

Outside the Bay

*An offbeat look at the world of North East football inside & outside of Hillheads. . .
with Paul Benneworth*

Taking a trip back to historical Whitley Bay



"The past is another country. They do things differently there." That quotation from L.P. Hartley's 1953 book *The Go-between* feels particularly apposite when applied to Whitley Bay's recent run of form. Late opposition goals seem all too often to have denied us points we are starting to increasingly desperately need for a reasonably successful season.

That stands in stark contrast to a decade ago, where the FA Vase winning side seemed expert in fighting back into games and themselves benefiting from late winners. So for this edition of *Beyond the Bay*, I am going to cheat slightly, and reflect on the history of Whitley Bay as another country, as captured in a recently-published book about the FA Vase.

Whitley Bay do have literary pedigree. Renowned sports writer Harry Pearson is known to occasionally take a trip to Hillheads time. One occasion was for the 1993 FA Trophy Tie with Chorley, captured in *The Far Corner*, widely regarded as the best volume ever written about non-league football.

The game ended 1-1, and following Pearson's writing style, the chapter was less about the game, but Pearson's own experiences with non-league football and his footballing fandom more generally. The existential futility of that fandom is revealed in the chapter's final sentence, where he reveals that Bay went out in the replay.

A different cup competition is *Northern Goal's* focus, newly written by Mark Carruthers, non-league journalist and regular visitor to Whitley Bay. The book recalls northern eastern teams' success in the last 40 years in the FA Vase, bringing those victories to life through a series of interviews with key players.

The twelve chapters cover nine clubs, including such familiar names as Billy Irwin, Gareth Bainbridge and of course the transformational Julio Arca who took South Shields to victory in 2017. With one third of those twelve victories being for Whitley Bay, it is unsurprising that much of the book is devoted to the exploits of the Bay and its key players.

History is another country because we tend to see it through today's eyes, and that is certainly true when thinking of Ian Chandler. Remembered by me as much for his managerial as playing exploits, he joined Bay at a time when we reached the third round proper of the FA Cup.

He lifts a veil behind the goings-on at the time to reveal that Steve Cuggy had stormed off after being dropped by Durham City. He'd luckily been brought back to the fold

for the final, just in time to slot a cross for Chandler to score the winner in the first of four victories.

The focus of the 2010 Vase story is Paul Chow, who would score the fastest goal at Wembley after either 19 or 21 seconds. He recalls that he couldn't believe he'd scored so quickly, and that it only really sank in after local journalists told him he'd won the record.

I followed Chow on Twitter even after he left the Bay, so losing his record to Eriksen was familiar to me. I'd seen Eriksen a few times in the Netherlands, and he was a worthy winner, even if it was disappointing he didn't acknowledge Chow as the old recordholder.

Lee Kerr faced the challenge of telling the story of the 2011 final, a hard-fought victory where Kerr and Chow set another record, becoming the first players to score at three consecutive cup finals. I was disappointed when Kerr left soon after to sign for Spennymoor Town.

But I hadn't realised he'd had a successful trial at Newcastle United in his youth that he'd never taken further. It's been great to see him back this season, and also to read that his move away was part of fulfilling real potential.

Perhaps the most moving of the interviews is from 2009 with Mark Taylor. Already suffering then the first symptoms of what would later be revealed as motor neurone disease, Mark Taylor's interview deals with his emotional, personal and physical struggles on and off the field.

Since then, Mark has been active in fundraising for research into the deadly condition. It is a great credit to Carruthers that a share of the proceeds go to the Motor Neurone Disease Association, a marvellous sign of the togetherness football brings.

There's another eight chapters covering the other eight clubs' success, and Whitley Bay rightly runs through those tales like a stick of rock, reflecting how many local players have some connection with the Bay.

It's a great read, and will definitely take you back to the time when Whitley Bay ruled the amateur world!

Northern Goal. 40 years. 9 clubs. 12 winning stories. is written by Mark Carruthers and exclusively available via Amazon for £11.99.

Paul

