-0 at Bloomfield Road. Tommy Mulgrew made his debut in this game and looked good. Ronnie Simpson, an exceptionally good ‘keeper, saved a pen. Chelsea next at home 2-1 and then away to Man Utd. Where, before a crowd of 33,258, we drew 2-2 in a great match between the Cup Holders and the League Champions. Simpson was brilliant. Keeble put us 1-nil up, they went 1-2 ahead and we equalised through Robledo with five minutes remaining. On this very day Gateshead beat Crewe Alex 2-0 before 10,371 in the 1st round of the Cup and our juniors beat the mackems 3-2 in the FA Youth Cup.

Coming up to the Xmas period we beat Pompey 1-0 at home in such poor weather conditions that spectators in the Gallowgate could not make out who scored the goal in the Leazes. A white ball was used to combat the poor light. We were then easily beaten at Bolton 2-4, beat Villa 2-1 at home in slush, and in an astonishing game at home to Sheff Wed we completely and utterly dominated the game from kick off to final whistle…. and lost 1-5.

On Xmas day we hosted Cardiff City and won 3-0. There were only 36,143 there and two days later at Cardiff we drew 0-0. This prompted strong calls from both clubs who complained that to play teams so far apart from each other on a Xmas day was ludicrous. Also the fact that the crowd at SJP for a holiday game was so small prompted Stan Seymour to say that he would play similar games in future with morning kick-offs. On New Years day we were at home to W.B.A. and in a great game lost 3-5 before a more respectable 48,944. Milburn made his come-back in this match, scoring one.

January 3rd and away to Spurs. On a mud heap of a pitch we lost 2-3. After 15 mins, we were 0-2 down but almost snatched a draw. Arthur Rowe the Spurs manager considered this to be Tottenham’s match of the season, surprisingly not Arsenal. “These are always great games and Newcastle have phenomenal support in the Capital” he said. 52,648 turned up (not all Geordies).

Then to our hearts desire – the F.A.Cup, and the third round saw us drawn at home to Swansea Town. 63,480 turned up, and, through rapidly increasing gloom, saw 8 minutes of play before the Ref called the players off. Throughout the country there was road, sea, air and rail chaos due to dense fog and SJP was no exception.

There were a reported 10,000 locked out of the ground before kick off and they were the only ones happy as the fog came rolling onto the pitch making it impossible to see from one touchline to the other. After three inspections the game was abandoned, to be replayed the following Wednesday. Meanwhile over the river Gateshead sensationally beat Liverpool 1-0 to progress to the 4th round. 15,193 saw them deservedly win.

Wednesday saw perfect sunny dry conditions, and an astonishing 61,064 turned up to see Swansea’s Ivor Allchurch give a stunning display of football only to see his side beaten 3-0.

Thus on to the fourth round and with a home draw once again, this time against another second division side, Rotherham United, we were sure as damnit on our way to Wembley for a third successive time. Prior to this game we had drawn at home to Burnley 0-0 and lost away to P.N.E. 1-2. However, before the biggest attendance of the day and in a gale force wind, we crashed in the most feeble manner possible to a Rotherham side inspired by a player called Jack Grainger, despite being 1-0 up until the 63rd minute. Immediately after the match, Stan Seymour tried to sign Grainger. He’d scored the first, made the second and scored the third. It was one of those days. At 1-2 down Keeble, who was badly injured and a passenger in this game, somehow got a cross in to Robledo, who, from two yards out managed to head it over the bar. It was a sitter. Meanwhile down at second division Hull, Gateshead won 2-1 to reach the 5th round so Tyneside was still in the Cup! At Old Trafford, Man U. (League Champs) were held to a 1-1 draw by Walthamstow Avenue (FA Amateur Cup holders). What a day!!

Why? asked Players Union leader James Guthrie, are footballers, especially the “star players”, on a maximum wage of £14 per week. The Chairman kicked this one straight into touch with the comment that £14 was NOT the maximum. There was a £2 win and a £1 draw bonus to be had. It would rumble on….and on.

On Wed 25th Feb SJP hosted it’s first ever game under floodlights with a friendly against Celtic where 41,836 turned up to see a good win and experience a great occasion. Basically, though, our season was over. We drifted through the remaining games, losing away at Portsmouth 1-5 (it could have been 10) and coming close to relegation, only becoming mathematically safe when, despite losing at home 2-3 in the penultimate game of the season to a Nat Lofthouse inspired Bolton Wanderers, other results went in our favour. Gateshead had previously lost at home to Bolton 0-1 in the 5th round and Bolton would go on to play Blackpool at Wembley.

We finished 16th in what had been a disappointing season. George Robledo had played 25 games and scored 18 goals before leaving for the Colo Colo club in his native Chile and Joe Harvey would move to the coaching staff next season having been one of the best Captains we would ever have - up to and including the present day. An average gate of 45,669 was exceptional in view of the way we had played throughout the season but once again showed everyone the loyalty that the Geordies had for their club.

Ken Brown. [1]
Imagine The Hoppings in summer 1953 and strolling amongst the stalls. You could see “Marguerite, the Worlds Ugliest Woman” or “The Fat Lady and The Fat Gentleman” (skinny as rakes by to-days standards), “Tina the Worlds Tiniest Woman”, “The Tattooed Lady” (plain as day compared to now) and best of all “The Naughty Nineties” where, for a Tanner, (2.1/2p) you could step inside and “See the Lovely Ladies Wearing Nothing But a Smile”. There was only one lady, she was far from lovely, and you got a one second glance as she parted her extra large feather fans (blink and you’d wasted your Tanner). Today’s Politically Correct Stasi would be orgasmic at the fabulous time they would have banning all of this. Oh!... and let’s not forget Bertram Mills’ Circus and Menagerie, seats from 2/6 (12.1/2p) to 12/6 (62.1/2p) featuring actual, real, live animals such as Elephants and Lions and Tigers and Monkeys and loads more besides.

Topping all of this however was the upcoming season, opening on August 22nd with a home “derby” versus the Mackems. Jimmy Scoular had been signed from Portsmouth and was our new skipper. Jackie Milburn would play at outside right with Keeble at centre forward. During the close season Everest was conquered for the first time, Queen Elizabeth II had been crowned (we all got a day off for the Coronation) and Jackie had opened a shop in Ashington selling fireplaces to cushion his retirement! We won it 2-1 with Milburn playing a blinder at No. 7. 58,940 saw Shackleton put them ahead after only two minutes but we equalised with a mis-hit penalty by Mitchell after 33 minutes. He stabbed the ground as he hit it which fooled their keeper. On 61 minutes a Milburn corner was headed in by Keeble. Then on 83 mins the Mackems were awarded a controversial penalty. The ball had run out of play but the ref waved play on and in the subsequent melee Cowell fouled Shack. The linesman tried to intervene but was overruled by the Ref. Trevor Ford, a bad tempered Welshman, stepped up and blasted the ball goalwards only to see Ronnie Simpson dive to his left but stick a leg out to save. A great start to the season but tempered by a cartilage tear to Scoular which would keep him out for the next six games.

Then away to Liverpool 2-2 and Man U 1-1 (only 27,837 turned up - biggest club in the world apparently). These were not the nail biting, bum clenching, visits like today. At the end of this season Liverpool would be relegated. Consider the following lists for example:-

**Group A:**
- Wolverhampton Wanderers
- United
- Preston North End
- Blackburn
- Portsmouth
- Derby County
- Bolton Wanderers
- West Bromwich Albion
- Burnley
- and others....

During the Forties/Fifties, (and even into the Sixties and Seventies), teams like those shown in Group A would regularly either win the first division title (Wolves in particular) or mount a serious challenge. However since the formation of the Greed/Sky league only those teams shown in Group B have won it, with the sole exception of Blackburn Rovers in season 94/95 (thanks in large part to Our AJ). Never again will we see football as a true competition between all teams. Never again will the likes of Group A clubs win trophies. Shame.

61,310 saw us lose at home to a good Bolton Wanderers (2-3) followed by an away draw at W.B.A. (2-2). Next, away to Preston (2-2) which heard Geordies singing “Wor Jackie’s a Mazer” and “Keep your feet still Finney Hinny” in tribute to a genuinely great player, Tom Finney. In those halcyon days travelling to away matches meant simply turning up at the ground, paying at any turnstile and mixing in with the locals. Travel was usually by train and often the team would be on the same train coming back home.

Sept 17th saw the visit of West Brom who after eight games were unbeaten home or away. It wouldn’t change after this game which saw an astonishing 3-7 scoreline at SJP. Strangely enough we were somewhat unlucky. Barlow the Throstles skipper was cautioned for time wasting and at 3-4 down with 15 minutes left we were camped in their penalty box with the Gallowgate roar in full throttle. Scoular was back from injury but in those last fifteen minutes they scored three breakaway goals. Both sides were applauded from the field.

Tottenham (h) 1-3, Sheff Wed (a) 0-3, Burnley (a) 2-1 and Charlton (h) 0-2 brought us to a home match against Wolves. They were the team of the fifties and we lost 1-2 with Wolves scoring two in the last 15 minutes. We had now lost 5 successive home league games – a record. We consoled ourselves by heading to the Queens or Gaumont cinemas (ask your Granddad) to see Ronald Reagan in “Law & Order” (a western).

look back in anger the rock and dole years - 1953/54

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A win away to Villa 2-1 took us to 13th with the Mackems rock bottom. This slightly compensated for the next game at home to Huddersfield Town which we lost 0-2 for our 6th successive home defeat – a new record.

At the end of October England played The Rest of the World at Wembley and drew 4-4 with a last minute pen scored by Alf Ramsey. However we were utterly and comprehensively outplayed, despite the scoreline, and questions were asked about the vastly superior skill, tactical nous and fitness of the foreigners. Possession, ball control, pin-point passing and complex movements were now employed by Johnny Foreigner and we were no longer considered "the best". Various excuses were trotted out including one from Bill Murray, the Sunderland chairman, who advocated the suspension of relegation for a trial period. At that very moment they were bottom of the League. Draw your own conclusions!

Games followed: Sheff Utd a) 1-3, Cardiff City h) 4-0 (at last a win at home largely thanks to Ivor Broadis), Man City a) 0-0 in (which Don Revie was excellent), and 48,830 saw us draw at home 1-1 against Portsmouth. At the Empire Theatre Laurel & Hardy appeared in a new comedy mirthquake, "Birds of a Feather" also starring Wonder Horse Tony, Jill, Jill & Jill! and Betty Kay’s Pekingese Pets!!

On November 25th England played Hungary at Wembley. An "expert" opined "England would win by two clear goals with our team tactics upsetting the robot marvels". It was an eye-opener. England’s fighting never-say-die spirit was almost completely obliterated by a display of total football light years ahead of anything seen up to then. It finished 6-3 to the Magyars. They had been over to study the Wembley pitch (then the best in the world by far) and had measured it exactly so that they could practice accordingly. They were supremely fit, technically brilliant and tactically very astute. The whole team!

Back to the mundane First Division and away to Arsenal who were not so mighty this season being near the foot of the table, in which we outplayed them but lost 1-2. Chelsea h) 1-1, Blackpool a) 3-1 and then away to the Mackems.

This turned out to be a poor game in which we were much the better side but for some reason shot-shy. They were 1-0 up on 49 mins but Broadis got the equaliser against his old team on 66 mins. We had 13 corners to their one and Simpson took 10 goal kicks to their 20. A good opportunity to give them a hiding simply went begging, 49,923 saw it.

On Christmas day away to the Smogs which we won 3-2 in a good game in which Scullor took a quick free kick which hit the ref and was diverted into the net. This incensed the players and the crowd, some of whom invaded the pitch. After several minutes hold up the Police managed to clear them off. The following day (Boxing Day) 43,750 saw the return game and the same scoreline only this time to the Smogs 2-3.

Come the New Year and speculation was suddenly rife that Jackie Milburn was to join the Mackems and/or Spurs. He had been dropped for the Boxing day game. On New Year’s Day we were at home to Blackpool winning 2-1 in which both goals were scored by Jackie. Sighs of relief were heard all over Tyneside. On Jan 2nd Matt Busby brought his youngsters (not yet called the "Busby Babes"), including a laddie called Duncan Edwards who had an outstanding game, and beat us 1-2 in front of 56,034. They outplayed us!

Meanwhile we had been drawn at home to Wigan Athletic in the third round of the cup. They were part timers from the Lancashire Combination league and had seen off Hereford United 4-1 in the previous round. We struggled from start to finish despite going a goal up.

If Jackie Milburn had not dribbled past three players and slammed the ball in from 18 yards to make it 2-2, 52,222 Geordies would have been severely embarrassed. Wigan then had a goal disallowed for a very dubious off-side decision. We were very lucky! The replay at Wigan the following Wednesday at a dilapidated stadium saw a terrific game in which Wigan went out fighting to the last. We won 3-2 and were easily the better side on this day with Len White outstanding.

Bolton [a) 2-2, P.N.E. (h) 0-4, brought us to the 4th round away to Burnley who had a good side then. We were easily the best team but could only draw 1-1. Mitchell missed a pen and the players wore rubber boots to combat the snowy pitch. Estimates put 13,000 Geordies there. The replay was a poor game which we won 1-0 this time Mitchell converting a pen in the 81st minute. Wembley was beckoning and the draw paired us away to West Brom. They were currently top of the league and going for the double. Before this tie though we lost to Spurs a) 0-3 and beat Burnley h) 3-1.

60,330 inside and an estimated 20,000 locked outside the Hawthorns saw us lose 2-3 in a fighting display. We were 0-2 down but came back to 1-2 with Albion hanging on grimly. On 73 mins, against the run of play, Ronnie Allen completed his hat-trick. Three minutes from time, Jackie made it 2-3 but we went out. The police later highly commended the United fans for their behaviour, especially those who’d been locked out.

Once again though, our season was now effectively over. We manded to the end of the season with only a 5-2 thrashing of Arsenal at home of any note.

On April 10th Bishop Auckland played Crook Town at Wembley in the FA Amateur Cup Final in front of 100,000 fans. Ending 2-2, the replay was at 5P before 56,604 also ending 2-2, before Crook finally won 1-0 at Ayresome Park.

So, another disappointing season, finishing eighth bottom. Wolves, W.B.A & Huddersfield were 1,2 & 3 at the top whilst Liverpool and Middlesbrough suffered relegation. The Mackems finished 5th bottom. W.B.A beat P.N.E. 3-2 in the FA Cup Final. Our crowd average was 45,815.

Ken Brown. [i]
look back in anger
the rock and dole years - 1954/55

As usual the close season was not without its highlights. Roger Bannister ran the mile (1609 metres) in 3 mins 59.4 secs – the first time ever under 4 minutes. England played Hungary in Budapest as a World Cup warm up and Sir Stanley Rous, head of FIFA, fancied us to win. The players themselves were quietly confident. They stuffed us because there’s no point in crying – we played well in the second half without any luck”. It was 0-3 at HT. The World Cup was held in Switzerland and we crashed out 2-4 to a vastly superior Uruguay, the current holders. West Germany would beat Hungary in the Final 3-2. There was an IRA raid on an army barracks in Armagh in which they escaped with more than 300 rifles and at midnight on July 24th food rationing finally ended. Teddy Boys were taking flak for causing trouble in dance halls and cinemas and vandalising parks and other public places. So called because of their style of dress which consisted of a finger length jacket (or Drape) upon which the collars, cuffs and pocket flaps were black and the cloth usually dark red, bottle green, royal blue or purple. Add matching shirt with a bootlace tie, tight drainpipe trousers, luminous socks and black chunky laced shoes with soles at least one inch thick (known as brothel creepers). The hair style was a thick crew cut combed into a ducks arse at the back and a “roll” hanging down the centre of the forehead. Young people were beginning to assert themselves and society would soon experience the full force with the forthcoming of Rock n’ Roll.

Meanwhile we were eagerly awaiting the new season which kicked off on August 21st with an away game at Arsenal. 65,334 saw a great and deserved win, 3-1, even though centre forward Alan Monkhouse played the entire second half with his arm in a sling. Brennan and Simpson also took severe knocks. Sadly, also on this day, the Grand Theatre in Byker put on its last performance before closing the doors after 58 years. At home next to W.B.A., (the Cup holders), and another win, 3-0, which saw Len White score twice. We lost the following match 1-2 at home to lowly Sheff. Utd. Away to W.B.A. (2-4), P.N.E. away (3-3) and Aston Villa home (5-3) in a splendid match which saw Len White score four of our five goals. He would eventually become one of United’s iconic No 9s. Only 39,960 were there. There was concern that crowds were falling. They were down by almost one million last season and over 4,500,000 since the resumption of football after the war. Still, at the next game, at home to Burnley, 47,346 saw a 2-1 win.

We did the double over Villa (away 3-1) and then lost away to newly promoted Leicester City 2-3. Up for discussion at this time was Sunday soccer which was the norm on the Continent. Also the BBC wanted to show a live match on Saturday. Decades would pass before either happened here. Cinemascope arrived, featuring Marilyn Monroe and Robert Mitchum in “The River of No Return” at The Essoldo. Morecambe & Wise were third top of the bill at The Empire. We lost at home to Chelsea 1-3 before 45,640. They would win the league this season for the first time.

Losing away to Cardiff, 2-4, took us to Joker Park for our first derby of the season which we also lost 2-4 in front of 66,654. 17 trains left the Central for Seaburn.

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We were second best in this one. 0-2 down at half time Milburn brought us a glimmer with a fine goal but the s**t went 1-4 before Mitchell gave a slight respectability to the final scoreline. To really rub it in they went top of the league after this result whilst we went 8th bottom. Our next game at home to Spurs saw a 4-4 result which meant that we had conceded 4 goals in the last three successive games. In this match our goalie Stewart Mitchell was injured and for the whole of the second half Jimmy Scoular was in goal so the result wasn’t bad considering.

We headed towards Christmas with a series of un-noteworthy games except for an away draw 2-2 with Man Utd who were current league leaders but only pulled in 29,217 for this one. Then a home game on 18th December against the not so mighty Gunners who we outclassed 5-1. Crowds were down due to the proximity of Christmas but 35,060 (the highest gate of the day) witnessed a terrific game. A few days earlier on 10th December United announced the imminent arrival of a new manager on a three year contract. He was Dugald Livingstone, a Scotsman, who had been coaching abroad. He wouldn’t last the three years!

On Christmas Day we travelled to Man City where 26,664 saw us lose unluckily 1-3 but two days later we beat them 2-0 at home before 52,850 and it should have been 6-0 such was our dominance. There were huge crowds throughout the country on this day with Chelsea pulling in 66,922, Everton 75,322 and 51,000 at WBA. The New Year took us to Sheff. Utd., and a great start it was not. It was the first game with our new manager fully in charge and we lost 2-6. We were four down after only eight minutes and 1-5 after 32! It was not the best preparation for our next match which was the FA Cup third round away to Plymouth Argyle currently second bottom of the second division. On the 8th January Dan Duffy a native of Blaydon arrived in Plymouth having walked and hitched the whole way. He was 60 years old. He was rewarded after 34 mins when Keeble scored the only goal in a match we were incredibly lucky to win. Ronnie Simpson played the game of his life in goal. Gateshead lost 0-2 at home to Spurs and York beat Blackpool away 2-0. We would meet Brentford in the fourth round at SJ&P.

Meanwhile there was uproar from the fans when the club transfer listed Big Frank Brennan. He was 31 and had been a great centre half. It highlighted also how the club tended to treat the players in a somewhat shoddily way. The Brennan case was mired in controversy as it was widely considered the “Rock of Gibraltar” was being singled out for bad treatment on account of him opening a sports shop in Gallowgate in opposition to the Stan Seymour Sports Shop in NE1. Stan Seymour was a club director. There were protests meeting at the City Hall and local opinion was enflamed against the board. Not for the first time, nor the last. In the past such good players as Bentley, Wayman, Shackleton, Taylor, etc. had found themselves “surplus to requirements” and not particularly well paid. Brennan came off the list but never really reclaimed his place. From hardly ever missing a game since arriving in 46/47 he would play only 11 more times over this and next season including being selected to play for the A team against Heaton Stannington in a Northern Alliance league game. Geordie Bob Stokoe, a lifelong supporter was now the preferred choice.

Severe winter weather meant loads of games postponed and it wasn’t until the end of January that we played Brentford and won 3-2. They were a Third Division (South) team and once again we were more than a tad fortunate to win. Milburn had a poor game but at 2-2 Bobby Mitchell scrambled the winner. On this day Bishop Auckland lost 1-3 to York City. The weather then improved and on Feb 13th we lost away 3-4 at Chelsea. We were 0-4 down, including a Roy Bentley (ex United) hat-trick, but on the 70th minute we started our fight back and nearly got a draw.

The snow and ice returned but our 5th round tie at second division Nottingham Forest went ahead at the City Ground before 25,252. Once more the cry was “Lucky United” in which we were well and truly outplayed. On 77 minutes Forest scored but a minute later Jackie equalised and forced the replay. Before that however there was the small matter of a home game against the Mackems. Twenty of the 46 league games were off because of the weather but we managed to lose this one 1-2 with the winner scored in the dying seconds of the game. It was a good end to end game and we deserved a draw. A few days later we replayed Forest at SJ&P and were 2-0 up at half time. Second half was all them and they equalised to take the game to extra time finishing 2-2. A coin was spun to see who would host the second replay and Stan Seymour called heads correctly. Thus two days later we eventually got rid of them 2-1 after extra time. 75,204 saw these two games and just about all agreed that we’d enjoyed the most outrageous good fortune. Milburn in this game was brilliant and laid on the winner for Alan Monkhouse, a second-rater, to score the winner two minutes from time.

Fans were now questioning the new managers chopping and changing the team, and his tactics, which were producing a boring brand of football. Nevertheless, we were still in the Cup and were drawn away to Huddersfield Town, a first division side. Inevitably we were once more branded “Lucky Newcastle”. We equalised through Len White in the 87th minute after Huddersfield had totally dominated the game and had had two stonewall penalties denied. A few days later we made up for it by winning 2-0 after extra time but deserving to go through. Mitchell in particular had a great game. Andy Beattie, the Huddersfield manager, came into the dressing room after the match and hoped the lads would go on to win. The semi final draw paired us with York City and the Mackems against Man. City. The prospect of a Tyne & Wear FAC Final had both sets of supporters drooling.

A brief interlude saw us draw 2-2 away to Wolves and then it was on to Hillsborough for the Semi Final. After 14 minutes Vic Keeble put us one up in a quagmire conditions made more for the likes of York’s Arthur Bottom (Ed: that’s a made-up name, surely!), a big and burly centre forward of no skill, little movement, no brain but plenty of muscle. He signed for us in 1957 and played a total of 11 games over two seasons scoring ten goals. He was
played in April due to the bad weather backlog, we
recorded five wins, four draws and only two defeats.
Three consecutive victories over the Easter period
basically saw off the relegation threat with a 2-1
(away) and 4-0 (home) double over Everton and a
5-0 home thrashing of Sheff Wed. It helped that
seven of the games were at home.

The usual scramble was now on for FAC Final tickets.
Both clubs received 12,000 and by the time the officials,
players, etc. had taken their wedge it left 10,000 for the
fans. This time however there was hell on by the players
who only got 12 each. The club chose to issue vouchers
at the turnstiles at the home game against Bolton
Wanderers which was a stultifying boring 0-0. The plan
was that the supporters would send in these vouchers
with their name etc. and there would be a draw with
the lucky ones getting a Final ticket. On the 27th April after
the home game against Cardiff, United’s
players
held
a
dance
at
the
Oxford
Galeries,
£/-
a
ticket
(25p),
all
welcome.
Cardiff’s
players were there as well.

In the last game of the season (Spurs, away 1-2) Bobby
Mitchell set a new club record when he scored his
19th goal of the season. It was the
best
ever for a left
winger beating Stan Seymour’s
previous best. The lads then set
off for Brighton to prepare for the
Final. This was our tenth Cup Final – also a record.
The players had produced their own souvenir books
to earn a bit extra cash and they sold well. The game
would be shown in full on television. Charlie Crowe
had unluckily picked up an injury at Spurs and it

would keep him out of the team with Tom Casey as
replacement. Reg Davies contracted laryngitis and
would be replaced by Len White.

The team was Simpson, Cowell, Batty, Scoular, Stokoe,
Casey, White, Milburn, Keeble, Hannah and Mitchell.
Milburn, Mitchell and Cowell played in all three finals.
If there was to be a replay it would be at Huddersfield.
The team were in their “lucky south dressing room” and
the weather was good. So was the match. City played
the “Reivie Plan” in which Don Revie played as a deep
lying centre forward – but to no avail. It began with the
fastest goal ever recorded at Wembley when Wor Jackie
headed the ball from a White corner into the City net

after just 45 seconds. In the 18th minute tragedy struck
as Jimmy Meadows, their full back, turned inside out
by Mitchell - damaged his ligaments and thereafter
was a passenger. Len White severely damaged his left
ankle at the end of the first half and Milburn played the
second with a pulled stomach muscle which restricted
his movement. Nevertheless City equalised before half
in time. In the second half Mitchell really turned it on
and after scoring the second (53m) with a tight angled shot
which fooled the goalie, he then set up Hannah for the
third five minutes later. Came over and deservedly won
with the Queen handing the trophy to Jimmy Scoular.
Laura Milburn, Jackie’s wife, had predicted a 3-1 victory
before the game and Bob Cowell’s wife was praying for
a third win because they had three kids so they would
each get a medal. Stan Seymour had won the Cup with
United as a player, manager, director, vice-chairman and
now chairman. Once more London was regaled with
mad Geordies singing their tribal Blaydon Races anthem.

The lads returned home to the expected rapturous
welcome. The locomotive pulling their train from
London had a huge circular placed on the front which
read “It’s Wors Agen” and in The Central there were two
huge banners reading “Well Done Lads, It’s Still Wors”
and “Well Done The Lads”. Massive crowds lined the
route through Neville, Collingwood, Mosley, Grey and
Blackett Streets and on up the Gallagowate to a packed
and exultant SJP giving it the full Gallagowate roar and
Blaydon Races.

We finished eighth top with an average gate of 42,987.
Bishop Auckland beat Hendon 2-0 to win the FA
Amateur Cup. Chelsea and Wolves were 1 and 2 in the
league. Leicester, newly promoted, were newly
relegated along with Sheff Wed. What a season!

Ken Brown. [1]

nicknamed “Dirty Bottom”. On this day however he
equalised for City after 29 minutes and the conditions
certainly suited York’s beefy style. It ended 1-1 although controversy raged when
Bottam had a header in the dying minutes scooped off the line by Ronnie
Simpson with the York players screaming that it was over the line. Lady Luck was
with us again. In the other Semi the Mackems lost 1-0 to Man. C (58/948).

At Joker Park 59,239, watched us deservedly win the replay 2-0 with
goals from White and Keeble. After the
game Milburn said that he was very
surprised that the crowd were much
more in favour of York than United.
He thought the Mackems at the
game would be cheering us. They
have always been small time. It had
taken 15 hours of football for us to
reach the Final but here we were for
the third time in five seasons.

Back to the league, with us in a
relegation situation but in the
last eleven matches, all
Amusing banter heard at SJP today might include: "f**k off ref" -or- "their centre half's a d**ty c**t like" -or- "f*****g f**k off you f*****g fat f*****g cockney f*****g w*****" and such like. However in the forties/fifties the merest hint of bad language within earshot of women or children was met with a stern rebuke to which the swearer would grovelling apologise. Pre-match and half time entertainment was usually provided by a colliery welfare band from somewhere like Appleton or Annitsford. A motley looking crew would huddle at the players tunnel and regale supporters with a selection of brass band music.

Only those nearby could hear them. Refreshments consisted of a peanut seller walking around the pitch side track offering a brown paper bag of peanuts for a tanner (£1.1p). Buyers would throw down their sixpence from the crowd and he would throw the bag of peanuts up to the buyer. He was a crackshot! He never missed! Eldorado choc bar ice creams were sold in the exact same fashion only sometimes the wrapper would blow off and the catcher would get a fist full of splattered ice cream running down his arm. Bovril was available from kiosks. No alcohol. More and more people now had tellies and would argue whether a Pye, Ferranti, KB, Regentone, Murphy, Bush, Ecko, Ferguson etc. was the best. There was no wall to wall football and those games that were shown (in good 'ol black & white – no colour, HD, 3D) had none of the totally irritating gob-shite experts/pundits that infest our screens today.

It had been a hot summer with Gosforth peaking at 88F (32C) during July. Jackie Milburn said it was imperative we finish higher than the Mackems this season. We wouldn’t. In July, Len White had received his call-up papers (you’ll have to ask your Grandad about this) but because he worked as a plate layer at Burnrad Colliery he got off as a ‘deferred occupation’ but he had to work there for the entire close season whilst the other players enjoyed their hols.

On August 20th - proud Cup holders - we opened the season at home to Sheff. Utd. Bobby Cowell a superb right back and three times cup medalist had been severely injured in our close season tour against Nuremberg in Germany, by a dreadful and deliberate tackle. Bobby would never play another game for us. We beat the Blades easily 4-2 and followed up a few days later with a home draw 2-2 against newly promoted Birmingham. Then PNE (a) 3-4, Birmingham (a) 1-3, Burnley (h) 3-1 with Frank Brennan back at centre half, WBA (a) 1-1 and Luton Town, also newly promoted, (a) 2-4. Both promoted sides would do well this season. We played Chelsea at Stamford Bridge before 12,802 for the Charity Shield and lost 0-3. We’d also lost the others, against Spurs 1-2 at WHL (27,660) in ’51 and 2-4 against Man U (11,381) in’52. We were consistent. Charlton Athletic arrived at SJF second top of the league and unbeaten they outplayed us 4-1 with a Milburn hat-trick. Bob Stokoe was preferred to Brennan and would star for us in the next match away to Spurs which we lost 1-3. Johnny Thompson, our keeper in for the injured Ronnie Simpson, had a blinder, keeping the score line respectable. Spurs were currently second bottom of the league with Arsenal bottom.

Up to now we had been un uninspiring and this would continue with Everton (h) 1-2, Pompey (h) 2-1, Arsenal (a) 0-1, Wolves (h) 2-1, Villa (a) 0-3 and Blackpool (h) 1-2. Blackpool had a good side. Stanley Mathews played in this game and whilst well policed by Ron Batty, our left back, he was nevertheless instrumental in their win. He was 40 years old! Better followed in our next game away to Huddersfield Town which we won 6-2 with Vic Keeble scoring four. Next up we beat Cardiff 4-0, but on this very day the Mackems, (at that time league leaders), lost away to Luton Town 8-2. What a great day! Then, Man City away 2-1 with Don Revie dropped and Bolton at home 3-0 with another two goals from Keeble, giving us four wins on the trot. Naturally we lost the next one at Chelsea 1-2 and a similar result away at Sheff Utd brought us up to Christmas.

Buses and trains were jam packed bringing shoppers into town on a spending spree never seen for decades and all the stores predicted a record sales bonanza. The Empire Theatre was starring the Beverly Sisters in Cinderella. A Standard Vanguard motor car, equivalent to a Mondeo, would set you back £599 plus £250.14s.2d purchase tax. All was not well however. Teddy boys had become the scourge of the nation with trouble flaring up everywhere. Fights, stabbings, vandalism and hooliganism were rife. Here, in the North East, Police and Magistrates were increasingly alarmed at underage binge drinking, especially amongst girls. Boys swallowed pints while the lasses favoured “shorts” of whisky, gin or rum. Publicans complained that it was impossible to discern the ages of the girls in particular. Nonetheless, Christmas would be kind to Newcastle United and its fans. Very kind!

It began on Christmas Eve with a home game against Preston N.E. in which 32,976 saw us stuff them 5-0 to set us up nicely for the first derby of the season away to the Mackems. A Keeble header after only two
minutes was followed by Milburn (14 mins), Curry, a 21 year-old walker lad, (18 mins) and another Keeble header on 28 minutes putting us 4-0 up. It was sensational! They pulled one back but Milburn again on 67 mins with a rare (for him) header and then and Curry after 81 mins completed the 6-1 rout. At Roker Park, 6-1. Read it again. 6-1. We played them right off the park and if Bobby Mitchell had not been a passenger for much of the game the score would have been higher. 55,723 were privileged to see it. Not all in attendance would have enjoyed it but a massive following from Tyneside certainly did. Almost as good followed the very next day at SJP where we strolled to a 3-1 win. This was a great game in which the Mackens had signed a player, Holden, from Burnley, on the day of the 6-1 thrashing and he opened the scoring at this match. Not to worry. We simply upped the game and with three goals in the second half from Keeble, Milburn and Len White (and Jimmy Scoular a passenger), we completed the double. For them a young Stan Anderson had a good game. 61,040 were there. And most enjoyed watching a second successive thrashing over two days.

New Year's Eve we lost 1-3 away to Burnley but we weren't really that bothered. The North East was booming, jobs were plentiful and new factories competed for labour with the traditional Iron/Steel, Shipbuilding and Mining industries. Ransome & Marles, George Angus, Rowntrees, Aveling Barford, Edison Swan (cathode ray tubes), Dunlop Rubber, De La Rue, British Oxygen, Caterpillar Tractors and Thomas Hedley (Proctor & Gamble) with a new research and development facility, were hiring. With the exception of Thos Hedley and De La Rue, the rest have long since disappeared.

After losing at home to WBA 0-3 we travelled to second division Shelf Wed for the 3rd round of the FA Cup. We proved a class above and won it 3-1. Floodlights were on during the second half to aid the 48,798 there. In this round Arsenal were held 2-2 at home to Bedford Town and Man Utd (league leaders and cup favourites) lost away to Bristol Rovers 4-0. A snowy pitch saw us beat Luton Town 4-0 and a 2-0 win away at Charlton brought us to the fourth round, away against Fulham, another second division side, with Jimmy Hill, Johnny Haynes and Bobby Robson in their team. We strolled into a 3-0 lead only for the usual complacency to set in and in the second half found ourselves 3-4 down with 15 minutes remaining. We equalised with a goal that would never be allowed today when Keeble bundled the ball and the goalie into the net. They then had a goal chalked off for offside before Keeble scored the winner in the 80th minute. On this day it was announced that our Manager, Dugald (Duggie) Livingstone, had “left the Club by mutual consent”. There was still two years of his £1500 p.a. contract to run. He had allegedly left Milburn out of last season’s Cup final only to be overruled by the directors. He wouldn’t be missed.

On Feb 19th we played another second division side, Stoke City at SJP in the fifth round of the Cup and in heavy snow we were somewhat lucky to get a 2-1 victory. Crowds in the league had been dwindling but cup gates were up as 61,540 at this game testified. The draw paired us at home to the Mackens in the sixth round. What a tie and after the Xmas thrashings there was only one team heading for the semi’s.

Before that, however, an historic occasion. On Wednesday night February 22nd 1956 at a bitterly cold Fratton Park the first ever official competitive floodlit football match took place between Portsmouth and Newcastle United which we won 2-0. Only 15,100 turned up, due no doubt to the freezing conditions. Bill Curry had the distinction of scoring the first goal. Floodlit friendlies had long been a feature for us, usually against Scottish teams (Hearts, Hib, Partick Thistle etc.) who played to a high standard then – unlike the ridiculous Rangers/Celtic situation now.
Teddy Boys and their girls, the Black Angels, were causing mayhem. The Red Flower gang from Daisy Hill crossed The Tyne to Hebburn and in a pitched battle caused the dance organiser to call the Police and cancel all dances for the foreseeable future. You could move away from the City “smog” to a John T. Bell three bed semi in the “country” at Hillheads, Westerhope, for £1,775. Westerhope was the “country” in those days! The average First Division footballer earned a basic wage of £794 p.a. (not including any bonuses) and it was generally agreed they were overpaid.

The Football League was strenuously resisting television pleas (and cash) to show matches fearing they would hit already falling gates. Most grounds were virtual slums with primitive facilities and besides, there were other leisure amenities to enjoy. You could, for example, go to the Playhouse Theatre* and see a performance of Agatha Christie’s “Ten Little Niggers” if you so fancied, or “Marcelino” was showing at the Stoll Cinema* (so that’s where he was). Last season had been unconvincing and we were hoping for better this time. It wouldn’t be. True to Newcastle United tradition we had got rid of our genuinely good players and not replaced them. Furthermore others, including Milburn and Mitchell, were now getting “old”. The only new signing was George Eastham, an amateur from Ards in Northern Ireland for £9,000, who would eventually form a devastating trio with Ivor Allchurch and Len White. Not this season though.

Come August 18th 1956 amidst floods and gales on Tyneside the season opened. Unlike last year it had been a terrible summer. Meteorological experts warned us the Polar ice caps were melting, the Arctic Glaciers were shrinking and the Greenland ice cap had been retreating steadily for the past 30/40 years, thus we could now expect warmer summers. Sound familiar? Portsmouth at home saw a 2-1 win before a drenched 30,191, Charlie Crowe opening the scoring. He would be sold to Mansfield soon.

We celebrated at the Queens* or Gaumont* cinemas where the film “Rock Around the Clock” opened. It was a sensation and the Police were present inside the cinemas to prevent unseemly behaviour such as teenagers getting up to bop* in the aisles. Rock & Roll was sweeping the world. Elvis Presley, Little Richard, Fats Domino, Jerry Lee Lewis, Gene Vincent, Eddie Cochran, Buddy Holly and hundreds of others gyrated sexily, much to the horror of the grown-ups.

Our next game at Cardiff, 2-5, was not good practice for our trip to Joker Park where a goal 3 minutes from time from Reg Davies saw us win a poor game 2-1, in which we took what few chances there were and they didn’t. It was played in torrential rain throughout which almost seems default mode when we play them. Milburn had headed us ahead just before half time but Len Shackleton equalised early in the second half. We were best in the first half, in the second $1,032 turned up.

A deserved 1-0 home win over Cardiff with a Keeble goal well into stoppage time before 34,859 was followed by two away thumpings, 0-4 (4 goals in six minutes) and 1-6 at Sheff Wed and Birmingham City respectively. At home 50,130 saw Man Utd fortunate to leave with a 1-1 draw (Milburn scoring).

A young part-timer called Gordon Hughes from Fatfield made his debut in this game and had a stormer. He would eventually be nick-named Charlie Drake*. Another debutant was Dick Keith a Northern Irish right back who played well and would become a long server for the Club. Two days later in a friendly at Morton, Hughes broke his leg.

A series of games followed in which we were generally poor as we drifted around the neither regions of the First Division. Milburn was out with an injured ankle which accounted for his unusually poor form and George Eastham made his debut in a home draw 2-2 against Luton Town. For the first time an English club, (Man U), entered the European Cup competition which so far had been won exclusively by Real Madrid. Meanwhile, Villa hadn’t won for a month but beat us (1-3) at Villa Park, with Eastham our scorer. Then, Man City, after failing to win their last six games, beat us (0-3) at the SJP. Can’t win? Can’t score? – send for the Toon!

It is now the end of October and during the last five days the Hungarian people have been in open revolt.
against the despised Russian occupiers of their country. The Soviets, fearful counter-revolution will spread to their other satellites, especially Czechoslovakia and East Germany, send in tanks and troops. In the terror that follows thousands of Hungarians escape over the border into Austria including a certain Ferenc Puska, one of the truly great footballers of all time. He would go on to star with Real Madrid. We were plodding along Christmas playing the likes of newly promoted Leeds at home who had a truly great player called John Charles. In this game he made two and scored one in our 2-3 loss before 49,034 fans. Also appearing for Leeds was 21 years old Jack Charlton. Charles would leave for a great career in Italy soon.

In Hungary the last stronghold of the fighting Magyars was in the Budapest suburb of Újszép where the Russians slaughtered the last of the "rebels". The recriminations and show trials in the coming months were horrific. In 1969 we would go there to claim the Inter-Cities Fairs Cup. On the 1st of November Premium Bonds were introduced to the Nation with monthly prizes from £5 to £1000. The biggest uptake was here in the North East. Imagine that!

After the Leeds game, two wins, two draws and two draws and two draws took us up into 22nd and a pre Christmas treat. We were at home to the Mackems and on a filthy, foggy, waterlogged day only 29,790 turned up to see a brilliant young attack (no Milburn, no Mitchell) tear them to shreds. After only seven minutes Len White scored after the Mackems goal had already taken a pounding and on 21 mins Alec Tait, at that time a Willington Quay schoolteacher, shot through a packed goalmouth. Ten minutes later Tait spread the cheer.

Just before half time Fleming pulled one back but ten minutes into the second half Tait got his hat-trick when, from just inside the Mackem half, he ran through and blasted it past their goalie – a superb goal. Fleming scored another but who cared? 70 minutes, Tait was fouled, Tommy Casey took the penalty and blasted the net off. Two minutes later Reg Davies completed the 6-2 thrashing. It was murder in the mist. For the first time for months the Gallowgate Roar was heard. The day was rounded off by going to the Essoldo to see Fats Domino in "Snake, Rattle & Rock" – a dreadful film but great music.

On Christmas day we played WBA away (0-1) and immediately after the game the team took the train to London, caught the overnight sleeper to Newcastle, had a nap at a hotel, had some lunch and then played the Throstles* at SJP kick-off 2pm. We whacked them 5-2. 20,230 saw a superb game played on a pitch covered in two inches of snow. Rumours abound that Jackie Milburn and Bobby Mitchell were signing for the Mackems. They didn’t but Sunderland had tried. And failed.

Winning 3-2 at home to Birmingham on New Year’s Day (29,383) took us to the third round of the FA Cup at home to Man City, the holders. It was an even game all round with a 1-1 result. 57,980 were at SJP (the biggest of the day) and 46,990 saw an absolute stunner at the Maine Road replay the following Wednesday. The team had been picked by six Directors over supper at their hotel in Blackpool. Bobby Mitchell was recalled but Milburn was replaced by Alec Tait. We found ourselves 0-3 down at half time but in a roaring fight back to 3-3 the game went into extra time. We then go 3-4 down but the boys were in “never give up” mode and soon made it 4-4. Then a Tommy Casey pen made it 5-4 for a sensational victory. Needless to say the cry was now “We’re gonna win the Cup” especially as we had been drawn away to Millwall. Ever the optimists!!

“Teenagers” (a new American word) were frequenting dance halls to bop* as well as buying records,” going to pubs and clubs to listen to live music, shoving money into juke boxes and buying fashionable clothes. They have become a powerful economic force with jobs a-plenty and money to spend. This season there has been a glut of truly diabolical films such as "The Girl Can’t Help It", "Love Me Tender", "Don’t Knock the Rock" etc., which were cashing in on the R&H phenomenon. Great music though. Bill Haley and the Comets were live at the Odeon Cinema and stayed overnight at the Royal Station Hotel with hordes of screaming girls camped outside. All spoilt by petrol rocketing in price to 5s (25p) a gallon*

We remained in Manchester to play the “Busby Babes” who were League Champions and currently top of the league. In this game we were so knackered by injuries that the club sent for Malcolm Scott, a 20 years old apprentice engineer from South Shields, a part-timer, who travelled down overnight to make his debut as our centre-half. Before 44,911 we lost 1-6. Absolutely not his fault! On a frost-bound SJP, Arsenal, (11 games unbeaten), were seen off 3-1.

And so to the Den, to wipe the floor with some no-hopers from the Third Division (South)! It was absolute chaos. Millwall had massively oversold tickets for this match and literally hundreds of Geordies either never got into the ground or, once inside, had to leave because of the crush and unable to see the game. There was a delay whilst police cleared the pitch and some fans had to be moved so corner kicks could be taken. One couple complained bitterly they had paid £4.10s (£4.50p) for their return rail fare and match tickets and didn’t see a thing. Perhaps it was just as well. The “pitch” was a mud-bath and most of the game was played in torrential rain. Millwall’s huge forwards simply lapped it up. With them playing the long ball and us trying to play football we lost 1-2.

After this debacle our season (once again) was over. Fourteen unremarkable games remained in which we won 4, lost 8 and drew 2. We lost the last four games on the trot with the final match away to Chelsea, losing 2-6. This result sent us from 12th place to finish 17th. Man U, Spurs, Preston NE and Blackpool were the top four. The Mackems just missed relegation at third bottom. Only two were relegated in those days. We’d averaged 36,235 who saw an indifferent team struggle throughout. Bishop Auckland won the FA Amateur Cup for the third time in a row, beating Wycombe Wanderers 3-1. Aston Villa beat Man U 2-1 in the Cup final and NUFc planned to invest the money saved through the scrapping of entertainment tax* to buy new floodlights next season.

Ken Brown. * Ask an old fogey
On June 12th 1958 Hughie Gallagher was found decapitated at Dead Man’s Crossing in Low Fell having thrown himself under the York-Edinburgh express. He’d been due to appear in court that morning on charges of mistreatment of his youngest son. Signed from Airdrieonians in 1925 he was maybe the first of the great Magpie No. 9’s.

And now, in this close season, another legend, Jackie Milburn, left the club. He was installed as player/manager at Linfield, N. Ireland. At the end of May the Belfast club had asked for Jackie’s hand in marriage and the betrothal took place on the 14th of June. In return we got a young right winger called Jimmy Hill, who never made the step up, playing only eleven games for us. Linfield got the best of the bargain as Jackie went on to win nine trophies for them. He had been an outstanding player, athlete, sportsman (in every sense of the word) and gentleman. In 395 league and cup appearances he scored 198 goals and although generally remembered as a centre-forward, a fraction over half. After Linfield he managed Ipswich Town but quit soon after and became a sports journalist back in the NE. In 1967 he was given a belated testimonial in which 50,000 turns up at StJP to pay homage.

In Jackie’s day most players smoked and they received a tab allowance from the Club. In October 1988 he died of lung cancer aged only 64. His funeral was held at St. Nicholas’ Cathedral and the cortège wound its way to the West End Crematorium with the entire route lined with at least 60,000 mourners (including me). It was a fitting tribute to a great man. The club don’t get many things right but re-naming the West Stand, The Milburn in his honour was absolutely the right move. Getting his statue re-located outside The Gallowsgate End can’t come quick enough either. These things count.

In early August the Mackems announced the appointment of a new manager, Alan Brown, who was described as “the best soccer coach in the country”. He was hailed by the chairman, players, fans and press as a great appointment. Little did they know!

This season kicked off on the 24th August but come the end we wished it hadn’t started at all. We still didn’t have a manager. The team was selected by the directors, having taken advice from the trainer Norman Smith. This season Len White, one of our best ever players and a worthy wearer of the No. 9, would really come into his own. He would score 25 goals from 32 games and he it was who scored the first goal of the new season, away at West Brom, (31,410) which we lost 1-2. (Sir) Bobby Robson had opened the scoring for The Throstles and he was an outstanding player during his time there. Next, at home v. Spurs (37,680) which we won 3-1 with 17 year-old “wonder boy” Jimmy Greaves scoring for them. Two away games - 0-1 at Sheff Wed and 4-1 at Birmingham, followed by two at home – Pompey 2-0 and Chelsea 1-3 and then one away – Pompey 2-2, took us to blunderland for the first of this season’s derbies.

In front of 45,218 we managed to lose 0-2 but with it was virtually all them and we could register no complaints. In fact it could have been a heavy defeat had they not had such a poor team. It was played in torrential rain. The directors were still picking the team and the side pinned up for this game showed four changes from the previous outing v. Portsmouth. Captain Bob Stoke queried this with director Stan Seymour who said that he was not involved in the selection because he had been away. Seymour then re-instated the team that had done well at Pompey which led to accusations in the Press of “player power”.

There was a serious flu epidemic sweeping the country and several matches were postponed but ours, against Burnley away, went ahead which we won 2-0. We’d played ten games and were 10th in the league. This was as good as it would get this season.

It was (erroneously) reported that Rock n’ Roll was finished. Skiffle was in vogue, with Chas. McDevitt and Nancy Whiskey, Lonnie Donegan and others hogging the charts. Calypso music was also popular. Good news for footballers was agreement had been reached to increase their wages to £20 per week, the average wage in the NE being £10.

Meanwhile we drifted to a splendid 5th bottom of the league after a series of performances in which our defence and midfield was generally not bad but the attack just lacked skill/ability. An up and coming youngster called Gordon Hughes was making the Number 7 his own following the “failure” of Jimmy Hill, the makeweight in the Milburn transfer. Hughes wasn’t particularly good but he had a real turn of speed and a remarkable ability to take the ball at full speed right to the goal line and then somehow get a cross in which the opposition didn’t expect. He never failed to impress. He also looked very much like Charlie Drake.* Meanwhile, blunderland’s fans were lambasted in the press for barracking their own players after they had been pasted 7-0 by Blackpool and then 6-0 by Burnley. Geoff Whitten the chief football reporter in the Sunday Sun wrote that “visiting press-men always comment with astonishment at the unsympathetic treatment Sunderland players get from their own fans at Roker Park. The faithfulness of the Gallowsgate crowd on the other hand, is a by-word in football”. It was ever thus.

The season rumbled on, Vic (feeble) Keeble was sold to 2nd Division West Ham and proceeded to score lots of goals for them. He had found his level. Notable games were a 1-1 draw at home to Wolves (43,490) who were top of the league and would finish the season as Champions. It was a good result for us but Wolves were a class above. Then a 1-2 defeat at home to Man U in front of 53,890. We were leading 1-0 until six minutes from time. (Sir) Bobby Robson was winning his first cap for England, v. France.

look back in anger
the rock and dole years - 1957/58
A week later we beat Arsenal 3-2 at Highbury and came home to eat Fish & Chips at the newly opened Bowers Restaurant in Nuns Lane which was claiming to be the “biggest F&C shop in the entire world” with room to seat 350 customers.

Christmas rolled around with shops very busy. TVs were best sellers. A 17” TV set would cost you 74 guineas, a radiogram* 35 guineas and a record player* 12 guineas. A guinea was £1.05 so do the arithmetic. It was a right con. Colour TV was a long way off.

On 25th December, k.o. 11am, we played our last ever Christmas day game. At home to Notts Forest we were twanked 1-4. A mere 25,214 bother to turn up. That afternoon the players travelled down to Nottingham with the Forest contingent and the following day won 3-2. It was a good game which saw us 3-0 ahead after half an hour. A 3-3 draw away at Spurs took us into the New Year and an FAC 3rd round tie at Plymouth.

Argyle were then a 3rd division south team (5th top) and undefeated at home for 21 games. Three goals from Len White, 2 from Eastham and 1 from Bobby Mitchell gave us a 6-1 victory in front of a capacity 40,000 crowd. After the game the Plymouth chairman gave his sprig of “lucky” white heather to Bob Stokoe expressing the hope we go on to win the cup!

The “Italian Look” was now replacing the Teddy Boy fashion amongst us young’uns. Short hair combed straight forward. Short, tight fitting jackets (bum-freezers) with narrow lapels and pocketless. Crisp white shirts and striped ties. Trouser were straight without turn-ups. The ensemble was completed with shoes of crushed leather with long pointed toes. It was sweeping the nation and Newcastle was right up there with them.

After demolishing Plymouth we were given a home tie against 3rd Division North Scunthorpe. A dodgy! The “lucky” white heather was working a treat. Come the day, (25th Jan), 39,230 showed up in absolutely atrocious weather (the game only got the go-ahead an hour before k.o.) to see an absolutely atrocious display from our heroes. We were outplayed/fought/classed. Despite us coming back from 0-1 to 1-1, Scunthorpe simply upped their game and scored a further two to humiliate us 1-3. Not good prep for our next match – at home to the Mackems.

This game was crucial to both clubs. The positions were:-

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You can see that our home record was poor. 47,739 watched an injury ravaged United outplay them with practically our reserve team.

After 23 mins we went 1-0 up through Alec Tait and in 37 mins 2-0 thanks to a Tait centre to Bill Curry to head in. After 67 mins they got a disputed handball decision and one of the dirtiest players ever to appear on a football pitch Billy Elliott, scored from the spot. Elliott had received death threats from fans throughout the country. Four minutes later they equalised but still we pressed for the winner and finished the stronger of the two teams. We went 19th.

To cheer us up the City Hall was advertising tickets for sale for Paul (Diana, My Way) Anka on 4th March and two days later a giant of the music world, Buddy Holly and the Crickets.

Prices were:- 3/6 (17.5p), 5/- (25p), 6/- (30p), 7/6 (37.1/2p), 8/6 (42.1/2p), and 10/6 (52.1/2p). Yes, that’s 52.1/2pence for the best seat in the house. Weep!!

Then on Feb 6th the Man Utd airplane disaster at Munich shocked us all. 21 people died and several suffered various injuries, some very serious. Some would not recover. There were plenty connections to Newcastle United and the North East in the tragedy.

Milburn’s cousin, Ashton the lad Bobby Charlton survived as did Hebburn goalie Ray Wood but South Shields lad, Tom Curry who had played almost 250 times for us and had an association with us for twenty years, later serving as coach with our younger players in the North East League, was killed serving Manchester United as Matt Busby’s trainer on the ill-fated flight. Top non-league club, Durham’s Bishop Auckland helped the devastated club out with players for the rest of their campaign. It’s a gesture still remembered at Old Trafford.

From now on the rest of the season was a desperate scramble against relegation. We signed a centre forward, Arthur Bottom, from York City who was a footballer of the most basic kind. He would play eight games this season and score 7 goals. Not helping matters was a festering row amongst the two main directors, Alderman Wm. McKeag (chairman) and Stan Seymour. McKeag was furious at reports that Seymour considered himself to be “the Boss”. Seymour responded by saying “I couldn’t care less what he says”. Pathetic, but symptomatic of Newcastle United Football Club at the dawn of the television age when we could confidently say we were as big a club as any in the country and bigger than most.

Out of our final 14 matches we won 4, lost 7 and drew 3 but the match that saw us safe was a classic, against fifth top Man City, in which Len White made his reputation by scoring one of the finest goals ever seen at SPJ.

This was also a crucial game. We were third bottom. We had to win, and we did – 4-1.

At 1-1 and with City on the attack the ball was cleared to White who was 15 yards in their half (the Gallowgate) and he dribbled through their entire defence before blasting the ball from 12 yards past Trautmann. The crowd went berserk but White wasn’t finished. Picking up the ball on the right hand touchline he raced down the field and from the byeline shot past Trautmann who was expecting a cross. Pandemonium! Albert Franks completed the scoring to make it a delicious night.

The season couldn’t end soon enough. Wolves were champions with Preston N.E. second. At the bottom however it couldn’t have been any closer. From 42 games, two teams were relegated:-

At 19th NUFC 32 points

20th Pompey 32 points

21st Sunderland 32 points – relegated for the first time in their history!

22nd Sheff Wed 31 points

Our average gate was 36,382. Bolton Wanderers beat Man Utd in the FAC Final 2-0 with the late, great, Nat Lofthouse scoring both.

What a season, and hopefully not another one like it. Some hope!

Ken Brown. [ ]

*Refer to old fogeys
Sex, Beer and Football (not necessarily in that order) kept us awake in the summer of 1958. In those days the feminine birth control pill hadn’t been invented and condoms were not that easy to obtain. Not a single boozier had a machine in the Gents netty which nowadays give you a choice of size, colour, shape or taste (ugh!). Thus, many’s the time a girlfriend told her boyfriend “I’m late”. Not a single one of them had a clue what she was on about. Only later when she uttered the fateful words “I’m up the duff” did the penny drop. The inevitable result was MARRIAGE! No ifs, no buts. Once that rascally little sperm dunched into that welcoming ovum, then wham!! - down the aisle you went!

Luckily, Newcastle Breweries were producing IPA at 1/- (5p) a pint, so for a mealy quid you could swallow twenty pints and momentarily forget all your woes.

To calm us all down there was, of course, the football. This was a World Cup year, held in Sweden and in which all four Home nations had qualified. Like United, the England team was picked by selectors and we performed disastrously. In our group of four, we drew all of our games and had to play Russia in a play-off to reach the last stage. Naturally we lost but throughout this tournament our football was abysmal. After being taught a severe lesson in 1953 by the Hungarians we had learnt absolutely nothing. We were still “Biff! Bang! Wallop!” whilst every other country (except the other Home Nations) had progressed to high quality sophisticated and skilful football. It was embarrassing. Meanwhile back here, United had a short list of three for our new managerial position, the club eventually selecting Charlie Mitten. He had been a good player for Man Utd in the 1940s but in 1950 he took the boat to Colombia where he was offered riches galore to play for Bogota and became known as the Bogota Bandit. He came back a year later and was suspended from all football for 6 months. Colombia at that time was not part of FIFA thus it was “illegal” to play football for any team there. Nevertheless, he was officially appointed as our manager on the 17th June and gave us the usual bullshit about: “The NE is a special place; best for talent; fans second to none; needs time to build; wants two teams of local talent etc. etc.” Also he designed a new strip to take us into the modern era. The one with the petticoat shorts, Jimmy Scoular winced in when he wore them.

Mitten’s own son, John, joined us from Mansfield Town, his Dad’s previous club. Thus in good heart we looked forward to the coming season. The players’ wages had increased to £20pw (£17 in the summer). In Newcastle United’s case, however, only those who actually played in a first team game got the £20. Injured, or in the reserves, you got £17. This caused some disgruntlement amongst the lads. The referees were paid £7.40 and linesmen £3.68.

August 23rd saw a new season begin. We had a new manager. We had a new strip. We had some new players and we opened at JP against newly promoted Blackburn Rovers. What could possibly go wrong? We were stuffed 1-5 in front of an expectant 52,497 fans. New manager Charlie Mitten publicly apologised for the display. This was followed by a 0-3 defeat at Blackpool. Third time lucky, however, when 36,602 watched us beat Everton 2-0 at Goodison Park.

Things slowly improved and after ten games we were 10th in the league. One of these games, away to Chelsea, we lost 5-6. On 66 minutes we were leading 5-3 despite Gordon Hughes our winger playing with a broken nose from the 57th min. 46,601 saw this great game. Man Utd were at JP next and were very lucky to escape with a 1-1 draw before 60,490. Our football was looking slightly better after a nervy start to the season. The manager was trying different ideas and sometimes they worked, sometimes they didn’t. Some of the players weren’t really up to it. There was a core made up of Scoular, Eastham, White, McMichael, Keith and soon the magnificent Allchurch.

From the opening game of the season, at the end of each match, the young supporters were running on to the pitch in large numbers. The only trouble they caused was to the pitch. Despite several appeals to quit they persisted until the club decided to close the junior turnstiles. They were re-opened soon after. Darlington last season wasn’t a first.

One of the pleasures on a Saturday night was the football edition of The Chronicle. Huge teams of sellers would spread out throughout the City and
suburbs and from about 6.15 pm onwards you could hear the calls of “FEEEEEEIIIIIIIINAAAAAL”. The paper had all the match reports and statistics as well as covering all other sports. Some City centre vendors had a side-line selling condoms. Honest. Imagine, buying condoms from the bloke out shouting Chronicle!

The Queens cinema had been refurbished and opened with a spectacular new film called “South Pacific” which was shown in the new “Todd AO” system which was a huge, slightly curved screen, high definition picture quality and 6 high fidelity sound speakers. Not only was it a great movie but a great spectacle too. Elvis Presley starred in King Creole at the Odeon. Supposedly a gangster thriller it was nothing more than an excuse for Elvis to sing. By now however Newcastle was down to ten cinemas in the city centre and 23 in the suburbs. The Westgate/Gaumont (now the Academy) was being converted into the Majestic Dance Hall which became an extremely popular venue. Adverts were appearing for the new Tyne Tees Channel 8 coming next January 15th. There were still four theatres open for business.

At times Mitten had the team playing some decent football but there weren’t enough good players in the squad. He had instructed them never to kick and rush, always to pass and move. Meanwhile on 20th October, we signed 28 years old Ivor Allchurch from Swansea for £62k and on his debut at home to Leicester 46,686 saw him score twice in a 3-1 win with White scoring the other. This was the first time the Eastham/Allchurch/White combo played together and they would eventually form a formidable trio. White would (disgracefully) never get an International cap.

There were, of course, no derbies this season and the Mackems were currently rock bottom of the Second Division. We played on towards Christmas with some occasional good scores. For example, 54,330 saw us beat Man City 4-1 at home, with Len White tormenting them as he had done last season, and a defeat at Highbury, 2-3 in front of 62,801. Arsenal was top of the league and we were only two points behind but in 7th place. Also, crack (ahem) Brazilian outfit Breta Viston were touring England and came to SJP for a South American friendly. We beat them 12-1 and questions would follow as to just how “crack” they were cracked up to be. Christmas day games were now a thing of the past but on the 26th and 27th December we lost twice to Notts Forest, 1-3 at home (49,360), and 0-3 away (39,907).

Christmas was a time of plenty. Indeed, Thos Hedley of Byker (Now Proctor & Gamble) was heavily promoting a new line of soap which promised that “You’ll look a little lovelier each day, with fabulous Pink Camay”. Not only that but it contained Paris perfume at 9 guineas (£9.45p) an ounce. Phew! Another great picture was on in town at the Odeon “The Defiant Ones” with Tony Curtis and Sidney Poitier! If you’ve never seen it do so if you get the chance.

Our Chairman, Alderman Wm. McKeag wished us all a Happy Christmas and told us that “our prospects are brighter than ever”. As usual, they weren’t. Holidays abroad were also the rage although not to Cyprus where a literally murderous campaign was being waged to give the island its independence. You could go to Palma instead, for 15 days, for £40.85p, fully inclusive, arranged by Lunn’s, Lambert Bros., Pegassus, Thos Cook, Poly Travel, Hunting, and BKS amongst many others. The year ended with Britain enjoying jobs—a-plenty and money in pockets. The Newcastle Stock Exchange (yes, there was one in Newcastle as there was a Bank of England too)! was booming and we all drank to the New-Year ahead.

It started canny well with a home 4-0 thrashing of Everton before 42,440 on Jan 3rd which was our best display of the season so far, but a big winter freeze caused the cancellation of our 3rd round FAC tie against Chelsea. It was not until Jan 17th that we met Spurs at home losing 1-2, followed two days later by the re-arranged Cup. We fancied our chances and on a Monday night, 57,038 saw us lose 1-4 on a frozen SJP pitch covered in mud. After 48 mins we were losing 0-4 even though Chelsea were effectively down to 10 men with one of their players injured. No subs allowed!

This basically would sum up our entire season. Some games we were quite brilliant, others pretty damn clueless. For example on the last day of January we travelled to Old Trafford and came away with a 4-4 draw in front of 48,777. We were 1-4 down with 20 minutes left but stormed back with goals from Len White (2) and John McGuigan. Ivor Allchurch had scored our first and we deserved to win.

In mid-January Tyne Tees Television opened its studio on City Road and was broadcasting throughout the region. One of its programmes on a Sunday evening was dedicated to teenagers. It was called “The Sunday Break — The Sunday Club for Teenagers” and hosted by the Reverend Dr. Donald Soper. It included a selection from Sadlers Wells Opera introduced by William Reed. Cool eh?

At home next to Wolves which we lose 3-4 (42,377). We seemed to be a team of two halves meaning we had some decent forwards, especially Allchurch, Eastham, White but some poor defenders (Jimmy Scouler excepted). We drifted on, winning away at Pompey 5-1 but losing the next game 1-5 away at Man City (25,417), then beating Arsenal at SJP 1-0 before a sparse 32,620. At this time we were allegedly looking to sign Brian Clough and Dennis Law. If only!

The final eight games saw us win two, lose two and draw four against such opposition as West Ham (3-1), Luton Town (2-4), and Leeds (2-2), finishing in 11th position (out of 22) which neatly summed up an average season. Since the excitement of football’s return after the war and the Cup Final triumphs of the fifties we were now firmly in a rut of mediocrity. Excuses were we had suffered injuries to several key players but truthfully we were just not up to snuff. The united board of directors was split down the middle as to whether or not to extend Charlie Mitten’s contract to next season. They did!

Wolves won the league for the second season running, with Villa and Pompey relegated. The Mackems finished 15th (out of 22) in the second division. Our average home attendance was 40,280. Len White was top scorer with 25 goals from 31 games and Allchurch next with 16 from 27. The Club had installed much improved new floodlights and made a profit of £9,321.10s.2d. Crook Town won the FA Amateur Cup beating Barnet.

Ken Brown.
Fourteen years after the end of WWII, and despite the best efforts of both Tory and Labour governments, we had prospered. Newcastle had always been a great place for a drink but now “the times they were a changin”. We were on the cusp of the swinging sixties and teenagers were now the dominant force of the population. The entertainment industry (music, fashion, cosmetics, night clubs, coffee bars, jazz clubs, casinos, billiard halls, dance halls, television shows (The 6-S Special, Drumbeat, Oh Boy!, Cool for Cats)) was gearing up to supply this economically powerful group. People were “dining out” and Newcastle now had six Chinese restaurants – the most in any provincial city. The summer of ’59 was gloriously long, hot and sunny and just before the big kick off Bill Bradley, who had kept goal for us in the 1924 F A Cup final against Aston Villa, told us that; “Football’s just a money racket nowadays – not like it was when I played. It’s just what it was when I played. It’s just a business now. You played for the glory in my day”. Hey-Ho!!

October arrived hot and sunny – 78F in Newcastle and the NE crying out for rain (amazing eh?). There was a General Election in which the Tories easily twanked Labour. At the Labour Party conference Hugh Gaitskell astonishingly blamed cars, television, refrigerators, washing machines and modern cookers. “I suspect our failure was largely the failure to win the support of the women” he said. He went on “nationalisation has cost the Labour Party votes. There must be no more giant state monopolies. We cannot take everything into State control”. Barbara castle didn’t necessarily agree.

After Burnley, a series of 2 wins, 1 draw and three defeats left us fifth bottom of the league and on a cold, grey November day a paltry 23,930 showed up at St P for our fixture against Everton. We had signed two players, Bobby Gilfillan from Cowdenbeath and George Luke from Hartlepool. The latter was a tidy left winger, the former a flop. After only four minutes Luke scored the first goal in an 8-2 walloping. Two minutes later Gordon Hughes added the second. White (12Mins), Eastham (pen,15), White again (49) and Allchurch(61), before Everton got in on the act with a goal by Thomas (70), White (72), Thomas (73) and Allchurch (89) completed the scoring. In our previous eight home games we had scored only six goals! There were huge bragging rights by those who had actually bothered to turn up, and this result saw us rocket up the table to 8th……bottom. Naturally we lost the next game away at Blackpool 0-2 and dropped back to 5th bottom. Never mind.

A truly great film, “Some Like It Hot” starring Jack Lemmon, Tony Curtis and Marylin Monroe cheered us up enormously at the Grainger Cinema. If you’ve never seen it, make an effort to do so.

We won the next four games on the trot including a very good 4-3 away at Man City (29,416) and a handsome 4-1 at home (39,940) to a very poor Arsenal. George Eastham had a blinder and the Arsenal manager, George Swindin, said that he was “a great player with a great future”. He wasn’t wrong! Unfortunately for us it was with Arsenal!! Eastham fell out with United and took the Club to court over “Freedom of Contract” claiming players were absolutely tied to a Club under the “Retain and Transfer” system and could only leave if the Club permitted. Eastham won his case in the High Court and eventually signed for the Gunners.

He played in every game this season was outstanding, forming a formidable partnership with Len White and Ivor Allchurch.

Coming up to Christmas we lost 0-4 away at Spurs (32,824) who were currently league leaders. Our chairman, Wally Huford, was promising; “better facilities for our terrific supporters”. They would be a hell of a long time coming!! He also said “we will win the Cup”. Promises! Promises! Over this period we played Chelsea twice drawing both 2-2 away (48,642) and 1-1 at home (43,492). It was a prosperous period with most industries going through a boom although Newcastle’s very last pit, Montagu Colliney, closed.

Nevertheless we were all looking forward to a splendid 1960 and what an absolutely fabulous start we had. On Saturday the third of January we were at home to Manchester United who were 11th top of the league with us just below at 12th. 57,200, the biggest crowd of the day by far, showed up for a spanking 7-3 victory in which Gordon Hughes our right winger had the game of his career. Hughes was one of those players who often flatter to
deceive (you know the sort) but he had a blinder in this game, as did Eastham and Len White. After only six minutes Hughes shut under the keeper for 1-0. Ten minutes later White got the first of his hat-trick when, after dribbling brilliantly through the Mancs defence he swapped passes with Eastham and flicked the ball over the goalie. Dawson pulled one back but just on half time White made it 3-1. Jackie Bell hit the post on 54 mins and White headed in the rebound for 4-1. Albert Quixall made it 4-2 before Eastham scored a penalty (67 mins) and then Jackie Bell, our left half, scored another beauty (76) with a great 25 yard shot. Manchester replied with a Quixall pen to make it 6-3 after 81 mins. However, we were playing easily the best football of the season with our defence superb and our attackers brilliant.

Finally, Ivor Allchurch got onto the score sheet with a header to make it 7-3 (87) to complete a truly memorable match. This was one of those games that will always remain in the memory (and would have sold a million DVD's today). It started a slow creep up the league and set us up nicely for our next game at home to Wolves in the third round of the FA Cup.

On the 10th January, 62,433 (again, the biggest crowd of the day) crammed into SJ to see us take on the "Mighty Wolves" and afterwards leaving thinking we had been a tad fortunate to get a 2-2 draw. The following Wednesday at Molinieux, 39,082 saw us lose the replay 2-4 on a snow covered pitch. We were simply not good enough and once more our season was effectively over. Wolves were the team of the decade having won the league three times, been runners up twice and won the League Cup three times. However, they were also playing in the European Cup, now in its fifth year, and in the quarter finals met Barcelona. In the first leg at Camp Nou they were utterly overwhelmed 4-0 before over 80,000 fans. Nevertheless in the return leg at Molinex the famous "British Bulldog" spirit and "robust fast play" was expected to overcome this deficit. The second half of the game was shown on Tyne Tees T.V. and in an absolute masterpiece of football yours truly was left open-mouthed at the sheer brilliance of the Catalans, who won 5-2, to finish with a nine-two aggregate. English football was shown up for what it was, i.e. kick and rush. We aren't much better now! Barcelona lost the semi to Real Madrid who beat Frankfurt 7-3 in the final at Hampden Park before 127,621 spectators. This was the fifth final and Madrid had won them all.

Whilst our season may have been over there was a galaxy of Rock 'n' Roll stars appearing at the Empire Theatre and the City Hall including Cliff Richard and the Shadows, Ella Fitzgerald, Eddie Cochran, The Everley Bros., Conway Twitty, Bobby Darin, Gene Vincent, Marty Wilde, Tommy Steele, Billy Fury, Adam faith, etc., etc. The Empire featured the Black and White Minstrel show, a show that would see all participants locked up nowadays. "Beatniks" was a new word coined for a new set of layabouts. Cinemas were closing, however, due to competition from television, people preferring to stay at home and "watch the box".

In February, on a pitch covered in snow, we beat Leeds, including Jack Charlton and Don Revie, 2-1 at home when just 16,130 turned up. The weather caused havoc throughout the country resulting in very low attendances everywhere. We went through the entire month of March winning every game (four) which pulled us up to sixth top of the table but the remaining seven games saw us win only one, at home over the Easter week-end against Wolves 1-0. They were second top at this time and well fancied to win the league and FA cup. 47,150 showed up and saw an exciting match with Len White getting the winner.

By now the team consisted of ageing players such as Scouller, Allchurch, Bobby Mitchell (still playing well at 35) McMichael, Stokoe and Keith. Furthermore, the younger players were not good enough nor coming through from the reserves, a recipe for impending disaster. Eastham would leave and Len White's career would never be the same after a disgraceful tackle from Dave Mackay at Tottenham.

We finished eighth top, with a crowd average of 37,237, scoring 86 (63 from White [29] Eastham[20] / Allchurch[14]) and conceding 84. Football attendances this season were the lowest since WW2 in all four divisions and finances were dwindling. Burnley pipped Wolves to the title by a single point but Wolves beat Blackburn 3-0 in the Cup Final. Sunderland finished seventh bottom of the second division.

Disastrously, however, Gateshead, who had finished third bottom of the fourth division, was voted out of the Football League. It was a scandal at the time but truth to tell it was a combination of the other clubs not wanting expensive travel to the NE, poor attendances and a ramshackle Redheugh Park located in a rundown industrial neighbourhood (Ed: he can't mean the bohemian quarter known as The Teams can he?). It has been put about by Mackens that United voted Gateshead out of the Football League. Absolute tosh. The vote was in secret and it would have taken more than a vote from St James' Park to send The Tynesiders out of the league. Peterborough, a prosperous market town in the south took their place. That's all the explanation you need. Mackens talking rubbish as usual.

Since the resumption of football after the War we had come out of the blocks running, playing some superb football in some memorable matches with some genuinely great players. We were promoted, did well early on in the First Division and won three FA Cups. We were the best supported club in the country (have a look at the attendances) and one of the aristocracy of English football. This was to become the age of mass communications, TV and the consumer age. The big city clubs were lining up their guns, clubs who were inferior to our own ... Liverpool, Manchester United, Leeds. United had a mediocre side but its potential remained enormous and this was the time to assert ourselves on and off the park.

However, as has become our wont, we drifted into mediocrity and ultimately became the club we know and love. At times thrilling and exciting but mostly just a drain on the emotions. ‘Twas ever thus and will ever be so! Ken Brown.

Editor’s Note: This is the last in the series of Look Back in Anger. True faith has covered every season since the end of WW2 with eye-witness accounts of every twist and turn in Newcastle United’s post-war history and the people who have done it are those who paid their money and clicked through the turnstiles to support your club. Can I thank everyone who has...
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