

BLACKBURNING WITH THE
BLACKBURN TRADES CLUB
TRADES COUNCIL



Mick Pickup

**BLOWING WITH
THE
BLACKBURN
TRADES**

by

MICK PICKUP

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ISBN

For Carole (Caroline)

FOREWORD

One of the more revealing characteristics of the British Working Class males is the habit of establishing institutions which echo those of the aristocracy. From the Sunday morning 'ratting' - the proletarian pursuit of the uneatable - to the mumbo-jumbo camaraderie of the Royal and Ancient Order of the Buffaloes, British workers have developed mirror images of aristocratic male power and privilege.

Nowhere more so than the 'Club', to where the weary male can retreat from the cares of work and home.

Working class males established their own, male-only watering holes in serious emulation of the hallowed halls of St James, London.

I well remember being admitted as a young child to my grandfather's club, a place spoken of with reverence and mystery. Unprepared as later children brought up with film and television images of James Bond and other assorted spies being briefed at 'M's' club when the contrast would have been even starker - I was taken aback at how dingy, and well - ordinary - the club was. But we are always assured, it's the atmosphere that counts - the ambience in St James', the 'crack' in my own father's dated slang.

The 'club' is important for working men - and I presume women, too nowadays. It is a refuge, an asylum, but more. It is the scene for Byzantine schemes for power worthy of the Medieval Court, or that other remaining haunt of clever Peter Pan plotters, the House of Commons. Club politics, particularly election to the all important 'Committee' and the consequent positioning, can be deadly. Such intrigues have yet to find their theoretician, as the Medici court found in Machiavelli, though they deserve one. However, club politics have found a witty and entertaining chronicler in Mick Pickup.

The Trades Club in Blackburn was a unique experiment, in that its founders did try to establish a club which would show loyalty to the political cause of the working class - a relatively easier thing to do in the earlier decades of class consciousness in the tight knit pit villages of Yorkshire and South Wales, but a relatively difficult task in a Blackburn ever notorious for its Conservatism in the 1980s.

Blackburn, my home town, was one of the constituencies which vindicated Disraeli's belief that giving the working class male the vote was not such a risk, for he counted on their innate deference and lack of adventure, particularly strong in textile workers, to vote Tory in gratitude.

The founders of the Trades Club tried to make the club the natural home of the politically aware workers in the town - their ultimate failure to do so, and their continuous and mutual ambiguity towards the local Labour Party speaks volumes.

It is somewhat odd to read about events and people you know when narrated by others. I remember very clearly all the political events which form the background to this book - my successful election to the European Parliament took place during the great Miners' Strike of 1984-5, for example. I also remember mainly at second, or third hand, hearing of the scheming and manoeuvring down the 'Trades Club' and I still know and like many of the people who appear in these pages, and though my own judgment may be different than Mick's, I had an entertaining read and a laugh at his description of people and events I know.

The tale of the Trades Club reveals many of the virtues of the working class. It is a story of battling against the odds with great energy and frequent naiveté, stoicism and loyalty against sometimes better judgment; always with humour. All excellent and indeed essential qualities for a Blackburn Rovers fan.

Michael Hindley MEP for Lancashire South 1996

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Writing this book has given me deep pleasure, especially when I cast my mind back to all the crazy things the members and club committee got up to when the place was open.

Many people gave me the inspiration to put pen to paper, but certain people's contributions are worthy of recording my appreciation of. First on this list must be John Lynch, my partner in crime in the running of the Trades. Another John is Cramsie, who along with wife Chrissie not only put a roof over my head, but also loaned me their only working computer to carry out the writing of this book. But the biggest inspiration of all was the club itself. Never was one place so full of so many characters, yet people who would give you their last penny, even the ones off their eyes when they were in their coffin.

The club itself was a comedy and a tragedy for the Blackburn labour movement. It was a comedy because so many daft things went on in the place, yet a tragedy how it all ended so quickly after such a short life of only thirteen years.

At least the club did its bit for people in struggle when they needed help. Miners, Dockers, Railway, Postal, Bakery, Aerospace and Ambulance workers all had their disputes helped by the club and its members.

I would also like to thank the Ethnic Minorities Development Association in Blackburn for allowing me the use of their equipment and especially Sharifa and Penny for helping type it on to the computer disk for me.

Thanks also go to Jim Hammonds for his expertise in helping me put together the finished work in a professional form and Mike Hindley (MEP for South Lancashire) for writing the foreword.

Since the club closed I spent just short of a couple of years trying to write this book. I must thank my girlfriend Carole (Caroline) for putting up with what became almost an obsession in my attempts to finish this book and get it published.

PREFACE

In 1984 I was elected, or rather 'Shanghaied' on to the Management Committee of Blackburn Trades Council Club. Two years later I lived to tell the tale and decided to start keeping a monthly record of its activities. This was for my own interest and to win the occasional bet off gullible club committee members.

In 1993 the club closed after thirteen years, much to the sadness of many people, but not enough to set up another similar institution.

When the writing was on the wall for the club, I started looking through my collection of monthly reports and noticed how it came to a substantial number. This gave me the idea of turning them into some kind of a book.

I started writing seriously about the time the club shut down and found it one hell of a slog. If I can do it, so can anybody else. The main thing is the club may be gone, but will never be forgotten, thanks to these pages.

What must be remembered is a club is only as good as its members and there were some great people who came in the Trades. I've tried my best to name as many of them as possible, but the sands of time cover many tracks. Unfortunately there were far too many people whose names I should have included, but with hindsight you can do anything. I must take this opportunity to apologise to anybody who I omitted accidentally.

I have tried to make this book as light hearted as possible because the club was such an eccentric and funny place. Most books I've read about the labour movement tend to be a bit boring. I hope anybody reading this won't tar me with the same brush.

Also as a proud Blackburner, I notice there seem to have been very few books written about my beloved town, even less about the labour movement here. Hopefully I might have done my bit to correct this and show we do have one after all.

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CHAPTER ONE

'Shanghaied' aboard a sinking ship

The first time I went in Blackburn Trades Council Club was December 1982. I along with my workmate Cathy Owens wanted to join the electrician's union, the EETPU. Cath used to frequent the club when it first opened up two years before. I'd never heard of the place.

She told me it opened up in September 1980 after a long and hardworking campaign by some of the Blackburn trade union movement's elder statesmen.

I don't remember much about it really. Being a 21 year old, all I was bothered about was watching Blackburn Rovers, supping ale and trying to get my end away with as many girls as possible, not usually successfully.

My involvement in the labour movement came during 1982. The war in the South Atlantic, then a weeks holiday in Berlin changed my life. The Berlin trip became a delayed action 'Road to Damascus.' I became a Socialist. But it didn't put me off my habits described earlier.

By '82 I'd worked for a firm called WPA for six years and was well fed up to the back teeth. This in combination with my new found outlook on life made me decide to join the EETPU along with Cathy Owens. Another lad at the firm, Martin Wilmot, was already in the union. Maybe we could organise the firm, maybe pigs could fly.

This proved to be easier said than done. Joining the union wasn't that easy either. Our first trip to the club proved fruitless. A little fat fellow, who turned out to be Pete Greenwood, told us the EETPU didn't have a meeting until January. We would have to come back then. Me and Cath persevered and eventually were accepted as members of the union, joining the Auxilliary Section.

I went to branch meetings at first, but found them boring. I started wavering and lost interest very quickly.

Later in the year my interest rekindled. I started buying left wing papers such as the 'Socialist Worker' and 'Militant,' eventually playing about with the latter. This encouraged me to start attending branch meetings again and I joined the Labour Party. I ended up becoming the branch's political delegate. Quite ironic really, the most right wing union in the TUC electing a Militant sympathiser as its delegate to the General Management Committee of Blackburn Labour Party.

When it came to being a delegate I seemed to do a pretty good job, this was down to me always taking notes in meetings and giving the branch a written report. Not such a difficult thing, but at most meetings I went to nobody else seemed to be taking notes only me, apart from the Secretary.

Giving the EETPU a written report from Blackburn Labour Party went down very well, especially as I was not only a young chap, but the branch's first political delegate in years.

Next I let my brothers talk me into becoming one of the branch's Trades Council delegates. I was a bit wary of this at first, our lads had been given a torrid time at local level due to not only the national scene, but through local issues too.

The union's decision to proscribe Communist Party members from holding positions of office didn't go down well with the Stalinist members of the 'New Communist Party.' They had a foothold on Blackburn Trades Council, George Davies their national organiser was a delegate.

Also the branch's recently elected Secretary, Bob Horman, had been a key member of the extreme right wing National Party. This became the first overtly racist party to win council seats in Britain when they won a couple in Blackburn in the 70's.

Bob's salad days were well behind him, but not everybody thought so. His presence in the club even led to a walk out. This was fairly understandable, many of the Trades Council delegates had been involved in the battles of the '70s, including the 'Battle of Bridge Street.'

I found Bob to be a decent bloke, certainly a good Branch Secretary. So I was prepared to give him the benefit of the doubt. After all I've made enough mistakes in my life and still am, like everybody else.

Lo and behold I became the branch's third delegate, joining my colleagues Ken Phillips and Bob Haworth. Ken had been a delegate for a few years. Me and Bob replaced Alf Lloyd and Walt Green who couldn't take any more stick from the other Trades Council delegates. Alf was a Tory, Walt not too far off, but both were good trade unionists and had been two of the leading lights in the setting up of the club.

Of the original eight club steering committee members, it was quite a honour for two to be from the same branch. Sadly both had reached the end of their tethers, due to circumstances beyond their control.

Their tales of woe must have got to Bob Haworth as I don't think he ever went to a Trades Council meeting. He was a very quiet chap, never saying anything at branch meetings anyway, so I probably didn't notice him there whether I went or not. He resigned fairly quickly as a delegate, leaving me and Ken to get on with it.

My introduction to the Trades Council wasn't the torrid time Ken expected. I had the advantage of knowing quite a few delegates already through my Labour Party activities. Also being a young activist I was warmly welcomed, everybody seemed to be out to recruit me to their various causes. Perhaps being a left wing EETPU member must have made people sit up and take notice.

The only problem was the Trades Council and club were going through a bad patch when I joined them. My first three meetings as a delegate were iniquitous, giving fuel to my branch to call in the North West TUC to investigate the running of the organisation. There was no chance of that happening. They probably needed treatment themselves. There was a noticeable lack of confidence in the movement since Maggie won her second General Election.

I'd heard on the grapevine about the club's misfortunes. I joined it within weeks of going to my first branch meeting. The club Secretary was called Mike Seery. He'd been elected when the members turned on Frank Smith, his predecessor, for some reason as often happens in clubs and other institutions.

All sorts of rumours were flying round about the club going bust, or being taken over by the Labour Party. I felt my membership money may have been put to better use. Hopefully things would sort themselves out. It was all new to me, I had no idea what was going on. Besides my favourite watering hole was the Balaclava on Watford Street.

Everything came to a head at the May Trades Council General Council meeting on Monday the 21st 1984. I'd heard all of the club committee jacked in 'en bloc,' apart from Zafar. He had only just been co-opted on to the committee. There were two resignations that very evening, Pete McLaughlin and Harry Atwal to confirm it.

Chairman of the meeting, Frank Gorton, said exploratory talks were being carried out with the Labour Party over a possible joint venture.

I wasn't too sure what to make of this idea, but we had a saviour in Caroline Lynch. She was a NUPE delegate and married to the club's Steward John Lynch. She fired off saying: "There are delegates in the room prepared to go on the club committee. Nobody had any right talking to other organisations about joint ventures, certainly not without the permission of the club members."

By the fickle finger of fate I became one of these people. It seemed to happen so fast, I wasn't sure what I was doing. I remember it was Pete McLaughlin who nominated me for the club committee and my mate Alan Jones who seconded me. Al got on too, I think it was me who nominated him when he said he was interested.

We ended up with six volunteers from the meeting: Frank Smith from the GMBATU; Pete Greenwood AUEW; Tommy Holden UCATT; Pete Kennett NGA; Al Jones NUPE; and me from the EETPU to continue the tradition.

There were also two existing club committeemen in Zafar, another NUPE delegate and Don McKinley from USDAW, but we weren't sure about him. He hadn't formally resigned from the committee, but we could deal with him at a later date. Our first priority was saving the club. We met together after the meeting and arranged to meet each other every week for the foreseeable future.

We started off as a committee as we meant to continue. I think Frank Smith and Pete Greenwood really wanted us to join up with the Labour Party, but our enthusiasm convinced them we could make a go of the place.

Frank later confided to me how if the joint venture with the Labour Party had gone ahead, he was earmarked for Secretary anyway. He got this with us. Frank and Pete were seen as the most experienced committeemen, so we elected Frank Secretary and Pete Chairman. Pete Kennett agreed to be Treasurer, nothing like a volunteer.

It turned out the club was up 'Dickey's Meadow.' We found this out at our first meeting and decided drastic action was needed. We'd carry on getting together every week as well as Sunday mornings just to keep an eye on the situation, at least until we had some breathing space.

I was very naive then, a bit like now, being under the impression that if the club went bust, we as a committee would be liable for whatever money was owing. This didn't bother me at the time, being unemployed and still living with my parents.

Later it was revealed to me that as the club was a limited company it was limited liability. All the committee and members would have to stump up would be £1 apiece. This was a relief, but I didn't let on how ignorant I was on Company Law. I'd only just got involved in politics and thought we could take on the Tory Government single-handedly.

Unfortunately I was brought back down to Earth by being given all the dirty jobs in the club, mainly because I was the youngest member of the committee. My tools of socialism were a mop and bucket, being on the club committee was no glamour position.

The first meeting started off the trend of me being given the dirty jobs, not necessarily of the cleaning kind. We decided to sack the doorman, Old Frank. He was a waste of time anyway, stopping decent

people coming in, including members, but letting idiots in without so much as a hoot. We received a lot of complaints about this.

Old Frank used to shout at you and ask you for your club membership card when you entered the bar room. Then when you had convinced him you were a member, he'd be round to where you were sitting and try and sell you stuff. He once tried to sell me a steering wheel, then a set of Mario Lanza records. He couldn't have picked a more unlikely customer; a punk rock fan on the dole.

So in our first meeting we decided to sack Old Frank. I felt a bit sorry for doing this, until I found out he not only received the old age pension, but a ROF one as well, and he drove a brand new Ford Fiesta. No wonder he wasn't bothered when I told him we had to give him the Big 'E.' I had to do this job, the other lads lost their bottle.

Another dirty job I had to do was pull the idiots and clear them from the club. This was the main reason why the place was in its present state. The last committee let anybody in, so all the town centre drunkards started coming to take advantage of our four o'clock last orders each afternoon.

This led to John the Steward having to put up with shady and unruly characters who wouldn't leave the club when asked. He was left to fend for himself and had received threats upon his person.

To make matters worse, the last committee stupidly made some of the dead-eyes into club members. John eventually had a bad do with his nerves due to his treatment and went on the sick.

While John was off sick, his duties were covered by his old workmate from his previous job at Allspeeds, a chap called Kevin. John was off for the first few weeks of the new club administration. When he came back I had the job of going into the club each day to back him up if any undesirables came in. A few drunks did call by, but none of the local yobbos. I thanked my lucky stars this was the case. Luckily I didn't have to turn too many people away.

There was one particular chap I didn't look forward to having to turn away from the club, he was called Ginger Mick and enormous. I'm an agnostic, but I prayed he wouldn't come in the club.

We decided at the committee meeting to let him know by letter he was barred. He was a member, but we told him if he came in the club the police would be called immediately. It seemed to do the trick and kept him out along with the rest of the dead-eyes.

The occasional plonker did call in, after all we didn't have a doorman anymore. All I did was ask them for their membership card, this usually did the trick. Most drunks were only interested in getting a drink, not arguing and wasting valuable supping time.

Some Smart Alecs did try it on though. The funniest case I dealt with was when a young couple tried to come in the club at four o'clock one afternoon. The lad said he'd lost his card, but told me his membership number. When I checked it out it turned out to be one of our Asian member's numbers. 'Brother Hussein' didn't get served that day.

An idea I came up with was shutting the front door at three o'clock. I persuaded the rest of the committee to allow this course of action because all the problems we had at dinner time occurred after three o'clock. People would go out blowing their money elsewhere then come in the club pissed up causing havoc. Why should we be there for the convenience of folk who didn't give a damn about us. These dollopers hardly spent anything and every penny was costing us dear.

This didn't go down well with the members at first, but we said it wasn't such a big job to come in the club before three. The main thing was it did the job, the locked door was enough for most people at that time. We added a bit of flexibility by letting members in by prior arrangement or anyone on club business, like me nipping to the bank for loose change.

Another idea we came up with was to introduce new application forms for membership. There seemed to be total confusion with the existing system. I was one of the lucky ones. It must have only taken about three months for mine to go through.

Our new forms looked professional like the ones in workingmen's clubs, with a proposer and a seconder from the membership. Our forms differed by applicants having to include their trade union, provided they were in one. This last point needed looking into at a later date. It was definitely a grey area.

As the weeks passed by the new club committee gradually started getting to know each other. Me and Al Jones were already mates before I went on the Trades Council. We met not so long after he came out the army and went working for a chap called Frank Campbell as a van driver.

Frank was a nice bloke who used to like philosophising. His favourite saying was : "Life is a game of chess and we're all prawns in it."

I was working for a firm called WPA who supplied Frank with amusement machines and met Al briefly before being made redundant, thanks to my new found trade union interests.

Me and Al hadn't seen each other for a year or so, when we met up on a peace march from Darwen to Blackburn. Me, him and a mate of mine called Chris Roe all went on a drinking spree afterwards and did this every week until Al went to Colleg Harlech on a trade union course later in the year. Chris was to come on the club committee himself a few years and a few unions later.

Frank Smith seemed a funny kettle of fish. Nobody in the club liked him, never mind trusted him. Unproven allegations were often made about him to me when he was out of earshot, but people were calling me 'Johnny come lately,' so I accepted it as part of the job, as I imagine Frank did too. I gave him the benefit of the doubt even though a lot of people were on my back about this. I just told them to get themselves on to the Trades Council and stand against him, otherwise give the lad a chance.

Frank's biggest asset was the ability to turn his hand to virtually any kind of DIY job. He could finish jobs I hadn't a clue how to even start. It didn't take long to realise the club needed Frank more than it needed me, and most of the committee. The only problem was me evolving into his unpaid labourer.

There are two types of bloke in this world. The one who never does a tap and the one who never stops. Frank was definitely the latter, much to my chagrin. To make matters worse, he seemed to get loads of time off work. I was on the dole but definitely not unemployed.

Every time Frank came in the club I'd hear the shout: "Mick have you got a minute? Give us a lift with this."

But Frank was one hell of a Secretary and could get people to do things. He also got the club committee to stick together and work as a team, something sadly lacking from the last regime.

Pete Greenwood the Club Chairman was a Blackburn Labour councillor. Like Frank, a lot of people didn't like Pete. This was because of him being a fiery character, like a lot of folk with red hair seem to be.

Pete must have been a bit of a boozier in his younger days as he had an enormous gut on him, like a barrel. He spent most of his time tying and untying his belt, easing the discomfort of his extra weight.

I met Pete through his son Michael, we were both members of the Labour Party and involved in the Labour Party Young Socialists (LPYS). Michael was Secretary of this and me a grudging Vice-Chairman. Luckily I was saved from this burden by reaching the age of 25 and retiring.

Pete didn't trust me at first due to our political differences, he was a bit of a Stalinist, I had Militant sympathies, but we probably had more in common with each other than the rest of the committee. We were the most politicised and had many an argument over a pint in the bar.

At first it was orange juice with Pete due to his dodgy ticker, I was a bit worried when me and him used to fly off the handle at each other. I didn't want to send him to that great commune in the sky. Within a few months of being on the committee Pete came in drunk one afternoon and told me his doctor said he could drink beer again. He looked like he was making up for lost time.

Tommy Holden was a painter and decorator with the council and stalwart of his UCATT branch. His father and grandfather were both painters with the same employer. Tommy was the last of this dynasty as like me he was a bachelor. We used to know him as Elvis Presley before finding out his proper name. Obviously a keen Elvis fan, he wore badges proclaiming his loyalty to the king of rock'n'roll.

A few months later Tommy had a bit more in common with me. I left my parents nest and moved up Queens Park flats. Tommy lived not so far away in Queens Park Close. He moved three floors above me when his home was earmarked for demolition. Tommy was a man of few words, his favourite saying being: "I'm saying nowt." But he was a good trade unionist and there when he was needed, unlike a lot of others who should have been.

Pete Kennett was a printer, a skilled one too as he was a member of the NGA. He worked at Duxbury's, but that was about all I knew about him. We had one common bond though. Both of us were die-hard Rovers fans, unlike the rest of the committee.

It had been suggested we hold our committee meetings on Saturday afternoons. Me and Pete put the kybosh on the idea straight away. He was nearly as mad on Rovers as me, if that's possible. Also Pete had custody of his children on Saturdays, so it wouldn't have been fair to have him down the club on such a valuable day, his highlight of the week.

Zafar was probably the best boozier in the club. He smashed any stereotypes people may have about Asians being Muslims and teetotal. Maybe most of them are, but Zafar made up for the rest of them. I thought I could shift a few until I met Zaf. He spilt more than I could put away, that was just at dinner time.

Zaf became my best mate on the club committee once Al Jones left us to go to Harlech. He was very handy working at Queens Park Hospital just up the road from where I lived. I sometimes called on him when he worked the nightshift there. I always got a good feed.

One night I was having a brew with him, when a security guard pulled him to one side. It turned out a prowler had been stalking the nurse's quarters. Luckily I'd been with Zaf when this happened. I was even luckier when the prowler was caught red handed, by Rocky the Alsatian.

I still asked Zaf to escort me to the steps leading to my blocks of flats just in case Rocky fancied the taste of somebody else's backside. Zaf was a NUPE delegate from the Hospital branch. He started off as a kind of token representative because of his background.

He wasn't really into politics, although a Labour Party member. He'd sooner stop in the bar downstairs when meetings were going on in the club, and often did. But Zaf wasn't as stupid as some of his colleagues thought. He never missed a bean.

It's hardly worth mentioning Don McKinley, I never met the guy as a committee man. He was a relic from the last bunch and technically still on. He didn't resign formally, so we did the job for him.

I came up with a scheme to sling him off by installing an attendance clause for membership of the club committee. This stated if you didn't attend a meeting within a three month period without good reason, then you were out on your ear.

This last point has to be emphasised because hardly had we got on with trying to save the club, the Miner's Strike broke out. Everybody wanted to do their bit for the miners and we did, after all we were trade union activists, but it was felt other Trades Council delegates should be pulling their fingers out like us.

We reckoned a closed down Trades Club served no purpose whatsoever. Certainly no good to the miners, or the labour movement.

A miner's support group was set up by the Trades Council and started holding meetings in the club on Tuesday nights. Unfortunately this was the same night we held our new club committee meetings. Sunday mornings were for doing the books and cleaning the place. There was a gentleman's agreement not to bother with meetings as such on Sunday mornings as all the committee liked a drink on Saturday night. Our fraternity could have been put to the test with formal meetings.

We found our way round this difficulty by sending Pete Greenwood to the new miner's support group. We'd have our committee meetings without him. He was only the thickness of a wall away from us anyway. With his voice he could probably have chaired both meetings.

The Miner's Strike was a good time in the club, even if not for the brave miners. It's probably the only time most of Blackburn's labour movement pulled together as one.

There were some elements who didn't want to know us though. Mainly the Blackburn Labour Party's ruling establishment under Jim Mason's tutelage. They were boycotting us anyway. Their attitude to the club was: "If we don't run the show, nobody does." Some things never change and still haven't yet.

Our main problem in the club was sorting out the staff situation. John the Steward hadn't been back at work a matter of weeks when he went sick again. It was a combination of his nerves and a dislike of Frank Smith which made him decide to eventually jack in his job with us.

John also made demands on us which we found unacceptable at the time. He wanted time off work to attend Trades Council and his own union branch meetings.

He also wanted the Trades Council to be arbiters in any dispute between himself and the club committee.

We virtually told John to go to hell with his demands. He had no support on the Trades Council, apart from Caroline. There were delegates on the Trades Council who weren't even club members. No way was any non-member having a say in the affairs of this club.

There were only six of us on the committee once Al Jones left, two short of a full quota. Our attitude was any Trades Council delegate who wanted a say in the running of the club could put their names forward and be co-opted on to the club committee. In other words: "Put up or shut up!"

This was a bit of a reactionary attitude, but our job was saving the club. The last thing we needed was people carping at us, especially if they weren't prepared to do anything for the club. If people didn't like it - tough - That was the way things were going to be done now we were running the show.

Unfortunately John didn't like it and called it a day. He later told me of his anger after putting thirteen days in without a break and all we could do was moan about his taxis home. We appointed his mate Kevin to the Steward's position.

Kevin was about John's age, there the similarity ended. Where John was married with a young family, Kevin was single and still living with his mother in Oswaldtwistle. He was a Burnley fan unlike John who was a Roverite like me. What they had in common and why they were mates was a mystery to me.

The oddest thing about Kevin was his hairstyle. It never seemed to change, neither in length, colour or parting. Some members reckoned it was some kind of wig and he was bald really. Not even Zafar could see a joint, so it remained an unsolved mystery.

In a way we did quite well managing the club financially. John got paid his full wage whilst being on the sick right up to when he jacked in his job. We had to pay Kevin while he was off, meaning two sets of wages had to be found from somewhere for around six weeks. This could have crippled us as the club was hanging on for its dear life.

Anyway we managed to survive those critical few weeks. We did get a bit of luck, we deserved it too. The Miner's Strike intensified. Once the Trades Council got its act together to help the miners, all and sundry wanted to be involved. Political groups buried their differences and fought together for the common purpose. Of course the club was the place every organisation could call its own. There was a buzz, it wasn't just the miner's fight, but ours too.

I reckoned at the time it was our energy and enthusiasm as a new committee which revitalised the labour movement in the town.

The Trades Council started having quorate meetings again and we managed to get the message across to people how the club was the home of the movement, meaning every different grouping.

All sorts of people started coming in the club to do their bit. Food and money started being collected for the miners. We organised street and factory collections.

Some of the Burnley striking miners were involved with us, we got them to stand at our collection point by the spiral staircase between the two markets in the town centre.

This became a regular thing each Friday and Saturday. We had a bit of abuse hurled at us, but most folk were friendly and threw their small change into our buckets. Back at the club we'd give the miners a few pints and count out the money we collected. Our lads from Burnley were very pleased with the amounts we pulled and reckoned they could keep up their struggle till Kingdom-Come.

Sometimes you could hardly move in the club thanks to all the stuff people were dropping off for the miners. There were countless tins of food, boxes of groceries and the walls were piled high with sacks of spuds. A lot of money was handed in at the club too. Little old ladies would come in with envelopes rattling or rustling with money they could hardly afford to give. But giving meant everything to them. The miners were fighting for us all.

These were exciting times in the club. Every night had some kind of meeting to do with the Miner's Strike taking place. It became the in thing to have a striking miner, or miner's wife at your meeting. Every time the Burnley lads came over collecting they would be invited to speak at somebody's gathering.

Burnley striking miner's leader, Alan Chadwick, was even put forward to challenge Jack Straw as Blackburn's Labour candidate for the next General Election. Unfortunately he wouldn't stand. The left had to settle for Graham Chadwick to oppose Straw. Graham is a nice bloke and Alan's namesake, but no miner. He was a 'minor' diversion for Jack Straw who romped home easily.



Club Chairman Pete Greenwood (left), and the author

CHAPTER TWO

Saved by the miners

My life changed quite a bit at this time. I always said I'd leave home and get my own place when I was 25. So I put in for a council property. In the last week of July '84 I was given a place on a Manpower Services Commission community programme for a year's temporary work. In other words - a scheme.

Later that same week the council offered me a flat up Queens Park in one of the multi-storey tower blocks. This was handy as my new next door neighbour here was Martin Wilmot, my mate from WPA, who suffered a similar fate to myself with the said company in our efforts to get the firm organised. Martin was a club member and had many a drink with me in Union House.

In the club I started getting to know most of the members who came in the place regularly. The lads who came in on their dinner times were amongst the best, never a problem with them or a bad word about us on the club committee. They hadn't time to moan about things, a pint of beer and a go on the bandit was all most of the lads wanted.

There was 'Wilf' Manion who didn't even like football. He liked four pints of Guinness in his hour in the club. Sometimes though it didn't like him, giving him the nosebleeds every so often. Wilf was an old Navy man who couldn't swim a stroke, as is so often the case with the senior service. He told me it gave you a stake in your own future.

Bill Lightbown and Jack Carr used to come across the road from the signmakers Parkinson & Worden. They loved making fun of each other and another Jack who was from the printers up the road called Hulme & Whitehead. Their half hour in the club was spent playing the bandit, egging each other on to put more money in the machine. The shout would often be: "You can't leave that on.!"

Derek Brown came in not to play the bandit, but to trough as much ale as possible in his dinner time. He always took four cans of beer back to work with him, then came round at three o'clock for another couple of pints as part of his 'tea break.' He told me at the time he'd been given five years to live by his doctor, that was two years ago. There was no way Derek was going to die sober.

Sometimes when Derek wasn't working he would lie in the old churchyard across from the club. The problem was the yard being often occupied by a horse called Jason who belonged to the Chaplain at the end of St Peter Street. One day the obvious happened and Derek lay in a load of its manure. He stank for a few days, even after having a bath, so we told him.

Jimmy the postman was one of the club's most loyal members. Every afternoon he came in the place whether he was on the early or late shift. You could usually tell which one he'd worked as he tended to drop off if he'd been on lates.

He was one of the few Scotsmen I've met who liked cricket, and he supported Partick Thistle. This he put down to him coming from north of the River Clyde in Glasgow. He liked a 'thrill at Firhill.'

The most sinister member we had, apart from the politicians, was a chap called Tommy. He once told me a tale of how he was serving with the Army in Egypt and he needed some money one night for the services of a local prostitute.

Tommy said he sold an Egyptian some Army blankets then when his back was turned he pulled out his bayonet and killed him. It seems his victim told him he wasn't registered, so he didn't matter. Life was very cheap in Egypt in those days.

Billy Clogs was the most anti-social member in the club, always breaking wind. One day I was on a job with him doing a run from Preston to Blackburn. Billy had been dropping them all morning.

At Samlesbury there was this awful smell and I pulled Billy about his flatulence. He turned on me and made me feel a right lemon when I realised we were passing the effluent plant nearby. Billy shouted: "It's not me you gormless bastard. Look down there, it's the sewage works, you bloody idiot."

Tony Sideways was a strange looking creature. He was very anti-social too, although he made amends for this by joining virtually every workmen's and social club in Blackburn.

He always asked if we had anything on that night whenever he came in. I eventually found out why one night at one do with a spread on. It must have been the only time he ever had a decent feed.

And feed he did, he must have spent half the night stuffing himself with sandwiches on this particular occasion. Unfortunately he also had the loudest belch I'd ever heard which put us off telling him about future events.

By October '84 we began to see the signs of an upturn in the club's fortunes. We weren't going bust anymore, just struggling. Our corner had definitely been turned. The most pleasing aspect of this was the number of people now wanting to join the club.

We decided to take on new members at the end of the year and ask for subs off existing ones then instead of the stupid time of October. This was due to the club opening in September 1980 and convenient at the time. It meant we gave everybody free membership for the last three months of the year.

Another bonus we brought in was charging unemployed members a new rate of 75p instead of the normal couple of quid. We already charged pensioners the 75p rate anyway.

As the pressure was off us now, we didn't have to keep holding committee meetings every Tuesday night. We decided to hold them once a month instead. All the lads turned up on Sunday mornings to do the books and spruce the place up, so if there was anything pressing a special meeting could be organised. Most things could be sorted out on Sundays, this became a good routine for us.

Ten o'clock was our usual starting time. We tried eleven at first, but this was no good to me as I left at noon to go up to my parent's house for Sunday dinner. It was my one decent meal of the week now I'd moved up Queens Park Flats. I used to take my dirty washing round too, much to the other lad's amusement.

The club was starting to pull a few socials in the Big room, so it was useful having plenty of bodies down to clean up the place. We employed Vera our cleaner Monday to Saturday, with Sunday off.

A lot of these socials were to raise money for striking miners. The club committee decided to make a donation of £100 to the strike fund as well. It was the least we could do following a mistake we made when they came back to the club one Friday afternoon.

Kevin the Steward started getting friendly with one of the girls who worked in the Centre for the Unemployed. She helped him out behind the bar sometimes. This all stopped when she opened her big mouth one day and said: "They should be back at work."

She wasn't allowed in the bar again, never mind behind it and caused deep embarrassment to Kevin. He felt like putting his wage in the collection bucket that day.

In a way we started becoming victims of our own success. As there were more meetings going on in the club some of the people attending them started taking advantage of us. All of a sudden our notice board started filling up with posters advertising meetings in other venues.

There was no way we were allowing this, so we cracked down on these freeloaders. A notice went up saying all posters would be removed unless permission was granted from the club committee. Our policy stated only meetings in the club would be advertised on the notice board.

This stance didn't go down well with some of the organisations. But it was only right if we were prepared to pull our tripe out for the club, then other people could at least use the place. Our attitude became: "Use us or lose us!"

The main reason for this was to try and monopolise ourselves as the only place labour movement activists should hold their meetings. After all, the more meetings in the club, the more sneek lifting in the bar.

As it was obvious by now we had turned the club around, we started to think about the future. There was always going to be a difficult balance to maintain. We had the ideological aspect of the club and what it stood for. The whole point of the club and its reason for being set up was to serve the local labour movement.

But the message seemed to be difficult to get across to people how supporting the club meant putting their money back into the movement. Why spend all your money in a workingmen's club which probably refused to serve Asians and stopped women going in certain rooms? Or a pub where all the profits went into the landlord's and brewery's pockets.

The Tory's had certainly learned the answer to this question. Even a Labour town like Blackburn had six Conservative clubs at the time, all full of Labour voters giving their money to the enemy.

On the other side of the coin, ideology didn't pay the electric bill. Our first duty to the labour movement was being there. A shut club wasn't much use to anybody, apart from the vagrants. The social side needed pushing. It had to be the priority.

The reality of the situation was most of the members didn't really give a damn about politics. It was just a nice little friendly club to most of them. Quite a few I'm sure weren't even trade unionists.

It meant I was always having people on my back saying the club was far too political. Whilst others would say it wasn't political enough, just a boozing shop, Groucho Marx was better known than Karl Marx.

As far as I was concerned, that wasn't my problem. Most of the politicians didn't sup much when they came in the club and couldn't wait to leave the place when their meetings finished. If they wanted it to reflect their opinions, try getting in more often and joining in with our activities.

I'd be grabbing at straws, especially ones called Jack if I thought that was going to happen. The higher echelons of the Labour Party, SWP, NCP and 'Militant' all seem to be middle class college lecturer / social worker types who probably felt uncomfortable amongst the working class.

If you told these people a joke, they'd stare at you and try and analyse what you had said. Most ordinary club members didn't like these kind of people, they were on a different wavelength to us. Besides the club committee probably supped more themselves every time we went in the club than these flower children.

One problem though with having a committee of good boozers was it sometimes meant tongues would wag out of school. There were always people who enjoyed a good stir. We ended up passing a resolution at a committee meeting were all our business stayed in the meeting room and the lads kept their mouths shut. This became a hard rule to enforce.

I'm not sure what the Labour Party's ruling establishment thought about the club. A few months before they were the ruling establishment of the Trades Council too. Once they realised the plan to take over the club by the way through the backdoor route had fallen on stoney ground, Eric Smith and Frank Gorton, ex-committeemen themselves, accepted we were here to stay for the foreseeable future.

Eric was secretly pleased about being able to get out as he had too many things on his plate already. He encouraged me to stick with the club, he couldn't wash his hands of something he'd fought so hard for.

Frank Gorton, the little gnome I used to call him, on the other hand was the type of old trade unionist and Labour councillor who didn't realise he was past his sell-by date. In a way he was worse than useless as he stopped young people from taking over the reins. An example of this was him still being Secretary of his COHSE branch even though he had been retired for a few years.

Unfortunately Frank is only a symptom of a larger problem and would probably like to retire from all his many commitments just like Eric. If nobody is prepared to come forward, people like Eric and Frank will carry on until their white beards touch the floor.

It was actually Eric and Frank we dealt with when it came to sorting out new financial arrangements with the Labour Party over Jack Straw's office. We gave the party very generous terms, throwing in free room rental for certain meetings. These were per month: one GMC; one EC; one LPYS and one women's group meeting as well as any special election ones. The latter section only had an odd one due to their make-up. This isn't a pun as they were known for being men haters and probably didn't like meeting in a male dominated institution like they perceived the Trades to be.

The fact every member of the club committee, apart from Pete Kennett, was a Party member probably helped. There was a gentleman's agreement originating from Eric's time where the Labour Party was given generous terms within the club, the rent of the building stayed low. With the building being condemned, even the Tories used to give the lease agreement the nod. Consequently we had a peppercorn rent of a few pounds a year.

We would have been mad to have rocked the boat. Even though the top echelons of the party were boycotting us, there were a substantial number within the party who did support the club. These were people who were trade unionists first and Labour Party members second.

This is why we were generous to the Labour Party. After all they were only one of a number of political parties using the club. We pushed the club Articles of Association clause which stated profits made by the club could be ploughed back into Blackburn Trades Council and Blackburn Labour Party.

This was a grey area, possibly illegal, but it did the trick. I think it stemmed from the days when towns such as Blackburn had a Trades Council and Labour Party which were one and the same organisation.

Round the corner from the club on Clayton Street there used to be the headquarters of 'Blackburn Labour and Trades Council,' I don't know much about this as it was well before my time. This was probably the forerunner of the present Trades Council.

A problem we sometimes had was: were rights of individuals overlapped what the club was all about? Pressure would be put on us if a member did something unacceptable to others in matters not connected with the club. The best example of this was the Jack Lee scabbing situation.

Jack was an active member of one of two UCATT branches which met in the club, in fact the Chairman of one of them. The problem was he worked at the ROF and was also a member of either the GMBATU or TGWU. There was once a one day strike at the ROF, Jack crossed the picket lines saying it was nothing to do with him.

This didn't go down well with Janice Kelly, one of our bar staff and a shop-steward at the ROF, who watched him cross the picket line. Janice refused Jack service when he came in the club when she was on duty behind the bar.

We were in a funny position here. No matter how odious it was what Jack had done, it was still none of our business. But on the other hand we could serve who we wanted and the last thing we wanted was to have any scabs coming in a trade union club.

Our way out of this was to send Jack a letter informing him what the club stood for and strike-breakers were not part of it. This did the trick, Jack stopped coming in the club socially and he didn't renew his membership at the end of the year. He did keep going to his UCATT meetings though.

From the same strike, my EETPU branch was in the process of pulling in and disciplining some electricians for their conduct. So we asked the Trades Council for guidance over such issues. We were in a no-win situation and wanted to share the problem.

Our role was to help out trade unionists in struggle. The Miner's Strike gave us ample opportunity to do just that. It also gave the club a high profile within the labour movement.

I was able to get involved early on when the strike broke out at Kenyon's Bakery. One of my mates worked there. The only problem here was the place being organised by two unions; the Baker's Union and the Driver's union, URTU.

The strikers asked for help and we were most willing. Facilities such as strike meetings, an office, telephone etc were all given free of charge. They hardly needed us as their dispute didn't last for very long, some kind of deal was done between the company and Lancashire Enterprises Ltd to make the workers redundant and pay them off. But it showed people we were going to be there for them if they needed us.

When the club set up in 1980, Union House, as the building became known, was a derelict nursing home which went on to be used as a refuge for battered women. It was obvious the place needed loads of work doing to it, the facilities left a lot to be desired.

The previous committee did a fantastic job renovating the premises and we managed to do a bit with what limited building knowledge we possessed. This was mainly down to Frank, he seemed able to turn his hand to anything. I helped him out most of the time.

Occasionally we would get Tommy Holden to do a bit of painting for us, although this was grudgingly. Tommy liked to leave his job at work, but could be gently coaxed into doing a bit.

Our main problem was finding time. This wasn't so bad in my case as my job with the MSC was only from Monday to Thursday, leaving Fridays clear for me. Frank managed to wangle a lot of these off.

Personally I would have preferred to have stood with the miners in town while they were collecting, or go on the pop with my mates. But when Frank was around there was always a job needing to be done. So I had to accept Fridays as unpaid workdays.

The previous club committee toyed with the idea of building a Games room incorporating a full size snooker table. My old branch Secretary Alf Lloyd even did a technical drawing of it showing how it could be set out, he even included measurements.

We decided to look into this idea ourselves. It was a big job, far too big for us with our limited building capabilities. So we decided to contact some builders and look at a few estimates over what kind of costs we were talking about. We also wanted to know if the bar and Big room could be extended to cope with our increased trade.

It was a case of mixed fortunes with these projects. The Games room was a long term project and needed quite a bit of looking into before we could make a firm decision.

Our plans for downstairs included knocking down the existing toilets and building new ones in the back yard. This meant we could link the bar room and projected Games room with the bar on the site of the old toilets. It would mean the room being greatly enlarged and the Games room having its own bar access without having to walk through the club opening doors and carrying drinks.

These plans were thwarted due to the club's structural walls. We would have to get steel girders installed to hold up the building. This would have cost the club thousands of pounds and was well beyond our financial means. We always had to consider the future

of the premises and the inevitability of them coming down due to the Inner Relief road passing right through our bar room.

Extending the Big room wasn't such a problem. We did have difficulties with structural walls up here too, but we got away with it by turning them into arches and knocking through to one of the old rooms behind. This also made the corridor a part of the room and gave us extra capacity. Once the building work was finished, we decorated it ourselves. It looked great when the paint dried.

Now the Big room decorations were complete we decided it was time they started paying for themselves. We put an advert in the Evening Telegraph saying the room was available for private functions. This proved a successful venture.

Firstly we had to make sure we didn't cock things up through double bookings or staff shortages. So we knocked up new room booking forms to make sure nobody had any excuse for not turning up to any event they may have booked. Previously we'd taken bookings by telephone, especially meetings. We also made people fill in forms for these too. This meant we knew who would be using the club and keep out undesirables.

The Big room refurbishments started paying for themselves almost immediately. More large meetings were taking place in the club as the weeks passed, but socials came in as well.

Socials, especially private ones, were the lifeblood of the club. When we had an ordinary one it was like an extra night's income. When we had a big one it could sometimes be like half a week's bar takings. Private ones were better than the ones booked by club members because the people who came to these were often surprised how cheap the club's beer was. Consequently a lot was sold. It was also a way of pulling in new members and even more socials.

It used to amaze me just how many people coming to dos in the club told me they had never heard of us and how much they liked the place. What did annoy me though was hearing punters call it the Labour Club. This was probably down to them seeing the Party logo on the side of Jack Straw's office. I used to correct people when I heard them on the telephone ringing taxis for the 'Labour Club.'

Most of the socials we had were money-spinners, there was hardly any trouble. I even managed to persuade a few mates of mine in punk rock groups to hold gigs in the club.

Unfortunately these had to be knocked on the head after one concert where we had a lot of damage. It was alright taking over £200 across the bar, but it cost £50 to replace a window and have it boarded up. Our profit ratio was around 33%, meaning for every £1 we spent, £3 had to be pulled back over the bar.

This was a shame because the club was a great venue, especially for any new group just starting out. Quite a few local ones did, namely the 'Levellers 5' who were given a lot of national air play. They made their debut playing a benefit for CND.

The problem in Blackburn was finding anywhere suitable for groups to play. Most venues were too small whilst King George's Hall is too big and expensive to hire for local bands.

The club was cheap to hire and had a great atmosphere when there was a crowd of between 50-100 inside the Big room. But as is so often the case, it only takes a small minority to spoil things and so nobody got it for a time. I still liked seeing live acts and was sure this problem could be solved in a way acceptable to everyone.



Frank Smith and Janice Kelly

CHAPTER THREE

The tail couldn't wag the dog

It was just short of a year of our new committee taking over the club when the Annual General Meeting was due. Originally there used to be eight directors on the club committee and this was the constitutional number the Articles of Association said we should have.

The club rules stated four of the directors should stand down and be up for election the following year. Like most club committees we were under strength as there were only six of us. Zafar had been elected to the previous committee for two years already, so we decided to put all the rest of us up, apart from Tommy Holden. There was no reason why Tommy should be the odd one out, but it had to be somebody. Really we made it up as we went along, interpreting these complicated rules as best we could.

It meant me, Frank and the two Petes putting our names on a list which we displayed in the bar, next to the bandit of course, for us to be proposed and seconded by full members of the club. It turned out we were the only ones who stood, much to my surprise.

This became a formality when the AGM took place. With nobody else prepared to stand, we were elected 'en bloc'. This meeting was quite a happy occasion, more of a relief to the members that it was taking place at all.

After our elections as directors, we got on with the nitty-gritty of going through figures with our new Accountant Mr. Thompson. Also in the Big Room was Raymond Hacking our Stocktaker. They both seemed pleased with the way things were going in the club under the new regime.

There was a very good turnout of 48 members filling up the Big Room. I can remember noticing a lot of unfamiliar faces peering at me and the rest of the committee sitting at the front. I whispered to Zaf: "If this lot came in a bit more often, we wouldn't have been in the trouble we were in."

We then took questions from the floor. Only Foxy Fowler came out with any kind of dissent. He complained about us moving the TV in the bar from above the bandit and to the other end of the room. We explained how this was done to relieve the congestion around the bar and bandit, then more people could watch it without falling over each other or bumping into others trying to get served or play the bandit. At the other end of the room there was loads of space, people could sit down quietly and watch the telly in peace.

What we didn't mention was one of our bar staff, Billy Pickup, was too easily distracted by the telly. He couldn't take his eyes off it when he was working behind the bar. 'Laughing Billy' as he was known, wasn't so happy when we moved it.

Apart from this small item, the members thanked us for our efforts. We deserved it too having succeeded in saving the club, even though we would sooner have helped the coal miners save their industry. But we did our bit whereas a lot of people did nothing at all.

One good thing which came out of everything was getting the Trades Council going again. In 1984, so far we only had one quorate meeting, that was the AGM. We'd elected the same people who'd been there for years, a bunch of tired old men who'd had it easy for too long. As 1985 came round things improved. Virtually all our General Council meetings had enough delegates attending them. I was even elected to the Executive Committee at the Trades Council AGM. I must have been popular.

A month or two after the club AGM we gained a couple more volunteers to serve on the club committee. Ex-Steward John Lynch and Janice Kelly were both co-opted on at a General Council meeting. Janice was a workmate of Frank's at the ROF and member of his GMBATU branch.

They were both shop-stewards and so the butt of wagging tongues as expected in such a large workplace. Janice already had quite a bit of involvement in the club. She worked part-time behind the bar and her mother Vera was our cleaner. They came from Bolton as I could tell by their accent. I used to gain great pleasure telling them how you can't get teacakes in Bolton. They call them flower cakes instead there. Maybe that's why they slung that said town out of Lancashire.

It was quite a surprise to everybody when John Lynch decided to join us on the club committee. I thought he would have had a bellyfull of the place from his days as the Club Steward. Besides it was well known John and Frank didn't get on with each other. Still John carried on coming in the club unlike many others who left under a cloud.

John was a member of TASS, the local Branch Secretary to boot. He'd also been on the club committee before back in 1981, though not for long. He didn't stop so long this time either, only a couple of months. This was due to him taking up a pre-degree course at Blackburn College and coming off the club committee.

I started getting friendly with 'Lynch' and Caroline his wife. Me and him went on a mass picket of Padiham power station organised by the Trades Councils in the East Lancs area. At this event we thought we'd turned a coal lorry round, only for the scab driver to realise he'd mistaken Padiham power station for Huncoat on the other side of the valley.

After this rush of blood we were dropped off back in Blackburn. It wasn't even nine o'clock in the morning, so we went for a brew on the market and yapped about the club. We were both members of Queens Park Ward Labour Party and of a similar left wing persuasion. It didn't take much arm twisting to persuade Lynch to go for a drink with me. This became the first of many sessions. Lynch made the point to me of us giving his old job to Kevin, saying Kevin was a Tory.

It was about this time we had our first emergency meeting. This may sound a bit melodramatic as it couldn't have been any more of an emergency meeting than the ones we'd been holding since we took

over the club. What was different about this one was it being an official 'Emergency meeting.' It was really a special one called to sort out a problem relating to a disagreement over payment of rental for the Big Room by a chap who booked it for a gig.

The chap's name was Kevin Durkin, a bit of a peace activist at the time, with a squeaky voice. He later bit the bullet and became a local Labour councillor, swapping his donkey jacket for a pin striped suit. Durkin had put in a written complaint moaning about the club's facilities and was refusing to pay the £34 Big Room hire charge.

We decided Durkin could get stuffed and cough up. Also we weren't prepared to take any more bookings off him and short of barring him, we told him he wasn't welcome in the club anymore. He could still come in for meetings though.

It was generally thought Kevin Durkin was being used as a 'Patsy' to attack the new club committee by a Trades Council delegate called Pete McLaughlin. He used to be on the club committee and he hated Pete Greenwood.

Durkin at the time was working for the Centre for the Unemployed based on the ground floor of the club building. We seemed to have an uneasy relationship with this organisation. Pete Greenwood worked in here on a voluntary basis when it was first set up by the Trades Council in a loose partnership with Blackburn Council and other voluntary bodies.

Eventually the Co-ordinator's post became a full-time position, along with other jobs in the centre. This place was looked down on by most club members as a 'Jobs for the boys' shop where the movement's blue-eyed boys were given a job until they were provided with something by the council, or some MP's research department.

The reason for this disrespect was down to the staff's habit of seeming to spend all day sitting around the place doing nothing. They even hired a pool table to help pass the time of day. We didn't mind this because we used it ourselves when the centre was shut at night. When the snooker table arrived we upset them by insisting only members could use it.

Another bloke who worked in the centre was the ultimate 'Blue-eyed boy,' Greg Pope. This guy seemed to get all the breaks in his

life, not just on the pool table. One of the luckiest people I've ever known, he eventually became Labour MP for Hyndburn.

Greg ran with the right pack of wolves, so joined the little club which runs the local political scene. He had alternated between Blackburn and Hyndburn throughout his life. Born in Blackburn, lived in Great Harwood. School in Blackburn, university, back to work here. Councillor in Hyndburn, moved to Blackburn then a councillor here once a safe ward was found for him.

This was Bank Top ward. It followed the death of Tom Ellis, an 80 year old councillor who we slung out of my Queens Park ward. Greg was selected as council candidate without the Bank Top members even having a say once old Ellis pegged out.

Greg did one better in Hyndburn. Not only had he been a councillor here, the Labour Party selected him as their parliamentary candidate. With the unpopular Tory Government and the mistakes his local party made last time, he wasn't going to lose Hyndburn and he didn't.

At least Greg has one good thing going for him. He's a Rovers fan, even from the days before Jack Walker came along, unlike Jack Straw his parliamentary colleague. Jack never gave Rovers the time of day until 'Uncle Jack' arrived upon the scene. Straw was a Manchester City fan, even being castigated in the Commons for listening to one of their matches on the radio. When 'the man of steel' arrived from Jersey, the man of straw's scarf went a darker shade of blue.

When Greg's one year contract with the Centre for the Unemployed ended, there was a job going. I was on a scheme at the time so tried my luck at putting in for it. Unfortunately Greg himself and Frank Smith were on the selection panel. This probably snookered my hopes due to connotations of bias which might have been levelled at them.

I wasn't too bothered about getting the job anyway as there was a good chance of my being taken on by the Electric Board in a temporary capacity as a meter reader. This is what happened.

The centre management committee must have wished they had given me the job because the lad they appointed was a waste of time. He made Greg and his team look like galley slaves. He fell out with

Frank after losing the centre's keys then put in a written complaint about Frank's behaviour, saying he was drunk. As expected, the committee of this body threw out these allegations. He jacked in not long after.

Following this bust up with the centre co-ordinator, we cracked on with our plans for the Games Room. First we put in for a loan from the brewery for £5,000 after going through the estimates which different builders had given us. Blackburn Council's own building department offered to do the refurbishment for the lowest price, so we plumped for them. We also thought about giving jobs to our own people and that the council's workforce was trade union organised.

Before this was put into motion, we hired a painter and carpet fitter to decorate the bar area for us. The carpet fitter also stripped the lino off the top two storeys of the club building. It was like an Aladdin's cave up here with all sorts of gear which had piled up over the years from when the club had been a nursing home. He fitted this lino throughout the rest of the club, this must have saved us a fortune as it was in right good nick.

While decorations were going on in the club, we didn't forget our obligation to the Trades Council. Ever since I became a delegate there had been moves to try and set up some kind of Resource Room for the movement. Eventually we put aside no.5 room for this purpose.

The main problem was getting somebody to run the place, we wanted some kind of librarian to collate information in a tidy way. I don't think we ever managed to get anyone to do this for very long. John Lynch had a go, but was given a free transfer to the club committee. One or two others tried also, but didn't receive much feedback, so it lay dormant.

We on the club committee tried to do our bit for the Resource Room. As well as providing no.5 room, we carpeted it, donated a TV, chairs and tables. I even donated a video recording taken on a course I went on with Pete Harrison in Liverpool. This was for unemployed trade unionists on how to handle the media.

The video was for the TV section where people on the course were each interviewed by Tony Wilson of Granada. He gave me a hard time, but it was good experience and I enjoyed it.

Maybe that's why the Resource room died a death. Seeing my ugly mug on video was enough to make anybody call it a day.

It was a shame the Resource room never took off. We had all sorts of material collected over the years. Perhaps one day some kind of local labour movement archive will be set up, especially when there is a rebirth in trade unionism.

With the club starting to get busier and busier, it was soon brought to our notice the thorny question of staff wages. This was a funny situation for the club committee. We were all used to negotiating wage rises from the worker's side. Now it was the poachers turned gamekeepers. This took a while to sink in for me. I had always hated gaffers where I worked, now the boot was on the other foot.

Some of my politico colleagues made fun of me with snidey comments, saying I was a fat cat capitalist. I laughed it off and told them to have a go, see how they liked trying to save their own meeting place. But we all knew what we were taking on when we joined the club committee. Difficult decisions had to be made, it was part of the job. What we needed was goodwill from both the staff and committee.

How could a trade union club be seen as a bad employer? The local press would have a field day if we'd had a dispute with our own staff. They would have accused us of not practicing what we preached.

Luckily we sorted things out very amicably. As a matter of course we paid our staff more than the going rate other places in town paid for doing a similar job. Why should they suffer for other people's mistakes. We gave Kevin a £6 rise to take his wages up to £111 a week. Vera the cleaner received £3 to take hers to £33. And casual bar staff were given a rise of 62p an hour, taking their hourly rate up to £1.875. They all seemed quite pleased with their rises.

I suppose after all when you were looking redundancy in the face, you weren't going to appear ungrateful. If we hadn't stepped in as the new club committee the staff would have joined me in the dole queue.

I'm glad we got the staff wages out of the way pretty quickly because we had a problem to sort out in the Big Room. This was down to it becoming so popular. It seemed the law stated you could only have so many functions in the room when non-members hired it. Something to do with the 'Little Ships Act.' I didn't understand what this was all about, I thought we were a club not a ship.

Our solicitor told us the club was only allowed twelve functions a year in the Big Room where non-members could use the facilities. This was a bit of a problem for us because we wanted the Big Room to be used on Friday and Saturday nights regularly. Already a lot of bookings had been taken for next year and we were still in October.

There was no problem with the club members booking dos in the Big Room. So we thought about getting round it by holding bogus functions for different members. We knew this couldn't go on for ever, we'd started having difficulty getting extensions in the club. This wasn't just our problem. Magistrates were not giving extensions for 18th birthday parties to any club in the town.

We had to tell potential customers we couldn't guarantee them getting an extension. We were charged £4 every time we went in court for one whether we got it or not. So we included it as a separate charge. All of a sudden we started getting 21st birthday parties instead of 18th birthday dos. They must have aged overnight, a bit like a racehorse.

On the bright side, we had no problem with election nights. Tory and Liberal clubs always got extensions, so we were treated equally as the only recognised place where Labour supporters would naturally congregate. Blackburn had a few Conservative clubs, although only three of them were genuine ones.

The next course of action was to call an Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM) to get agreement from the club members for our plans. We decided it would be on a Friday night as there were always a few meetings taking place and it would be busy in the club anyway.

When it took place we had a struggle to reach the required quorum of twenty members. We ended up interrupting the NCP meeting in no.2 room and an AEUW branch in no.1 to 'borrow' some members from each of them who were also club members to make up the numbers.

Thankfully we only needed a show of hands from everybody which only took a few minutes, so nobody minded. Most of them weren't sure what we were doing, but they were only too pleased to help the club and get us what we wanted.

We seemed to hit a golden age in the club now. We succeeded in our plans for the Games Room and installed a snooker table and the dart board, which used to be in the bar room in here. There was decent seating inside too.

It was decided because of all the money we'd invested in the Games Room, we wanted it protected. It was too much to expect bar staff to have to keep checking the room and leave the bar every two minutes. We solved the problem by having a security camera installed with a monitor behind the bar. Two birds were killed with one stone here by also having a camera installed upstairs in the Big Room just in case any trouble should break out there, we could nip it in the bud.

A lad called Brian Worden did this job for us. He worked with Frank up at the ROF as an electrician and was in my EETPU branch. We never really needed the cameras, but they were a good deterrent to potential thieves or trouble makers.

Time seemed to fly in the club. Before we knew it the club AGM was up upon us again, on February 11th 1986. There wasn't as big a turnout as last time, but decent all the same with about 30 members including the committee. Mr. Thompson our Accountant came along and was joined by Steve McGoogan the rep from Whitbread. It was the first time Steve had been to a club AGM. He'd heard about the ones in workingmen's clubs, they are normally quite secretive in these institutions. He was a bit overawed by the all pervading atmosphere.

This meeting was a bit of the kind known as a backslapper. Four of us were up for election; Zafar after his two year stretch and Tommy Holden who was the odd one out from when we took over the club. Also Janice Kelly and John Lynch who the Trades Council co-opted on to the club committee to be endorsed by the members. Just like last time they were all elected 'en bloc' unanimously.

There was only one dissenting issue to deal with. George Davies put forward a resolution to the AGM asking for political literature to be allowed to go on sale in the bar area.

We had stopped this practice a few months before, it hadn't gone down well with groups like George's own NCP or the SWP. They accused us of being more interested in beer than socialism. Our reason for this was because some of their members were so keen on selling their literature they wouldn't give you a moments peace.

You would be sitting in the bar enjoying a quiet pint, when all of a sudden a paper such as the 'Socialist Worker,' 'New Worker' or 'Militant' would be thrust under your nose, sometimes all three when certain meetings took place.

This became too much for a lot of members and we received complaints about them having their enjoyment spoiled. It made us decide to ban paper sales in the bar, you could buy them outside the club when one of the fringe groups was meeting their supporters would always hang around outside the club selling their material. Also it wasn't so difficult to ask for information from one of their people in the bar if you were interesting in purchasing something.

George's resolution was put to the meeting and defeated in a round-about sort of way. It ended up being amended by Alain Douglas where only trade union literature could be sold in the bar. These were few and far between occurrences, so would give us a bit of peace in the bar area.

It didn't take long for it to be tried out. I pulled Tom Howard selling the 'Socialist Worker' in the bar. He was only given a warning, but it told the fringe groups we meant business.

At the AGM I managed to push through one of my ideas. This related to Sunday night's member's draw. At half nine the draw was made. If your number came out you won whatever was the current amount, usually around £30. To win this you had to actually be in the club, after all this was what the draw was for, to bring members in on Sunday nights.

I thought it was a bit unfair at the time why our club teams playing All Fours and dominoes used to miss out on the draw when we played away matches due to us not arriving back in time. It bugged me as we were literally going out of our way for the club, in most cases paying a lot more for our drink as our match opponents were pubs who didn't charge club prices like we did.

The committee was against me at first, but I wouldn't drop it and they gradually came round to my way of thinking, especially when I said I wouldn't turn up at away matches. The members at the AGM also agreed and it went through easily without any dissent.

We used the ruling to apply to any member on club business, not just playing for one of our teams. Tommy Holden had recently been elected to the All Fours and Dominoes League management committee and sometimes had to go to special meetings which finished later than the draw time.

A couple more questions came up at the AGM. Chrissie Cramsie asked about us getting a few more stools for the bar. We only had three and these were always snapped up pretty quickly at opening time. We voted against this, arguing there was too much congestion around the bar already. More stools would have meant more folk clogging up the bar, creating even more difficulty getting served.

Eventually though we did succumb to Chrissie's wishes and managed to get hold of a few more stools, courtesy of our friendly removal man Keith McClure. He supplied the club with loads of stuff over the years.

The other question was relating to the bar area. A problem we had in the club was the majority of members smoked. I was one of the main sufferers here, having never indulged in this filthy unhealthy habit. To make matters worse, everybody on the club committee smoked, apart from me. I used to sit in our meetings and my eyes would start streaming, I wasn't the only one either.

Somebody brought it up in the meeting about the lack of ventilation in the bar and Big room. There wasn't a lot we could do about the bar area, there was already a smoke fan, but this made it cold round here in Winter. We just put it on and had to grin and bear it. It wasn't much of a problem though.

Me and Frank solved the problem in the Big Room. He pulled me over the next Friday afternoon, like he often did. This time it was on Shear Brow, I'd just been to my parent's nearby. I was on my way to the club anyway, when I heard a carhorn and Frank's voice. "Jump in Mick," he shouted and persuaded me to help him install a new extractor fan in the Big room. I didn't realise how big a job it was until I saw Frank's lump hammer.

We spent all morning putting in this extractor fan. Most of it was spent knocking through the concrete floor of the ceiling above the Big Room. It must have been about a foot thick. I was well and truly knackered by the time we broke through. Putting the fan on was no problem and one of our electrician members wired it up for us. Tommy did the paint job, touching up around it. After this ball-ache of a job, I was in two minds about calling for a ban on smoking in the Big Room.

After this useful AGM it was back to the mundane business of keeping the club open. As usual Sunday mornings became our main focal point of events. Everyone seemed to be able to get down, apart from Lynchy. He wasn't so happy about getting out of bed, especially if he'd had a jar or two the night before. I never had any trouble, even after my Saturday nights. But I didn't have Caroline lying at the side of me. Lynchy liked a peaceful life.

We decided to keep the routine going by re-electing Pete Greenwood Club Chairman for another year. Frank was happy being Secretary, not that there was a great queue for his job. Pete Kennett seemed to be comfortable as Treasurer, so we left him to it.

My main job now was doing the wages. Pete Greenwood showed me the ropes for this. I'm useless with figures, but I managed to get the hang of it. This became my job for the duration.

One minor cock-up we did make was organising a committee trip as a form of recognition for services rendered. I was against this as I felt it would cause bad feeling in some quarters. I wasn't far wrong either, there were a few snidey comments. I didn't go on the trip myself, but defended the rest of the club committee for the work they had done for the club, all unpaid, when we did get slagged off as expected by a minority of the members.

The committee went to either Martholme Grange or the Dunkenhagh for a meal cum booze-up. Whilst there they met the Blackburn based World Snooker Champion, Denis Taylor, also there having a meal.

This brought it home to me just how vindictive some of our members were. These same people who were prophets of doom and wouldn't do a tap in the club unless they were paid for it.

With me being the baby of the committee, I used to get my ears bent by a lot of people, some thought they'd found a soft touch. I showed them how wrong they were.

We did give the members something which went down very well though. With the 'Blackburn Wakes' in July a lot of people used to go on their annual holidays. We thought we'd try an experiment where we reduced the price of beer by 10p a pint for the second week of the holiday fortnight.

This turned out to be a good move, it definitely covered itself as people would buy an extra pint each session. Some members actually made a holiday of boozing the club.

What extra beer we sold in the club helped pay off our brewery write-off loan. Whitbread even helped soften the blow by throwing in an extra barrel of beer for us. We carried on this practice subsequently every time the 'wakes' came round. Unfortunately Whitbread increased their prices after the holidays following another budget. This rise didn't go down well in the club, even though every pub and club copped for it. There seemed to be too many beer increases too often. It was as though we weren't being allowed to make a living. It made us fancy the idea of making another beer available in the club.

Of Blackburn's three breweries, my favourite was Thwaites, but it was impractical to have their lovely brew in due to it being cask ale and our cellar not being suitable. Lion came next in my league table, quite a few members asked about having this, then Whitbread third.

The latter brewery was the only one to come up with the finance the club needed to get off the ground. They had stuck with us when others weren't interested. It meant we owed them more than just money, loyalty doesn't have a price. So beggars couldn't be choosers.

Following our request to them exploring the possibility of having another brewery in the club - they knocked us back. I suppose the piper does call the tune. Why should they let some other brewery take away their business? They suggested we try another of their beers. As the resident bitter drinker on the club committee, I plumped for Chester's. A small brewery they had taken over.

I was very pleased with the Chester's bitter and didn't bother with Trophy again, except when it ran out. The bitter went down well with the members and the mild even better. Whitbread also deprived us of a bit of choice at this time, like they did with everybody else when they withdrew Dutton's 'Oh be joyful' (OBJ) from sale. This was the last remnant from Blackburn's old Dutton's brewery which was taken over back in the 1960s.



Tom Howard and Pat Gleave

CHAPTER FOUR

Frank's 'big green elephant'

The first three chapters of this book were written at 8 Victoria House, Queens Park Flats, in Blackburn. I lived here throughout my time on the club committee, apart from the first four months when I still lived up at my parents on the other side of town.

It's worth mentioning this because my reminiscences of the club have reached September 1986. At this time I started keeping a 'Director's Diary' of how I saw events in the club, writing them down as a monthly report. I've no idea what suddenly made me decide to keep a diary of being on the club committee.

I'd always kept notes from meetings I attended as a delegate. Perhaps I was becoming forgetful or maybe a bit obsessed with making notes. It was also odd why it took me two years before starting to keep a club diary. Maybe it was because I was back on the dole again after my year's temporary contract with the Electric Board. I left here under a cloud, trade union activities were to blame again. Some things never change.

My first diary entry was a brief introduction to the club committee and members of staff. It said our club building was the old nurse's home and we had around 250 paid up members.

The committee was in the process of dotting the 'i's and crossing the 't's regarding the loan from Whitbread towards building the new Games room. Foyster's our solicitors had seen to this. We just had to send them our last six monthly accounts, they did the rest. There seemed no problem here as the club was doing well. The bar was pulling in around £1,200 a week and we'd reduced our costs drastically.

So on the whole the place had been turned round. We owed Whitbread about £15,000. This was after £9,000 was spent equipping and doing up the Games room, the snooker table itself cost £3,000. The loan was the write-off kind paid through the amount of beer we shifted. The more beer we sold, the faster the loan reduced in size. These are popular with clubs and even more so with breweries, you get so much knocked off your barrelage. Our rate was £3 a barrel, or thereabouts

The Games room was a little slow taking off, it didn't take a genius long to realise we weren't a snooker playing club. Half the members came to attend meetings then have a camp about them afterwards. A pint and a sit down afterwards was their idea of entertainment.

Lynch's theory as to why members didn't take to the snooker table was probably the most realistic. It was too separate from the bar area. People don't like not having a bar in sight. Successful snooker rooms always have access to a bar within sight of the table. With ours you had to trail through the hallway and bar room to get served. I didn't think this was such a difficult thing, but others did.

It's already been mentioned how we toyed with the idea of linking up the Games room to the bar by knocking down the toilets and rebuilding on their site. We got knocked back with this because of the same old problem with the club building, it was unsuitable. Not only would it have cost us a fortune modifying the structural walls, but the club building was listed too. This meant certain aspects of the place had to be left alone. Our horizons were very limited.

Strangely enough the Games room did start taking off, but it wasn't the snooker table which generated the interest. It was taking £15 a week during its first few weeks in the club. It had a light which cost 10p for ten minutes use, meaning 25 hours a week. It didn't last as interest died off.

What really caught the member's imagination was moving the dartboard from the bar to the Games room. It didn't take long to get a darts team going. Tommy Holden was the driving force behind this. He was a keen player himself and pleaded with some of the most unlikely people in the club to play for the darts team.

They included Trades Council Secretary Ian Gallagher, who didn't drink. He is so tall he could almost reach the dartboard when he stretched out his arms.

George Davies was the full-time organiser of the NCP and my own Branch Secretary, Bob Horman, turned out to be really good players. I gave it a try myself, but darts usually seemed to clash with Rovers matches - Besides, I'm a lousy player.

It's best to never consider yourself on the crest of a wave because it was about this time the staff wages were due. Kevin had a discussion with us where he put the case forward for himself being worth a lot more than he'd heard rumours we were prepared to offer him. This sounded a bit like the case of somebody talking out of school, or maybe Kevin was calling our bluff.

We had a friendly chat and listened to his case, not telling him we had already decided what he was getting. But we were open to ideas, after all he was out to get the best deal he could, just like we all did in our workplaces.

Kevin ended up with a 7.5% pay rise of £9 a week, taking his pay up to £120 a week. Joe the part-time Steward was given a rise of 12.5% to £45 a week. The cleaner got 15% to take her wage to £38 and we decided to pay casual bar staff £8 a session.

Perhaps one reason justifiably why Kevin wanted a big wage rise was down to the club moving into the age of technology. He had security cameras behind the bar to keep his eye on as well as the bar itself. Really he didn't have to as it was more of a deterrent. The Big room always had staff on upstairs and we only let members play snooker.

The snooker table was becoming an issue in itself. Frank was so keen on getting one and he'd reckoned we could join one of the local club snooker leagues. We found out almost immediately this wasn't going to be the case. Our problem was the old fashioned attitudes of other clubs. There wasn't another club in Blackburn which allowed women to play snooker, most workingmen's and Conservative clubs even excluded women from their Games rooms.

Blackburn Trades Council Club's code of equality well and truly hit us in the knackers. Our female members couldn't just waltz in to any workingmen's club and start playing snooker. The old sexist ways were still alive and kicking. I saw this as a challenge, why couldn't we be the club to start the snooker ball rolling?

Grudgingly we let the people from the Centre for the Unemployed use the snooker table. It was funny having the monitor behind the bar and watching the centre staff doing nothing all day but play snooker. On the 'bright' side, at least they helped our snooker light takings. We drew the line where only staff could play on the table.

This helped us secure an agreement with them over usage of the Games room during the day. It was obvious certain staff members had a misspent youth. Technically it was only to be used by the club at night, its real function during the day was as a coffee bar. Frank Smith and Pete Greenwood met the management committee of the centre about this. As expected we didn't have too much difficulty getting our way, especially as Frank was a member of this body. Ian Gallagher was on the centre committee too, so we had enough people backing our case.

The only management committee member who tried to block this was Stan Nixon, a retired full-time official from UCATT who was one of the founder directors of the Trades Club. He never did us any favours due to his time before we came along. I never liked Stan and used to give him a disdainful look conveying the message: "You ran away from the club when the going got too tough."

Really Stan pulled his tripe out for the club and like Eric Smith and Frank Gorton saw the club as their only blemish in long distinguished service to the labour movement. We didn't and made Stan, Eric and Alf Lloyd from my union, life members of the club.

As things went on the Games room became a fixture, although the snooker table didn't prove as big a hit as we thought it would. I coined the phrase 'Frank's big green elephant,' but it was a little unfair here as we couldn't really tell whether the table paid for itself or not. After all it was a facility on offer, every club needed one. We never did join a snooker league, we didn't try to either.

The Games room ended up being used twice a week. We had darts and domino matches on Tuesday nights then All Fours and does on Sundays. All Fours for the uninitiated is a card game which we Blackburners can almost certainly call our own. I've never found anywhere else where the game is played, at least not to the extent it is in this town. My Granddad used to say you weren't a proper Blackburner if you couldn't play All Fours.

I used to play for the club All Fours team, but under protest. In our club which had a highly-strung membership at the best of times, I never knew a game which caused so much aggravation. I admit I wasn't a great player, learning the game when I was on the MSC as a way of passing time in the cabin when it rained.

The problem with playing for the club team was there always having to be an inquest, even in practice or friendly games in the club amongst ourselves. I thought people played this game for fun - no way. As a small club we should have been more interested in winning friends than matches.

Tommy Holden was the stalwart of both darts and All Fours teams. He captained both of them too and was on both league management committees. He took the games a bit too seriously for me, calling himself the 'Shark.' You could tell he was unhappy when you lost a match, especially if you had played a wrong card at All Fours. You faced his wrath after the match.

Unfortunately for Tommy he put winning darts matches too high on his agenda. The darts team was all conquering when it first started out on its road to glory. Tommy always made sure the star players were given a game even though some of them wouldn't always turn up for matches. It was the 'bread and butter men' who showed up every week and missed out having a game who began to get fed up with this practice. All good things come to an end, unfortunately so did the darts team.

The door may have been shut as far as playing in a snooker league was concerned due to old fashioned attitudes. But as so often happens in this life, when one door shuts another often opens.

Blackburn's workingmen's clubs tend to be dominated by old bigoted men and the Tory clubs by the 'Colonel Blimp' types. This was actually a cloud with a silver lining in our favour when it came to persuading Asians to use the club. We were the only club in town where there was no kind of discrimination or prejudice either racist or sexist. At least not within the club committee's earshot anyway.

Consequently we had female members and trade unionists from ethnic minorities joining the club. Harry Atwal and Zafar had been on the club committee. Zaf was still on when I arrived on the scene.

Technically he was the senior committeeman. At one time the only one the night Frank Gorton paid him a visit with the club keys, the rest of the committee having disappeared. It must have been quite a surprise for Zaf finding a little gnome on his doorstep.

Zaf managed to bring a lot of Asians into the club. The funny thing was he hardly ever drank with them, preferring to sup with me or other bar flies. I used to make fun of him about his ability to consume a vast amount of beer and even more spirits. He was the ultimate lapsed Muslim, he even ate bacon sandwiches and pork pies. He told me he was one though, just interpreted it a different way by not following the Islamic law. No different than our Christian members who broke a lot of the ten commandments.

The other Asian lads were kindred spirits to Zaf. They knew how to trough their ale and Baccardi. They used to love gambling too. We even heard about the case of a taxi firm changing hands over a game of cards in the Trades Club.

On the other side of the coin though, the number of Asian lads using the club had a an effect on the white trade. To say our club was the nearest thing in town to a socialist club, full of trade unionists, I got the impression not all of them supported total integration so far as where they went for a pint. I noticed this with quite a few older Labour Party members when it came to Asians. They liked their vote but not their company.

In a way the Asians, apart from a minority, didn't go out of their way to mix with the white members. They were happy to mind their own business, play the bandit or take each others money at cards.

It was an irony when Anti Racism meetings took place in the Big room upstairs, you hardly ever saw an Asian in attendance. There would be a lot more downstairs in the bar supping ale and totally disinterested in whether the meeting was in their interest or not. This proved to me they were no different than white folk. Apathy has the same meaning in English, Urdu or Gujerati.

And so we approached another Christmas and New Year period, probably every club's busiest time of the year. We felt another strong sense of optimism. It was also an exciting time in the club as far as the labour movement was concerned, with two big industrial disputes taking place.

The main one of these was the News International Dispute taking place at Wapping. Earlier in the year I'd visited the lads picketing Rupert Murdoch's plant with Chris Roe while we were in London watching Rovers. They showed us the police surveillance cameras all over the place. It was a real eye-opener. I swapped a badge from the 'Silentnight' Beds strike with one of the Wapping lads picket's badges.

I was to visit Wapping again, this time we took a coach from the club to take part in the big demonstration here, later known as the 'Battle of Fortress Wapping' which turned into a confrontation between demonstrators and the police. I lived to tell the tale.

The funniest occurrence was first thing in the morning when we found the club had been broken into the night before. The police arrived while we were waiting for the Wapping coach to pick us up. Some of us were already drinking cans of beer in the Games room when they walked into the club.

We didn't dare tell them where we were off to. We told them it was a club trip, a mystery one. The police would see for themselves on their TV screens next day where we ended up.

At least nobody on our trip got hurt or arrested. Some of the lads were chased down Wapping High Street by the police on horseback. Me and Godfrey Barden had been separated from the rest of the lads and were in a pub while they were being chased. Arthur Scargill was with them as they were being pursued. There wasn't time to be formally introduced.

We did lose one of our entourage. Pete Kennett lost his way and couldn't find his way back to the coach. He still turned up in the club next morning having spent £20 on the train back to Blackburn.

Zafar had a bit of a scare when he was dropped off in Blackburn at two in the morning. He was stopped by a couple of coppers who asked him where he'd been. Zaf told them he'd been to see his brother in Birmingham, then sneaked off home.

The News International Dispute was responsible for a lot of meetings in the club. As was the other big one at Silentnight Beds. This wasn't as big as Wapping, but a lot nearer in Barnoldswick. We filled a coach from the club for this one. I was nearly arrested

for talking to a copper. His Sergeant came over to me all heavy handed for some reason, he didn't like seeing his men fraternising with the enemy. I may have looked subversive.

Our coach to Barlick was delayed because I couldn't get the top off my two litre bottle of beer. Trusty Frank Smith did the job for me by turning the bottle using a door-frame as a vice. I also had to smash in the door of no.1 room because a meeting had been booked and the handle had been pulled off, typical subtle Mick. This cost us a bob or two to put right. Something always seemed to go wrong whenever the Trades Council hired a coach for a demonstration.

At the end of January we had a crisis due to a severe bout of flooding. The damage ran into thousands of pounds, but we all pulled together and coped with it very well.

I remember that very morning as I'd been up to the Star Paper Mill for a job interview. I was all dressed up and thought the interview went very well. While sitting on the bus to town I fancied a pint in the club as it headed down King Street and got off round the corner.

As I walked through the front door, the club looked like it had been hit by a monsoon, a stream of water was flowing down the stairs. The place was in a right state, water had flooded through the Big Room from the top of the club and into the bar below. Frank and Janice were hard at it mopping up the Big room along with Janice's mum Vera.

Kevin the Steward said he'd been round to my flat this morning to get my help. He hadn't been so sure which number I lived at, but saw my Rovers scarf through the letter box. Unfortunately I wasn't in, but it was a good job I'd been passing the club anyway.

The flooding was caused by the instillation of a couple of gas multi-point water heaters in the club the other week. Connecting them up to the existing water supply had burst the old pipes due to the higher water pressure.

So as with every kind of flood, it was all hands to the pumps. The Big Room was under three inches of water. Downstairs the bar room had only been half flooded. We cordoned off the area round the TV and windows where there was water. The immediate drinking area was

alright, so we were able to open up and serve our members. At least the flood hadn't stopped the club making money.

We must have switched on every heater in the club it was safe to. We also hired a big hot air burner type along with two big industrial cylinder vacuums.

Friday afternoon and evening was spent mopping up, as well as all day Saturday. A wedding had been booked for the Big room and we were determined the show would go on. Everybody on the committee did their bit. I was proud of how they all pulled their weight. The wedding did take place. Our dance floor was a bit on the wobbly side due to the flood forcing up the floorboards through the lino, but with the drink flowing people get used to things like wobbly floors. They usually blame themselves and put it down to a good bit of sneek lifting.

Luckily the club's insurance covered the damage and we didn't do so badly from the flood. We even managed to get some expenses for the club committee in reward for their efforts. Also on the bright side we didn't lose any of the functions which had already been booked lately. Some of the large meetings had to be moved to the Games room, but that was no problem, people were very helpful.

It was about the time of the flood we were to hear news which was to greatly affect the club at a later date. This was the re-routing of the Blackburn Inner Relief road and suspension of Stage 3 of the route due to a cut back in funding.

The Blackburn Inner Relief road had been talked about for years as a way of helping the traffic snarl-ups expected once the M65 came to the town. The most ironic aspect of this motorway was the idea for it actually came from Blackburn Trades Council back in the 1970s. The delegates at the time could never have dreamt they would end up with their own club being affected by the repercussions of their own creation, victims of their own success, a bit like Frankenstein's Monster.

Nobody really took the Inner Relief road seriously because it seemed to be taking so long for anything to actually happen. There were four club's premises on its proposed route in the mid '80s. These were the Top Hat Club; St. Paul's Workingmen's; the Railway

Club and ourselves. The route itself changed at regular intervals so nobody expected it to even start. The M65 itself was often in doubt.

Our premises only had a peppercorn rent even though the building was listed, due to us being on the relief road's route. Therefore we were condemned. We always knew we were on borrowed time where we were. It was hoped in the short term to run a service for the labour movement and eventually buy our own premises, perhaps with the help of a friendly local brewery.

Most people in the area of the route, including these four club's members took the relief road with a pinch of salt. This was because it had been talked about in the early '50s, before I was even born.

The cat was put amongst the pigeons when the Department of Transport gave the go ahead for the M65 and its continuation to the M6. Instead of being dismissed as a non-event, people discovered the Inner Relief road was really going to happen. We realised our days on St Peter Street were well and truly numbered.

The days of the Centre for the Unemployed were numbered too. There were rumours flying round about their grant from the council being pulled, resulting in them having to quit the club or even finish as a service. The council was being accused of having too many outlets in the town doing a similar job. Our relationship with them could never have been described as comradely, but they provided a useful service in a town where such services are vital. The centre also provided us with a handy source of income through the rent we received for their office. They also paid for their own decorations.

Secretly I'd always hoped the centre would die a quiet death and do us all a favour, but John Lynch convinced me even though most of its staff had been idle and a pain in the arse, it was a worthwhile organisation which we should encourage to grow and gain influence as it had in other towns and cities. Some centres like the one in Kirkby and Birkenhead were fighting campaigning organisations. I'd been on a course in Liverpool with volunteers from these two centres and found them to be a great bunch.

The problem with the Blackburn centre was the way it had been used as a way of giving jobs to the boys. Most people would probably say my main gripe was not being one of those boys.



*The Games room: Anne Parker and Phil Riley (seated)
Jack Perkins (left) and Frank Smith playing snooker*

CHAPTER FIVE

The great schism

In the March of 1987 we had radical changes to the personnel make up of the Trades Club committee. The Club AGM was to take place this month, I was up for re-election to the committee, along with Pete Kennett, Tommy Holden and Frank Smith.

Unfortunately Frank wasn't standing this time. He had decided to take voluntary redundancy from the ROF and try his hand at running his own pub. He'd been at the ROF since he was a lad and could expect a decent pay out and pension. His wife had a good job with British Telecom, which she intended to keep, so they had no trouble with the Brewery Bond and were able to keep their house.

The problem with Frank leaving the club committee meant we were losing a damn good Secretary. He agreed to stay with us a few more months to help out whoever succeeded him. Unfortunately that was the \$64,000 Question, we weren't prepared for such a change.

Before the AGM we had other matters to sort out. One of these which wouldn't go down well here was the committee's decision to end closing at four o'clock and shut an hour earlier. This was following complaints from bar staff about the time they had to lock up the club after closing time then get back later for seven o'clock.

Zafar and myself wanted to keep the four o'clock closing time, our argument was none of the other committee members hardly ever came in the club at dinner times anyway as they were all working. I was on the dole and Zaf worked nights most weeks, so we used the club in the afternoons.

Pete Greenwood wasn't working, but had council business during the day. I remember remarking how committeemen didn't object to the four o'clock finish when they had days off. Besides would we have had any problems if Kevin lived locally. It wasn't our problem him living in Oswaldtwistle.

We had another dispute to sort out. This was the perennial one of people booking the Big Room for bogus birthday parties when really they were for political meetings or fund raising socials. I didn't mind these going on, it was the club's purpose. What didn't go down well was when organisations advertised meetings by flyposting the event all over the town centre, highlighting the club as the venue.

The latest culprit to do this was Les Scott. We'd pulled him before along with his colleagues from the SWP. This time we lost our rag with him and told him we weren't taking any more social bookings from his lot. The club was now in a position where we could turn away business due to us doing so well at the time.

Les hit back at us in a strange sort of way for a week or two. The Duke of York on Darwen Street was one of Blackburn's oldest pubs. It was having hard times like everywhere else, so tried a scheme where people could hire a room for free. The plan behind this was to sell ale to customers who went to the meetings etc, and wouldn't normally have gone in the pub.

What knackered up the SWP's brief phase of meeting in here was their party members would come in the Trades until their meeting at half seven, then nip round to the Duke of York. Most of them didn't even bother buying a drink in the Duke, saving their money till they came back to our place afterwards. Our prices were so much cheaper.

Eventually the Duke's landlord got sick of seeing his pub full of people sitting around empty handed and slung them out. Diplomatic as always, we took them back into our place telling them the difference in our prices fully justified them staying with us. Also being one of the organisations at the vanguard of the labour movement, it was their duty to support their local trade union club.

We didn't have any problems with the SWP's meetings again, proving the old saying: 'The revolution starts at closing time'.

One aspect of Frank leaving the club committee meant the return of John Lynch. Frank and Lynchy never saw eye to eye with each other. This was a shame because they were both talented lads, if they had been mates the club could really have flourished. But as is often the case, it wasn't to be.

Also Dave Simpson put himself forward for the club committee. 'Big Dave' was a mate of mine, in fact he was one of the few club members I knew before joining the place or becoming involved in the labour movement.

I'd known Dave since I was a little lad due to him living round the corner from me. Both of us came from a similar background and took part in childhood battles against each other. I lost touch with Dave in my teens, but met up with him again through my friendship with Chris Roe.

Chris and Dave were both SWP members, I followed 'Militant,' their fellow travellers. I used to have a drink with them in the Balaclava each Saturday afternoon once their paper sale finished. It wasn't difficult persuading them to start using the Trades Club. They were both good at the art of sneek lifting and I eventually persuaded them to join the Trades Council as delegates from their trade union branches.

Dave was a member of the old footwear union called RUBSSO; the Rossendale Union of Boot Shoe and Slipper Operatives. Chris seemed to be a nomadic trade unionist. He started off in the AUEW then some small union called the AMU when he saw an advert in a newspaper. He eventually ended up in TASS.

One advantage of having Big Dave on the club committee was his size. He was six foot two and sixteen stone. When he asked someone to leave, they left.

We cheated a bit on the night of the AGM. This was done by softening up the members, giving them two beer tokens apiece to treat themselves in the bar after the meeting. Consequently we didn't have as rough a ride as I expected. The main point was the decision to close at three o'clock each dinner time instead of four. But following pressure from members, the committee said they would look at it again.

I was pleased about this, especially since I'd asked a few people to

bring the matter up for discussion. Namely my mate Bob Horman who I persuaded the committee to accept as a club member in days gone by. He owed me a favour as well as liking an afternoon drink and game of darts.

Next it was a lop-sided club committee election. Zafar, Pete Greenwood and Janice Kelly were elected last year. This meant me, Tommy Holden, Pete Kennett and the two new lads: Big Dave and Lynchy were all up for endorsement. Lynchy had been elected last year, but came off early. He had to go through it all again. Not that there was much to go through. We needed five directors to bring us up to strength anyway, so as per usual we were all elected 'en bloc.'

We got our stupid question, as AGM's of clubs always do. This came from Alain Douglas, himself disabled, asking about the possibility of us installing a lift in the club and better provision for our disabled members. We said we'd look into this, although the idea of us putting a lift in the club was pie in the sky.

Alain knew this, but he was one of those types who have to say something whether it is feasible or not. I didn't mind Al really, he meant well and I passed a BTEC from one of the courses he was always asking me to go on.

The Sunday after the AGM it was obvious the club committee was splitting into two camps. This was over who we picked as Frank's successor to be Club Secretary, it was going to be between Lynchy and Pete Kennett. I wanted Lynchy to have the job because he'd done it before and we needed an experienced hand to follow Frank.

Pete was a good lad, but he hadn't the experience. Also he was a bit unreliable and a funny bloke when he'd had a jar or two, this was down to the injections he took for his diabetes. He'd talked on many occasions about jacking in the committee. Lynchy, for all his faults, always stuck by the club, even after finishing as Steward. With his experience of the club he was the right man in my opinion.

Pete Greenwood must have seen the storm clouds looming. He gave us all a pep talk before we started our usual Sunday morning chores of counting the money and cleaning up the place.

Big Dave was a bit overawed, taking it in like a student listening to a teacher. Lynchy took it a different way, he was contemptuous of the way Pete gave us the sermon on the mount.

In a way this is what made him decide to stand against Pete Kennett. He told me later he wasn't sure whether I'd support him or not.

To my calculations, Pete Kennett would be supported by the other Pete, Tommy Holden and Janice Kelly. I reckoned Lynchy had my support along with Zafar's and Big Dave's. We all agreed to meet on Thursday to sort the whole thing out.

The meeting had a 100% turnout of the new committee and Frank Smith. We took a quick vote on the Secretary's position and it came out 5-4 in favour of Pete Kennett. Frank had a vote which was technically out of order as he wasn't on the committee any more. Lynchy brought it up on a point of order, saying it wasn't constitutional to have nine members of the club committee.

As Frank's vote was invalid we had a tie. Pete Greenwood tried to clinch it for his namesake by using his casting vote in favour of Pete Kennett.

This time it was my turn to call a point of order, saying there was nothing in the club's rules saying the chairman had a casting vote when it came to elections. I don't think any of us were really all that sure about the rules of the club, but at Labour Party selection meetings the chairman didn't exercise one. This seemed good enough for Pete, while everybody else hadn't a clue either.

A compromise was reached where we took the matter up with the Trades Council and let them fathom it out. I didn't agree with this course of action, everybody else did including Lynchy and Pete Kennett.

My argument was because of the Trades Council being made up of club members and delegates who weren't. Why should people who didn't give a damn about the club, so much so they couldn't even join the place, have a say in such an important matter regarding its future.

Ironically this argument was used against Lynchy when he was the Steward. I was a lone voice at this meeting, the rest of the committee were more diplomatic. They wanted to play for time, or pass the buck.

Unfortunately the backstabbing started almost as soon as the meeting finished. I wasn't happy about the Trades Council having a say in who the club committee elected as its Secretary, it was none of their business. I was very vociferous on this issue, really it was because I knew full well who they would pick for us, Pete had it in the bag.

Perhaps the reason for my vociferousness was my recent acquisition of employment with British Rail. It was at the back of my mind that I might have to come off the club committee and Trades Council through transferring from the EETPU to the NUR. I had to take each week as it came regarding my union membership.

The battle of Frank's succession came to a head at the April General Council meeting of the Trades Council. The issue of the Trades Council having a say in how or who we picked as Club Secretary provoked a lot of arguing. I related it to the current Kenyon's strike on Crossfield Street. In this case non-trade unionists had been allowed to partake in a strike ballot, then scabbed when the vote was for strike action.

I shouted out in the meeting: "Any non-member who votes on this is no different to the Kenyons scabs." Or words to that effect. I saw a lot of worried looks on delegate's faces, lots of head shaking and people looking round like lost children.

What the meeting decided, with a few abstentions, was the Chairman's vote would be a casting one. Therefore if the result was the same at our next committee meeting the job was Pete Kennett's.

Things got even more heated at the May Day Social later in the week on Friday night. Me and Pete Greenwood had an exchange of words, this wasn't helped when Janice Kelly joined in. I slagged her off to such an extent, she chucked her bunch of keys in my face and stormed off shouting her resignation from the club committee.

I continued to argue with Pete Greenwood, he wanted to close the bar upstairs, but I said he had no authority. Surprisingly I was backed up by not only Big Dave, but by Tommy Holden and Pete Kennett who were still in the club themselves. I remonstrated with him for being too much of a dictator, that he was past it and should be pensioned off.

Pete, like Janice, ended up leaving, muttering oaths under his breath. Big Dave could have been knocked down with a feather judging by the look on his face, he was as sober as a judge too. Tommy and Pete Kennett had been playing darts, they carried on where they had left off. It must have been a close game.

Next morning we all turned up as usual, apart from Pete Kennett. We carried on with our usual chores then Pete Greenwood called a meeting. We filed into no.1 room and sat around the table. Pete asked for us to nominate the new Secretary. I proposed Lynchy, seconded by Zafar. He was the only nomination and duly elected.

Pete Greenwood and Janice Kelly then both duly resigned from the club committee after this and left the room. Childishly I put two fingers up at them after they left the room and closed the door on us.

While all this had been going on, Kevin the Steward phoned in sick. He wasn't too specific when he'd be back, or whether he would be. So we had a meeting about bar coverage and decided to ask Dave Bates, our temporary replacement bar man, to do Kevin's job until he came back to work. Dave readily agreed to this.

Our reason for employing Dave was because recently the Assistant Steward, Joe **** did a runner to Blackpool with £380 of the club's takings he filched from our safe. There was over £1,000 in there at the time, it seems he just wanted a holiday and a good steam up, we gather. The magistrates must have taken pity upon him as they only gave him a suspended sentence.

I remember arriving down the club this particular Sunday morning after he'd gone on 'holiday' to find the other committee members sitting around with blank looks on their faces. When I asked them what was wrong they told me money had gone from the safe and Joe was missing. They thought he may have had an accident.

He would have had an accident if I'd known where he was and I told the rest of them so. They hadn't even phoned the police, so that was the first job we did. They must have thought I was a heartless bastard, but I thought he was the bastard. We went out of our way to give him a job, at his request. This was the way he thanked us. Also the whole purpose of the club was to help working class people, it was like pinching out the church poor box.

Joe wasn't a problem anymore, but Kevin was. We called an emergency meeting of what was left of the club committee. The news about Kevin was he would be off for a fortnight with his nerves. He put this down to all the inter-committee bickering.

Our first priority was bar cover. We were all right here as Dave Bates said he would do all the hours we wanted from him. The first concern was covering the two bars on General Election Night. Everybody on the committee said they would pitch in and help out during the evening.

Next day was the annual May Day procession through the town centre. It was a disaster, only about thirty people showed up. Embarrassingly there were more majorettes at the front than marchers.

I was with Big Dave, we stood at the front with our mates from the club, whilst Pete Greenwood stood with his people. It was like two rival groups of demonstrators, sworn enemies instead of fellow trade union brothers and sisters on their big event of the year. So much for the motto: 'United we stand'.

Matters were made worse when nobody would carry the Trades Council banner. It ended up looking lop-sided when Secretary Ian Gallagher and Chairman John Easton had to do it. Ian is about six foot three, John near enough a foot shorter. At least they didn't rip it like last year when me and Ian carried it.

It was one of those days, we decided not to bother marching through the town centre anymore.

There was an unlikely bonus for us though. I had a feeling Pete Kennett and Tommy Holden might jack in as committeemen. But if Tommy had any doubts, then these were soon cast away when Pete Greenwood had a go at him in the bar, calling him a bastard for supporting the rest of us. He never liked Tommy anyway.

I had a flash of inspiration to persuade Pete Kennett to stay with the club committee. Why not make him Chairman? Most thought I was earmarked for the job, but I wasn't one for spoils of victory. Pete agreed to accept if nominated when we had a quiet chat about it over a pint in the bar.

One of the first things we did as the new regime running the club was to co-opt Andy Marshall on to the club committee. Andy was a member of my EETPU branch who suddenly appeared on the scene, a bit like I did some years previously. Unusually Andy wasn't motivated by political reasons, he had no interest in this sphere of life. He paid the political levy to the union, but was also a member of Hoddlesden Conservative Club.

Andy was a larger than life character, quite literally, he must have weighed around twenty stone. He seemed an intelligent chap, a real gentleman too, unlike the rest of us dollopers on the committee.

I managed to interest him in the Trades Council from the reports I brought back to our branch meetings. This persuaded him to join me and Ken Phillips on the General Council. It wasn't long after Andy became a delegate that he started taking an interest in the club. I bent his ear a bit and practically dragged him on to the club committee, no mean feat for someone Andy's size.

This turned out to be a great move. Andy could do almost any DIY job, he made Frank look like me. He was an electrician by trade of course, but his dad was a builder and Andy had been taught all the skills of that profession. As if these talents weren't enough, he had a head for figures too. None of us on the committee had volunteered to be Treasurer, we solved this problem using my great gift of persuasion and Andy was duly elected to the position. As expected with this lad, he was an immediate success.

At the meeting we co-opted Andy to the committee, Lynchy said he didn't want to hold a set of keys for the bar area. This followed an incident in the club before my time. It left Lynchy with cold feet because of the way he was treated.

Some years ago the club had a doorman called Bob, he was the lovable rogue type. He stole some cheques from the club and the police were called. Lynchy had to spend a night in the Northgate Hotel (police station). As Club Steward he was responsible for the money. The committee decided to suspend John on full pay while an investigation was carried out.

Luckily Bob the doorman eventually owned up to the theft, putting Lynchy in the clear. But the damage had been done, once bitten, twice shy in Lynchy's eyes. He was wary over keeping a set of keys.

The way we solved this problem was by agreeing to no director having sole access to the bar and cellar area. So we sorted out different keys for everybody. It was an oddball situation where one committeeman had a front door key, another a bar key, someone else a key for the cellar and I had the keys for the coin machines, ie the phone box, bandit and light meter.



*L-R: Billy Pickup, Dave Simpson, John Lynch,
Chris Roe and Andy Marshall.*

It sounded odd, but it worked. If one of the lads couldn't make it down the club on a Sunday morning, he could hand his key over to one of the others, depending what access they had. Of course Kevin had a set of all the keys, apart from the ones I carried, so he could open the bar and lock up at night. We also had another set cut for Dave Bates when we appointed him Assistant Steward.

It's a peculiar thing, but the club never had much luck when it came to employing doormen. When I first joined in 1983 there was Old Frank who I mentioned earlier, he was a waste of time.

When I brought it up at a meeting saying we needed a doorman, Frank and the other thieving one are probably the reason why I was given the cold shoulder. Maybe we were better off doing it ourselves after all.

The only problem was getting the members to sign their guests in. I was fighting a losing battle here. The realisation was apparent as the committee were as bad as anybody at not signing their guests in.

We decided to play it by ear and pull non-members who looked a bit on the rough side, or appeared shady. Obviously this didn't apply to any guests who were playing matches at the club. We had some kind of 'Ad Hoc' booking for these circumstances.

And so we passed our first milestone as a new club committee by seeing out the month of May. I think a lot of people thought we might screw up with Frank Smith not helping us any more. Some might even have wanted us to in their heart of hearts. But we stuck together and persevered.

Kevin the Steward came back off the sick, I don't think he was happy about Frank, Pete and Janice going. But if he didn't like it he knew what he could do.

I was becoming a bit of a club committee recruitment agent now. As well as persuading Big Dave and Andy Marshall to join us, I was able to get my mate Chris Roe to come aboard.

Chris was a member of the SWP when I met him. We had a lot in common, both of us being keen Blackburn Rovers fans and liking a beer or two. We were in the habit of going for a pint with each other on a Saturday in the Balaclava on Watford Street. This led to us going out boozing together at weekends and travelling to Rovers' away matches together. We even went across to the Isle of Man together to watch Rovers play in the week long Manx Cup tournament.

He was as daft as a brush like me, maybe that's how I persuaded him to join the club committee. I'm still not sure how I did it now. He told me it was something I said when bending his ear while we were drunk somewhere. But there was nothing unusual about that, normally he didn't listen anyway.

One thing Chris did manage to put over me was through his age of 21, he became the youngest person to join the club committee. He beat my record set in 1984 of 24 years old. Andy was younger than me, but I was elected at a younger age when I first went on.

Chris shattered my record by three years and may even have been the youngest club committeeman in Blackburn at the time. It was also quite ironic that when the club opened Chris was still a pupil down the road from the place at St Wilfred's School. He might have even fancied his chances of getting an underage drink.

I used to find all these unusual little bits of information about the club fascinating. The only trouble was nobody else did. We were a bit of an oddball club, so I thought little snippets of information may have enriched the culture of the place. I was wrong, people thought I was a bit of a 'loom baht shuttle.'

With two SWPers on the committee it didn't take long to heal the small rift we had with this organisation. Les Scott successfully appealed against his ban on booking social functions. I didn't mind as it was a handy way of getting Trotskyite groups like 'Militant' and Les' own SWP to start using the club socially.

At the same time I got wrists my slapped for my one and only time as a committeeman. This was for talking to the press. Although I still thought I did a good job at the time by highlighting the old fashioned attitudes of Blackburn's clubs.

A freelance journalist called Pete Wharton came to a public meeting of the Trades Council organised in support of the Wapping strikers. I got talking to him and he started coming in the club regularly. He was from the East End of London and recently moved to Blackburn. Pete was friendly with a chap from the Evening Telegraph who advised him to put his money into property in Blackburn. So Pete sold his house in the East End and bought three in Blackburn, living in one himself and renting out the other couple.

I was the first person from the labour movement to get friendly with Pete. There was a lot of distrust of journalists following the 'News International' Dispute. I told him about the attitude Blackburn's clubs held towards women and our problem of not being able to join any of the local snooker leagues. He found it surprising in this day and age and wanted to do a story on the subject.

Next day I received a phone call down the club from a chap called Tony Livesey, a young Evening Telegraph journalist who was destined for higher things. He went on to become a big wig at the Daily Sport, in other words he was an early riser.

Tony asked me a few questions, then a day or two later his story appeared in the Evening Telegraph. It was a case of greatly expanded truth, but I was proud of seeing my name in print. I must admit I've always done well with the Telegraph and the stuff I've fed them through press releases.

The other lads on the club committee weren't so happy though. They reckoned I'd got away with the story, but it could have turned out differently and brought bad publicity upon the club.

I said they had the typical trade union stereotype fear of the media which I didn't share. My attitude is the old adage: 'They may be saying good things about you, or bad things about you. But at least they are saying things about you.' The club would probably never ever receive such good publicity again.

It was decided any future communication with the media must be given the go ahead by the other directors, in other words censorship. I had to accept this, grudgingly.



Tommy Holden

CHAPTER SIX

Poachers become gamekeepers

A sad event occurred not long after the new committee took over the club. Janice Kelly's father died. So we gave Vera, his wife who was also our cleaner, time off work as compassionate leave. Zafar's wife, Christine, took over Vera's duties for the next fortnight.

Tragically Vera died within a fortnight of her husband. It must have been a devastating time for Janice and her sisters. We sent a spray of flowers to both funerals. I felt a bit bad after the rowing I'd done with Janice, but that wouldn't bring her parents back.

Consequently Christine was given the job as club cleaner. She, like Zafar, worked up at the hospital, as a part-time cleaner. She wanted to work in the club mainly because she and Zaf only lived down the road on the Galligreave's Estate.

I got on well with Christine, she used to call me 'Andy Cap' because I often wore a flat cap when it rained. We seemed to have a cult in the club of wearing these following the Miner's Strike. Every time a dispute broke out locally, the Trades Club lot would be there complete with flat caps too. A bit like the donkey jackets and braziers of the 'Striking '70's'. The Kenyon's Dispute was going on at the time, we even got their strikers wearing flat caps.

Now we were sorted as a committee and accepted by the club members and labour movement, we started to knuckle down and make a bit of money for the club. This was done by using what seemed an odd way - giving out freebies. The philosophy behind this was to get people into the club. We reckoned our rents were so cheap we might as well give room rental 'buckshee'.

The first group we tried this out with was the Irish in Britain Representative Group (IBRG). This organisation was composed of Irish ex-pats and their families and friends living in the Blackburn area. They had been holding meetings in the club a while, once they got off the ground. They also started holding socials containing Irish music and dancing. Often these events would be packed out, luckily we had a Guinness pump up in the Big Room.

It was actually the IBRG who approached us and offered us a deal; If we gave them the Big Room free every other Sunday night, they would fill it and we'd both make money. Then on the door, us over the bar. We readily agreed to this and so began a happy symbiotic relationship.

Following this we decided to take things a step further by putting an advert in the Evening Telegraph. This offered free hire of the Big Room to parties wanting to hold functions. They would pay £20 deposit and get their money back, provided there was no damage to the place.

We also offered all the organisations who met in the club two free Big Room socials between August and the end of the year. These could be for long service presentations or retirement dos.

One thing I liked about this deal was the way it brought back local bands into the club. I still followed the punk scene and persuaded some of my friends in groups to hold gigs in the club. These usually turned out to be money spinners, but we occasionally lost control and had damage to contend with.

The only problem with having all these dos was it meant the lads on the committee having to put a in lot of work. This could be policeing dos if they got a bit rowdy, or having to help out behind the bar or collect glasses. Every Saturday and Sunday morning the club committee would be found down the club cleaning up from the previous night.

As we were out to make money for the club, we decided to bring back four o'clock last orders on Friday and Saturday dinner times. This was pleasing for me as I never wanted it knocking on the head in the first place.

We invited Kevin the Steward in and listened to his views on this issue. He wasn't happy about it, but reluctantly agreed to our plans.

We were going to do it anyway, but assured him the door would be covered, or at least there would always be committeemen in the club on Friday and Saturday afternoons.

I finished on the railway at three o'clock on Fridays, Big Dave even earlier at twelve from Newman's and Chris Roe knocked off early from Charles Baines too. Zaf was always in the club when he worked days, all of us were in at some time on Saturday afternoons.

Once again I came up with the idea of shutting the front door at three on Friday and Saturday afternoons. The only problem was the Centre for the Unemployed. The staff usually knocked off early, but sometimes they finished late. It was never a problem though.

In the early days it was the odd dinner time when we had problems. Now if we had any, they occurred at night. One was with a chap by the name of Imdad. He seemed to terrify our Asian members, even though he was one himself.

As a big bloke he looked a bit of a hard nut, but he upset them by bringing a camcorder into the club, then filming them boozing and playing cards. These activities to most of our Asian members were like the Jewish 'kosher bacon roll', not allowed by the Synagogue, but enjoyable all the same. We soon reached a point where when Imdad walked in, the rest of them walked out.

Allah must have answered our prayers, thank God too, because Imdad was starting to cost us big money. He came in drunk one evening and had a do at Zafar, then knocked over a table full of empty glasses.

This was the heaven sent opportunity we needed to excommunicate him, which we did to turn the club back into the land of milk and honey it was before Imdad's arrival.

All things come to he who waits and Kevin got his way over not wanting to serve until four o'clock on Friday and Saturday afternoons.

One Saturday night, or rather Sunday morning, in early August 1987, Andy Marshall and Big Dave were walking past the club after a night out, when they noticed the bar lights were on. There had been a stabbing nearby and it was after two in the morning, so they went in to investigate.

In the club they found Kevin and Pete Kennett at the bar, both having a drink. Dave and Andy weren't bothered whether they were drinking after time or not. The fact was anybody could have walked in, including the police. This might have cost the club its drinks licence.

The previous week we had a meeting with Kevin over his working hours. He wasn't happy working in the club and had told members and the club committee of his intention to look for employment elsewhere.

At the meeting he requested a clock card to be installed and if he went past a certain time, overtime would be paid. The committee told him this was unacceptable. Unsociable hours were part and parcel of any job in the licenced trade. We were the Trades Club, not Mullards.

Big Dave asked Kevin if drinking after two in the morning was his idea of overtime, to which Kevin resigned on the spot. He tried to claim compensation from us alleging he suffered constructive dismissal.

We met his union rep, who wasn't very happy about taking up this particular case. He said he was only doing his job, far be it for him to want a legal battle with a trade union club. He'd never known a similar dispute and didn't want to again.

The union rep told us Kevin was planning on taking us to an industrial tribunal. He reckoned Kevin really wanted some kind of out of court pay-off rather than go through with legal action.

When the rep had gone we discussed the situation and decided against paying him off. I argued this may be seen as admitting defeat and could be damaging to our credibility. Also it would be a slap in the face for Big Dave and Andy who had only been doing their jobs as committeemen.

We told Kevin, through his rep, to go to hell and try his luck at the industrial tribunal. After all he had resigned and if the reasons came to light he wouldn't exactly come out of it smelling of roses, especially if he tried getting another job in the licencing trade.

A letter arrived a few weeks later from ACAS saying Kevin was planning to take us to an industrial tribunal. We reckoned he was pushing his luck and called his bluff.

Lynch wrote back to ACAS telling them our position. Kevin must have developed cold feet once his union told him he was on shaky ground and they wouldn't pay his costs. This did the trick and we never heard from Kevin again.

Kevin was becoming a pain in the arse anyway in my eyes. He was moody when behind the bar and made a habit of telling anybody who'd listen how he was after getting away from the club as soon as possible. He also delighted in telling me how he always went in Church Conservative Club on his nights off.

In a way leaving us was probably a good move for him. I heard Frank Smith and Raymond our Stocktaker helped him find another Steward's job, somewhere in the Rossendale Valley.

All the same it was weird being involved in an industrial dispute of a kind, apart from one of my own, and dealing with a trade union full-timer from the gaffer's side. Us trade union activists taking on a Tory, poachers becoming gamekeepers, a reversal of the roles nobody will ever believe could ever have really happened.

This did cause a lot of resentment towards Frank Smith. He was perceived by most of the committee as the brains behind Kevin's claim for constructive dismissal. I knew for a fact Kevin didn't have the kind of knowledge to come up with this definition for his termination of employment. It had to be somebody with a lot of industrial know-how. Frank knew his stuff following his days as a shop-steward at the ROF. As Kevin's mate, he may have pointed him in the right direction.

So Kevin went and we appointed Dave Bates as temporary Steward. Dave had a good pedigree for the licenced trade. His dad, also called Dave, was the landlord of the Royal Duke on Johnston Street. His mum was the Manageress of St John's Tavern in the town centre.

Before working full-time hours for us, Dave used to help out in the Tavern. I used to occasionally pop in for a drink and a camp with him when he was behind the bar.

One dinner time I called in and was raving to Dave about the performance of Blackburn Rovers after they had a good win the previous night. Dave pulled me to one side and pointed to a small balding chap stood at the bar.

It turned out it was Rover's full back Chris Price, who I hadn't recognised from Adam. I'd even mentioned him having a good game too.

Dave told me he came in the Tavern quite a lot after training. I may not have noticed Chris Price, but I saw him put down three pints in the half hour I was in the pub. I wondered how we didn't have a leaky defence with a good boozier like that.

We decided to offer the Steward's job to Dave on a temporary basis for three months. It meant we could review his performance and vice-versa, the club might not have been his glass of bitter. This left us with the task of finding ourselves an Assistant Steward to cover the part-time hours vacated by Dave.

Doing what seemed such a simple process of hiring staff turned into a right balls-up. It was probably down to our relative inexperience as a club committee and our age factor. Four of us were in our twenties, two in their thirties, leaving Tommy and Zaf as the ancient men of the committee in their forties.

It seemed obvious the lads wanted a dolly-bird behind the bar and it became more like a beauty contest than a job recruitment exercise. Our advert in the job centre for an Assistant Steward/ess provoked a good response and quite a few people put in for it.

We knocked up a shortlist and held interviews a few days later. At the interviews it was down to a couple of lasses. One was a nice looker called Andrea Walsh, the other was an absolute stunner. She was the one who caught our imagination and after a unanimous vote was selected. We decided to send the other applicants, including Andrea, a letter thanking them for their interest, but this time they were unlucky.

The only problem was our intended Stewardess gave us backward the day after we offered her the job. So hurriedly we decided to get Lynchy to phone Andrea, telling her to ignore our letter of rejection, saying we'd made an administrative mistake. She wasn't in when he phoned, but her dad was and he passed on our message.

Luckily Andrea took us up on our job offer and started work with us. She was only 19 and lived in the Feniscowles district of Blackburn. Like Tommy Holden, she had an unidentical twin sister.

Working in the Trades Club must have been a culture shock for

Andrea as her last job was working behind the bar of Pleasington Golf Club. From one extreme to another, the boys in the nineteenth hole would have held vastly different views than us bunch of lefties. This suited Andrea, she thought they were a bunch of toffee-nosed snobs and couldn't wait to get away from there anyway. Her only problems were transport to and from the club, Blackburn's bigger than you think.

One night Andrea had a real transport problem. She was waiting for her dad to pick her up after working behind the club bar. She was waiting in her usual place, the bus stop round the corner on Freckleton Street, when the police pulled up and accused her of being a prostitute.

Unluckily for Andrea the club premises were right in the heart of Blackburn's 'red light' area. She tended to dress up in motorcycle leathers, which probably gave the police the wrong idea of what her real occupation was.

Andrea was taken down the police station, but persuaded the coppers to let her go after asking them to ring Lynchy. This wasn't the first time the cops had pulled him out of bed and wouldn't be the last. What she should have done was show the coppers her club keys and get them to try the door if they didn't believe her. But that's easy for me to say. Nobody ever thought I was on the game (I hope!).

After Andrea's unpleasant run in with the Vice Squad, the committee decided to pay for a taxi home for whoever was working behind the bar at night. Dave Bates only lived off Johnston Street, but was entitled to the offer and took it up too.

On the rare occasion I did a bit behind the bar, I'd save the money and walk. This paid for my bacon and egg sandwich which I was in the habit of eating in the cafe next day, as part of my new job on the railway.

About this time the Trades Council decided to present Frank Smith with £25 and a memento for his services to the club. Just before Pete Greenwood jacked in the committee, he said whatever the Trades Council gave, the club committee would match.

This was unacceptable in the eyes of the new committee. There

was a lot of bad feeling against Frank from our end because of the Kevin 'Constructive Dismissal' situation.

Maybe we were a bit childish, or it was spoils of victory, but we decided not to give Frank anything. Our reason was there had been no formal decision to give him anything and he'd pursued a vindictive campaign against existing directors of the club. There was no proof of this and sleeping dogs should have been left to lie.

Matters weren't helped on this issue when a few lads went up to the Sportsman's on Shear Brow where Frank was the landlord. They went there after going round Accrington on Dave Bates' Stag Night.

In the party was a German lad called Johan (pronounced Yawn), a bit of an eccentric who sometimes went out in his shorts. His party piece was singing German Socialist songs. When he did this in the Sportsman's it didn't go down very well. A lad belted him, probably out of xenophobia.

A punch-up started between Frank's regulars and the Trades Club lads, leading to the police being called. Just to rub salt in the wound, Kevin was working behind the Sportsman's bar that night.

This didn't put Johan off Blackburn, he liked the place, especially watching Rovers. His football team was Werder Bremen, strangely enough the team Rovers played in a friendly to introduce their new floodlights. What surprised him more than anything was the amount of beer people in Blackburn supped in general and the Trades Club in particular.

The silly incident was brought up at the Trades Council when Frank's GMBATU branch sent in a letter of complaint. It was signed by Janice Kelly and her friend Dorothy Hickey.

Fortunately it had to go through the Executive Committee of the Trades Council, of which I was a member. I argued the incident was none of our business and if Frank wanted to bring a complaint, which he didn't, then it was a police matter.

Surprisingly the Executive never said a dickey-bird. Perhaps they were fed up of past bickering, or noticed the club wasn't going to go bust as predicted when Frank left. He'd given us only three months, everybody else gave us the benefit of the doubt. It was more of an embarrassment than anything.

In the middle of all this turmoil was a breath of fresh air. The club darts team won its league title at its first attempt. They did it in style by winning all their matches, except the last one. Nobody turned up for this one strangely enough. Their opponents that night must have thought our team was so good they didn't even need to show up.

The darts team included a motley collection of three union activists; Ian Gallagher the Trades Council Secretary; George Davies the full-timer from the NCP and Bob Horman the local EETPU Branch Secretary.

Life was one big paradox for Bob. His bosses at work called him a communist, at first club members called him a fascist, due to his past life. Now he was in the Trades Club darts team sharing the oche with the full-time organiser of the New Communist Party.

Having an all conquering darts team was quite a surprise. The only problem was getting the really good players to turn up due to their labour movement activities. Tommy Holden was the captain and no less an activist himself. Darts was his first love though, probably more than his trade unionism.

One member of the darts team was Dave Roberts. We made a stupid mistake with him, helping to continue our bad luck with doormen, by appointing him to the job. Our reason for this was to placate the bar staff on Friday and Saturday afternoons because of the recent return to four o'clock last orders.

We should have known better. He must have held the record for being pulled by the committee for his conduct in the club. He was a 'shit-stirrer.' I even lost my rag with him one night and threatened to punch his head in. I apologised to him immediately upon cooling down.

Dave's problem was his mouth, he loved stirring things. Every pub or club has a Dave waiting for their chance to create. Also he was a bit stropky after a pint or two.

So we ended up appointing a doorman who caused trouble instead of preventing it. He didn't last long in the job, thankfully. One night he became involved in a drunken slanging match with John Walmsley, no stranger before the club committee himself, whilst on duty.

They ended up rolling round the pavement outside the club, like a couple of mating whales on a beach. We sacked him for that, deciding we would have to police the bar ourselves yet again.

Not long after Dave's brief spell as club doorman, he surprised us all by getting a job up at Queens Park Hospital as an ancillary worker. We already had a colony of club members working there including Lynchy, Zafar, Bert Turner and Graham Blackburne to mention a few. It was easy for Dave Roberts to slot in.

Tragedy was to follow Dave within a few months of him starting. He had a terrible accident while shifting some rubbish, when one of the hospital dumper vehicles crushed him against a wall. It might have had a faulty handbrake as nobody was driving it .

Dave was rushed to the Infirmary where they tried to save his leg. When I went with Lynchy to see him, I thought they had done. His leg was a mass of tubes and wires, but he could still waggle his toes. The next thing we heard a week later was his leg had to come off or else gangrene may have infected it.

We held collections in the club for Dave and organised a do up at Queens Park Hospital, in the function room. It had a good turnout of hospital staff and club members, raising hundreds of pounds, perhaps over a thousand.

After his operation Dave briefly started coming in the club again, first in a wheelchair, then on sticks. But it was too difficult for him to get to our place, so we gradually saw less and less of him.

The final irony was Dave forgetting to keep up his NUPE union subs and so getting into arrears and out of benefit. He ended up having to take up his case for compensation privately through a solicitor.

As some form of consolation, at least Dave didn't lose his other leg. There had been a danger it might have to come off as well.

At the time we sacked Dave as doorman, the committee seemed to be in a barring phase. Quite a few people were shown the door. This never bothered me, I always took the attitude where one door may close it usually meant another opening.

I had a run in with one member who was a strange chap called John, or Billy, or Adam. Nobody was sure what his real name was. He was a retired teacher we thought, definitely a man of high intelligence often seen reading books in Blackburn Library and one of the town's most noticeable characters.

And noticeable he was, dressed like a tramp and with a horrible nicotine stained beard. What made matters worse were his anti-social habits, especially his snorting in the bar with a noise like he was going to be sick.

He may have been a tramp by appearance, but he supped like a tramp steamer. His tippie was lots of Gold Label bottles, consequently he used to become legless.

On one occasion he was so drunk when I was serving behind the bar, he accused me of short-changing him. He then became excited and started calling me a thief. I wasn't having any of that, so we pulled him before the club committee and suspended him for three months.

John, or whatever his name was, remarked at his disciplinary meeting how a three month ban would mean him not being able to come in the club during the Winter. As this was the case, he told us he wouldn't be renewing his membership and left the club for the last time. The lads on the committee breathed a huge sigh of relief.

The worse thing about John's presence in the club was its deterrent effect. We had lately been pulling in a growing number of young women, mainly friends of Andrea, now working for us permanently. John tended to sit next to people rather than on his own, even when the bar was empty. It wouldn't be long before his snorting would start. Also it looked like the club was taking tramps off the streets. I used to get fed up of explaining what a clever but eccentric fellow he was. I'm glad he had a go at me now.

We really started showing our teeth at this time. As well as losing John the tramp, we barred a couple of lads for fighting and tried to take legal action against Joe our ex-Assistant Steward for filching the £340 from us. We didn't get far with this, being advised by Dave Ryden, a club member who was a solicitor, it would probably cost us more to take him to court, never mind getting anything out of him. He was skint, not even having a proper roof over his head.

At least threatening legal action did the trick with another member. This was a chap called Shaun who passed us a few bouncing cheques. He had been appointed Co-ordinator of the Centre for the Unemployed, the latest case of 'jobs for the boys.'

Shaun had been to Sheffield University and gained a degree following his trade union activities. His problems started with the break-up of his marriage. Like many people in a similar position, he started hitting the bottle.

This was even worse for Shaun having a bar right next door to his workplace, in the same building. Our bar was like a bone to a dog for him. He started drinking and playing the bandit in the club not only at dinner time, but in his tea breaks too.

Anybody with an alcohol problem knows from experience money doesn't last long, especially in your bank account. Shaun started passing his own cheques over the bar until they started bouncing.

When the bank began sending these back to us we sent him a letter to come and meet the club committee and explain himself. Unfortunately he didn't trap, so I went round to see him and asked him to meet us, with a little help from the threat of legal action.

We managed to sort things out with Shaun, he paid what he owed at a fiver a week. He solved his alcohol problem eventually.

I'm just glad I was able help him. He told me on the night he was supposed to see us, and didn't, was because on his way to the club he couldn't even pass the pub down the street where he lived.

Sadly Shaun was probably one of the main reasons why the Centre for the Unemployed shut down not so long afterwards.

Following our experience with Shaun, we brought in a rule where only a limit of £10 would be allowed on cheques over the bar and these had to be backed up by a cheque guarantee card.

One good thing about us showing our teeth was the respect it earned us. People like a strong club committee and don't mess you about. This was reflected in how well the club was doing.

About this time I was pleased to welcome the Plumbing Lodge of my EETPU union into the club. They had met in the Courts Hotel for many years, but the current landlord wouldn't turn his juke box down while they were holding their meetings. I knew the Lodge Secretary, Frank McGarry. He was a keen Roverite like me. Nobody hardly went to any of their meetings, but pride wouldn't allow them to be swallowed up by the Electricians.

Another union started meeting in the club around the same time the plumbing lodge joined us. These were the Blackburn Tapesizers, one of the old textile unions which used to be all over the place in Blackburn. They used to meet in the old Woolworth's building, but redevelopment meant they had to move out.

We were more than willing to accept the 'tapeworms' as they affectionately became known. They probably more than any other union, apart from the Overlookers, were a part of Blackburn's industrial culture from the textile trade. It was a shame because they were all old fellows who were fading away, a bit like their industry. Yet it was the textile trade which made our town into what it is today.



Dave Roberts holding the club's darts championship

CHAPTER SEVEN

Democracy discovered

The age of technology continued to dawn. This was down to Andy Marshall, his work rate and some of his ideas were of great benefit to everybody. One of these was the leasing of a photocopier. I was particularly pleased about this due to my many labour movement activities.

As well as being on the club committee through my union, I was obviously its delegate to the Trades Council and on the Executive Committee of this organisation; also my branch committee and my union's political delegate.

These commitments were a piece of cake. I was also Secretary of my local Queens Park Ward Labour Party. This was a lot of work, writing numerous letters and minutes as well as my other written reports. So the photocopier was very welcome to me.

Other gadgets we bought included a microwave oven. Andy's party piece with this was to put a light bulb into a pint glass of water then get it to light up. I've never tried doing this and wouldn't recommend anybody else doing it either.

We also bought a freezer to go with the microwave and started selling loads of pies. As the club was doing so well, we decided to plough most of our profits back into it. We'd found the secret of success. You get out what you put in.

Our appliance of science encouraged the Trades Council to rehash the idea of getting the Resource Room going again. The man who agreed to be the mug who co-ordinated it this time was Mick Howarth. He holds an unusual place in the history of the Trades Club, as the one of the few persons ever to lose an election for the committee in my time. This happened when we held our Annual General Meeting in February 1988.

It was my fault really. I transferred from being the EETPU Trades Council delegate to the NUR's in the same week. It sounds a bit shady and probably was. The EETPU had a meeting and sent me packing once I joined the NUR. My new union was short of a Trades Council representative following the resignation of Norman Heaps, their Branch Secretary and long serving delegate.

I'd been elected to the club committee the previous year. But it was constitutional I stood again, being classed as a newcomer. This meant there were six people putting in for five places. Unusually we had to hold an election.

Me, Zafar, Chris Roe and Bert Turner were all elected, with Bert beating Mick by one vote. A few months later we co-opted Mick on to the committee when Chris Roe resigned his position.

I came second in the ballot, one vote behind Zafar. The committee elected him Club Chairman the month previously when Pete Kennett resigned for personal reasons. He never really got over Kevin and him being caught in the bar that fateful night. Pete stuck by us when we needed him, to his credit. He helped our credibility with the labour movement, we lost a lot of support when Frank Smith and Pete Greenwood left the scene.

Pete had suffered from diabetes for a long time and was slowly going blind. He eventually had a foot amputated through the condition, but never complained about it.

I'm not sure why Chris jacked in the committee. Andy said he was going to as well in one meeting. He didn't, thank heavens. There was a lot of bickering over the appointment of Dave Bates as Steward on a permanent basis. This seemed to go on for months.

We tended to turn club committee meetings into verbal battles, usually between me and Lynchy. Yet people didn't seem to understand we were the best of friends.

Maybe the pressure was a bit much for the lads due to their lack of experience as committeemen. We received a lot of criticism, mainly from the Trades Council, saying the club committee was too young. When Chris jacked in our average age soared.

One piece of unfinished business from Frank Smith's term of office was the question of having a juke box in the club. Eventually we came up with the idea of asking the club members what they thought. After all they would be the punters who would be using it.

There was a lot of opposition from the Trades Council, more slagging off about the youthful make-up of the committee. I thought this particularly unfair as I've never worn make-up in my life.

So we threw it back at them, how we weren't afraid of democracy. The members voted slightly in favour of having a juke box, but the ones who did were people who used the club a lot. The ones against the juke box were people who tended to come in the club for meetings and wanted to have a camp afterwards.

Frank had always wanted a juke box and so it seems did the majority of club members. I'd never been too sure of this, but eventually pushed for it.

Ironically the kind we installed was one I actually had a hand in manufacturing. It was a WPA music system, the first firm I started my working life with and who I was still working for when I joined the EETPU and the club. It was like my past coming back to haunt me. In the wall box was a unit I assembled years ago and even had my writing inside on the serial number.

The juke box came from Abbey Leisure, the operating company we used for all the club's amusement machines. I knew the two lads who owned the firm, Derek and Steve, who I remember setting up together. We did most of the business through Steve in person, or one of his engineers when the machines either went wrong or we changed them. I don't think I ever saw Derek since leaving WPA.

One aspect of the juke box poll and AGM election was how it showed what an unconstitutional club we were. As a club committee we were really an elected dictatorship. I could see signs of the founding fathers and mothers here.

Some of our Articles of Association actually contradicted themselves and others were definitely illegal. One stated any profit from the club should not only go to the Trades Council, but the Labour Party too. Luckily not many members seemed bothered about the rulebook. This was a good job too as there were only a few copies available. I had one which I'd 'inherited' from Alf Lloyd.

In this same month of March, Dave Bates' temporary Steward's contract was up. We had to either give him the Steward's job permanently - or fire him.

On the other hand there was the option of another three month temporary contract, but most of the committee didn't see this as fair on Dave, especially as Andrea had been taken on permanently. Another split was looming on the horizon.

By now from our own experience we'd learned not to let differences of opinion get in the way of the common cause. After all if you believe in something you want continuity. Too many people had washed their hands of the club just because they didn't get their way, a bit like the little lad who takes his ball home if he doesn't get a game. I wasn't going to jack in if things didn't go my way at the next committee meeting.

The licencing trade had come into Dave's life due to both parents having their own pubs. After a few years in the Army, Dave followed the family vocation.

Unfortunately he didn't really help himself. His work behind the bar was great, but he tended to join us in our drunken habits on his days off work. This didn't go down well with some people in the club, especially on the committee.

I liked Dave, he was as honest as the day is long and what he did on his days off wasn't relevant to the club, in my opinion. Let's face it; we on the club committee were setting a great example of how not to conduct ourselves. We weren't in any position to slag off anybody's behaviour. But we had the power of life and death in the club. It wasn't fair.

So at the decision making committee meeting Tommy Holden couldn't make it, the jammy get. Me, Big Dave and Chris Roe pushed for Dave to be given the job on a permanent basis. Lynchy, Zaf and Andy were against this proposal. It all rested with Albert, he was undecided.

I managed to persuade Bert, with a bit of brinkmanship, he would be responsible for putting a man in the dole queue if he voted against the proposal to give Dave the job. Bert didn't have the heart of Pontius Pilate and voted our way. Dave got the job.

It was a good job Tommy couldn't make the meeting, he was undecided too. We would have ended up with a compromise, offering Dave another contract for three more months. We couldn't keep putting it off over and over again.

At least we sorted out the Steward's job. Peace then broke out on the club committee and we all started getting on with each other. They even elected me Vice-Chairman.

Everything seemed to be going just great, when we fell out with the Labour Party. This arose from a dispute between Bill Taylor, the local Party Agent, and Andy Marshall. It was over something and nothing really, displaying Labour's election posters in the club's windows in the run up to the forthcoming local elections.

Bill rubbed Andy up the wrong way by assuming in his usual arrogant manner he could just put them up as a matter of course. Andy told him he needed permission from the club committee.

This upset Bill, he took it up through the party procedure and put in a complaint to the Trades Council. This led to us taking stick from all quarters.

I backed Andy because I was fed with everybody taking the club for granted. People felt they had an eternal right to do whatever they wanted with us. Technically Andy was correct, it was on record only trade union related literature could be displayed in the club. But traditionally we always helped the Labour Party out. We just felt they were biting the hand that fed them.

As expected our loyal Trades Council brethren didn't see our side and arranged a meeting to sort things out. The damage had already been done with the Labour Party. They decided, or rather the higher echelons of the party decided to try and set up their own club some time in the future.

We ended up having to apologise to the Labour Party for whatever misunderstanding had been caused. Our attitude was they were a valuable source of income we could well not do without. We needed friends not enemies.

The club committee also alienated some of the Trades Council delegates with our plans to increase our numerical strength to eleven members. What upset people were the three extra places we planned to add to the existing eight Trades Council delegates quota. Those committee members would not need to be from the Trades Council, but ordinary trade unionists who were club members. This idea had been talked about for a while. I think it was Lynchy who came up with it originally.

I had argued against it previously, mainly because there had never been a problem finding enough people to serve on the club committee. Although pulling in a full compliment was another story. Even in '84 we managed to run the place with only six of us, quality was more important than quantity.

Unfortunately I could see the writing on the wall when Chris Roe left us. Mick Howarth's domestic problems soon put paid to his brief spell as a committeeman. But what brought me round to Lynchy's way of thinking was when John Easton, Chairman of the Trades Council, put himself forward as a committeeman.

This was a non-starter almost immediately. John only appeared to come on as a way of keeping an eye on us, naturally causing resentment from the other lads. To make matters worse, he was a lecturer in Sociology at Blackburn College and was looked down upon accordingly. As expected he didn't last long. A few snidey comments did the job of making him feel unwelcome.

It made me decide I'd sooner have members on the committee who cared about the club, rather than Trades Council delegates who weren't prepared to pull their fingers out. Or who thought it was a way of justifying their working class credibility.

There were quite a few line-up changes going on in the club anyway. Andrea jacked in her job as the Assistant Stewardess. She didn't do a bad job for us, her only problem was serving too many 'Preston pints.' This for the uninitiated amongst you is Blackburnese for a short measure. We also used to ask Andrea if the vicar was calling as she gave our pints their large collars.

We decided after Andrea to bring in a bit of maturity and hired Chrissie Cramsie to cover her duties. Caroline Lynch helped us out when she was available.

On the club committee we had the possibility of losing Andy Marshall and Big Dave due to problems affecting their unions. Dave's branch of RUBSSO was a tiny one based locally at Newman's and Feniger & Blackburn. They were considering not re-affiliating to Blackburn Trades Council, leaving Dave high and dry. He wanted the union to merge with the TGWU anyway.

Andy was a victim of the national political scene. There was the possibility of the EETPU being suspended from the TUC as a result of the Wapping debacle.

Losing these two lads was a terrifying prospect. It was fair to say Andy was the brains and driving force behind the success of the club at the moment. We explored all sorts of ways of keeping him on the club committee if his union was expelled from the TUC.

Andy was proud of his union and said his committee membership would be untenable if the inevitable happened. So it looked like we were all victims of the national scene, very sad indeed.

As was the usual case with the club, every cloud had a silver lining. A stroke of good luck came from my new union the NUR. We were in the middle of four one day strikes, restricted to my own S & T Section of the railway.

Like most unions do these days, we lost the dispute. But the good thing to come out of this dispute was BR's hardening attitude towards the railway unions. They increased the price of hiring Blackburn Station's Ambulance Room, where we held our meetings. This went up from a fiver to £25 a year. A move deliberately aimed at making us sling our hook.

This was meat and drink to me and I managed to persuade the NUR to join most of the other unions in Blackburn and meet in the Trades Club. I told them they had a moral duty as a trade union to support the club and they agreed to do just that.

It was a strange one to me why the lads never wanted to meet in the Railway Club. I was a member here, for the bank breaking cost of 6p a week out my wage, although I didn't go in very often. It was ironic the Trades and Railway Clubs were so near each other at either end of Freckleton Street, separated by the River Blakewater. Both clubs had a good case as our meeting's venue.

The main reason the branch didn't want to meet in the Railway Club was many of the lad's dislike of Frank Bond its President. He was a bit of a dictator, but I always got on with him due to him being a keen Rovers fan like me. Frank might have been a dictator, but 'his' club wasn't short of a bob or two. He was the main reason for this, a very shrewd man was Frank.

We could have used this Frank's advice when it came to deciding upon the snooker table instead of the other Frank's. We finally arrived at the conclusion it wasn't going to take off. It had never done much and we ended up calling it 'Frank's big green elephant'.

Our problem was not just the fact we'd never get in a club league because of our ethics on women having the right to play, but where the table was. There was nothing we could do about this. Even playing darts matches and our All Fours and dominoes games in the same room didn't stimulate much interest. It was obvious we weren't a hot bed of snooker.

We decided to install a pool table in the Games room too. After all everybody can play pool and you get a lot more games in than waiting ten minutes for the snooker light to use up 10p.

The Centre for the Unemployed was definitely on its way out, their people wouldn't be getting in our way anymore. Another door had the possibility of opening here. The County Youth service who met in one of the rooms upstairs showed interest in renting the vacant office.

The EETPU did get kicked out the TUC, which meant Andy coming off the club committee. Unfortunately Trades Council Secretary Ian Gallagher was a little zealous in informing the Electricians of the TUC's decision, so they pulled out the club.

I found this particularly annoying, especially since it was me who brought the branch back into the labour movement fold following the incident with Bob Horman. Bob himself didn't want the branch to leave the club either. He said he'd try and pull a few strokes behind the scenes to coax them back. He owed me that for services rendered, like I owed him for getting me an interview with NORWEB, which led to a temporary job.

Not only Andy left the scene. Dave Bates jacked in about the same time, saying he wasn't happy working under Lynchy. Therefore a new Club Steward was needed once more and we had to go through it all again.

The chap we appointed as our new Steward was called Ian. He impressed us at his interview, but that was the one and only time. It soon became apparent we'd picked ourselves a duck egg. Ian wasn't all there, he seemed to have his mind on other things when working behind the bar, to the point of being in a trance.

He was the only man I've ever seen take an order from one person, give their drink to another, then go and ask for payment from someone else. It had to be seen to be believed, unfortunately it really did happen. Most members found it comical at first, after a while it was irritating. I used to try my best to get in before anybody else arrived at opening time. He had difficulty then.

On the bright side, Ian was an accomplished painter. He gave our toilets, quite a bit of the club bar and hallway a spruce-up. He never had any problems finding committeemen to cover the bar while he was painting. Ian could go into his trance then.

It was also a way of saving the club money having him paint. This was because every time he went behind the bar he would smash beer glasses, usually by pushing them too hard into the pump nozzle through too much enthusiasm. If that failed he tended to drop full pints on to the floor on the way to serving the wrong person anyway.

Our current state of incomings and outgoings continued when Big Dave jacked in the club committee. This happened one Sunday morning at a meeting specially called to discipline an Asian lad who had been drunk in the club the week before.

Sunday morning was probably the worse time to have any sort of meetings, especially disciplinary ones. Mainly because we all tended to roll in, still feeling the effects of the previous night.

It was the case on this particular occasion. Dave and Zafar accused each other of not pulling their weight, leading to Dave storming out no.1 room shouting his resignation. Zaf was in the wrong really, he was pissed out his head and was generally over-protective whenever an Asian was up before the club committee.

I think Dave wanted to get away from the committee anyway. With Chris Roe and Andy Marshall gone, there was only me left of his mates still serving. I tended to be a bit of a maverick who went his own way and didn't have any bias who I upset, consequently I expected it back and was often isolated.

A bit of light relief took our minds from all this falling out with each other. The Labour Party contacted us to say Channel 4 wanted to make a documentary about Socialism in Europe with a feature on Barbara Castle, in the Trades Club.

The television crew seemed to spend all day in the club. There were a few reporters from the press and local radio too. The event was stage managed as all political events are these days, but it didn't turn out too badly. Our only problem was the TV people blowing a few fuses because of their equipment's power consumption. I felt I was up and down the ladder changing fuse wire all day.

When I saw the finished programme on telly, there was even a glimpse of me. As everyone expected I could be seen at the back of the Big room, the one with the beard and white tee shirt picking up a pint of bitter for a crafty sneck lift. I'd never met Barbara Castle before in the flesh and was surprised just how tiny she was. She spoke well at the event, even though she must have been around the eighty mark. I was collecting some glasses from her table when she grabbed my arm and asked me how I was. She said she liked it in the club and was Proud Blackburn had this place.

There was a blaze of publicity from the event, with Barbara Castle appearing on the front page of the Lancashire Evening Telegraph and giving an interview to Radio Lancashire. Unfortunately all this publicity was to lead to the club's eventual downfall.



*L- R: Chris Roe, Andrea Walsh, Dave Bates,
John Walmsley and Dave Simpson at GCHQ rally,
Cheltenham 1988.*

CHAPTER EIGHT

The crazy Club Steward

All of a sudden attacks on the club started appearing in the local press. These were saying we weren't paying a reasonable enough rent for the club premises. A Tory councillor called Donald Heatley-Jackson, or some double-barrelled name like they all seem to have, started the bandwagon rolling.

We never had any trouble like this before due to the club having to come down eventually because of the Inner Relief road. Eric Smith used to get the club building rent through with a nod and a wink even from the Conservative and Liberal councillors. Blackburn Council has always been known for its deals between political parties.

For some strange and unexplained reason, Lancashire County Council decided to move the route of the road slightly. Putting it through the Spiritualist church next door and missing the club, leaving us in the middle of the Inner relief road and a dual carriageway either side of us.

This was stupid because the 'Toffee Crisp' people, as we in fun called them, owned their building. Union House was condemned and the property of Blackburn Council who didn't want it anyway. Consequently it was derelict on the top two floors, there had been no point spending money on a building which was coming down.

Heatley-Jackson's ploy was a clever political move in the way it had a dig at the Labour Party meeting in subsidised accommodation paid for by local ratepayers. He also slagged off Jack Straw for sharing the club with organisations like the SWP.

We ended up becoming a political football, the Tory's argument was quite legitimate. They said as it was the case of the club not coming down now, it was worth a commercial income to the Council. We ought to be charged its full market value.

In reality it was a daft suggestion as the top two floors were in no fit state of repair, needing a lot of money spending on them to bring the premises up to standard.

We were doing the Council a favour acting as caretakers. After all we were in Blackburn's red light area, some people would have liked to use our premises for other purposes.

The Labour Party lost their bottle over this issue. Also they still hadn't forgiven us for the election posters fiasco. So they announced to the world their plans to try and push for their own club. This would be a posh place, more of a centre, where meals would be available. There was no way it was going to have an elected committee though. Blackburn Labour Party's higher echelons basically didn't trust their own members, too much working class influence.

They did try to get the defunct Bank Top Working Mens's Club, but lost their bottle here as well and missed out where they shouldn't have done. £100,000 would have got it if they had made a bid. This was peanuts to Jack Straw, the land the club stood on was worth a fortune. All sorts of things could have been done with the site.

A car dealer snapped it up for the measly sum of £70,000. It made me question their determination to get their own place. It showed how well we'd carried them over the years. They knew which side their bread was buttered on.

It must have been a lucky month for us. I persuaded the committee to put pressure on the Whitbread Brewery to up the £3 barrelage they gave us to pay off our write-off loan. They must have liked us as they doubled it to £6 without a qualm.

From talking to people involved in pubs and clubs, especially our Stocktaker Raymond Hacking, it looked like the brewery was having us over a barrel. We were getting only £3 knocked off a barrel compared to some places getting £30. Raymond said there were even pubs which were getting a better deal than us.

I reckoned for a change we could hold a gun against Whitbread's head. After all we only sold their beer and had a run in with them over wanting to sell beer from another brewery.

We were in a position to tell them to sling their hook out of our club due to us doing so well. Hopefully other breweries would fancy their chances of supplying us. I'd heard all sorts of stories of brewers outbidding each other and throwing in sweeteners to get into clubs.

Luckily Whitbread swallowed the bait and agreed to our request. I just wish it could have been a £6 a barrel write off from Day 1. We could have paid them off and acquired our own place years ago. But life is about what might have been.

Ian the new club Steward was becoming a problem. He wasn't getting any better and the complaints were rolling in. He seemed to drift off into trances, then was too easily distracted.

A couple of women started coming in the club at dinner times. This became a problem in itself due to them bringing young children in all the time, one was a baby. The others gave us cause for concern due to the father complaining about their non-attendance at school.

There wasn't a lot we could do here as the two women were both members. Quite a few people complained about the baby being brought into the club, due to the smoky atmosphere. We did draw the line on her bringing it in at night. We thought she was pushing her luck a bit here, during the day fine, but not at night, it wasn't the greatest start to its new life.

Ian got on very well with the two women, a bit too well. They had him nipping to the toilet changing the baby's nappy on one occasion. I remember Jimmy the postman complaining about this, especially when he had to wait for Ian to serve him.

We had a committee meeting due to sort out the staff situation. The three month temporary contracts Ian and Chrissie Cramsie had were both up for renewal about the same time.

Chrissie had done a good job for us when we needed her, so she was taken on permanently. But what had we to do about Ian? This was a tricky one.

The debate was a difficult one. We accepted Ian was keen, hygienic and honest. But he was always in a bloody trance! Also he did crazy things like serving one of the members a pint of pump cleaner, we could have had a death on our hands.

We decided to offer him the job permanently, on condition his work improved. We might as well have talked to the wall. He didn't get any better.

Our prayers were answered again, not bad to say most of us on the committee were either Atheists or Agnostics. One afternoon Zafar was in the bar and noticed the two women were also in, knocking pints of ale back as usual.

Zaf thought it odd how they weren't paying for any. So when he pulled Ian about this, Ian lost his rag with him. Zaf told Ian to get out from behind the bar and leave the premises. He would then arrange a committee meeting to sort out the matter.

Ian was still blazing as he left the bar and picked up a stool with the intention of braining Zaf. Luckily his aim was as good with the stool as it was with his beer glasses and the pump nozzles. He hit the top of the bar surround and the stool fell to the floor, on the way down it unfortunately hit Pete Wharton the journalist, quietly having a pint and doing his pools at the bar end.

Pete was alright, but Ian wasn't because Zaf came from behind the bar and smashed him. Lynchy was working in our office and came in the bar when he heard all the commotion. Zaf was holding Ian down with his foot on his chest.

Ian was told he was fired. On his way out Lynchy made a deal with him. He was still sacked, but we would say his three month contract had finished. He would also forget about his nose being re-arranged by Zaf's right hook. We also agreed to give Ian a reference to anybody daft enough to give him a job. Zaf's fist did our job for us.

One of the first things we did after this incident was to stop children coming in the club on a regular basis and definitely at night. We were in a no-win situation here as the majority of members who brought their children in during the day always kept them under control and were no problem. But as is generally the case, the innocent suffer with the guilty.

The two women at the centre of the incident were barred not long after when they were drunk one afternoon and threatened Chrissie Cramsie. This was yet another case of us getting lucky. A fortnight later they tried to get back in the club one night, so I ended up calling the police to have them ejected when they refused to leave.

It was quite amusing how one of them kept telling the young copper who came how I had no right to sling them out. He thought she was a bit of a nutter, like the rest of us.

The other was even more of one, she fancied Albert. This caused domestic trouble for him as she even called round to his house while his wife was in. Luckily he managed to shake her off. I told him if her husband found out, he'd break her white stick and strangle her guide dog. Unfortunately for Bert, Pauline his wife didn't trust him and came in the club for a bit after this incident.

As well as Albert, other committee members became the focus of attention because of their private lives. Mick Howarth split with his wife and she left him with three children to look after by himself. He soon disappeared from the scene.

Lynchey got done for drunken driving. I was actually in the car with him when he got busted. He was giving me, his wife Caroline and John Walmsley a lift home. We had all had a few, Lynchey also ordered a Chinese meal from a take-away on Darwen Street.

On our way to the Chinese we turned under the railway bridge. I saw a couple of coppers walking down the road approaching the town centre. I told Lynchey to keep on driving, but he wouldn't have it. He got out of his car with a grin on his face.

The coppers pulled him in the Chinese. He took up their offer of a bed for the night. A two year ban followed and a £300 fine for what turned out to be a very expensive Chinese take-away.

With Ian's brief spell as 'Bar Cellarman' over, we had the problem of finding ourselves a replacement. It didn't take us long to find a solution to this. John Walmsley, a man mentioned on many occasions in this book, decided to give it a try.

John, or Walmsley as he is more usually called, worked as a roofer for PGB Roofing next door but one to the club. He started coming in our place during one of the regular closures of the Kings Head, the pub round the corner from the Trades at the bottom of Freckleton Street.

This lusher is reputedly Blackburn's oldest hostelry and a listed building. Unfortunately there was nothing listed about its clientel due to it being situated in Blackburn's red-light district. A lot of prostitutes and their punters tended to frequent the place over the years, along with its fair share of lowlife.

We didn't have this problem due to being a club and having members, even though we were on the same patch. The Kings did have one decent landlord who we had a good relationship with. He was called Maurice Blackburn and very handy when either of us ran out of change or beer. We were forever rolling barrels across the street to each other.

Walmsley had a voice which carried, he also drank far too much, but was honest and probably the hardest worker I've ever come across. His biggest problem is his shakes, this he puts down to falling off a roof he was working on. Nobody believes this, most people put it down to his hobby of excess drinking. This has also given him a weather-beaten face.

Consequently he fancied a change of career, a job inside instead of battling the elements on windswept roofs.

We weren't so sure about Walmsley, but he was really into the club and would do anything for us. He did most building jobs, including replacing windows which we were always having put through. This was usually the work of our political opponents and passing drunks.

So we gave him a three month trial to see if he was as good serving ale as he was supping it. Unexpectedly he didn't do such a bad job for us. Although if you compared him with the last bloke, there was no contest.

Walmsley endeared himself early on. Previous Stewards used to clean the beer pumps during the week, sacrilegiously tipping the residue beer down the sink. Walmsley decided to do the pump cleaning on Sunday mornings. Not a drop was tipped again.

I was the main beneficiary of this, being the only lad on the club committee who drank bitter. I would get a couple of pints from each bitter pump, we had two bitter heads in the club. There were also a couple more in the upstairs bar which were cleaned whenever we had a do on in the Big room. As well as these I supped Guinness and Murphy's too. Some days the wages took me all morning.

Generosity being part of my nature, I used to hand over the odd pint to the other lads who were down, especially as some Sunday mornings I might end up with twelve pints. Usually I supped them all before the club opened at twelve o'clock. This is why I didn't mind missing my Sunday morning lie in.

We had a bit of a problem in March due to the Salman Rushdie Affair. Our Asian members may have had views on this issue, but kept them to themselves. Zaf thought the 'FATWA' was a bit crazy. Besides the vast majority of Muslims in Blackburn were Sunnis, not Shiite Muslims like the Ayatollah Khomeini. But feelings were running high in some parts of the world, even Blackburn.

Literature used to come through the club's letterbox from obscure Islamic groups, we got enough junk mail from crazy Christian groups too. The Jehova's Witnesses were down the road from us and dropped off their stuff occasionally. But religion was generally looked down upon by most club members, especially the politicians like me.

What put the cat amongst the pigeons was the SWP jumping on the band-wagon by setting up a group called 'The Friends of Salman Rushdie.' Unfortunately they dragged us into potential trouble by using the club as the group's address.

Luckily we nipped this in the bud straight away. We expressed our fears of possible vandalism, or even worse to Phil Webster, Blackburn SWP's main man. Phil was very understanding about our concerns and had one of his people write to the Evening Telegraph to say 'The Friends of Salman Rushdie' were not based in the Trades Club. This followed an earlier one they wrote promoting the organisation.

We even received an apology from the SWP for not asking permission to use the club as an address. 'The Friends of Salman Rushdie' never really got off the ground and folded into obscurity, as often happens with well meaning front organisations. The Rushdie affair didn't give us any trouble at all.

Now we had the staffing situation sorted out, everybody was able to take a back seat as far as committee work was concerned. Caroline Lynch was still doing a bit of work behind the bar, but less and less. She and Lynchy were doing degrees at Preston Polytechnic. Walmsley and Chrissie had everything covered.

I was quite busy myself. The Trades Council elected me as the Press and Publicity Officer. Also my influence in the NUR was growing. There was a strike starting to loom on the railway. We held a special meeting in the club about British Rail's proposals to throw out the machinery of negotiation between the unions and management.

The Trades Council itself was doing a bit for a change. We were in the process of organising a 'Trade Union Week,' which would include an exhibition and Quiz night. There was even going to be a play put on called 'Brandon' about one of the unemployment work camps used earlier in the century.

There was a lot of political activity going on in the club because there were two sets of elections in the pipeline. These were for the District Council and the European Parliament.

The Labour Party was holding meetings in the club every Sunday morning. Our only problem was them keep coming into the bar while we were boozing as we did our Sunday morning tasks. This wasn't much of an advert for the club. Jack Straw the MP would keep popping in taking telephone calls while we were downing pints before official licensing hours. We didn't care what he or the rest of them thought anyway, but we still locked the door to keep them out.

Our Annual General Meeting was three months late this year, in June 1989. We had to wait for the books to come back from the Accountant. It wasn't a bad meeting, apart from Zaf's inability to chair it properly. I spent most of the meeting whispering instructions in his ear. His spoken English was never Oxbridge either, so there were a few blank faces in the meeting when he made pronouncements.

Mr. Thompson the Accountant told us the club had made a small loss, we were currently spending £25 a week more than we were pulling in. But we'd paid off most of our write-off loan which wasn't so bad at all.

The only voice of dissent we had in the meeting was Caroline Lynch, she always gave us a hard time, mainly to put Lynchy in his place. Nobody was that bothered anyway. Whoever came up with the idea of giving members attending the AGM two free beer tokens should have been given the Nobel Peace prize, or at least life membership. It gave us on the club committee an easy time.

Bob Horman was very good that night. He wasn't happy about the way the EETPU had been treated by the Trades Council, but saw the club suffering needlessly by them pulling out and meeting in the White Bull in the town centre.

I saw him after in the bar. He suggested a letter to the branch might do the job. I persuaded Lynchy to swallow his pride and drop them a line. It worked, the prodigal union returned to the fold.

Having a dispute with my old union was the last thing I needed. The railway strike did break out after all, we decided to picket Blackburn Station each strike day morning. I made a banner in the club from one of my old bed sheets. It read NUR in big black letters which I made using an old toothbrush and a tin of boot polish.

We had six one day strikes every Wednesday in May and June, we must have been the first union since the Miner's Strike to actually win our dispute with our employers.

During the last couple of weeks of our dispute the town hall workers in NALGO came out on their own strike. This led to the strange sight of two separate picket lines very near each other. Ours outside the railway station, the NALGO one outside the offices on Jubilee Street. It would have made a great picture, but nobody thought about recording the event for posterity.

We settled for a rise of 8.8% which was 2.2% more than British Rail's 'Final Offer'. We also persuaded BR to drop their plans to get rid of the existing machinery of negotiation.

On a personal level my involvement in the strike as the main driving force finally persuaded the branch to hold our meetings in the Trades. Arthur Middlehurst also retired as Branch Chairman and I was elected to the job. At the time of writing I'm still there.

There was a lot of good support from club members who visited us on the picket line, even my dad showed up. People also beeped their horns as they passed us.

I always went back to the club after picket duty. Others went in the Star and Garter or the Railway Club, but only one place got the branch meetings. My only disappointment was the lack of interest from the local labour movement in the railway dispute.

A dock strike broke out at the same time. The Trades Council set up a support group for Fleetwood's few remaining dockers. I was left to drum up support on my own, probably because our strikes were only one day a week.

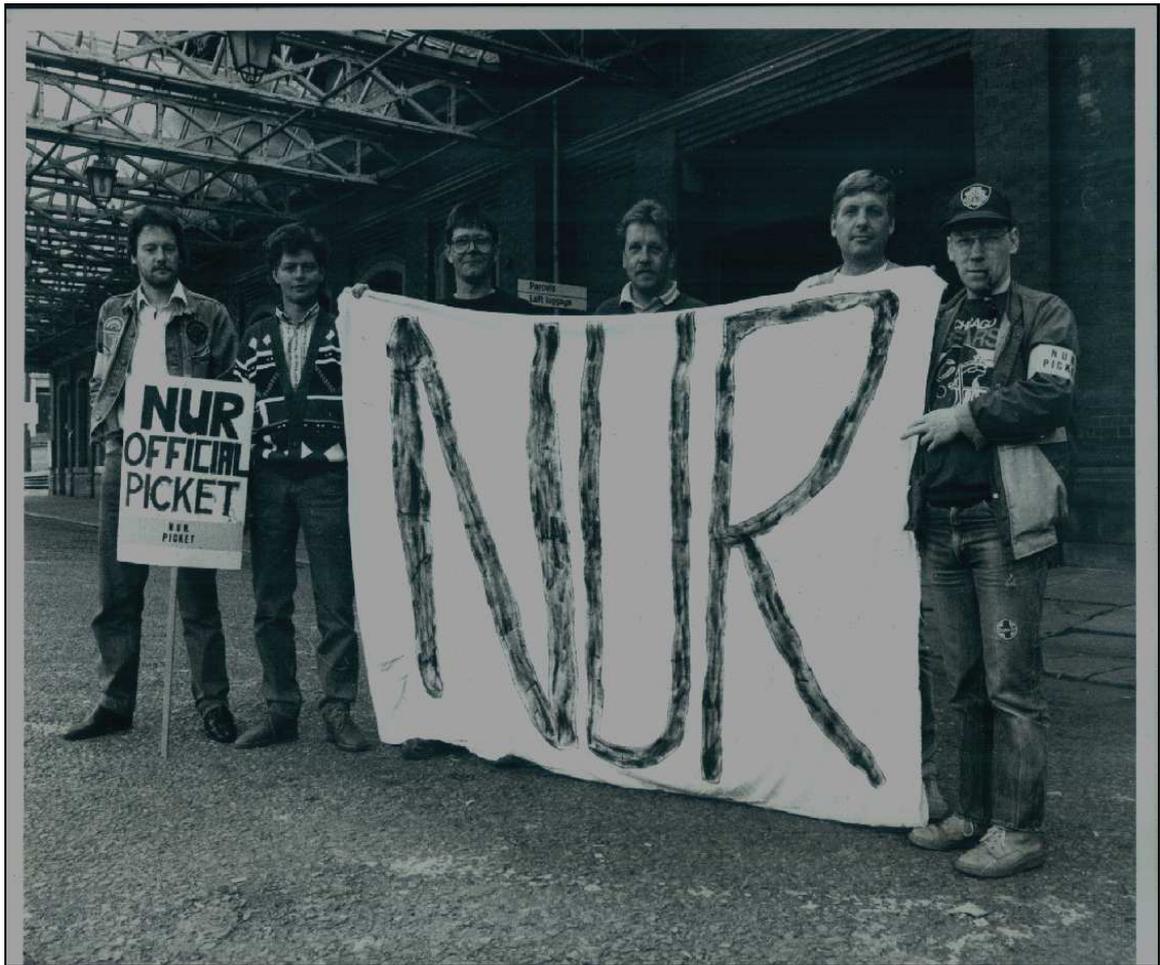
I suppose I did bore everybody with the dispute, I enjoyed the picketing and its comradeship and even wrote a poem called the 'Blackburn Railwaymen'. I gave this the snapper from the Evening Telegraph, but they never printed it because we were frightened of being victimised if we talked to the press. Most importantly, everybody from the railway locally supported the dispute, not one person scabbed on the strike throughout the duration.

THE 1989 RAILWAY STRIKE

*They'll never cross that picket line
They'll never break the strike
Let the gaffer's lackies
Say whate'er they like*

*These men all stick together
The brothers of the track
They've gone too far to give up
This time there's no going back*

*The bosses know they're beaten
A question of just when
They'll never smash the spirit
Of the Blackburn Railwaymen*



Striking railwaymen picketing Blackburn Railway Station in the Summer of 1989. (The author is on the extreme left)

Photograph courtesy of the Lancashire Evening Telegraph

CHAPTER NINE

Straight from the horse's mouth

Back to the mundane business of running the club after all the excitement of the railway strike. We changed our pies from Holland's to a firm called Barry Crowe, based at Garstang. Walmsley influenced us here and turned in a good 'un. The pies from Crowe's were great.

The chap who delivered them was a good lad too. He would let the club members buy their own pies from him and usually brought strings of sausages for sale at knockdown prices. These were full of meat and went down very well with the members. Barry Crowe's increased our pie sales by a large measure.

Unfortunately Walmsley didn't give us much chance of any more bright ideas. He jacked in as Steward not long after. It seems he couldn't divorce his professional life from his private one.

This happened from day one, he would come in the club drunk on his days off, a similar problem to the one we had with Dave Bates. The committee soon began to hear complaints about Walmsley's behaviour.

Eventually he resigned, saying he missed his weekends too much. I was a bit disappointed as his work wasn't so bad. He could handle the bar when the club was busy, even upstairs. And he talked to people. He just preferred life on this side of the bar.

Walmsley was a kind lad, especially to me. He managed to get me on a Manager's course at Whitbread's Salmesbury Brewery. This turned out differently than we expected. Normally these are just a glorified piss-up. The one we went on actually was a course, it even had a video showing a drayman drinking a cup of coffee. This was the first time I'd ever seen a drayman partaking in this kind of sacrilegious activity.

I only got one pint all the time we were at Salmesbury. Walmsley got about three, after I volunteered him to demonstrate changing a cask of ale. I made up for the lack of beer by putting away loads of grub from the generous spread at dinner time.

Most of the others on the course must have expected a good sneek lift like me and Walmsley and couldn't contain their disappointment. One of the lads even drank the contents of a faulty sample bottle of incorrectly fermented beer.

And so Walmsley was back to this side of the bar, helping the cash till jingle even more. This meant once again we had the problem of covering the bar.

We were helped out in the short term by Caroline Lynch on her days off from the Polytechnic. As a student she didn't pay tax, so could put in as many hours as Chrissie Cramsie. The lads on the club committee covered the rest of the hours.

There was a new addition to our number when John Cramsie joined us. He transferred his union membership from Manchester NATFHE to our area. It meant he could go on the Trades Council and the club committee.

It was an oddball situation now where all three staff members were married to members of the club committee. All three of them had names beginning with 'C' as well, but that's irrelevant. The situation may have been a bit dodgy when it came to the wage round. They wouldn't need to go on strike, just deny their husbands nocturnal services.

John Cramsie, or Cramsie as everybody calls him behind his back, had become a friend of mine over the years. I met him through Chrissie back in the Militant days. He's as generous a bloke as I've ever met. For every fiver he spent in the club, £3 would go on himself and the rest on other people. He shattered the myth of the jocks being tight-fisted.

Cramsie's problem was of there not being enough hours in the night. I've spent many a happy hour burning the midnight oil with him after time in the club, or back at his place with him and Chrissie. I was even sick in his car once, but it didn't stop him giving me a lift home. He hadn't been drinking, I obviously had.

Another good thing about Cramsie was his ability to volunteer for things. So we stuck him with the Treasurer's job. Unfortunately he couldn't get out of bed on Sunday mornings after a heavy session. This earned him the nickname of 'Count Dracula'.

As so often happens, we entered a time of change yet again. Quite a few good ideas came along. Whitbread encouraged us to sell Murphy's Stout in the club and it went down very well.

This was helped by us using their promotion of a couple of barrels and selling it at 50p a pint. The offer didn't last long, selling out in two days. We were pleased about this, especially as the Irish dos on Sunday nights were going from strength to strength. Having both of the Emerald Isle's famous stouts available in the club couldn't do us any harm at all.

Another good idea which we put into practice was to start a racing nap for Saturday afternoons. Lynchy came up with this suggestion. He was a member of Audley Workmen's Club where this activity was used successfully. A lot of our members were into racing anyway, so we gave it a go.

The plan was to get twenty club members putting 50p a week in a pool for ten weeks. This would make a total pot of £100. At the end of the ten week period the most successful tipster in profit terms would win £75; second place received £20 and third place a fiver.

One or two members suggested different permutations, i.e. a fourth place. But we thought we'd see how it went down first. Eventually we followed this course of action and brought a fourth place in.

This new activity in the club gave me a chance to exercise my embryo journalistic and humorous writing skills. I did this by knocking up a column each week alongside the league table of how people performed. I made fun of anybody who had a win and anything else I could think of.

A lot of members told me this was what raised interest in the nap and got it off the ground. Everybody found it funny, giving me a lot of self-confidence and discipline to write stuff.

CLUB NAP

P Wharton	+6
I Douglas	+0.25
J Duxbury	+0.25
N Riley	+0.25
J Shannon	+0.25
J Walmsley	+0.25
W Fletcher	-1
A Turner	-1.444
R Atkinson	-3
C Cramsie	-3
G Duckworth	-3
P Eccles	-3
M Kelly	-3
M Leaver	-3
C Lynch	-3
J Lynch	-3
M Lynch	-3
I McClure	-3
K McClure	-3
T McDonald	-3
M Pickup	-3
J Riley	-3
M Small	-3
P Walker	-3

WEEK 3

The Clark Kent of the club stopped being a mild mannered reporter and became Superman, powering his way to the top of the nap. So Pete the Hack is definitely back.

The beer must be flowing down Wensley Fold as Irene and Josie both had winners too. Just to show the girls from the gasworks haven't run out of steam.

We have one hell of a battle for second spot now, a real tight squeeze, with five people all on the same score acneing for position.

But this week belongs to Pete the Tabloid Android. He reckons it's good news. But there are still seven more weeks to go before he meets his deadline. Anything can happen and probably will.

I'd been doing a pretty good job as Press & Publicity Officer on the Trades Council and got a kick from seeing my work in the local paper, especially when my name was mentioned. I'd reached the point where all my press releases were being published.

The racing column was going down well so I was very pleased with myself. Lots of club members asked about joining the next nap. The main thing is it did the job and boosted Saturday afternoons. Everyone was into racing now, including me.

My problem was not having a clue about the sport of kings. The funny thing was all the so-called racing experts in the club didn't exactly rise like cream from the milk either. It was the usual case of only hearing about their winning when it happened and silence the rest of the time.

It was quite fitting our winner of the first nap should be Lynchy. His idea gained him £75, I slagged him off accordingly in my racing column. This was one of his better ideas. He didn't have many, but this one worked.

A problem was looming on the horizon in the summer of 1989. It was our perennial one of staffing. Caroline was going back to college to carry on with her degree. Lynchy was already there and the rest of us were all working. So we needed an extra hand.

Our confidence was a bit lacking when we discussed this situation. For some reason we seemed to be jinxed, or thought we were when it came to hiring staff. We decided to advertise in the job centre yet again and see what happened this time.

We received two replies to our advert and arranged a night for the applicants to visit the club and be interviewed. The position was advertised as part-time, but more hours would be available.

On the night one of the applicants didn't even show up. Luckily the other did. She was a little Scottish lass called Margaret Small, her name was very fitting. Her dress sense wasn't, she wore a pair of ripped jeans, not something many applicants wear at job interviews.

Margaret seemed a bit shy, but alright and was offered the job, which she accepted. My only qualm was her appearance, although I was one to talk, always in my oily railway overalls which I refused to wash because of my own private dispute with British Rail.

I didn't see why I should wash them myself and not receive laundry money like other workers.

She looked a bit boyish, definitely a lesbian. I wasn't bothered about that, she couldn't do a worse job than some of the characters we'd had behind our bar.

I was right too, she turned out to be pretty good at her job. Maggi knew how to look after the bar, having been on a Thwaites' course while living in a pub in Ingleton. She was a bit shy and didn't say much, but I was quite pleased with her.

Every silver lining has a cloud and Maggi's was her mates. She was a lesbian, that was no problem, but some of the girls who came in to see her were. A couple of them came in pissed up and swearing in the bar, one or two members complained about the language. This meant we had a delicate problem to sort out. Out was where we wanted them. As usual I was given the task of doing the job.

It was Lynchy who told me about Maggi's mates and we had a camp over how I would pull her. The best way would be at dinner time before any of the members came in, then a quiet word.

So that's what I planned on doing, she was behind the bar next day. I went in on my usual railway dinner time. Luckily I was in early, before Wilf and Billy, the ever present dinner time lads.

Maggi was bottling up when I asked her if I could have a quiet word in the Games room. She was a bit cagey at first, she probably never had a dirty oily railwayman asking her to come somewhere with him. When I told her what I wanted to discuss, she was very understanding.

I said to Maggi: "Margaret the club committee don't give a damn about the colour, religion or sexuality of who comes in the club, but our members aren't as broad-minded as the committee."

"Everybody to their own," answered Maggi.

"You're absolutely right, but I want you to see it from our side. I want you to think about the club. You know yourself how ignorance can spread like wildfire.

"Please try and bear with us. We think you're doing a great job and we like you." I said to her.

"It's nothing I haven't seen before," Maggi sighed.

Maggi was very good about what I'd said. It must have sounded odd to her, working in a club which claimed to promote equal rights and Socialism. Maybe we were ahead of our time.

She said she would keep her mates under control in future. We never had any more problems with them and Maggi settled into her job. She became very popular and nobody gave a damn about her sexuality.

The funny thing was quite a few of the lads in the club fancied her. Her partner Mo realised this, but she wasn't the type you got on the wrong side of. So Maggi was left well alone.

After my quiet word with Maggi, I called at the Lynch's house on the way home from work and told them 'Mission accomplished.'

Caroline remarked over how I was always given the dirty jobs. Lynchy was just relieved, he was expecting a few snidey comments from certain people. We decided to put the word round where anybody who insulted Maggi over her sexuality would be barred from the club.

I was very pleased with myself that night. Caroline made my tea at the Lynch's and I ended up drinking some of their home-brew beer too.

Gradually me and Lynchy were beginning to run the club together, ever since Andy Marshall left the committee. This also came about through other circumstances. Tommy Holden had taken voluntary redundancy from his painting job with the council. He saw retirement as a winding down process, which included his role on the Trades Council and club committee. He reckoned he'd done his wack and he was right.

Zafar was the other factor. He was starting to come into the club the worse for drink and losing his temper. He was probably frustrated about not living up to his expectations as Club Chairman. He indicated it was his intention not to stand for the position again.

This left the door open for me, like it should have done in the first place when Pete Kennett jacked in. Zaf should have been a lot more influential than he was, but it wasn't to be. He was developing a drink problem and not coming in the club as often.

For some reason the club's Asian members didn't associate with him either. This was a bit unfair because he'd always stuck up for the lads and encouraged them to join in the club's activities.

On the positive side of the club committee, John Cramsie did a pretty good job for us. His influence within the Labour Party was useful, he was a local councillor in Bank Top ward. It was handy when we came round to making a new deal with the Party over the terms of their rent in the club.

We heard Jack Straw the MP had recently taken out the services of a surveyor to assess what was a reasonable rent for his section of the club. We heard nothing from this, which told us we were obviously charging him a reasonable amount compared to his parliamentary colleagues.

Jack is well known for being careful with his money, his neo-nazi opponents put this down to his Jewish ancestry. It was also obvious the Labour Party's plans for their own club had hit stony ground and needed more planning than originally thought. Quite a few party members blamed Jack for not coming up with the money when Bank Top Club became available.

One idea I had in the club was to put up a list on the notice board of members who owed subs once the deadline for paying them had passed. Jack Straw tended to be a late payer, as expected because he was all over the country in his capacity as an MP. I just happened to mention this one night when Phil Riley the Party Secretary was in the club before a meeting.

Phil's hand went straight into his pocket like a rat up a drainpipe to pull out the couple of quid for Jack's membership. After Phil left I noticed he hadn't paid his own, but that wouldn't have bothered him, he hated the club.

Cramsie also brought a computer into the club which we installed in our office. I had a go on it myself, but had a lot to learn when it came to the age of technology.

It wasn't all one way with Cramsie though, he gained a dog from the club and a one legged chicken which he rescued from the road nearby. It didn't last long and died soon afterwards. The dog fared better. It was a stray which the Cramsie's christened Paddy because it was found one Monday morning after an Irish night.

An interesting problem arose which had been perplexing us for a long time. The club had begun to develop a good relationship with the SWP, especially since the Salman Rushdie Affair. They went out of their way to be respectful to us since the 'Friends' cock-up.

One of the things they did so as not to cause trouble for the club was to hold their special meetings in the public library. These were the ones open to the public, mainly as a way of recruiting new members to their organisation.

This was also the one they would advertise by fly-posting all over the town centre. They held this meeting in the library so there would be no comeback on the club due to the illegal nature of this form of advertising.

It became noticeable to us on the committee how we were missing out on a good night's takings with the SWP away from the club once a month. Love them or hate them, they were a good bunch of sneek lifters in the East Lancs branch.

We also thought it unfair how Blackburn Council had threatened us with legal action because previous SWP posters had named the club as their meeting's venue.

In our eyes it seemed reasonable if the public library could get away with allowing the SWP to meet on their premises and not be prosecuted, then why shouldn't we? So we gave them permission to start holding their public meetings in the club, fly-posting and all.

This went down very well with the SWP, even more so with our cash register. But it didn't take long before noises started emanating from the town hall. We ended up having to stop their public meetings again.

We never seemed to get justice from the council. After all Blackburn town centre is full of posters advertising groups playing at King George's Hall. But you wouldn't expect them to prosecute themselves in this case. The library is owned by the County Council and the same nepotistic rule looks to apply here too.

Really the club was an easy target, or maybe one or two Labour councillors didn't like the building where their party met and the MP had his office being associated with rival political parties. But it was all right for Blackburn Library to take the SWP's room rental and for us to have a quiet night once a month.

We could have used a bit of money from the SWP as our club bandit decided to come out in solidarity with them and become a Socialist. For some reason it developed a defect which started making it pay out more money than was being put in by the punters. Over a three week period we had to keep filling up the coin tubes with money from behind the bar.

The bandit was a new model which we used to replace an unpopular one the members had gradually stopped playing. They were given a good return on their investment this time. We reckoned the bandit cost us £530 of the club's money. We ended up inviting Abbey Leisure, the operating firm's director, Steve Robinson to a committee meeting.

I've known Steve for a long time, from my first job, he's a reasonable bloke. He offered us the use of the latest 'state of the art' bandits for a month or two so we could recoup our losses. We also made a deal where we installed a pool table in the club on a 50/50 basis. We had the option of purchase if successful and we readily agreed Steve's terms.

It didn't take long to pull the loot back. This was down to us opening all day on Saturdays, now the option was available. We decided to try an inducement to keep people in the club from four till seven o'clock.

This was done by dropping the price of a pint by 20p for these three hours. It did the job, maybe a bit too well. As usual there was always somebody willing to abuse it and a few people used to order three or four pints at five to seven, all progress has its price.

Not everybody was on their best behaviour as the evening went on, but we pulled the money over the bar. Controlling the swearing on some Saturday afternoons was a problem mainly due to the bar usually being run by one of the committee lads. I wouldn't put up with it when I occasionally covered the bar. Not everybody was as strict as me.

Maggi seemed pretty good at handling people. Being female and tiny was quite an asset in calming situations down. She slotted into the club very well indeed.

Our other Scottish import, John Cramsie, did a good job for us with the telephone. He managed to get a better line rental deal with one of the new firms which set up after British Telecom was privatised.

Like everyone else in the movement, I was against the practice, but there was no point in looking a gift horse in the mouth. We had a good think about it first though.

With the staff situation sorted out, Maggi ended up doing the job of Steward near enough full time. She was able to work over thirty hours every week, this suited her and us. It also gave us the chance to look at other aspects of the club.

One or two members wanted to start up a sports and social committee. This was a follow up to the success of the racing nap. Bob Atkinson and John Walmsley were the leading lights behind this idea. Bob used to be the Secretary of the ill fated Bank Top Workingmen's Club. He slightly resented not being able to come on our club committee because he'd let his trade union membership lapse.

Our attitude to a sports and social committee was to encourage it. Why should we be the ones who had to come up with all the bright ideas in the club. It would also be a handy way of taking weight off us when it came to selling raffle tickets, or going round with a football card.

The only thing I could see on the horizon was the possibility of the sports and social committee being dominated by one or a couple of people who would end up doing all the work, then get fed up with it.

We ended up trying to test the water to see whether enough people did want a sports and social committee. This was done through what was now becoming our usual way of gauging opinion. We put a notice up on the board asking anybody interested to put their name forward.

If possible it would be totally independent of the club committee, but there was no reason why we couldn't help financially to set it up. And perhaps one of us could join their steering group. Tommy Holden was the obvious candidate here. He was on the Blackburn All Fours League committee and seemed to like things like this.

The result of our survey showed about a dozen members had put their names forward for a sports and social committee. I could see from the list about half a dozen of the signatories might do a bit. Whenever something like this arose, people would put themselves forward for lots of different reasons.

There would be the kind who volunteer for everything and signed every petition put in front of them. Others who had been cajoled into it by somebody else who was keener, but weren't really interested. We also got the recalcitrant types who wanted to have a go at the club committee and saw this as a rival organisation.

And finally there were the members who were never much use. The first sign of having to do a bit of work usually made them sling their hooks. In a club like ours there were always plenty of critics, I saw them as a balance, they kept me on my toes.

The sports and social, or sub-committee as it became known, started out as a good idea. Unfortunately it became the disaster I forecast it would be. The members who put their names forward were John Walmsley, Ian Jones, Mary Leaver, Bob Atkinson and Paul Wignall. Tommy Holden was supposed to be involved, but he'd done a disappearing act. So it was open to any of us on the club committee. I made sure it wasn't going to be me.

They were a motley collection of characters. Mary was a councillor in my Queens Park Ward and Bob was the old Secretary of the old Bank Top Club. Walmsley was all right when we weren't barring him from the club for his drunken antics. His heart was in the right place though.

Ian and Paul used to work in the Elma Yerburch pub and 'Last Resort' night-club down the road. Ian also worked with the rest of the lads up at the hospital. He had a fetish for older women, old like their fifties and sixties. He was only in his early twenties.

Walmsley and Ian Jones ended up dominating the organisation. Some good ideas came out of it: A tote was started and there was talk of running a trip to Bolton Greyhounds. Sometimes sub-committee members would even go round with a football card and raise a bit of money.

It didn't take long before things started to go wrong. Walmsley and Ian had already proved themselves a partnership on a par with Laurel and Hardy by losing Ian's driving licence.

This happened when Walmsley got himself drunk and incapable down the club one night. Ian who was over the limit decided to give him a lift home in his car. Getting Walmsley to his flat must have proved a difficult job.

One of his neighbours thought he was being beaten up and phoned the police. So instead of Walmsley being done for drunk and incapable, Ian was breathalised and lost his licence instead.

After the experience of Lynchy and his Chinese take-away, now Ian and his Queens Park positive reading, not many people offered Walmsley a lift home any more. They say lightening doesn't strike twice, anything is possible with Walmsley.

The sports and social committee went horribly into debt by well over £70. I looked upon this fiasco as a useful lesson. It also showed the club members it isn't easy taking things upon themselves and showing responsibility. £70 was a cheap price to find that out.

It was also a cheap way of finding out a lot of people wanted something for nothing without putting anything in to it, leaving the work for somebody else. This sounds like the story of the labour movement, certainly the Trades Club.



Maggi Small (looking at camera) behind the club bar

CHAPTER TEN

Day of the Jackass

On December 27th 1989, I was finally elected Chairman of the club committee. This was a pleasing day for me, but should have happened when Pete Greenwood finished with us. Now with Lynchy as Secretary and me the Chairman, we were the dominant force in the Trades Club, officially.

We had a few battles on the committee over the years, but became the best of friends and still are. At this time we'd reached the point where we ran the club over a glass of beer in the bar, whoever won the argument had his way with the committee.

A couple of days later we had an unusual visit to the club. Three members of the committee: Zafar, Lynchy and Bert all worked up at Queens Park Hospital. Worked is a debatable word as they seemed to spend most of their time off on the sick, or in the club during their break times.

One week all three of them were off sick. Somebody must have tipped off their gaffers at work where they spent most of their time when they were not at home with their wives and families.

This particular dinner time Bert was in the club with little Zoe, his daughter, pint in hand as usual. All of a sudden two women came in and sat next to him. They were both smartly dressed so I thought they couldn't be with him, surely!

It turned out they were both managers from the hospital and had come down the club to try their luck at catching one or all of the lads who were on the sick from there.

Bert was unlucky, so were the two managers. If they had come down the day before they would have nabbed not only Bert, but Lynchy and Zaf and found another hospital club member called Graham who was also on the sick.

To make matters worse Graham was working behind the bar - for nothing though - He wanted to learn a bit about bar work.

I asserted my authority as Club Chairman and adopted the stance of the managers having no right to enter the club building. We were a private member's-only club and as far as we were concerned, they had trespassed upon our premises.

At the time they entered the club, I was having a drink with Pete, the journalist. Together we knocked up a letter of complaint to the Chairman of the local Health Authority, David Kenny.

I signed it in my capacity as Club Chairman. It wasn't really appropriate for Lynchy to sign it as Secretary for obvious reasons. His bosses might have asked him if he was on the sick when he wrote the letter. It was pushing our luck a bit too much.

As well as writing the letter, I decided to make as big a stink as possible about the incident. I brought it up at the next Trades Council meeting and at the Labour Party General Management Committee held the week after.

It did the job. I received a nice, almost grovelling letter from David Kenny apologising for the incident and saying it wouldn't happen again. Bert took it up with his union, NUPE, but jacked his job in not long after. He had a go at taxi driving, but didn't last long in his new career.

After the 'Health Snooper's Affair' we were back to the hectic task of running the club over the Xmas and New Year period. The club did particularly well over this period. Our biggest problem was not having enough staff available to cover the bar. This was because our two jocks made their annual pilgrimage north of the border to seek out Auld Acquaintances.

Chrissie did us a good favour here by getting one of her college mates to do some bar coverage for us. She was called Ronnie, short for Veronica, who was at the Poly with Chrissie. Ronnie did New Year's Eve for us, no mean feat as it was one of the busiest nights of the year in the club.

I had met Ronnie before. She occasionally came in the club with her companion, Gordon. He was an ex-Tory councillor from Accrington who must have had a 'Road to Damascus' conversion to Socialism like me.

Two big disputes were rumbling around the end of the year. One was the engineering union's campaign for a 35 Hour Week. This had been building up through a selective strike campaign. Only the Preston plant of British Aerospace was affected round here.

For a change the unions didn't need any help as they were being financed by a national levy. We did our bit where we could. I was the experienced striker so knocked up a poster in answer to the scab helpline BAe advertised in the local press.

My poster was a bit of a childish effort, but a few people liked it when I put it on the club notice board. The idea was to encourage people to ring in and jam the switchboard with stupid requests thereby causing havoc to the service and making it unworkable. Examples of this would be to ask if they knew what the times of the trains were to Blackpool, or improper suggestions to the switchboard operators.

The dispute which caught everybody's imagination though was the one involving the Ambulance workers. This was the club's finest hour, maybe even mine.

I'd been Press & Publicity officer for the Trades Council a couple of years and managed a reasonable coverage from the local papers and radio station. When the Ambulance Dispute broke out the Telegraph printed everything I sent them. They even phoned me up in the club on my dinner times asking for whatever information there was locally and what the Trades Council was going to do next.

I used to stand with the Ambulancemen and women when we held street collections for them on Ainsworth Street in the town centre. I would roar my head off, urging people to put their hands in their pockets and put money in the bucket. I was helped in this way by being blessed with a very deep voice which almost sounds like a fog-horn when I turn the volume up.

No other dispute ever produced such a reaction from the public. One Saturday morning we collected nearly £1,200. When we stood with the miners during their strike, people used to give the lads and us more abuse than loose change. The club did a lot for the Ambulance workers. We put on the bar what was now our familiar collection bucket. This pulled in a few hundred pounds while the dispute was on

We also put on a do for them which raised a shilling or two as well. It was almost a shame to see this dispute come to an end. Everybody pulled together to help out on this one, including Joe Public.

On the committee front, we had a couple of personnel problems. Tommy Holden hadn't been seen for a while. As usual I got my assessment wrong. I thought once Tommy retired he'd never be out the club. Now he was never in it. I think retirement applied across the board for Tommy. He'd been a good committeeman though, so I thought I'd better let sleeping dogs lie.

Albert was the other problem, he'd finished at the hospital and so his NUPE membership came to an end. Normally I'd have slung him off the committee as fast as I could kick him up his arse, but with Tommy doing a disappearing act we were a bit thin on the ground at the moment.

Our solution was to let Bert stay on until the Annual General Meeting. He said he was joining the TGWU in the near future anyway as he was now a taxi driver. Our other solution was to go ahead with letting ordinary members join the club committee. Lynchy wanted this, I wasn't so sure, but it was Hobson's choice now.

I brought up our plans for the club committee at the next Trades Council meeting to test the water. Surprisingly we ended up catching a fish. Sybil Williams put her name forward for the committee, so we ended up co-opting her to our number.

Sybil had a habit of landing in my net. I once did a report to my NUR branch about the Trades Council always asking for people to put themselves forward as magistrates. For some reason two of my branch members: Derek Riddeough and Nick Mawson asked to be nominated.

So at the next Trades Council meeting I nominated them to go forward to the Duchy of Lancaster magistrate's production line. Sybil who was also in the meeting said she fancied becoming one too. So I nominated her from the floor. Ian Gallagher the Secretary sent off all three names and I forgot about it.

To my surprise we had a mixed response. The two lads from my union were knocked back. Derek was too old, Nick too left wing, according to the personal profile he sent in.

Sybil was accepted. I put this down to some kind of tokenism due to her being Afro-Caribbean and a woman. The good thing was it showed our organisation was being taken seriously by the establishment.

The most paradoxical thing about Sybil becoming a magistrate was me actually appearing before her a couple of years later, when the Poll Tax was introduced. This happened on a couple of occasions and is probably the biggest irony of both our lives.

It's a bit like the American electrician who installed the electric chair in one of his country's prisons and was executed on his own piece of handiwork not long after.

Sybil is a lovely person. I met her through the Cramsies and have been to a few parties at her house, crashing out on her settee on more than one occasion. She brought up six children on her own, but still managed to be a good trade unionist and political activist.

The only trouble was the club committee not being her cup of tea. This was because she worked such funny hours in her job as a home help and had difficulty attending our meetings. It made her feel she was being kept in the dark over inner workings of club business. This was no more than the rest of them had to put up with.

When she was selected to become a magistrate, a nice piece appeared about it in the Evening Telegraph emphasising her being Blackburn's first West Indian holder of the position. The article was in the paper's 'Friday Folk' section, entitled 'Sunshine Sybil.' This was a cause of much merriment and wisecracking, especially from me. Sybil took it all in fun as she always did.

Around this time Blackburn Trades Council held an exhibition in the local museum. Ian Gallagher the Secretary was the leading light and main contributor to this event. He also wrote a booklet to accompany the exhibition.

It turned out 1989 was our centenary. Ian's booklet covered trade unionism in Blackburn from 1880 to 1939. This definitely leaves scope for a further contribution some time in the future.

There was some dispute about whether we were celebrating the correct year. Everything seems to have been shrouded by the mists of time. Blackburn Trades Council was supposed to have been formed in 1889 and Darwen's the year after.

Some years later they merged. 1990 was chosen because the organisation was now Blackburn and District Trades Council and the museum wasn't available in 1989.

I found out to my amusement the first Secretary of Blackburn Trades Council was a railwayman, like myself at the time. The only problem was he absconded to Australia with all the Trades Council's money, never to be seen again.

The exhibition was a good one. I visited it myself and found it very interesting. The success of the event spawned the idea of the club setting up some kind of permanent display of trade unionism in Blackburn over the years. We decided to write off to different unions for mementos and build up our collection of memorabilia.

One thing which wasn't going to be permanent in the club was the Labour Party. They announced in public their intention to one day acquire their own centre. From their experiences with us it sounded like they didn't want it to be a social club.

They certainly didn't want a democratic club committee. Some of the Party's higher echelons got together and formed a steering committee, behind closed doors.



Chrissie Cramsie (left) and Sybil Williams

A few of us involved in the club tried to find out what was going on, but it was very cloak and dagger. Even party members were kept in the dark.

We felt betrayed, so decided we wouldn't go out of our way for what could become a potential competitor. There was no way a town the size of Blackburn could sustain two labour movement clubs. We had plenty of difficulty keeping one going.

We were in dispute with the Labour Party at the time anyway. The MP Jack Straw was a notoriously late payer when it came to settling the rent for his office in the club. It was only a measly £18 a week and the Party had loads of free meetings thrown in, along with free gas and electricity.

They were having us on the soft. What kind of rental would Jack's Westminster colleagues have been paying in their constituencies, especially the London members? We put Cramsie on the job to have a word with him and the rest of his hangers-on (known as Jackasses).

The Party had always managed to get a good deal from us due to the traditional link between Labour and the trade unions. This was no exception even at club committee level. Everybody on the committee, bar Albert, was a Labour Party member. Cramsie was a Labour councillor and I was Secretary of the ward where I lived in Queens Park.

Perhaps this was why we felt we were being stabbed in the back over the club. The attitude of Blackburn Labour Party's establishment is: "If we don't run it, nobody runs it."

Yet the daft thing is it was the Eric Smiths and Frank Gortons of this world who almost shut the club within two years of it opening. A little gnome having to creep round to Zaf's house to hand the club keys over then steal away into the night. At least we'd managed two years longer than them.

Maybe blowing our own trumpet wasn't such a good idea as we were later to find out. The Accountant informed us we'd made a trading loss of between £2 - 3,000. But he didn't think it was a bad performance in view of the year's beer price increases.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer must have shut down more pubs and clubs in the last year than at any other time in history. First we had a 3p rise slapped on us, this was followed later in the year by a massive 6p increase.

It meant the death of Bank Top Club, amongst other things. Our loss wasn't too bad as we continued paying off our write-off loan to Whitbread through our barrelage discount.

We had a better deal from them now and we continued spending money in the club on decorations and electrical goods such as a new freezer and microwave oven. But the figures still needed watching.

Losing the Centre for the Unemployed did deprive us of rental income, but there was good news on the horizon here.

A lady called Dianne Webster approached us about renting the office the Centre for the Unemployed recently vacated. She was one of the 'Toffee Crisp' people who attended the Spiritualist Church next door to the club and saw our office as just what she required.

On the bonus side, she decorated the office herself and started doing our books for us. She was pleased to pay £20 for the facility and even replaced the windows which were in need of attention. This meant the club would pull in another £1,000 a year rental.

As another way of making money for the club, we decided to increase the price of hiring meeting rooms by £1 across the board. It was the first rise of this sort in something like four years.

We thought it was a fair for a couple of reasons. Our main one was the sheer cheapness of our rental charges. Most organisations were paying us direct from their head offices, especially the larger trade unions. Our prices were probably as cheap as anyone's.

The other reason for putting up room rental prices was because it wouldn't hit members of the club, yet still pull in money. What used to irritate me more than anything was people taking advantage of the club's cheap facilities and not spending money over the bar.

It wasn't a big thing to spend a few pence on a soft drink, but a lot of people were too selfish to bother about what kept the price of meetings down. There used to be whole Labour Party wards and union branches such as UCATT and a couple from the AEUW, who went straight upstairs to their meetings. The only clue to their presence was a couple of overflowing ash trays.

Even the Trades Council was a bit like one of these hidden species. Delegates would come up to me each year with their club membership subs, say what a good job we were doing, then go and sit down without even buying a drink. It used to bug me.

At least the two unions I'd been involved with weren't like that. Both the EETPU and the NUR members were good at troughing their ale. If every branch had been like these two, our club would have been the richest in Blackburn.

Another way of increasing sales was Zafar going on the sick again. He was unlucky to the point of being accident prone, but it had its compensations, which he managed to get his hands on when he wasn't injuring them. Quite a few of these were settled very favourably. Zaf must have had the most valuable wrist, ankle and elbow in Blackburn.

In a way it was only fair on Zaf as he'd had his share of ill luck too. The worst example of this was when he went to visit his folks in Pakistan during the early '70s. Just in time for the war between this country and its Indian neighbour.

Zaf had no sooner arrived in Pakistan, when he was immediately drafted into the said country's army. He was slightly wounded in what started out as a three week visit that turned into three months. He didn't get any compensation for this accident.

Albert was a bit jealous of Zaf and his compensation claims. One day he asked Lynchy to hit him on his fingers with an ash tray then blame it on a works accident. Lynchy did this, but missed, leaving Bert in excruciating pain and with perfectly functional digits. This may have been the last straw which made him jack in his job at the hospital. His only compensation was leaving a job he hated.

After a lot of discussion we finally decided to move the pool table from the Games room into the bar. I was against this at first, to me the Games room should have been just that, but succumbed to Lynchy's gentle persuasion and nagging.

We didn't look back. Abbey Leisure gave us the option of buying the pool table, which we did. It paid for itself within three months.

As for the snooker table, this was money wasted. We were definitely not a snooker club. The Games Room became used for large meetings more often, the snooker table was nothing more than a

facility used once in a while. It barely paid for itself. When the Annual General Meeting came round again, nobody even mentioned the Games room.

Five of us were elected to the club committee 'en bloc' as usual. They included me, Zafar, Sybil, Cramsie and Walmsley. The latter had graduated from the sports and social committee and was the second ex-Steward to join us. Nobody nominated Tommy Holden as he hadn't been seen for ages. Albert wasn't either, he had come off the Trades Council since finishing at the hospital.

The meeting itself didn't go too badly. We received our usual stick off Caroline Lynch. She had a dig at the club committee guzzling beer on Sunday mornings during pump cleaning. But not too much was made of this. She suggested we pay for what we consumed.

I said if it made her happy we would tip the lot down the sink. I was lying too, none of the other lads would have come on a Sunday if this became the rule. Besides I never got her wage wrong at all.

The most pressing thing to most of the members present was increasing the number of beer tokens given out for attending the AGM. The most important issue to come out of the meeting was our decision to push for trade unionists not on the Trades Council to be allowed to join the club committee.

We decided to go ahead with this following the lack of interest from our so-called parent body. This meant us calling an Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM) to pass it through our Articles of Association. We arranged it for a couple of weeks after the AGM.

The club constitution had a useful rule as a get-out clause for when meetings were inquorate. If this occurrence happened, the rule stated the meeting would be held the week later and only needed one member for it to go ahead.

This had never happened in my time on the committee, but it would come to an end when the EGM came up with our proposals over increasing the club committee size. Nobody seemed too bothered about this. We made provision for this by booking the meeting together for when we could all make it.

We didn't expect it to be flooded by delegates from the Trades Council wanting to knock the idea on the head.

The EGM ended up being knocked on the head temporarily due to us having a special meeting with the Trades Council anyway. We took the bull by horns and told them of our plans for not only co-opting non-delegates to the club committee, but for the setting up of an Associate Members Section.

There was only one dissenting voice; Stan Nixon, one of the founding fathers of the club, but one of the first to sling his hook when the going got tough in '84.

Stan threatened to hand in his card if non-trade unionists were allowed into membership. In his opinion we were selling out the labour movement.

The Trades Council still approved our plans. It was a case of put up or shut up. Stan had shown how willing he was to take that course of action in '84, so we had them by the goolies. The EGM happened as predicted, inquorate at first, then a formality the week later. After this meeting me and Lynchy decided to get back at Stan for his comments.

I was about to become a full-time mature student at Blackburn College. Lynchy was in the final year of his degree at Preston Polytechnic. Once or twice we had commented on Stan's non-attendance of Trades Council meetings. Also he had never given a report from his Trades Council nominated position as a governor of Blackburn College.

Our plan was for me to stand against him as the Trades Council nominee when his term of office ended. We made it known to people of my intentions.

Maybe we were a bit tough on Stan, but it did the trick. He not only resigned as our college governor, but retired as a delegate from the Trades Council. He was very nice about it, but we probably hurt his feelings. After all he did his bit in the setting up of the club and got off his arse in the early days.

We probably lost a few friends because of our treatment of Stan, but knowing the Blackburn labour movement, nobody probably cared about Stan's past contributions. We're all forgotten very quickly unless we go to the House of Lords.

I didn't even get the chance to become a college governor anyway. Under some silly bureaucratic rule I was disqualified from standing because I was a full-time student. What this should have had to do with it I'll never know.

There was no great hurry for the extension of the club committee. Walmsley set a new record of lasting just four weeks with us. He was a member of UCATT, ironically Stan's branch. Walmsley was out of benefit due to being in arrears with his subs, so dropped off the Trades Council due to being unable to hold office. We needed his bar and building skills, so turned a blind eye.

It was worth considering my own position on the club committee due to my own change in circumstances. I really hated my job on the railway and could see the writing on the wall with privatisation expected in the next few years.

I was starting to get myself in trouble because of my refusal to work overtime. This put me at odds not only with management, but with some of my workmates as well. They had it in their heads my refusing to do overtime could lead to British Rail stopping everybody getting it. There was no chance of that, the railway is run on overtime.

Just before I jacked my job in to start college, I received a Form 1 for refusing to work after my finishing time. A Form 1 is the 'black spot' of the railway.

I should have been suspended, but would have won my case eventually. Also soon afterwards my S & T Department colleagues nationally were hoodwinked into voting to accept Sunday as part of the working week, without overtime. All for a 25% pay rise. I would have been a saint not a signer and found my life a misery.

So I got out just in time. My only disappointment was not being able to fight my case further. Even my gaffer Jimmy Eccles said we had a good battle and shook my hand as we parted company. I never saw him so happy.

I decided to go to college for a number of reasons. The main one was my dislike of my job on the railway. It was an ideal opportunity even though going to college had never appealed to me before. Lynchy and Caroline seemed to make a good do of it, so did Chris Roe. So I thought why not?

Also I'd started getting interested in the media following the week long course I did in Liverpool for unemployed trade unionists. I did a reasonably good job as Blackburn Trades Council's Press & Publicity Officer and struck up a friendship with Pete the journalist. It was a big step into the unknown, with no guarantees. But you're only here once after all.

This brought into question the problem of my NUR membership. So I wrote to the head office and they said not only could I stay a member, in the Provident Section, but could still hold office and stay a delegate to the Trades Council.

I was elected Branch Chairman not very long after the 1989 railway strike. It looked like I would be around for two more years. They weren't getting rid of me that easily.



Bert Turner

CURSED BY THE POLLTAXGEIST

Beware the age of 18. It is the three sixes adding up to the number of the beast. You are liable to be cursed.

There is a horror sweeping the nation. An evil spirit called the Polltaxgeist. You know you have one, when things go bump on the doormat. The dreaded brown envelope arrives to haunt you. Polltaxgeists are assisted in their work by a blood-sucking vampire, known as the Bailiff. These monsters show no mercy, especially to the weaker members of society.

Across the land are found Witchfinder-Generals, who having sold their soul to the Devil, worship the Polltaxgeist. They drag innocent victims before the kangaroo courts, known as the 'Bloody Assizes.' There they unleash the evil bailiffs upon their victims.

The Polltaxgeist originated in Scotland. Here the wicked witch of the West turned five million people into Guinea Pigs. Then like the Black Death, it was the turn of England.

The creature takes many forms. Sometimes known as the Community Charge, it disguises itself in blue. After infiltrating the household, pretending to be junk mail, it begins to fester. The evil pungent smell attracts the Witchfinder-General. The horrors that follow are too awful to repeat.

After being tortured at the 'Bloody Assizes,' you are given a choice: Make a pact with the Devil and he will exorcise the Polltaxgeist. Or face the wrath of the Bailiffs.

Do not despair, there are many who fear not the Polltaxgeist. Brave men and women of principle who stand up to the Witchfinder-General. They wear garlic around their necks and carry a cross - which they draw upon paper. It is that cross which frightens the Polltaxgeist more than the Devil himself. Fear of the cross filled his zombies with such fear, they kicked out OldNick and put a stake through the heart of the wicked witch - replacing her with the Major. But it is too late for the zombies. A new spirit is sweeping the land.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Hampered by Walmsley

So now the club moved into yet another stable period, although we never had enough volunteers for the club committee. We managed to get 100% rate relief under the new system due to us having an equality policy in our Articles of Association, between men and women.

I'm not sure what the criteria was for this, or who decided it, but put it down to good work from Cramsie. Other clubs missed out due to their sexist natures. We must have been one of the few benefactors of the new rating and Poll Tax system.

After all we didn't have to pay it and the very people, including myself, who were leading the fight against the tax were using the club as their headquarters. We were home to the Blackburn Anti-Poll Tax Union and the main rallying point against the tax. I was to appear in court eight times for non-payment, twice before Sybil. This may be a record for Blackburn Magistrates.

Still on financial matters, we finally made a deal with the Labour Party over the rental of Jack Straw's office. This came to £1,500 a year and payment for meetings. Jack must have been pleased with this as he paid half of it straight away.

£1,500 was a memorable figure because coincidentally this was our bar takings weekly average at the time. A few months before we considered not opening at dinner times anymore.

There was no chance of that now, the club was booming. This was the main reason we decided to buy the pool table. We also decided to have another bandit installed in the bar. Members were practically queuing up to put their money inside.

Saturday was the worst time for bandit congestion while we only had one machine. A lad called John, from Clitheroe, used to go on it all day. Even when he won the £100 jackpot, all his winnings went back inside. The only problem with John were the two or three hangers-on he brought in the club with him. They were a shady bunch who looked as trustworthy as a pack of hyenas, or politicians.

Saturday became a real gambling and sporting day down the club. We now had 35 members participating in the racing nap. My only disappointment was the lack of interest from members in watching Rovers. Lynchy used to come with me sometimes, but it was usually a long and lonely journey down Bolton Road to Ewood Park for me.

When I set off for the match, everybody would be glued to the racing on telly and not even notice I'd gone. I only came back after the match if Rovers had won, otherwise everybody slagged me off if they drew or lost. When they won I practically raced back to the club, everybody had to know about this.

The only difficulty the club was experiencing at the moment was the old chestnut of covering the bar. Lynchy and Caroline both passed their degrees and Caroline managed to get a job doing social work. It was well paid, so working in the club was no good to her anymore.

This was quite an achievement, a husband and a wife both successfully graduating together. The Evening Telegraph did a story on them and pictured them in their gowns and mortar boards. They looked quite a funny sight, a right couple of bachelors.

I was on the same Industrial Relations course with Caroline which launched her educational vocation. She worked hard, doing longer essays than me. I found essay writing to be the most useless, boring and time consuming form of expressing one's self. Obviously I'm not cut out for a mortar board, but how many graduates write books.

Caroline worked hard for her BTEC and earned a higher mark than me. I was saved by a good exam performance as Alain Douglas the lecturer and fellow Trades Council and club member didn't do my essays any favours.

She carried on where she left off to complete her degree. Lynchy told me Caroline used to spend all week, eight hours at a time doing

her essays. Whereas he'd got the knack for it and could knock one out in a couple of hours. Lynchy got a higher mark in his degree, but she got the glory and something out of it.

So far as the bar was concerned, it was everybody mucking in as we often had to. Maggi and Chrissie could cover things, but we still needed extra staff especially with all the dos we had coming in.

My going to college was a bonus for the club. It meant me being able to get in every dinner time and with the hours I did, it gave me the opportunity to help out with tasks like collecting change from the bank, or pies, or bottles of cordial.

The only problem with this was watching how much I had to drink as I needed a clear head for my lectures. Sometimes I was tempted to have a little bit more than one should have. On one occasion I upset John Coops my Media Techniques lecturer, he told me if I came in smelling of beer again he would send me home.

I used to bring a few of my fellow students in the club with me, they quite liked the place. The well known pub frequented by students was the Vulcan, but this had gone to the dogs. The Peel nearby had shut down and the Jubilee consequently was too busy. This made us very handy, especially with our prices compared to the local pubs near the college.

With the club doing well, we were able to experiment and joined the video age. Our helpful removal man, Keith McClure, lent us a video machine. It was only a Space Invaders, but was useful for keeping our members' children amused. It did all right but kept breaking down.

We decided to put it upstairs in the Big Room and rent a more up to date one from Abbey Leisure. This didn't do badly at all. Keith actually made a little bit from his machine for the three months we had it in the bar. We did a 50-50 split, so it wasn't so bad.

A bit of extra money was needed as the staff wages round was looming on the horizon. After lengthy and amicable negotiations, we increased their hourly rate from £2.70 to £3 an hour.

This was as good a rate of pay as any bar staff were getting in this town and they were all pleased with their rise. Unfortunately we had to put a penny on a pint to pay for it. But we could hit back at any complaints from members by asking them whether they thought

our staff should be rewarded for their job. After all we were supposed to be a trade union club.

As is the case of a bit of extra income, you always get a bit of extra expenditure. We bought the pool table from Abbey Leisure for £300 once it was established in the bar. It pulled our investment back within three months.

Our rolling programme of decorations was also stepped up. This time we decided on sprucing up the front entrance to the club, mainly the hallway and stairs due to them being the first impression people had of the club when they came in the building.

We employed a lad called Brian Fitzgerald to carry this out. Brian was an Irishman who first started coming in the club when the Irish dos took place on Sunday nights. He became friends with a few of us on the committee and started using the club a lot, especially when his wife Anne was down the road playing Bingo.

Being a self employed painter and decorator, Brian was just what we needed. Our policy was to give as much work to club members, where possible, why not keep our money in the family. It was their club and every member was expected to help towards its improvement as they were the main beneficiaries.

With Caroline gone we coped quite well staff wise, but really needed someone else to call upon. I had a brainwave one night while talking to Maureen Bateson after a Labour Party meeting.

Maureen was a Labour councillor who was Pete Greenwood's No.2 now he was the leader of the council. She told me she had done a bit of bar work in the past. This spawned an idea in my devious mind where if I could persuade her to work behind our club bar, it might encourage one or two leading lights from the Labour Party to start using the club.

I had a word with Lynchy about this and he agreed it was worth a try. After talks with the rest of the committee, I offered Maureen the job. She said she'd give it a go.

Unfortunately it didn't work out as I hoped. The ghost of Jim Mason and his boycott seemed to be still haunting the club. Only occasional glimpses of the Labour Party's upper stratum could be seen when Mo was working behind the bar. She did a god job for us though, at least I killed one bird with one stone.

The only problem we had when she worked for us was the odd member making snidey comments about her due to her unfortunate position of being the council's Chair of Finance and the one who got her mug in the paper every time collection of the Poll Tax was mentioned. It wasn't Mo's fault, but someone had to carry the can for the Tory's biggest balls-up during their time of office.

Mo didn't stay with us long, just a few weeks, mainly due to her position as a councillor and what she could earn regarding her entitlement to expenses.

Not many weeks used to go by in the club without Walmsley upsetting someone, usually himself, or doing something crazy. During his brief time as Club Steward he moved up Queens Park Flats, not in my block but Alexandra House.

He didn't last here very long, but actually managed to set fire to his kitchen one Saturday tea time after an afternoon's heavy drinking session. He put some sausages under the grill then fell asleep in a drunken daze.

Walmsley was woken up by either the Fire Brigade or his neighbours banging on his door. Luckily there was only smoke damage in the kitchen, but he had to go down the chippy for his tea that night.

This unfortunate incident was what probably made him go back to his mum and dad's place. He was kind enough to give me a load of his crockery and utensils from his blackened kitchen, including a right good pressure cooker. Every cloud has a silver lining.

The daft thing is Walmsley hadn't been back at his parent's home two minutes, when he found a job cleaning at Queens Park Hospital. A hop, skip and a jump away from his old flat.

While doing the cleaning job he decided to supplement his income by becoming an agent for a food hamper firm. Everything seemed to be all right with this, he managed to get a few of the club members involved and collected money off them every week. He asked me if I wanted to be involved, but I've never been into Xmas clubs or catalogues.

As Xmas approached people should have started receiving their food hampers, but it didn't turn out like that and there were some angry members calling for Walmsley's head.

Luckily he's as honest as the day is long and eventually sorted things out; everybody received their hamper. Walmsley didn't get his commission, or many Xmas cards from his customers. I made fun of him in one of my racing nap columns, saying at least the person at the top of the league wouldn't need a food hamper. He wasn't very amused.

We made a cock-up with Walmsley towards the end of the year. He was up before the committee on one of his regular disciplinarys for being drunk and out of order. For some reason a few of the committee members' hearts bled for him.

We suspended him for three months, but this ban didn't come into effect until after the Xmas holidays so he could enjoy the festive season in the club.

This charitable action didn't go down too well with other club members. They accused us of favouritism and we received a lot of stick over our decision.

Our excuse was we needed his building and DIY skills in the club over Xmas. I don't think many members believed us any more than they believed in Santa Claus. Walmsley couldn't believe his luck.

Keith's video machine may have taken us slightly into the age of technology, but we really went into the space age quite literally when we decided to spend £370 on a satellite TV system.

There were two types of this apparatus around at the time. One was the SKY system using a round receiving dish using the Astra satellite, with Rupert Murdoch the main shareholder in this operation. The other was the BSB system with a 'Squariel' owned by Robert Maxwell, using the Marco Polo satellite.

The best deal offered was the one from SKY, but we had to consider the moral implications of whose system we bought, although neither of these two media barons were seen as a friend of the labour movement.

So we remembered Wapping, as me and Zaf from the club committee were there on the day it all happened, with Police horses charging down the High Street. And we plumped for BSB. The satellite TV proved popular with the members, not just with the football, but boxing too.

As was typical with our luck in the Trades Club, we hadn't had our new satellite TV system a month before hearing the news of BSB merging with SKY. This meant our system would be obsolete in a few months time. We weren't to know this would happen, but had to make the best of the situation.

The stupidest aspect of the SKY/BSB merger was it meant there would be a redundant Marco Polo satellite floating round in space not doing a great deal. Hundreds if not thousands of tons of useless scrap metal which cost millions of pounds to manufacture and even more to put up in space, was now like a discarded tin of beans.

I was hoping we weren't going to be another victim of the merger. This was a case of cosmic truth of the fact the Monopolies and Mergers Commission didn't work.

Zafar's luck ran out too. He got in a punch up with another Asian lad and took a bit of a hiding. The lad in question was known as Jonny, not his real name, but it's the common practice of Asian lads in Blackburn to take indigenous names as nicknames.

Even Zaf was known as Barry up at the hospital. His real name is Shahid Zafar, but it's also the common practice of many Muslims to use the surname before the forename. This sounds confusing, maybe it becomes easier when the lads take names like Barry and Jonny.

Zaf always had an oddball relationship with the other Asian lads who used the club. His wife is white, called Christine, and Zaf was seen by some of the Asians as an 'Uncle Tom.' This was unfair because he always stuck up for them. In his way he helped racial integration by taking part in club activities, like being on the committee and playing for our teams.

He was also a member of a CIU workingmen's club, one of the few Asians in Blackburn, something this body should be ashamed of and ought to do something about.

The punch up with Jonny started as an argument, fueled by drink which went too far. Zaf is a big lad, a lot bigger than Jonny. His problem is Anno Domini, Father Time catches up with all of us. Also it turned out Jonny was into kick boxing as well as being about fifteen years Zaf's junior. Consequently Zaf got a good licking for his pains. He managed to get one good punch in to hurt Jonny. If Zaf had been sober he might have got a few more in.

They made friends anyway not long afterwards and neither of them was too hurt, only Zaf's ego.

There was a bombshell in the news locally with the announcement that Scottish and Newcastle Breweries, who had recently taken over Matthew Brown, one of Blackburn's two remaining breweries, were going to close the Lion Brewery down. This caused a lot of bad feeling in the town especially amongst the workforce, they faced redundancy or transfer to another site.

As usual the Trades Council was in the forefront of the campaign to fight the brewery closure. I even did the press release to the local evening papers and radio station.

There was talk of a boycott campaign of S&N products, this would only have hit the club in a little way as the only S&N item we sold was Newcastle Brown Ale. This did well especially among young people when there were groups on in the Big Room. But if the 'the Dog' needed to be taken out, it would be taken out.

Not much of a campaign materialised, mainly because of the generous redundancy terms S&N came up with. They did quite a clever PR job in Blackburn, their master stroke being to move in as sponsor of the Rovers when PERSPEX finished their contract with the team.

We had all sorts of good ideas, including picketing Lion pubs and the club refusing to stock Newcy Brown. We also thought about trying to persuade other pubs and clubs not to stock S&N products. But there was no campaign to fight. It looks as though they went out like a lamb, not a lion.

This was yet another case of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission not doing the job it was set up for, just like our satellite TV fiasco. Many Blackburn people, including me, refused to drink Matthew Brown beer or S&N products once they shut the Lion Brewery. I went so far as to not buy a Rovers shirt when the McEwan's Lager advert went on the front.

My little campaign with the beer didn't last long, everyone else forgot well before me. I saw the Lion closure as a loss of part of Blackburn's heritage as a brewing town.

On the bright side, my favourite beer is Thwaites' Ales, Blackburn's last brewery. They are still family owned and won't be taken over the way the Lion was. I was never a great fan of Lion beer anyway, it was chemic to me, not real ale like Danny's.

After Zaf's punch up with Jonny, we had a bad incident in the club with a few other Asian lads. One night they had been drinking heavily and playing cards. Suddenly they attacked Walmsley, and a member called Dave, for no apparent reason.

Maggie and Mo who were in protected Walmsley by getting him into the gent's toilet. Dave got a bit of a hiding. Maggi told me he was just an innocent bystander who happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Walmsley wasn't very popular with some of the lads because of the time when he was Steward he had called a halt to them playing cards for money once or twice.

We ended up barring five of the lads, although one of them appealed successfully against his expulsion. He was the only paid up member amongst them and had tried to stop the trouble, so we let him off.

This disciplinary actually exposed our membership problem. There were something like twenty to thirty people wanting to join the club who didn't belong to a trade union. The ball was set rolling after this incident and put in motion our plans for an Associate Member's Section. Also for the committee to be enlarged by three extra members, these wouldn't need to be on the Trades Council, but had to be paid up members of a TUC affiliated trade union. We talked about it before, this time we did it.

It took two EGMs to get the Associate Membership through. The first one was inquorate, the second a formality. We decided existing club members would maintain the full rights they enjoyed up to the present, but new members could only join the club in full if they were members of a TUC affiliated union. Otherwise they joined the Associate Section and didn't have voting rights, but could attend the AGM as observers.

As expected there were grey areas, especially when it came to the EETPU. They were trade unionist 'persona non grata' as far as the TUC were concerned. They solved our problem here for us.

The electricians, still sulking from being kicked out the TUC, pulled out the club yet again. They said their members were having to run the gauntlet of prostitutes tapping them up outside the club.

This seemed a bit daft to me as the club was in the town's red light area. The EETPU knew this probably better than anybody else because they probably had more input in to the place than any other union. It still annoyed me the way the branch dropped the club after all these years, but enmity between brothers is the worst kind.

At least the Plumbing Lodge stuck with us. It took a few years to prise them out the Courts Hotel, but they were now as loyal as anyone in our place, unlike their brothers.

We had a quiet Christmas down the club in this year of 1990. For the first in the club's history we opened on Xmas day at dinner time. I was the mug who covered it. The reason for this was my falling out with my parents the month before.

Working Xmas dinner was quite weird. I was used to turkey, roast spuds and vegetables, not pints of bitter and mild. That came later. It was surprising how many members came down the club and it was brisk work behind the bar, especially after two o'clock when a lot of people started coming in. Zaf brought me some turkey from home. For a Muslim, he was the best Christian in the club.

And so we started the year on an optimistic note. The diary was filling up and sales over the bar were rising. If things continued this way, it looked like the club was going to make a profit. In the ten years the Trades Club had been open, a profit had only ever been made on three occasions. I hoped it would happen again this year.

The Labour Party surprised me with their determination to get their own place, when they had a do in Blackpool at their Party Conference, they managed to raise £30,000.

We countered this by saying they got this under false pretences and it should have gone to us as we were here first. This sum of money is a big one, but not nearly enough for acquiring a club of any kind. I reckoned they needed ten times that amount to buy a place and fit it out to what was required. But it showed the money could be raised if the will was there.

The Labour Party, or the group behind the 'Barbara Castle Centre' didn't keep the momentum going. Their mistake was keeping it to a small elite of 'politically correct' activists and not making it a mass member initiative.

This showed they didn't trust their own rank and file membership. We were too stupid to have such things as democracy and a committee. Maybe they had studied the Trades Club more than we thought, perhaps they were frightened of having the finger of betrayal pointed at them. They had no choice but to destroy us.

We didn't have time to think about potential rival clubs, our job was running our own place. The job Brian Fitzgerald did for us wasn't a bad one, so we got him to do up the Big room for us.

Brian also met the committee to talk about his idea for making money for the club. He reckoned he could make Friday nights money-spinners by putting on 'Crazy Nights' in the Big room, which would bring more people into the club. We thought why not give it a go?

First the decorating had to be done, so we gave Brian this job to be getting on with. Once these were completed he could have a do at his 'Crazy Nights.'

We diverted a few of the larger meetings into the Games Room and no.1 room was used for others. Most of the socials had been and gone over the holiday period. It would be a few weeks before we got back into the normal routine anyway, so it wasn't a bad time for decorating to be carried out. Brian told me he pulled in four jobs following his work in the club.

These decorations cost money, so we decided to reduce the 20p off a pint on Saturday afternoons to 10p off instead. This was brought in when we started opening all day on Saturdays. It was a sweetener to keep members in the club those extra three hours between four and seven o'clock. It had done the job, maybe a bit too well. We always emphasised it was only a temporary measure and proved ourselves as good as our word.

Another reason for maximising our income was due to our new staff structure. Since Maureen finished her brief spell in the club, we'd all mucked in. I had a chat with Lynchy about bar coverage, he must have been a great salesman as he persuaded me he should be given a full-time job in the club.

Not as Steward this time, he had already been down that road before, but as full-time Secretary. It was feasible so I agreed to give it a try for a few months. Lynchy was at the end of his tether with his job at the hospital. The kitchen staff were being put on three monthly contracts, so the writing was on the wall as far as he was concerned.

We also had to work out the hours for Maggi and Chrissie, although the cleaner's job would remain the same. We had a committee meeting and agreed everything amongst ourselves. Lynchy would be paid for thirty hours, of which ten would involve promoting and administering the club. I remember him writing this up in the club minute book. He must have written two pages justifying this job.

Maggi was offered thirty nine hours a week, which would make her full-time. She accepted this. Chrissie was offered twenty six and a quarter hours. She came back to us on this and we agreed to increase it to a round twenty seven hours. This meant everybody was happy with the new arrangements.



The author and Zafar before an Anti-Poll Tax march

CHAPTER TWELVE

Easy come, easy go

Now all the important things had been done in the club, we felt the time was right to take on our new club committeemen, if anybody was interested in joining us. A notice was put up asking for volunteers, outlining the conditions of eligibility for service.

To my surprise three members put their names forward. I might have known Bert Turner wouldn't want to miss his Sunday morning tipple, so he was the first one on. His TGWU membership was still going through, so it was good enough for us too and we co-opted him on as we did with the other two. All three would have to stand at the next AGM anyway.

The other two lads who put their names forward were Ashley Whalley and Pete Eccles.

Ash was my Government and Politics lecturer at the college, although I'd known him a while and he frequented the club on a regular basis. I bent his ear about coming on the committee even though I knew he would have problems attending our meetings because of his teaching job and turning up Sunday mornings because of domestic circumstances. Ash was a bright lad, something we needed on the committee.

Pete Eccles was a mate of Zaf's. He worked at British Aerospace on the night shift. But this didn't interfere with his club committee duties and he slotted in without any trouble.

Just before we co-opted the three lads to the committee, we decided to start opening all day on Fridays. It had proved successful doing this on Saturdays, so we thought we might as well try Fridays as well.

It was also a useful three hour gap where staff could make up their hours, or a committee member could cover it. Unfortunately that often turned out to be me.

It was only fair I suppose, me being the driving force behind this idea. When I started college, me and Ash often went for a pint after the last lecture on Friday afternoon. This happened to be politics which he took me for.

We used to go in the Park Inn on Montague Street. I thought it a bit of a waste, some other lush taking our money off us. What me and Ash drank on Friday tea time would probably cover the bar expenditure. Maybe that's why I copped for it. The good thing was quite a few of my fellow students joined me and Ash when we went down the club after our lecture. Two of Ash's fellow lecturers, Adrian Sackman and John Jackson, also joined us for a teatime tippie down the club.

One of the lads from the class who used to come in the club with me was called Ben Kortikas, a larger than life character, not only metaphorically, as he must have weighed nearly sixteen stone.

Ben became a friend of mine, which was strange in its way due to our totally opposite political beliefs. He was a Tory verging on the brink of Fascism. We spent half our lectures arguing the odds. Even worse, he was a Preston fan, me and Ash are Roverites.

I thought Ben was a Greek or something with his unusual name. It turned out his dad was a Dutchman. I told Ben if the Nazis ever got power, he'd be one of the first to be repatriated. Really he was a likeable lad, just a bit mixed up. He would probably grow out of it like most extremists do, apart from me. Ben and I became good mates. He lived in Hurst Green, so I let him crash out on my settee when he was in Blackburn. I even let him join the club.

Our year end accounts showed everything to be rosy in the club as far as financial matters went. Whatever money we pulled in went back into the club, as had always been the case. It was nice for a change not to worry where the money was we were spending.

At this time last year the account had only £1,000 left inside it. This year we had £10,000 in the account. I found it particularly pleasing after all the stick we had been given.

People said the club would shut within three months when Frank Smith left the committee. Similar things were said when Andy Marshall was a victim of the EETPU expulsion from the TUC. So we proved everybody wrong again. The only thing which would kill us would be the Inner Relief road going through and how the council would treat us. Anything could happen here.

I wouldn't like to say where the turning point was which changed us from being a continually struggling club into what we became. It was probably down to a combination of different factors. The main one was we persevered together.

A strike broke out at Walkersteel at the start of the year. We put the club at the strikers' disposal, as per usual when these occasions arose. They used it on Sunday mornings for their meetings.

The dispute started after Jack and Fred Walker sold out to British Steel for what some of the strikers were saying was £200million more than it was really worth. This led to the company starting a rationalisation campaign, which provoked the dispute.

The Trades Council became involved immediately. I sent press releases to the Evening Telegraph and Blackburn Citizen, these were used by the two local papers.

Strangely though, the text I sent came over Red Rose Radio on the radio in the strikers' van which I was travelling in up to the picket line. This was a pleasing shock to me, I thought it sounded familiar, then it struck me like a smack in the face. I hardly ever listen to Red Rose, it impressed the strikers hearing it on the radio.

The dispute didn't last long. Most of the strikers accepted they were on a loser, but put up a determined fight. Some were taken on by the new company, reversing their stance of the workers having sacked themselves. The others, who were the majority of the strikers, were paid off through redundancy. Perhaps if they hadn't put up such a brave struggle, they might have received nothing.

The club played its part in trying to help the strikers, so did I more so. I used to stand with them on the picket line and even went down the Blackamoor pub with them one afternoon when they got their strike pay.

It was a frustrating time for trade union activists. My own strike on the railway and the CSEU action for a thirty five hour week seemed to be the only worms that turned in over ten years of Thatcherism. We just had to keep plugging away and hope people's attitudes were going to change for the better.

For a long time we hadn't been satisfied with Whitbread's Brewery, our supplier. Their service to us left a lot to be desired, we never seemed to see their rep in the club. We even had difficulties getting ash trays and drip towels from them.

Also from talking to Raymond our Stocktaker, we reckoned they were having us on the soft when it came to barrelage. Every club seemed to be getting a better deal than us, plus Whitbread contributed towards Tory Party funds.

Lynchey told me about a trade fair at Blackpool's Norbreck Castle. We persuaded the committee it was worth the club's while me and him going to this fair and talking to the different breweries who would be exhibiting there. Everybody else on the committee was working on the day, so it kept costs down to a minimum.

Apart from us getting pissed out of our brains as expected, it was a good trip for finding out information. We met reps from the Newcastle Federation Brewery, Vaux, Wilson's and Marston's; all very generous with their products. I was particularly impressed by the Federation beer.

So me and Lynchey invited these different breweries to send reps to see the club and meet the club committee. We also invited Matthew Brown and Whitbread themselves. The one brewery we didn't invite was Daniel Thwaites, my personal favourite beer, due to our cellar.

We decided even before meeting the rep, Matthew Brown had to be a non-starter. It wasn't two minutes since the Lion Brewery closure and I'd done the Trades Council press release talking about boycotts, strikes and picketing local pubs. The press would have had a field day if we suddenly started selling their beer.

The Fed rep seemed the best one. Our only problem was the club premises and their future. We saw Fed as being the brewery most in line with the labour movement. On the other side of the coin, we heard rumours of them having financial problems themselves.

What came foremost from our Blackpool trip was an improved offer from Whitbread after we told one of their reps, not our usual one, of our intentions to change them due to their bad service. So me and Lynchy's piss-up beside the seaside was worth the drunkenness.

We didn't just spend our time boozing and talking to brewery reps at the trade fair. Other businesses were advertising their wares at the Norbreck Castle.

We ate like pigs as well as drinking like fish, and ate some right good hamburgers and placed an order for one of the firms to supply the club. This was handy for putting on a variety of food in the club now we had extra freezer space and the microwave oven.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer belted us once again with the budget. So we ended up having to put 6p on a pint after Raymond the Stocktaker recommended this course of action.

Luckily the club was doing well, the brief Walkersteel dispute had proved a money-spinner to the club. The strikers had a meeting in the club one Sunday morning, we took over £300 across the bar. This was just at dinner time. At their previous meeting the Saturday before, we took even more. We had our usual collection bucket up on the bar for the lads, but they were getting £90 a week strike pay. This was miles better than the £1 a day I got from the NUR in 1989.

It wasn't just beer sales which were doing well in the club, food sales were doing well too. We decided to buy another freezer to cope with the extra goodies we had on offer. We weren't just selling pies now, Kebabs and burgers were available also. The days were long gone when we talked of shutting at dinner time.

The decorations Brian did upstairs for us went down very well, so we decided to get him to do the bar room for us. This was a consolation as his 'Crazy Nights' never really took off. I think this was down to lack of encouragement from us on the committee.

Our problem here was the amount of time we spent in the club. In my opinion, going in the club wasn't a night out for me anymore, even though I'd spent many a happy hour there.

When I went out I wanted a break from the place. One of my favourite watering holes was Queens Park Workingmen's Club, not far from where I lived. My granddad had been a long service member here. I joined in 1986 and took pleasure from being able to go in as an ordinary member, not a committeeman.

Nobody bothered me in here, wanting me to sort their problems out. I had too much influence in the Trades Club, sometimes it was more like an occupation than a night or dinnertime out. But it was my chosen path as a trade union activist.

I didn't get a wage, or my mug in the paper, but the club probably did more for the labour movement and working class people in Blackburn than any institution, and it was the best I could do.

Our main reason for continuing the rolling decoration programme was news of the postponement of the last phase of the Inner Relief road by the County Council. The club was on this section.

One reason for this was the old churchyard across the road from us had a lot of graves inside. Each would have had to be exhumed, a very complicated and expensive operation. There was also talk of a change of the road's route by the County Council. Unfortunately this rumour became reality.

This was great, it meant the club had been strung along for ten years in a condemned building. We had no choice but to look for some kind of alternative premises as we were at the mercy of the local council. They could sling us out any time they wanted, by saying they needed our building.

It put a dampener on our negotiations with the different breweries. We needed a five year lease before anybody would commit themselves to going in with us. We resigned ourselves to the fact we were tied to Whitbread while we were in Union House.

At least they came back with an improved offer, but it was always going to be an uneasy alliance. We had no choice but look for our own premises. Just to be on the safe side as far as our wheeling and dealing with the breweries was concerned, we sent Fed a copy of the improved offer from Whitbread.

You could say now the club was at its zenith of its power as an institution in Blackburn. We made a profit of £4,244 for 1990, a club record. This wasn't too difficult as the club had only made a surplus on three previous occasions.

Seeing as we made such a big profit we decided to plough it back into the club, like we always did. We spent £200 on a television with its own remote control and teletext. This was particularly useful for the racing results now there was such a big following in the club for the sport of kings.

A lot of money was also spent on decorating the bar area. We put up mirrors around the bar itself. These were supplied cheap from a glass firm down the road whose lads used to come in at dinner times for a pint and game of snooker.

This helped the light's taking go back to what they were when we first installed the 'big green elephant.' The effect of the bar mirrors was pretty good, reflecting the light shining into the optics, giving a colourful kaleidoscopic effect, or that's how it looked to me with my short-sightedness.

Also we brought in new lights for the lounge which magnified the effect even more, especially when the bandits were being played. It was like being on an LSD trip.

The publicity we received following the Ambulance and Walkersteel disputes made us probably the most well known club in Blackburn, certainly the most covered by the media.

Unfortunately all this publicity generated a negative response as we were to find out. It was the election season at the time and Blackburn's Tories had a candidate called Ross Coates. He was the typical Central Office upstart who had been sent out to a solid Labour town to cut his teeth and learn the ropes, i.e. shake the establishment by writing letters slagging off the local council and gain as much publicity as possible.

This he hoped, would lead to him cutting Jack Straw's majority at the General Election, impress the Tory top dogs and get him a crack at a the marginal seat some time in the future.

So Coates wrote letter after letter. Usually he made a fool of himself by showing he knew Blackburn like he knew Outer Mongolia. Unfortunately he wrote a letter to the Evening Telegraph slagging the club off for receiving a subsidy from the Council.

He got his facts wrong due to his ignorance of the club. He thought it was a Labour Club which was being subsidised and the Trades Council just met there.

But the damage had been done. Local Tory councillors started questioning the link between the Labour Party and the club, and other political parties such as the SWP and NCP. They tried to imply there was some kind of sinister collusion between the left.

We were on a loser when the letters started appearing in the press once the club was officially outside the zone of interest of the Inner Relief road. The Tory's argument wasn't spiteful, so they said, they thought it fair Blackburn's charge payers should get the proper commercial rent for a council owned premises. Sadly the ruling Labour group saw their side, or may have thought it the right time to ditch us?

Funnily enough our relationship with the Labour Party appeared to be on the path of reconciliation. Cramsie was already a councillor in Bank Top ward. Chrissie stood there in the local elections and became one too. Ash Whalley also stood in Mill Hill ward and won his seat in the town hall. Now the club had three councillors of its own. Two on the committee, one behind the bar.

The Labour Party were using the club a lot more than usual. As it was the election season, we always gave them free meeting facilities on Sunday mornings and whenever they wanted.

To help the relationship blossom even more, we raised £155 from the May Day Social and donated it to the Labour Party. We checked whether this was constitutional, it was. Part of our Articles of Association stated any profit made by the club should go to the Trades Council and Blackburn Labour Party.

Not many of our members knew this, it wasn't something we broadcasted from the rooftops. If one of George's tankies, or a member of the SWP or another political party wanted to take us to court over this, we would have been on a loser - I think.

I presented the money to the Labour Party Treasurer at the June General Management Committee meeting and received a round of applause for my trouble. It was decided to donate £100 to Darwen CLP with Blackburn keeping the rest. This had been the course of action both the Trades Council and club committee wanted. After all someone had around £30,000 savings in the bank, or so we were led to believe.

On the subject of money in our place, it seems we made such a big profit because of a £3,000 saving in our business rate. We didn't pay a sausage due to the club being available to voluntary groups. The only problem here was having to rack our brains over which of the many organisations who used the club were voluntary groups.

The County Council Youth Service rented an office from us, but paid us £500 a year for this privilege. I believe the club was the meeting place of the founders of Blackburn Well Women Centre, but they had their own place now on Wellington Street St Johns.

We did manage to persuade the Galligreaves' Community Association to have some kind of meeting a couple of times in the club. I also went down the road to offer our services free of charge to the 'Pensioner's Voice' campaign group. But they never used us.

Still we were always ready and available if anybody wanted to use us. I even put the idea round of trying to organise the prostitutes. After all they were the nearest working group to operate in our area. We were right in the heart of Blackburn's red light area and the girls could have used a good trade union.

There was one pro I did try to help, a seventeen year old from Stoke called Stacey. But this caused more trouble than it was worth when I did the stupid trick of bringing her into the club and buying her a drink. She said she'd give up the game, but a couple of days later we read in the paper of her being busted. She must have done a runner as we never saw her again.

A dampener was put on all the good work we were doing in the club when we were stung by yet another price increase. This time the culprit wasn't the Chancellor, but Whitbread's.

It didn't matter what their excuse was this time. It was the third rise in the last three months, meaning a pint of bitter now cost 86p in the club, and we were cheap compared to the pub price.

The impact was felt straight away. Pubs closed down all over the place. We entered a quiet period, it was as though the breweries and the Treasury were acting in tandem to make the population teetotal. This had been tried with cigarettes, but people still coughed up, literally. So now it was the turn of pubs and clubs to suffer. We did just that.

Oddly enough it was the firm we rented our pay phone in the bar from who went to the wall. We ended up in the strange position of having to pay for any repairs to the instrument if it went wrong, yet still have to carry on the normal lease payments to the finance company who took over from the bankrupt phone operator. Cramsie said he'd look into this. It was a trading standards job.

The telephone problem and beer price rise seemed to herald the start of many problems for us in the club. Our luck appeared to change almost overnight, from making our biggest ever profit, to constant difficulties.

First of these was not long after we forked out £200 for a decent TV with a teletext and remote facility. We had a problem with the aerial being blown over in a thunderstorm. This made the text reception doo-lally.

A chap called Billy started coming in the club after not bothering for a few years. He offered to fix the aerial by climbing up on the roof and sorting it out for us. We paid him £25 for doing this. Later in the week the picture went strange again.

I'm terrified of heights, but plucked up courage to go on the roof with Albert. He noticed terra-firma was a long way down too. My fear of heights was replaced by anger when I saw the aerial was being held to the chimney by a length of clothes line.

Billy had done us a bum steer, we ended up having to get the job done by a proper aerial rigger after all. We barred Billy for that, after giving him a chance to explain himself. An opportunity he didn't bother to take up.

Our run of bad luck continued to get worse. We had three break-ins over the month of June. Two of them were not serious, the burglars fled when they set the alarm off.

But the third one was as bad as they come. The intruders came in through the side window, as they had in the previous couple of attempts. This time they ripped off the alarm bell and cut the telephone wires.

They forced open the machines in the bar, apart from the pool table. This still comprised of two bandits, a trivial pursuits game, the juke box and all the fags in the cigarette machine.

We reckoned it cost us £2,000 in cash and cigarettes. Luckily it was a Tuesday night when they struck. It must have been mainly money they were after, as they left all the bottles of spirits intact. They could also have taken the new TV and satellite system and microwave oven we only bought a week or two ago.

Following the break-in, we decided to invest in a new burglar alarm system costing over £1,500. This would be digitally coded, certain people would have their own number to enter certain parts of the club.

These included the bar staff, the cleaner, and me and Lynchy from the committee. We used the old demarcation system where people who held keys permanently could only go into certain places on their own. In my case the bar and back cellar were out of bounds.

This must have been money well spent because within a week of the alarm being installed, it caught a burglar. He was a bloke by the name of Campbell. The police caught him red-handed trying to climb out the window of Dianne's office. He said he'd fallen asleep in the upstairs toilet, but his form let him down. He later admitted it and got the usual come-uppance.

The alarm system not only paid for itself, but saved us money on our insurance due to its sophistication. A few weeks later we even won a set of ladders from a burglar trying to get in the club. They not only fled empty-handed, but left the tools of their trade behind.

I ended up giving the ladders away to George Duckworth. We recently appointed him as the new club doorman, on an experimental basis due to our ill luck with this position.

George was originally brought into the club by Billy who ripped us off with the TV aerial. Not a great start, but George, unlike Billy, would have died for the club. He was the loveable rogue type, always wheeling and dealing. George originally came from Rochdale and was a bit of a cowboy too.

The funniest thing which happened to George was when Walmsley and him nearly got themselves arrested in the early hours of a particular Sunday morning.

It was the common practice for Walmsley to get drunk every Saturday dinner time and fall asleep in such a way as he would be dead to the world. Some rotten devil, usually me, would draw all over his face with a red or green felt tip pen until he looked a bit like a Maori from New Zealand.

We wouldn't tell him what we'd done when he woke up and keep straight faces for the rest of the evening while he carried on where he left off boozing. If I was really cruel I would invite him to accompany me on a pub crawl without letting the penny drop.

On one particular night Walmsley - face painted once again - supped in the club till four in the morning with George. They went for some supper down King Street afterwards. What they didn't know was an acid party had been taking place down Pump Street, the police were called to disperse the ravers.

When the cops saw Walmsley they assumed like anybody else he was one of the acid kids and pulled him and George. Walmsley's luck must have been in as he came out with the all time classic excuse for the police by saying: "How can we be acid kids? Look at us we're pissed. This lot are into drugs, we're into beer!"

The police let them go, giving them five minutes to get home or they would be offered another bed for the night.



George Duckworth

BLACKBURN TRADES COUNCIL CLUB CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 1991

A more pleasing report can be delivered on the financial performance of the club compared to last year. We have been able to turn a £3,000 loss into a profit of £4,000. Much of the credit for this is down to the hard work put in by the club committee. But this would not be possible without the support of the members and staff.

As is usual since the club opened, we face an uncertain future. This is down to the re-routing of Stage 3 of the Inner Relief road. With the result that our club is not earmarked for demolition anymore. This leaves us in the position of being vulnerable to a heavy increase in rental charges from the Council. An estimated figure of £5,000 per annum has been recommended for approval by the Council. This means we have to take £300 over the bar just to pay the rent. With other overheads to meet, trade has got to improve dramatically.

Like most pubs and clubs in Blackburn our trade has been hit by a combination of the recession and unfair price rises imposed on us by the sheer greed and selfishness of Government and the Breweries. Also because of the number of trade union mergers, there are less meetings being held in the club these days. Not that we ever had great support from the local labour movement.

On the positive side, we always knew we were living on borrowed time in these premises. Now there is the chance, if the right combination of events fall into place, where we could end up owning this club one day. No effort will be spared by the committee in our attempts to get the best deal for the club.

I would like to end by once again thanking everybody for their support. It is noticeable that the club is far more pleasant and attractive than it was a year ago. Let's see if we can continue to improve things.

BTCC/AGM/10.7.91/MP.

Bro. Mick Pickup
Club Chairman.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

A tale of two Kennys

An unusual occurrence happened at our Annual General Meeting which we held on July 10th, 1991. It was inquorate, the first time this had ever been the case. We reconvened it for the week later and had a discussion with Mr. Thompson our Accountant about finance. We also talked with the members about the club's future.

I missed the reconvened meeting due to having arranged to attend the Queens Park Flats Resident's Association AGM. Nobody expected the club AGM to be inquorate, especially as it was our practice to dish out free beer to the members. We couldn't believe this would happen.

So I had to go to the resident's meeting as I was Chairman of this organisation, like I was the club. It wasn't my fault not enough club members didn't turn up for their own AGM. They couldn't say we didn't induce them. Four free pints induced me.

The QPFRA was my creation. I got the organisation off the ground with a lad called Richard Lee. We were becoming a good campaigning group and things were getting done in those flats. Unfortunately at the time me and Richard were indispensable to the fledgling group. It would have fallen down like a pack of cards if we had given up on it. We persevered and it went from strength to strength.

The biggest irony of the QPFRA AGM was it being inquorate too. It was one of those months, Blackburn Wakes hasn't disappeared just yet. I sent people out to pull in other residents of the flats to make up the necessary quorum of twenty.

Even more ironic was me asking Tommy Holden to leave his telly and join us in the meeting. Luckily he helped make up the required quorum for this to take place. I told residents: "This isn't the first meeting me and Tommy have been in together."

Tommy said: "And it probably wouldn't be the last the either."

I was given a bit of stick from members for missing the reconvened club AGM. But it was only a case of going through the motions. We held a club committee meeting and ended up with a case of as you were. Me being elected Chairman, Lynchy Secretary, Cramsie Treasurer and Pete Eccles the Vice-Chairman.

In between our two AGMs, me, Lynchy, Zaf and Cramsie went to take a look at the old 'Taj Mahal' restaurant. This used to be called the 'Ying Kin' for many years. It was above Blackburn's five day market.

We had a meeting with Council Officers over the rent, should we get this place. I attended this. The Council wanted £6,000 a year for the premises. One of their people showed us around the inside of the place, once we eventually entered through the right door.

I didn't realise how big the place was, although it needed a lot of work doing to it. But it looked like a club to me. Also being right in the town centre, it was beside all the bus stops and the railway station was only a stones-throw away. There was also loads of space for parking cars on top of the five day market and even more within walking distance. I really took to it.

The £6,000 a year rent for the 'Taj Mahal' wouldn't be all that different than we could expect to pay for Union House once the rent the council wanted had been agreed under the new circumstances.

I reckoned the hardest job would be persuading the club committee and members it was the right move to make. Union House had never been suitable premises for the club, but people tended to get attached to things and they definitely didn't like change.

We hardly had time to think about looking for new premises. Our immediate problem was staffing the existing establishment. I must have started a trend off as everybody seemed to want to go back to college. It meant we needed full-time cover.

Strangely though, everybody wanted to keep working in the club on a part-time basis. Chrissie wanted to do the Irish nights, while Maggi just wanted a reduction in hours during her course at Blackburn College. Lynchy needed a bit of work to help him through his teacher training course. We continued his contract until September.

Now we started making a bit of money through our office facilities in the club. Lancashire County Council agreed to an increase in their rent for their office. We also started hiring out the Big Room to some kind of job club from Rochdale. They gave us £75 a week for no.1 room, with £15 added when they used the Big Room.

As the days went on it became obvious the 'Taj Mahal' was slipping away from us. The council told us somebody else had put in for it, but really the will from our end just wasn't there. I couldn't seem to motivate the committee into accepting we needed to move.

I had an interesting conversation with Cramsie over one of our many booze-ups. John is great company when he's had a few. The drunker he gets, the further down his nose his specs slide. He also comes up with some of the most unimaginable schemes you'll ever hear this side of the Blarney Stone.

His latest one was for the 'Taj Mahal.' He reckoned we should stay where we were and open the old restaurant as an eating house again. Profits from this venture would subsidise our present premises.

My only trouble with boozing with Cramsie was always finding his schemes plausible. He should have been a salesman, or a conman, but he is too honest a chap. I would have been his most gullible victim.

It looks like the council weren't bluffing when they said they had somebody else interested in the 'Taj Mahal.' Whoever these people were, they weren't just talking about it, they meant it, so it seemed at the time

What we didn't realise, and the council didn't tell us, was the restaurant was being saved for use as the venue for the M65 Motorway's Blackburn Southerly By-pass public debate. The 'Taj Mahal' was only used for the duration of this debate and has been empty ever since. At the time of writing this is still the case. It meant we were out on a limb and had to look elsewhere.

Elsewhere wasn't all that far away either. For a long time the Elma Yerburgh pub on King Street had been empty too. It had a checkered past, having had more names than Elizabeth Taylor.

It also had what must be Blackburn's most robbed bank next door, which made things even more interesting. Although this was an asset due to them having to pay rental. So at least there might have been extra income coming in.

My only problem with the Yerburgh had been in the past when I took an accidental punch in the face when a fight broke out on the dance floor one night. Hopefully this wouldn't be an omen. My record in the club was a punch, a kick and a bunch of keys in the face. No wonder we could never get people to serve on the committee.

So we arranged to have a look around the place. Me, Zaf, Pete Eccles and the two Johns were the party from the club to take a look at our potential new premises. At least we hadn't far to travel.

It shows you should never judge a book by its cover. I didn't realise how big the Yerburgh was. There was loads of room out of sight, even a flat upstairs.

Even though it was outside of the red light area, it was still near the club and was easier to get to for all our members. There was also a housing estate adjacent to the building.

I'd often wondered how the Doberman Pinscher the last tenants of the pub owned managed to climb on to its flat roof. The dog may have been part of the problem which was the only stumbling block we came across. The flat roof had wet rot.

Also a lot of work needed doing, but I fancied it as perfect for us to make a good do of. Even the distance from the town centre wasn't too dissimilar than that of Union House. I really took to the flat over the pub and fancied my chances of moving down here from my tower block.

Thwaites' Brewery owned the place, they wanted £190,000, but we were looking at a realistic price of a ton grand.

I wrote off to Unity Trust, the labour movement's financial arm, to see if they could help us out. I was pleased with their reply. It was motivating the club committee again which proved the downfall. The lads just couldn't think of life outside Union House.

This put us in a dangerous position as the signals were looking bad as far as our rent was concerned. The council kept deferring our new lease agreement.

The latest chapter of this was certain Labour councillors saying they had to declare an interest. This, so they told us, was because the Labour Party used the club for meetings.

Yet the Party had no say in the running of the club and were only paying customers like the Blackburn Dungeons and Dragons club, or the Amateur radio enthusiasts who met in the club.

Strangely enough at the same time this was happening, that other great love of my life, Blackburn Rovers, was having part of its Ewood Park ground redeveloped. Rovers had to keep applying to the council for planning permission.

My argument was councillors who were Rovers fans should also have to declare an interest. But this didn't seem to happen here. In other words it was the Trades Club not Rovers who had the goalposts moved.

As is becoming the case whenever we tried looking for new premises, it was our existing ones which grabbed our attention. We were told to cancel a student party by the police.

It seems the father of one of the organisers didn't approve of his son having a do in our club. He was either concerned, or a Tory. In any case the police told us they were expecting mainly under-age youngsters to be attending, so we followed their advice and knocked it on the head.

To make matters worse, our proposed new £1,000 a year rent for the club was given front page publicity in the Evening Telegraph. They even put in an editorial criticising the fact that the meeting had been held behind closed doors in the town hall.

As expected we didn't get the Elma Yerburch. I hadn't time to make a song and dance about it, there were too many pressing things on my mind. I was skint, having spent all the money that was left of my student grant on my new Rovers season ticket.

I'd paid £60 for a Walkersteel seat, £30 less than my Blackburn End ticket would have cost me, due to me now being a full-time student. My old terrace ticket was £75 due to there being no reductions. But it still didn't help my perilous financial position.

Also I had the club to look after. The Lynchs were away on holiday in Bulgaria for a fortnight. With the other lads all working, I had to virtually run the place on my own. To make matters worse, Lynchy was top of the racing nap. Norman Riley picked his horses for him while he was away.

Now Norman picks horses like Terry Waite picks bodyguards, but he actually picked a winner for Lynchy to keep him miles ahead on top. This inspired me to write a bent racing round up for the Sunday when Lynchy was due back off holiday. It said Norman picked a 33/1 winner to pip Lynchy at the top.

The fictitious write-up went down well in the club and gave Lynchy a little heart flutter, but he still won the first prize.

My biggest problem the first week of Lynchy's holiday was looking after his pet dog Sheba. She fretted like hell for them at first. But its amazing what you can do with a recalcitrant dog by depriving it of food. By the end of the week she would have jumped through flaming hoops for me.

When Lynchy came back we had the usual problems of running the club. All the staff wanted to go to college. I ended up helping Maggi enrol at Blackburn College. I took her with me when I went to sign up for my second year and introduced her to John Jackson from the college management. He and Ash Whalley sorted her out with a teaching course.

Once we sorted out our academic life, I persuaded Maggi to come with me to the blood doning sessions at King George's Hall. I didn't have any problem having my arm drilled, I've been giving it since I was a teenager.

For some reason they wouldn't take blood from Maggi. She must have looked too frail, she did a bit, but they never saw her slinging beer barrels round the club cellar. She kept being asked whether she was eight stone, or had had any dinner. Both these were to the affirmative, but it wasn't her day. She still had a pint of Guinness when we got back to the club afterwards.

Our main preoccupation was to sort out staffing the club, we decided to advertise the post of 'Bar Supervisor' in the job centre. The kind of feedback we got back surprised us. We didn't expect much response - how wrong we were.

We received 63 applications, much to our surprise. It was a job in itself just sorting through these. Eventually we knocked up a shortlist of five candidates and picked a date to interview them.

Our job was made easier than expected, only four of the applicants turned up. After a lot of discussion and soul-searching, we decided to give the job to a chap called Kenny Anderson. Yet another jock behind the bar. He was an acquaintance of the Cramsies and worked behind the bar of the Lion on Wensley Road, a pub they have frequented for many years.

Kenny seemed very articulate and well dressed. Also he was six foot two, so should have had no problems handling any punters who were the worse for drink. Hopefully he was the answer to most of our staffing problems.

In between appointing our new Bar Supervisor, we had a couple of memorable trade union events in the club. The first of these was the 'NELASH Night Out.' NELASH stands for the North East Lancashire Action for Safety and Health. This group had been meeting down the club for a long time. It originated from the Trades Council and the Trade Union Studies Centre at Blackburn College. Dr. Charlie Clutterbuck was this group's driving force.

I went to this do, as did a lot of other people. There was a play performed about a lad who died in an accident at a local plastics factory. The saddest aspect of this was the mother of the poor lad being in the audience and reduced to tears.

The rest of the night was folk singing and a general knowledge quiz for teams of four people. I was in the team with Cramsie and his lads. I'm a bit of an anorak and got loads of questions right.

We came second, winning a bottle of whisky and a mug commemorating the 150th Anniversary of the Tolpuddle Martyrs trial. The other event started off as a liability, but ended up as one of the club's best ever nights. It was the 'Lancashire People's March For Jobs'.

I was heavily involved with this right from the start. This was because the Trades Union Media Group I was going to on Tuesday nights agreed to do the publicity for the event. Also in the club we were putting up the marchers on the night the procession passed through Blackburn.

This took a lot of organising. The powers that be took ages to fix the march's route through Blackburn, how much food was required and what kind of do to put on in the club for them. Of course all the actual work such as making the food etc was given to us on the club committee, as per usual.

We ended up having a cracking night on the Blackburn leg, as the marchers called it. The club was chock-a-block and the beer really flowed. It helped with the marchers receiving a tenner a day expenses and were ready for a good steam-up when they arrived.

It turned into an overnight party, not only marchers stayed in the club that night. I asked any of the marchers who didn't want to get their heads down to come for a drink downstairs if they felt that way. This was so the people who were tired could be undisturbed in their slumbers.

A few of them joined me and a lot of club members downstairs in the bar. We carried on supping until five in the morning and could have almost sabotaged the march with our hospitality.

I ended up sleeping with my head between the office door and its frame. When I got up the marchers had already eaten their breakfast, so I walked to the top of Montague Street with them, then practically rolled down the slope to college.

Out of my sense of dedication I went to my lecture. While waiting outside, my fellow students said I smelt like a brewery. I didn't pick up much information that morning.

Due to the success of the march, a few of us decided to go over to Blackpool where the procession ended. This was actually the idea of a lad called Damian Searson, him and me had been talking about the do in the club and how it had captured the imagination of the club members.

The funny thing was Lynchy and Glyn Lewis said going to Blackpool was a silly idea. But when me and Walmsley went for the train, it was they who turned up and not Damian. He phoned up to tell me he couldn't make it because he was working that night.

When we arrived at Blackpool North Station, we walked to the resort's Trades Club, but found nothing had been put on for the marchers. In fact they looked at us like we were idiots when we told them about the event. They seemed more interested in summer shows than what they were supposed to be about. This was the only disappointment of the whole event.

We ended up meeting the marchers at Clifton Labour Club. This was one of the places where they were staying on the Blackpool leg. Like their Trades Club, this place hadn't put anything on for the marchers, just lent them their floor.

This wasn't a problem because we all made our own entertainment and went for a pub crawl round Blackpool. Lynchy, Glyn and Walmsley all dossed with the marchers in a church hall in the town centre. I had to get back to Blackburn for my lectures, so bummed a lift off Andy Fawcett and his wife who were going to Accrington.

The 'People's March for Jobs' finished on the Friday. John Lewis and George Duckworth, our lads from the march came in the club that night. They must have had a bit left from their tenner a day. They told us everybody on the march said the Blackburn leg was the best one and the night in the club was the highlight of the whole event. They conveyed the marchers' thanks.

Next morning me and Lynchy were down to show Kenny Anderson the ropes on his first day as club Bar Supervisor. The only trouble was another Kenny was in the news that day in Blackburn. News was seeping through of football's worst kept secret.

Rovers were appointing Kenny Dalglish as the new manager. This event inspired me to write my third and one of my best stories for the Rovers fanzine '4,000 Holes.' It became known as the 'Parable of the fallen Rovers.' One or two people found it blasphemous, I didn't care.

The club continued its intense activity, the people from the job training agency wanted the Big room for a month. This was useful because Jack Straw did a moonlight flit from his office.

It looks like all the publicity must have got to him, like it got to the Labour members of Blackburn Council. They hadn't got a clue what to do about our new lease.

We were told we might have to cater for a Morris Dancing troupe who wanted to use the club for rehearsing. This was part of the terms for voluntary groups.

Jack may have done a runner, but the party still took advantage of the free facilities they normally received from the club. The word we were given from above was Jack had left the club because the office front entrance gave the Party a bad image. His home on Wellington Street St John's was also more central.

But he said he'd be back once the local elections were over. After Jack's typical solidarity with the club, we decided to rename his office 'Chappaquiddick.'

An inter-staff dispute broke out in the club. This was between the new boy Kenny and Chrissie Cramsie. In a nutshell, he was moaning about her standard of work and she didn't trust him.

We held a committee meeting and invited all the bar staff, including Maggi, who was sick of all the bickering and wanted things sorted out. We did manage to calm things down, but there were deep divisions between Chrissie and Kenny.

I was foolishly gullible, as I was to find out in the near future. I let Kenny bend my ear and swallowed his sob story about his wife having financial trouble. He wanted to send her £100, not so much for her, but for his daughter. I saw Lynchy about this and we agreed to him borrowing the £100 as long as he paid it back at a tenner a week.

A new face joined us on the club committee about this time. For the first time I'd known it, we now had two ladies on the committee. As Jackie Boardman, the Trades Council delegate from COHSE came on.

Jackie was a nurse at Queens Park Hospital, continuing the tradition of that workplace donating bodies to our body. She would be very handy for meetings when we rowed with each other because she always carried a thermometer. Like Sybil, Jackie had a problem attending our meetings due to her work hours.

Jackie picked a right time to join the club committee. Lynchy told me the council wanted £9,000 a year rental from us. We were currently £4,000 down on the year and didn't have a prayer.

We talked about the closing down of the place if this scenario was to carry on. Our plan was to give whatever money we had left to the Trades Council. Then we could take the club members out on some kind of a trip. At least we would go out with a bang.

I found out later Lynchy was being a bit pessimistic, in character I suppose. So I went to the other extreme and talked to Cramsie about the situation. Nobody knew how to brighten your day up like this lad. He told me everything would be all right if we could persuade a lot more voluntary groups to use the club.

Ash Whalley also told me this when I saw him at the college. My faith was finally restored in our survival when I saw Pete Greenwood one night after a Labour Party meeting. He told me there was no way we would have to pay £9,000 a year in rent. An investigation into uses for the club premises was to be carried out by the council in the near future, this should help matters.



Ash Whalley (with beard) in Budapest

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Stabbed in the back

Our run of bad luck continued with our choice of club stewards, or in this case Bar Supervisor. It was a Friday night and I was sitting in my flat reading political literature, when my buzzer went. It was Caroline Lynch. I went downstairs to see her in the car park outside Victoria House.

Caroline had been sent up to collect me as my presence was needed down the club. She told me in the car what the problem was. It turned out the club safe had been robbed and Kenny was missing.

He had been on duty at dinner time, but when Chrissie came in to open up at night, she found the burglar alarm had been turned off and the safe had been opened with one of our keys. Chrissie phoned the police immediately.

When we got down the club Kenny's girlfriend Kate was there. She hadn't a clue where he'd gone and was quite distressed. Kate had only been with him six months, they had made all the usual plans like getting married and buying their own home together. Maybe her loss was greater than ours, or maybe it was a favour to her.

We reckoned between £1,000 - £2,000 was missing. Luckily he hadn't forced the bandits, or the other machines. We didn't need to change the locks either because our new computerised burglar alarm only needed the code numbers changing. This would catch Kenny if he came back to the club, so had saved us a bob or two already.

I ended up having to work behind the bar the next night. To make matters worse, the electricity was cut off for an hour, around eight o'clock. I had to serve members only bottles and draught Guinness in the candlelight. Nothing stopped the lads having their tipple

It turned out NORWEB was doing some cable laying in the area and the power went off the night before. It wasn't my weekend. Just to make matters worse, I took a load of stick from members over Kenny scarpering with the money.

I didn't mention earlier how Kenny's girlfriend, Kate, worked behind the bar on his nights off. She continued doing a bit for us and somehow felt responsible for his actions, even though it wasn't her fault. The only trouble was some of the members made snidey comments about her being in league with him. This was a particularly difficult time for everybody in the club.

As the days went by we heard more of Kenny's movements from the police. It turned out he stopped in the Crest Hotel in Preston for one night. A member of staff found a number of the club cheques he discarded in the room he used. They were of no use to him now.

On the Friday after the robbery, in other words the next night, when I was working behind the bar and the juice went off, Ash Whalley was in the club with me. The Lynchs, Cramsies and the Eccles had all gone to this Labour Party do in Blackpool with Maggi and Mo. That's why Caroline paid me a visit.

All of a sudden these two big fellows came in. It didn't take a genius to recognise they were detectives from the CID. I could also tell by the looks on their faces they fancied a pint. So I gave them a couple apiece and told them everything I knew about the robbery.

They were quite a friendly couple of blokes, even more so when I handed them a pint apiece. Ash Whalley, in a round-about sort of way, asked them what they thought about after-time drinking. To which they replied: "Our job is catching criminals. If you don't bother us, we don't bother you."

Nobody ever said a bad word about coppers in the club anymore.

The Saturday after Kenny robbed us proved to be the last night George Duckworth was employed as club doorman. He'd not taken to it like a duck to water, more like an oilslick.

A bit like Dave Roberts, the last one we had, George ended up becoming more of a liability than the very people he was supposed to prevent coming in the club. Members were starting to complain about his behaviour. We could have done with him refusing himself.

This particular night, three brothers from Darwen came in, like they did most weekends. They were three big lads who put a fair bit of beer away, but were always well behaved.

George was pissed up and insisted they sign in as he was supposed to. Unfortunately George didn't know one of the lads was handicapped and couldn't read or write. He kept pushing this lad to sign the book and a heated situation developed. Luckily I was able to calm things down, with a little help from Walmsley.

George wasn't to know this particular lad was handicapped, but in my book he shouldn't have been on the door drunk as a mop. In my anger with him, I sacked him on the spot.

When Lynchy and Caroline arrived back in the club from Blackpool at dinner time, George complained about me sacking him. I told Lynchy he was sacked and that was that. Lynchy agreed.

At the club committee meeting on Sunday, George's dismissal was a formality, even though he had a go at me in the meeting for bringing Stacey the prostitute into the club. I had Brian Fitzgerald in with me as a witness over George's behaviour. Brian also said it was a Christian thing I did trying to get Stacey off the game.

In the bar after the meeting I went to see George. He was in tears. I made up with him and bought him a pint, explaining to him he wasn't cut out to be a doorman, which he accepted. I also told him he was welcome to continue helping out in the club on Sunday mornings. This did the trick and we let bygones be bygones.

It didn't take us long to solve our staffing problem behind the bar. Lynchy jacked in his teacher training course at Bolton Institute. We gave him his old job back. I had a feeling he was getting fed up of his course. This was down to him not getting on with his supervisor, who was giving him a hard time.

The only thing which irritated me about Lynchy giving up his course was the waste of effort I put in being one of his referees. The Institute asked me to write down any comments I had about him in relation to how it would help his application to become a teacher and why I thought he would make a good one.

So I wrote a full A4 page of bullshit saying how wonderful Lynchy is and what a sympathetic teacher he would make. It did the job, Lynchy was accepted by the Bolton Institute of Technology.

We decided to employ Lynchy until Christmas, both parties needed a bit of stability. Him in his working life until he decided what he was going to do. The club because we needed a bit of stability behind the bar. Also this time of the year was so important with the Xmas and New Year festivities in the pipeline.

News came through during December of Kenny Anderson being arrested in Great Yarmouth, he certainly travelled around. Scotland to Newcastle, to Blackburn, then to Great Yarmouth. Another month and they would have needed Interpol.

Coincidentally me and Lynchy were in court ourselves for the Xmas and New Year licences the day Kenny was up in Blackburn after being brought up from the south. We were granted our festive licences as usual and paid our £4 costs. Lynchy went back to the club, I hung around in court and watched Kenny be remanded in custody for trial at Preston Crown Court.

I told everybody afterwards how he had no expression on his face and looked straight through me. I gave him the coldest, most contemptuous stare I could, for what it was worth.

Kenny ended up getting about three months in prison, an occupational hazard to him probably. I felt a sense of betrayal. It seemed so stupid what he did; throw away a good job and girlfriend for a couple of grand. And most of all cause difficulty to a nice little club, whose people put their faith in him. This really sickened me the most.

After all the messing about with Kenny, we had a pleasant Xmas and New Year's holiday in the club. I was working behind the bar at dinner time yet again, the rest of them all had families to see.

I expected a quiet time working behind the bar, but it wasn't to be. I was practically run off my feet and never stopped. Like last year Zaf brought me some turkey down for my Xmas dinner. Even better was to come. Pete Eccles invited me back to his place for a party. Kath his wife had put on a cracking spread and Pete wouldn't take a penny for the beer he laid on.

Lots of people went back to Pete's place up Fishmoor, I even stopped the night on his settee.

During the party I decided I was going to hitch-hike to Wolverhampton next day. Rovers were playing Wolves. I hadn't a match ticket, that bridge could be crossed when I reached it.

I did make it down to Wolves, thanks to a lift from the Forrester's lads up Shadsworth who picked me up on the M6 in their minibus. One of them was the club's drayman from Whitbread. He gave me a can of beer, probably because of all the bottles we gave him.

Richard Lee, my resident's association cohort was visiting his folks in Wolverhampton. He and his dad had a pint with me before the match, once I'd bought myself a ticket surreptitiously. After the game I thumbed it home and made the last hour in the club, in time to have my photo taken.

There's an old saying that a bad penny keeps on turning up. And so Walmsley returned to the club committee in January 1992. He was selected at his new TGWU branch's AGM as one of their Trades Council delegates.

At the same meeting, so was Cramsie. It's a long story how these two both ended up in the same branch, but that's part of Blackburn's labour movement folklore.

Not many months before, Cramsie was deselected by his local Bank Top Labour Party in what many people saw as strange circumstances. It was a bit rotten how certain people banded together to get rid of John because he was a good councillor and had a brain on him. Maybe he was in the wrong game after all.

Cramsie's deselection was seen as an Asian coup, decided by one particular faction in a mosque. We'd had problems over the years with different religions. Just into the new year we started having leaflets pushed through our letterbox from the 'Islamic Jihad of Britain'. I think these were aimed at our Asian members, they may have been seen in some circles as having veered off the path of righteousness. They enjoyed their beer and were probably looked down upon in some quarters.

The Christians were no different to their Islamic colleagues. We were always having stuff pushed through our door quoting passages from the bible telling us to repent our sins. They were probably right, most of us had broken every one of the ten commandments, bar murder.

And I'm not so sure about this one knowing some of our fraternity. Our problem was our location. Not only were we in the town's red light area, but also its traditional religious enclave.

Between the club and the cathedral, a place some Blackburn people consider to be a religious building, although believed to have the distinction of being Britain's least visited. there was the Jehova's Witnesses' Kingdom Hall just a stones throw away; the Quaker's Friend's Meeting House; St Anne's Church; the old St Peter's churchyard outside the club and Chapel Street spire across the road.

There had also been a synagogue on Chapel Street somewhere and the keen eye can find other such places of worship, including reputedly, Blackburn's oldest pub.

Pride of place went to our next door neighbour, the Spiritualist Church. The 'Toffee Crisp' people were the friendliest of the lot of them. We used each other's facilities for various different functions over the years. We just differed over our attitude to spirits, there was nothing supernatural about ours, they made you feel like you'd been all the way to hell and back.

It wasn't just crank religions who gave us gip. We once had a bunch of junior nazis try to disrupt a NCP meeting. Seeing them off was no problem, we threatened to telephone their headmaster.

My worst experience was narrowly missing having my head taken off by a brick. We were in the middle of a club committee meeting when a brick hit the window next to where I was sitting. I nearly jumped out of my skin. Luckily the frame was made by craftsmen. Another inch and you wouldn't be reading any of this.

The club suffered a sort of vandalism by one of the left wing groups too. The Revolutionary Communist Group wanted to put a poster up on the club notice board advertising one of their meetings.

This organisation never set foot in our place normally and held their meetings elsewhere, besides they were daft Stalinists, another bunch of tankies like the NCP. This lot were even worse than George's lot, they said the Berlin Wall was built to protect the East Germans from Western decadence. I've been to that unfortunate country and seen it with my own eyes, they built fences to keep people in. And what's wrong with a pint of decadence?

So I told them where to go. They paid me back by fly-posting this particular meeting on the outside wall of the club. I told the bar staff not to take any bookings off this lot if they tried it on, I admired their cheek though.

The club also used to receive a few crank letters. These increased as we were given more publicity over our new lease. I used to quite enjoy reading these. Strangely enough they were never abusive, a bit like the ones we received from God's children. At least it showed people had heard of us.

One of the saddest events of this month was the passing away of Eric Smith. It was well known he had cancer, but there were hopeful signs he might pull through.

The day he died I had actually bought a get-well card to send him from Queens Park Labour Party in my capacity as Secretary. I found Eric to be a gentleman and got on with him. We had plenty of arguments over the years, but we were fighting the same battle.

I went to Eric's funeral. It was a big civic do in the cathedral. This was due to his many years of service to the council, including the Mayoralty. I'd never been to a funeral before, so I went with Ash Whalley. The cathedral was packed out. Jack Straw read the eulogy, or whatever they call it. Even I took part in the hymn singing, though only making sounds to the ones without religious content like 'Cwm Rhonda.'

I wrote on my card that I was representing the Trades Club, the RMT and Queens Park Labour Party. After the funeral service me and Ash Whalley went back to the club with Richard Eaves and Martin Guinan. We held our own wake for Eric in the place where it should have been held, due to his efforts in years gone by.

Also this month we were in a bit of a panic due to an expected visit from the Wages Inspector. Lynchy reckoned I'd cocked up Maggi's wage. He was right, I'd had a few problems with this due to us overpaying her by £100 for some strange reason.

Luckily we overcame this problem by asking her to pay us back at a tenner a week. The visit from the Wages Inspector was a formality, it was just a case of going through the records. It was a good job doing the wages was my first job on Sunday mornings.

We also had a visit from the Council Properties Department. They sent a few blokes down to measure the place as part of the new lease terms.

We thought we'd lost one of the surveyors up in the loft as he took ages up there. Perhaps he'd met the club glue-sniffer and shared his tea and butts with her.

None of us could ever catch this elusive girl. She left a trail of glue and lighter-fuel cans and occasionally set off the burglar alarm, but we didn't catch her once. I used to check the upstairs of the club with trepidation and an iron bar. I half expected to find her dead one day. But she was like the 'Scarlet Pimpernel.'

Eventually we had an informal meeting with the council representatives about the club lease. I attended along with Lynchy, both Cramsies, Pete Greenwood, Gail Barton and a chap called Derek Rowell from the Town Hall.

The meeting seemed to go quite well. Derek had something to do with the Borough's Property and Finance Department. He was a jovial chap who seemed to have our best interests at heart. He gave the impression he could do something for us as far getting favourable terms for our new lease was concerned.

My only qualm here was my distrust of council wallahs, me and Lynchy had been to an earlier meeting with Pete in his Council Leader's office in the town hall. I'd noticed how his besuited officers seemed to know which side their bread was buttered on. These were another bunch of Jackasses, they were 'Greenwood Grovellers.'

Derek told us one of the conditions would be having to rip the Labour Party sign off the wall of their office at the side of the club. There was no problem with Jack Straw renting the office as he was MP for everyone in Blackburn, not just Labour voters.

We couldn't be seen to be subsidising the Party directly, even though we were through meetings etc. So the sign had to go. I gave the job of removing this to George Duckworth. He was good at ripping stuff off. One thing I wished he could have ripped off for us was the £1,500 the Labour Party owed us in unpaid rent.

We managed to do a bit of musical chairs with the offices. Dianne was going through a quiet patch with her book-keeping business and wanted to pay us less rent due to her not wanting to use her office as much.

On the other side of the coin, Lancashire County Council's Youth Service liked using the club and had been asking to use Dianne's office for a while. So we swapped them round. We continued letting the Youth Service use the Big Room and the others when they wanted. Dianne carried on doing our VAT returns for us.

Our staff shortage problem became sorted when Maggi asked if she could do more hours behind the bar. It looked like her college bubble had burst. She'd had enough of the place very quickly and decided to get out while the going was good.

I was quite sympathetic to Maggi's request, not just because it sorted out bar cover once and for all, but because she lent me a portable TV to replace my telly which blew up.

The funny thing about this portable telly was the way it found its way back to where it started from. It originally belonged to Martin Wilmot who used to live next door to me in Victoria House. He lent it to John Cramsie for use with his computer. Cramsie lent it to Maggi, eventually she lent it to me. It was like that in the club.

We ended up giving Maggi thirty hours a week to start with. I thought she was making a mistake jacking college in, but I thought the same when Lynchy jacked in from Bolton. At least I didn't write out a character reference for Maggi. This would have been: 'She keeps a good pint of bitter.'

With Maggi coming back full-time, we had to be careful with some of our new found Sunday morning activities. Over the last few weeks we'd dug out the video, connected it up to the TV and started watching blue movies Albert managed to get his hands on.

What an example we were to the labour movement; supping ale two hours before opening time and watching pornographic films. The only trouble we had with this was trying to get a clear picture on the TV.

Most of the time the video recorder was faulty, due to it being damp. The images were usually blurred too, so a lot had to be left to the imagination.

My main difficulty was being short-sighted. Once or twice I'd forget my glasses, plus I supped more of the pulled off ale than any of the other lads these Sunday mornings. It definitely had to be left to my imagination.

Everything in the club seemed to be going well, apart from the bills coming in. Largest of these was the electric bill. After our own investigation, we reckoned we couldn't be using anywhere near what we were being charged, like many households across the land.

We asked NORWEB to install a check meter to find out if our meter was functioning properly. Unfortunately for us, it looked like everything was working as it should be. So we decided to contact a firm who reckoned we could save money on our consumption.

The meeting we held with the rep from this firm was a disaster. He wasn't a convincing salesman, sounding too good to be true. Sybil gave him a hard time, to the point where he was walking out the door, saying: "I don't need the business for this kind of aggro!"

We said we would think about it and call him back. I contacted one of the committee at Queens Park Workingmen's Club where I'm a member. My mate Jack Gallagher told me the club committee here weren't satisfied with the firm's energy saving device. This was enough for me. We gave it a miss and told them: "Don't call us, we'll call you."

There was a bit of sad news at the beginning of March when we heard of the passing away of Frank Fowler. 'Foxy' was one of the club's oldest and most loyal members.

He was one of life's characters. During World War Two he was a gunner, an ambulanceman after, and finally a small trader until his retirement. Like his name 'Foxy,' he was as daft as a brush and would do anything for anybody at any time.

At the time of his death, Foxy was helping me out by supplying bag after carrier bag of paperback books for the new resident's library we set up in Queens Park Flats. He was always bringing books down the club from his house up Fishmoor, as well as puppies and kittens.

Foxy was a well known and liked character throughout the Bank Top area. He came from round King Street and frequented all the clubs in that area, uncannily a member of them all.

His route would be the Railway Club, ourselves, Bank Top Club (until it closed down) and St Paul's Workingmen's. I think we were his favourite because he was one of our founder members and in right at the start.

He will be sadly missed by everyone, especially his sparring partner Joe Gorton, who he had many a friendly rib tease with in the club bar. My lasting memory of Foxy is when he locked Pete Greenwood in the gent's toilet and Pete took it the wrong way. Everybody in the bar needed the bog afterwards as we were dying with laughter.

Foxy's funeral took place at Pleasington Crematorium. Before that he lay in the Chapel of Rest on Darwen Street. Me, Albert, Zaf and Joe Gorton went to the chapel to pay our last respects. It was quite eerie seeing Foxy there in an open coffin holding a red rose. I'd never seen a dead body before.

Quite a few of the club members went up to the crematorium, but everybody met back in the club afterwards. I opened up, so me, Bert and Joe started the sneck lifting. We had a piss-up to remember that afternoon. Just what Foxy would have wanted.



Ali (left) and 'Foxy Fowler'

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Rats leave the sinking ship

After the debacle of Kenny Anderson robbing us, we had another one. This time it wasn't too much, around £400, but damned annoying all the same. It was carried out by a lad called John, who lived in the Salvation Army Hostel across the road from the club.

He distracted Chrissie one dinnertime by asking her to get him a spud pie from the freezer in the back cellar. While she did this, he grabbed a couple of money boxes and scarpered.

We managed to get a bit of it back when the police searched his room in the 'Sally.' It seems this John had psychological problems, having attempted suicide on a number of occasions. That same day he robbed us, he also made a bungled attempt at robbing the bookies on Bank Top. He ended up getting some kind of psychiatric stretch for this.

April 9th 1992 was the day of the General Election. As usual the club was heavily involved. I didn't get the chance to do much political work like I normally do on election days. Instead I was part of the team covering the election for the new Media Centre at Blackburn College.

In the afternoon I met my colleagues at the college. After our team briefing by John Coops, I was put in Carl Rigby's crew for obvious reasons and helped cart a load of camera, lighting and sound recording equipment across to the club.

On the way I scooped a load of sandwiches which had been made for us by the Catering Department. We then put the gear up in the Big Room and did a couple of dummy runs to put us through our paces.

Conveniently, I was the dummy used, mainly because I was known for being a Labour Party activist. Once everything was set up, we decided to move it all downstairs to the Games Room because the Big Room was needed for the Labour Party celebrations, or otherwise, after the election count.

We knew what we were doing after our dummy runs, also we found the Games Room far more suitable. So the plan was to use the Big Room up until around ten o'clock, then cart all the gear downstairs.

My only problem was worrying about the power overloading our fuses, like when the Channel 4 crew made the documentary in the club that time.

There are always ways to cut corners and we cheated a bit by using one of our dummy runs as the first interview to be used for broadcasting on Channel 7 of the East Lancashire Cable TV system. They were linking up with the college Media Centre.

One of the reasons for this was everybody being so pleased with wrapping it up in the second take. I insisted on being the first interview and explained to my colleagues how I'd probably be as drunk as a skunk later on, like everybody else in the club. The Media crew said they would probably be in the same state themselves.

Later on we called back at the Media Centre to sort out what we were all going to be doing. There were to be four teams involved: One in the Media Centre who would be presenting the programme on Channel 7. Another in King George's Hall for the election count. Carl Rigby's team in the Trades Club to gauge reaction from the Labour people and a crew over at St Stephen's Conservative Club to get the Tory's reaction.

Personally, I had the feeling they might have problems with St Stephen's Club because most Tories in Blackburn seemed to be keeping their heads down.

As expected my thoughts were proved correct, for when the crew went over to film at St Stephen's Club they were refused admittance. This was, I think, mainly because half of them were girls and the lads all seemed to have pony tails. It meant we were given double coverage at our place and the Tories got zilch.

I really enjoyed covering the election in the Trades Club for the Media Centre. Some of the interviews were disasters, that's what made them so good.

Chrissie Cramsie kept dropping coins in her hands while we were interviewing her, even funnier was the one we did with Glyn Lewis. He was wrecked, it made great TV. I think my performance early on - the dummy run which we decided to use - was the funniest.

It's now residing in the Media Centre archives and remains a classic, especially as I was not only sober, but the only person who was asked what would happen if Labour lost the election again. I even had an answer for that, unfortunately.

I didn't get away from the club on General Election night until four o'clock in the morning. Everything we shot in the place went out on East Lancs Cablevision, including my interviews. Chrissie took a bit of stick over her performance.

Perhaps the biggest irony to me was the arrival of my Labour Party membership card the next morning following our General Election defeat. This was four months after I paid my subs. It seemed to sum things up for me.

The most insulting thing to come out of the General Election at local level was the decision of Blackburn Labour Party to hold their post-election party in the Borough Arms in the town centre.

This was the ultimate act of betrayal to the club and its members. We'd given money to the Labour Party, not to mention all the free meetings and even covered the club windows with their posters. We decided they weren't interested in us, only in what they could get out of us, not too different from being an ordinary Party member.

Apart from the deselection of John Cramsie in Bank Top ward, this was the reason why Chrissie jacked in her membership of the Labour Party and went independent, whatever the Jackasses might say to the contrary.

On the club committee we decided the Labour Party couldn't give a damn about us, so we'd ditch them by cutting them out of the club's constitution where they were entitled to any profit made by us.

Under the Articles of Association, profits were meant to be ploughed back into the club, with anything over going to the Trades Council and Blackburn Labour Party.

We also worked it out where we could ditch the Labour Party by way of gaining our new lease. After all hadn't they all started declaring interests when it came to the crunch, technically at the time only the two councillors on the club committee, Ash and Cramsie, and Chrissie who worked behind the bar, had any real interest. Now it was us who had the interest - survival.

The meeting we discussed our relationship with the Labour Party was a difficult one for us. We made a £280 deficit on our bar stock, also there was the theft by John from the Salvation Army Hostel. The money box he stole turned up in the lady's toilet with £30 remaining.

We put the bar stock deficit down to ourselves and the staff, accepting the fact where the more people you have behind the bar, the more mistakes are going to occur. Some people get their decimal points mixed up.

My till never added up whenever I finished a stint behind the bar and I never stole a penny from the club.

A few weeks later we kicked the Labour Party off our Articles of Association. It was surprising just how little interest there was in us doing this. In fact it took us two meetings to do it. The first one was inquorate, the reconvened meeting only had an attendance of seven members. It took only two minutes to get the job done. At least if the club folded there would be one less claim over whatever was left in the kitty.

It seems we weren't the only people with problems over premises. The local AEU had to leave the club under a head office diktat to only use their own premises, this was down to saving money. So they started holding their meetings at their offices on Wellington Street St Johns.

Then came the news they wanted to come back, this was due to their office being put up for sale because of a rationalisation programme from head office.

So it's an ill wind which blows nobody no good and we were the beneficiaries of the said wind. Three AEU branches moved back to the club, making Friday nights busy like they used to be.

Another of the club's old stalwarts came back too, unfortunately not with the union. This was Walt Green, my old pal from the EETPU. He's a radio ham and brought his local group with him.

As is the case of doors opening, others tend to close. We lost Pete Eccles after he fell out with Walmsley. This was unusual, everybody fell out with Walmsley at some time. It certainly wasn't worth jacking in the club committee.

Pete's resignation was handy in one way, it kept Zaf on. We thought he might have to come off as he was now classed as a retired NUPE member. He also owed them a bob or two and you can't hold office if you're in arrears.

So we co-opted Zaf on in Pete's position. The daft thing was Lynchy didn't know the NUPE Hospital's branch had withdrawn Zaf. There always seemed to be communication breakdowns in this particular branch. Lynchy was the Branch Chairman, if anybody should have known, he should have. Still, we sorted that problem out immediately, or rather Pete did for us.

At the same meeting where Pete resigned and Zaf was co-opted, we gave the staff a rise. Bar staff had their rate of pay put up to £3.40 an hour. We gave the cleaner a £6 rise, it was done differently but actually worked out as slightly larger than the bar staff's due to it being a fixed sum.

We did it where Christine was below the threshold for paying any National Insurance contributions, which made everyone happy.

Everyone except me. Not for the wage rises, I was always happy to give rises. My problem was the new Tax and Insurance tables used for working out the wages.

I found out from an early age I would never make an Accountant. Lynchy had to explain to me how the new tables worked. Eventually I fathomed them out.

Some years before I made sure the first thing I exchanged my Tiger tokens, from filling up my railway van, was a solar calculator. It never let me down, apart from when it went dark. My biggest problem with the wages was having had a few the night before.

I always made sure it was the first job on a Sunday morning. Then I could put away all the pulled off ale. Little Mo did a funny cartoon of me sat at my table with a load of ale in front of me.

I entered a very busy period towards the end of May. The club had to wait its turn. After all people in the place tended to forget I had a life of my own to lead. My priority was my final exams which were taking place at the college.

Another distraction was my involvement with the Queens Park Flats Resident's Association where I was also the Chairman. We were at a critical stage with our negotiations with Blackburn Council and the Department of the Environment over changing our heating system in the flats.

Richard Lee the Secretary had me going to meetings left right and centre. It was well worth it in the end. We won our long campaign and a new heating system worth over £300,000.

Perhaps the biggest and most memorable distraction of them all was the promotion of Rovers to the Premier League. I can't help myself when it comes to my beloved local football team. Everything takes second place to the Rovers. It's cost me jobs, relationships, the lot. But I'm hooked on them.

Me and Lynchy went down to Wembley in his car for the Play Off game against Leicester City. We took with us his son Paul, daughter Nicky and Paul's girlfriend Kerry. As far as me and Lynchy were concerned, the club had to do without us for a few days around this match. Our heads were in the clouds.

Rovers were leading 1-0 when the referee blew his whistle for full time. It was a feeling of relief more than ecstasy. That was to come back in Blackburn in the club.

We even cancelled a meeting with the Trades Council officers because I'd painted my face blue and white and we had all gone to the wild celebrations outside the town hall.

There was one issue in the club which was becoming a problem, though not a bad one. This was the number of groups using us for their gigs. It was an old problem really. Most of the gigs were good dos, but the occasional one did get a bit rowdy, leading to outbreaks of vandalism.

This was very rare, but we decided to solve the problem by charging £30 for hiring the room with a £50 deposit added. Unfortunately this was easier said than done, but the deterrent did the trick. It wasn't so fair on the groups themselves, they couldn't be responsible for what their fans got up to, but beggars couldn't be choosers.

One of the groups which used the club a few times was the '104s.' Ben my mate from the college was this group's drummer when they formed. They slung him out, but he kept friendly with them, so did we, they held some good dos. Their music wasn't much to write home about, but they made up for it with their enthusiasm.

A particularly good do was the 18th birthday party of Kelly Stewart, another of my fellow students. My only difficulty was feeling a bit out of place amongst all the teenagers. I was an invited guest at this do, it made a change not to be working.

There was another nice do about this time, a bit more unconventional than normal. Burnley's Anti-Apartheid group phoned us up to tell us they were having a sponsored bike ride from Barnoldswick to Blackburn. They wanted to know if they could come in the club at the end of their sponsored ride.

Of course in our usual hospitable way we said not only would they be made welcome in the club, a buffet would be put on for them. To which they asked that it be a vegetarian one.

We decided to make them cheese, and egg and cress sandwiches. They didn't say whether any of them were vegans. They probably wouldn't have been able to make the journey anyway. I told them I'd confirm things by calling at their stall at the Burnley May Day Festival.

I was going to this event anyway as I'd never been before, my RMT branch had put an advert in the Festival programme. I designed this with the word 'Forward' highlighted. After much soul searching I went for this as it sounded better than 'On the right track,' certainly less corny and not being on the right wing track.

The 1992 May Day Festival itself was a waste of time, for me at any rate, as it didn't have a beer tent. I saw my Branch Secretary Clifford Heaton working at Burnley Central Station, had a natter with him, then went home. I did have a couple of pints in the Miner's club on Plumbe Street on the way back to the station.

When the cyclists did land in the club after their bike ride, we had a right good do. Me, Zaf and Lynchy's daughter, Nicky, got down the club early on and made the sandwiches. The only trouble was I couldn't resist eating them as I made them. Luckily there was a rake of butts.

What sandwiches were left were handed out to the members in the club. It only cost about a fiver to put the butts on from the tenner we took down town for the bread, cheese etc. What money was left we gave to the cyclists and also we went round with a football card. They were well pleased with the Trades Club.

The meeting Ian Gallagher arranged between ourselves, the Trades Council officers and Labour Party representatives finally took place on June 25th. I missed the beginning of this due to my RMT meeting taking place on the same night next door in no.2 room.

There was me, Lynchy and Cramsie from the club committee. Ian and Jim Noble from the Trades Council, while Phil Riley and John Roberts showed up from the Labour Party.

Phil and John told us in round-about kind of way their intention to pull out of the club as soon as possible. We were not good enough for the image of the new Labour Party, they implied.

They wanted to move operations into the MP's home on Wellington Street St Johns, then eventually the Barbara Castle Centre when it was built.

They didn't tell us anything we didn't know already, at least we knew where we stood with them. The meeting was quite amicable really. I put in a couple of digs about them not caring about the trade union movement in Blackburn, because like most Labour Party members in the town, they weren't Blackburners. Most of us on the club committee were, give or take a Scotsman, a West Indian and a Pakistani.

We didn't need the Labour Party these days. The club was booming on the social side. Our racing nap was the best yet, we had an internal pool league going, which meant we weren't all that bothered about playing in any other places in any of the local pub and club leagues.

There was even talk of forming a club football team. I kept myself well away from these activities, good as they were. I considered myself too busy with my own interests.

This is where my own views clashed a bit with the mainstream opinion of the club. I reckoned we had turned the place into a sports club, not a bad thing at all financially, but I felt we were running away from what the club was all about.

Maybe it was the example of a battalion of soldiers marching with me out of step and I thought the rest were wrong.

I thought it was wrong where I'd be the only one going to things like demonstrations and taking part in labour movement activities, while the club would be running a trip to Bolton Greyhounds.

At least I took advantage of the club's new sporting involvement. I was really skint following the end of my course at Blackburn College, so I borrowed £100 from the club to pay for my Rovers season ticket.

I was a bit of a hypocrite here as the two things I didn't agree with were after-time drinking and borrowing from the club. I gave up the ghost with the former a long time ago, and why not? There was no such thing as after-time drinking in Europe and why should we be held in a time warp.

As far as the latter was concerned, I'm a Rovers fan from the days before Jack Walker took over and didn't see why all these new fans should reap all the enjoyment. I bought my first season ticket in 1977 at the age of seventeen and have had one ever since.

When I was 17, I got my first ever permanent job with a firm called WPA. It wasn't as permanent as I thought because they made me redundant seven years later. I like to think this was for trade union activities, even though only me, Cathy Owens and Martin Wilmot actually joined the union.

During my time with WPA, I became friendly with a chap called Mick Martin. He was a leisure machine service engineer who worked for a few firms and did a bit for himself. Eventually he became a publican, a job he must have relished judging by the many pints we supped together and the enjoyment it gave him.

Mick was always a man to chance his arm and had a go at making a success of the night-club round the corner from us called 'Mojo's.' This used to be a pub called the Prince Arthur. It had not proved a success as a pub due to the depopulation of the Canterbury Street area where it was situated. This depopulation was down to that old chestnut, the Inner Relief Road.

It hadn't fared much better as a night-club either. Different proprietors had tried it and it had been previously named 'The Last Resort' and 'Flames.' I heard Mick had a do with it as 'Mojo's,' but wasn't doing a great deal.

In our search for new premises I heard from the Whitbread Brewery 'Mojo's' was up for grabs, being empty at the time. The Elma Yerburch had already been taken by someone, so we had to look elsewhere again.

I fancied 'Mojo's' because of its close proximity to the club. When I heard Mick Martin still held the keys, this made me decide we should renew past acquaintances, all the better him having his own licensed premises. It was worth a night out.

And so on Sunday June 28th 1992, I decided to pay Mick a visit to his pub, the Cross Keys at Clitheroe. At dinner time I discussed the idea with Lynchy. He said it was worth finding out more information and agreed to me being given a tenner expenses for my bus fares and a few pints in the Cross Keys.

I decided to save myself some money on the outward journey and hitched a lift from Whitebirk to Billington. It was a beautiful night and I enjoyed walking to Clitheroe from here.

The walk helped sober me up from dinner time. When I rolled into the Cross Keys just before half seven, Mick and his wife Carol, once a club member herself coincidentally, put a stop to my brief sobriety. I carried on where I left off earlier.

Mick told me the brewery wanted £60,000 for 'Mojo's,' but this probably meant around £40K. The place also had a full entertainment's licence. He reckoned we could make a do of it, so did I.

After an hour and a half with Mick and Carol, I caught the bus back to Blackburn and the club, not forgetting my £1.85 bus ticket.

When I saw Lynchy I told him my findings. He seemed very interested, more so than when we looked at the other couple of places. He left it to me to arrange a meeting for Mick Martin to show us round 'Mojo's.'

The week later I seemed to be playing against myself. Me and Lynchy were supposed to meet Eddy Runswick from the town hall and Hazel Catt from the Council for Voluntary Services. We wanted to try and set up a decent lease deal by way of persuading the voluntary services sector to start using the facilities in the club.

My only problem was Lynchy going down with the flu. Nobody seemed to suffer from this ailment like Lynchy. It would lay him out like a blow from a gas oven. I saw him lying on the settee with only a tub for spewing up in for company. I even felt sorry for him myself for all the ribbing I gave him.

So that meant I had to meet Hazel and Eddy on my own. Cramsie and Ash were working, the rest were a liability. I was on my own trying to bullshit both of them, I think I pulled it off too. Both of them seemed nice people who genuinely wanted to help us.

Hazel liked the idea of the CVS using the old Labour Party offices. Maybe we had found a way of staying put in Union House. The trouble was I wanted out, I'd got my mojo going. That's where I wanted to go.

Later in the week I met Ash Whalley to see what he'd found out regarding the financial terms for our rent. He told me the council wanted £12,000 a year for the whole of Union House, but only £9,000 for the parts of the building we wanted to use.

This was because the top two floors of the building were derelict. The council were interested in opening up this part of the building as some kind of hostel. A lot of money needed spending here, but it was a distinct possibility.

Ash reckoned if the CVS got involved in the club, it would mean a £6,000 subsidy to us and they would decorate the place as well. So we would end up paying £3,000 a year, well within our capabilities.

My only reservation here was it made staying in Union House far too attractive and kept us tied to the council. As far as the club was concerned, I wanted us to develop itchy feet, get our own premises and never have a gun held against our head again.

The lease itself was a gun against our head because it was only for three years. This was no good to the breweries if we wanted to get rid of Whitbread. The lease had break clauses inserted too, so the council could sling us out any time they wanted. They had us by the short and curlies.

My fears about the lease were soon realised. Me and Lynchy had a meeting with Trevor Bishop from the town hall's Property Department. It looked like bringing in the CVS wouldn't do us any favours. They wanted Jack Straw's old office and were prepared to pay us £6,000 a year for the privilege.

Unfortunately the Property Department wanted the same amount off us, meaning their valuation was £12,000 per annum, a load of cobblers. It meant our rent would be £140 a week, not a lot in relation to the going business rent, but we worked it out where for every pound we spent, we had to pull in £3. This put our rent at £420 a week in real terms. The club was pulling in about £1,200 a week, it meant we were in trouble. Even Lynchy was interested in 'Mojo's' now.

Lynchy had also explored the financial implications of this venture. Whitbread wanted rid of the place and would settle for £50,000 at 6% over ten years. Vaux Brewery were interested as they were trying to get a toe-hold in Blackburn. They were prepared to do some kind of deal with us, a sum of £80,000 was being banded about. We decided to see Mick Martin the week later. We had nothing to lose.

There was a misunderstanding before this took place. Lynchy and Cramsie had a falling out do that Friday night over us taking it upon ourselves to meet Mick Martin. I sorted things out, it seems it was a drunken argument. Me and Lynchy made the mistake of assuming Cramsie wouldn't be able to make it because he was working. He thought he was being kept in the dark.

The next afternoon me and Cramsie did a bit of research ourselves by going for a drink in Mill Hill Workingmen's Club where Federation beer was available. We wanted to find out how well it did in this place and did they want other outlets in Blackburn.

Mill Hill Club's Secretary was very helpful and put us in contact with the Fed rep. Back in the Trades we saw Lynchy and agreed to invite the Fed rep over to our place to see what he could do for us. Me and Lynchy had met him already at the Blackpool Leisure Trade fair - I think.



Mo Lynch's cartoon of the author

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Trying to get our 'Mojo' going

Our meeting with Mick Martin at 'Mojo's' was an event in itself. He turned up ten minutes late, then couldn't get the power on. Also what Mick forgot to tell me in Clitheroe was the top two floors of 'Mojo's' were being used as the headquarters of a motorbike gang.

It seems the bikers had been using the place for a few years by now, dating as far back as when it was the Prince Arthur. Mick had inherited them just like the managers of 'The Last Resort' and 'Flames' before him.

Whitbread tried unsuccessfully to auction the premises, but it seemed the bikers had a secure tenure, making them more than part of the furniture.

This situation didn't bother me, every bunch of unconventional going had used the club at one time or another, including this bunch, who I knew anyway from going in the Balaclava pub a few years ago.

I didn't see any problem with our potential new tenants. They would certainly deter any burglars and from what I remembered of them, they were good drinkers when they weren't riding their bikes. There was mutual benefit to be gained from this union. I was prepared to grasp the oily fist.

In the meantime we had to keep our options open and arranged to meet Unity Trust about acquiring 'Mojo's.' We also kept in contact with the various brewery reps about finance for this place. We also had to reconsider our plans should we have to stay in Union House.

We tried a ploy with the Matthew Brown rep by reducing the beer prices by half during his visit. The plan was to fill up the club on a quiet night and show it as a place worth getting involved with.

Our ploy didn't work and we got nowhere with this particular chap. He probably remembered our campaign against his bosses taking over the Lion Brewery and was under orders not to touch us with a barge pole. At least our members had a cheap night out.

Next day me and Lynchy met the chap from Unity Trust and showed him round 'Mojo's.' He was called Graham Thomas and very interested in our plans, especially with the two buildings being so close to each other. Graham said Unity were prepared to back us with 60% of whatever the asking price for 'Mojo's' was. This meant we would still have to find the other 40% of the asking price.

When Graham left I called up Federation on their Manchester number to arrange a meeting that night with their rep, Steve McManus. He said he would be glad to come and see what we had planned. He was as good as his word, turning up around nine o'clock.

Me and Lynchy had a chat with Steve, but found him as cagey as the other people we had talked to. In these difficult times nobody was prepared to throw money around willy-nilly, not unless they could see a return on their investment as quickly as possible.

Steve said if we got 'Mojo's,' then Federation would give us a good discount if we put their beer in. The most useful bit of advice he gave us was to contact our own Blackburn branch of the Co-op Bank, he went to school with its Manager. This was handy because we used this branch anyway. I'd been a member of this bank from when it virtually started in business.

One thing I wouldn't be telling the Co-op Bank's Manager was my mum's experience when she tried to close her account with them. They charged her a tenner for doing so, even though that figure was all she had remaining in her account.

She was so incensed about this she went to the local press, resulting in the Evening Telegraph publishing the story, followed by a comment in the 'John Blunt' column. It even reached the Daily Mail. I reckoned it wouldn't be expedient to mention it in passing.

After our meeting with Steve, Lynchy said he would contact Pete Greenwood about any compensation we might be entitled to should the council see fit to sling us out of Union House in the near future.

This subject had been talked about for years, a figure of £9,400 had been mentioned in wishful thinking. If this came about we would be laughing all the way to the bank, and 'Mojo's.'

Another idea I picked up was calling into the council's 'One Stop Shop.' I saw an article about this organisation in one of the local papers. It had been set up to help small businesses in the Blackburn area. We were one, so why couldn't they help us with our relocation plans for the club?

The chap I met from 'OSS' was called Barry Entwistle, in his office in the town hall. He said he would see what he could do for us. It wasn't a lot as I was to find out later. The council had some kind of policy on not giving money to licensed premises, so I was told. This sounded cobbler's to me.

As is usual when I've got my teeth into something, I get distracted. We held our club Annual General Meeting on the 13th of August 1992. I had to write my usual report. It was a question of not getting it mixed up with the one I did for the Queens Park Flats Resident's Association. Luckily my union didn't want one too.

To make matters worse, I upset everybody by throwing in a couple of resolutions on to the AGM agenda. One was about life-membership, the other was about free membership for the unemployed. Normally our club AGM's were about back slapping and beer swilling. People didn't want debates - Hard luck, it wasn't their night.

When it came to electing the club committee, it was dead easy for the Trades Council delegates. Me, Cramsie, Sybil and Walmsley were elected 'en bloc' as the only standing candidates.

The cat was put amongst the pigeons in the member's section when Zaf was slung off the club committee after being outvoted in a rare election. Bert Turner, Ash Whalley and Glyn Lewis were elected in a high turnout of around thirty members in the meeting.

Zaf wasn't too disconsolate as he'd arranged to renew his membership of the Trades Council with a bit of jiggery-pokery.

BLACKBURN TRADES COUNCIL CLUB

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 1992

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

The most pleasing thing I can report is the fact that we are still here today. At least our future is looking more secure than press speculation would have us believe over the last year. This has been a worrying time for all of us. As you know, it is difficult keeping a club going these days at the best of times, without the added pressure imposed on us through having lease negotiations.

Unfortunately these have been covered extensively in the local press due to our traditional connections. We decided to take a non committal stance even though supporters and enemies alike wanted us to "bite." It's now looking like we did the right thing. I personally don't want this club to have a gun held against its head ever again and see the only way forward is to acquire our own premises. We are endeavouring to do that and are exploring various options. It is also worth considering that our existing location is not going to get any better, especially as these premises will have the inner relief road on either side of the building.

As far as the club itself is concerned, things have been difficult. But we held our head above water while other places went under. Most of this is down to lots of hard work and loyal support. At the same time we made mistakes which you cannot afford to do these days. Our biggest was the appointment of a less than honest bar cellarman. We would have made a profit apart from that.

I am reasonably optimistic about the future, but we must not be too complacent. I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone for their continued support. Let's go forward together.

Bro. Mick Pickup : Club Chairman

It turned out he should never have been stopped from holding his delegate position as a NUPE delegate, whether a retired member or not. We co-opted him back on to the club committee a few days later.

My two resolutions were both passed after a lot of discussion. The first one was for the committee to be able to pass on life-membership to whoever it deemed suitable. This was passed by the AGM without any real dissent.

The other one called for free membership to be given to unemployed trade unionists. It created a lively debate and a bit of arguing amongst ourselves. Some people thought it was unfair for certain unemployed people to be given free membership and others not.

My argument won the day when I said we were a trade union club and it was our duty to encourage people to keep up their membership of trade unions. People tended to either forget to keep it up or didn't care anyway when they finished working. Surely excusing them £1.25 club subs shouldn't cause that much resentment.

It must have been my lucky night, not just for being re-elected and getting my resolutions through. In the bar downstairs Ian Gallagher, who doesn't drink, gave me his beer tokens. Sometimes everything goes your way.

Another distraction came my way after the AGM. Lynchy and Caroline went on holiday to Bulgaria again. They obviously weren't bothered about a romantic fortnight on their own as they were taking their children, Paul and Nicky and Paul's girlfriend Kerry. They were also taking another couple of kids with them: Walmsley and Glyn Lewis.

So with three of the club committee in Bulgaria, it was obvious I wasn't going to have a holiday for the next two weeks. Just to make things worse for me, Caroline's mother was away too.

I agreed to look after Lynchy's house on Lambeth Street, feed and take their dog out and put Caroline's car in dock. At least they had a video and left me a bit of beer.

The first day Lynchy and Co. were away was a bit of a 'pain' to me quite literally. Much to my chagrin, I found a window had been put through in the Games Room. So it was on to the town hall for a glazier. He didn't take long to call round and did a good job for us.

We had the Galligreaves Community Association down this day. It must have been one of those days as we were soon at loggerheads with each other. The members in the club bar complained to me about all the noise which was coming from the Big Room.

It turned out the Gally lot had a child's playgroup with them today. All we could hear was the patter of tiny Doc Marten's. To make matters worse, I couldn't get them to leave the club until four o'clock. Unfortunately I had the same problem with the members this afternoon. Any excuse for another before tea time.

Things gradually became easier as the days went on. Chrissie wanted to work a few more hours, which suited me fine.

The best news of the week was Jack Straw sending us a cheque for £1,147. All the money he owed us in unpaid rent. It also told us he'd dispensed with our services for good. The end of an era, or more the case of a rat leaving the sinking ship.

When Lynchy arrived home from holiday we had a long serious talk over what the future of the club would be if we didn't get 'Mojo's.' We were going to need all the money we could muster, so we came up with the ultimate suicide solution; making him redundant along with the two Christines.

The only problem with this is it would mean us having to work behind the bar for nowt, but it meant we could keep Maggi on full-time. We would also employ Chrissie at the usual rate of pay.

Later on in the week we discussed this with the club committee at our usual meeting. Everybody agreed with this course of action realising it would be make or break. Chrissie not only agreed with her own redundancy, but offered to work behind the bar for nothing.

Zaf's Christine understood her own situation and accepted redundancy when I told her the score. It meant her husband doing it instead of her. Me and Lynchy would have to do it as well. I was also relying on the other lads to pull their weight. That was easier said than done.

In the same meeting, Cramsie came up with an idea for the club if we couldn't get 'Mojo's.' His idea was for the Council for Voluntary Services to become the landlords of Union House and we rent rooms off them, as and when needed.

He reckoned it would work out at £40 a week. We would continue to rent the bar, office and Games room all the time, while the unions would rent the meeting rooms off the CVS directly. Really it was almost the status quo.

My only problem with this was it being too good to be true, to the point where we couldn't be persuaded to look for somewhere else. I had this burning desire by now to get our own place. If we stayed in this place we would never be in control of our own destiny. Now the CVS would have a gun against our head, like the council.

I had an idea I called the 'Stingray' plan. It was called this because it came to me as I was watching his brilliant puppet series from my childhood in the 1960s.

The plan entailed trying to get all the labour movement to put their differences aside and support the club wholeheartedly for two months. That meant going only in the club to socialise, gritting their teeth if necessary. It would mean the club could pull in several thousand pounds to help us get hold of 'Mojo's' and decorate the place.

It didn't seem a bad idea really. Whitbread had advertised the place in the press recently, they only wanted the measly sum of £35,000 for it and were auctioning it.

We reckoned they might even take less for it as they obviously wanted to get rid of the building. We could have made a deal with them to carry on selling their beer.

Therefore I reckoned we might pull in a few grand if everybody used the club for a couple of months. This would put us in a good bargaining position when it came to borrowing finance to acquire what we hoped would become the new 'Union House.'

After all we had raised thousands of pounds for workers in struggle. People such as the miners, ambulance workers and dockers. Why not try to get Blackburn's trade unionists to do a bit for themselves.

My 'Stingray' plan was accepted in theory by the Trades Council, but not in practice. I don't think people could imagine the club in another building. I was banging my head against a wall.

Nevertheless I was determined to keep trying to get 'Mojo's.' Cramsie and I arranged to travel to Rochdale for the auction. That is until we heard it had been withdrawn.

Instead me and Lynchy arranged a meeting with Mario the Assistant Manager of the Co-op Bank in Blackburn. We wanted to talk to the Manager, but he wasn't available.

Mario seemed all right. He said the Co-op bank would lend us all the money if 'Mojo's' was cheap enough. He even gave us the phone number of a surveyor to give the building the once-over. They were called Cavendish-Tate. A sweet proposition.

We nearly cocked things up when Lynchy asked Mario if we could have a £2,000 overdraft due to us hitting a cash-flow problem. Mario was having none of that. He said it would jeopardise our loan chances if we went for 'Mojo's.'

I'm glad he didn't ask us why we suddenly hit a cash-flow problem. It would have looked well Lynchy telling him three members of staff, including himself, had just been made redundant. Most of the money had been used to pay Lynchy and the two Christine's redundancy pay.

The Co-op Bank Assistant Manager would have felt he had a right couple of plonkers in his office, certainly not a good risk for lending up to £30,000.

I arranged for the surveyor from Cavendish-Tate to come up from his office in the Midlands and do a survey of 'Mojo's' for us. I also gave him Mick Martin's phone number, Whitbread's too, just in case he didn't have them. I was told it would cost us £200 for the job.

Me and Lynchy turned up to meet the surveyor at what we eventually hoped would become the new 'Union House'. The surveyor said he would be a bit late as Mick didn't have the keys. He would pick them up from Whitbread's Manchester office.

While waiting for the surveyor, we noticed a bell on the side wall of 'Mojo's.' Upon pressing it one of the bikers came down to see us. I knew the bloke from my days of going in the Balaclava pub, he also went to the same school as me. It was funny how this scruffy oily bloke suddenly started ringing, he then pulled a mobile telephone from somewhere in his leather jacket.

The biker showed us round what we hadn't already seen. The surveyor arrived while we were looking round the biker's section. He got on with his job straight away.

The surveyor spent about an hour giving the building the once-over. He reckoned the bricks and mortar were worth about £47,000 and advised us to put in a bid of £25,000 for the place. He appeared to be a bit of a motorbike fan himself, spending a lot of time talking shop with the biker who also came round with us.

It was thanks to the bikers that Whitbread had withdrawn 'Mojo's' from the auction and may have done us a favour. We arranged to meet a representative of them in the club in a few days time.

We had to take difficult decisions as far as being able to make any potential move over the next few weeks. So we decided to cut our costs even further than we had with the redundancies in the club. We took the drastic step of closing dinner times from Monday to Thursday.

This didn't go down so well at all, so much so it only lasted a week. Lynchy's redundancy became virtually a drop in pay really. We got our way round bar coverage by me, Lynchy and Zaf doing both this and the cleaning first thing in the morning.

We worked it out at £1 an hour. Everybody on the committee covered Maggi's nights off and the days in between.

One job we did manage was to get a £1,000 overdraft from the Co-op Bank. Me and Lynchy met the Manager this time and he was very amicable once Lynchy explained things to him. Funnily enough we were to make a welcome discovery as the Manager went through our account. It seems Abbey Leisure owed us £436 on our statement. It must have been our lucky day.

It wasn't Walmsley's lucky day, we were to find out later. It turned out he was injured in a works accident. He burned himself by knocking over a tin of bitumen while working on a flat roof and had to be rushed to the Royal Preston Hospital.

A day or two later we heard his injuries weren't as bad as they might have been. Unfortunately he would be permanently scarred and he had to spend a little time in hospital.

We held a committee meeting on the Saturday morning. Ash Whalley called this to argue the case for staying put in Union House. His idea was for us to wait until the council kicked us out of the building. This would entitle us to compensation. I didn't agree with Ash and put the case for us trying to get 'Mojo's.' It was becoming a bit of an obsession with me.

Unfortunately most of the club committee preferred to take Ash's side of the argument. Me and Ash argued the odds in the meeting and Ash left in a bit of a huff. He was only a new boy really and wasn't used to the venom which occasionally spewed out.

Ash must have realised this because he was in good mood when I saw him later in the afternoon. It had helped that after the committee meeting we both went to watch Rovers stuff Norwich City 7-1 at Ewood Park. I saw Ash in his car on Bolton Road after the match and he gave me a lift back to the club, where we watched Rovers goals on TV again.

The planned 'Mojo's' move took another twist a couple of days later. We had a committee meeting to discuss another of Cramsie's plans. This one sounded very feasible, John was prepared to come up with his own money to buy the place. The club would pay it back once we were up and running. This was provided the price was cheap enough.

It meant we could sign a new lease for Union House, meaning we would be entitled to compensation if the council wished to chuck us out the building, a scenario becoming even more likely.

This was down to Blackburn College sending their people round the other week to assess the suitability of our building. It looked like Blackburn Council were definitely in the market and could do without us on the scene.

On the other side of the coin it meant we had reached a perfect compromise between what I wanted for the club and Ash's aspirations for compensation.

We had a bit of a boost when we met the rep from Vaux Brewery. He liked our plans to take over 'Mojo's' and was more specific than when we met him last time. He said they would like to come in with us, they had a few outlets in Blackburn, but were always on the lookout for new sites.

As usual though, he wasn't prepared to talk in terms of money. Like the Federation Brewery, Vaux wanted us to take the risk, do all the work and come up with the bulk of the money before joining in. I was looking forward to us getting our compensation. Then we would start having the sweeteners thrown at us.

One sweetener we wouldn't have minded in the club was a decent satellite TV system. We didn't have much luck with this. First of all we bought the squarial type owned by Robert Maxwell's bunch. This had to be replaced due to it becoming obsolete when SKY took over BSB. Now our new system wouldn't accept the card we were given when we had it installed.

Having a working satellite TV system in the club was crucial due to it being a money-spinner, especially when Rovers had their matches covered live on Sky Sports. Last time they were on, we must have had around thirty members in the bar watching the match. We made a small fortune in beer takings.

The problem was getting through to the aerial company, they were based in Harrogate and never seemed to answer their phone. When we did get through they put us on to their Manchester office.

Eventually it was sorted out by the Harrogate branch. They gave us this Scottish number, when we phoned them they switched us on as if by magic. We had to follow their instructions over the phone while adjusting the telly, by way of their separate remote control.

Their bill didn't need any magic to come through our letterbox though. This was ten times quicker than the time it took us to get our satellite reception sorted out.

A bombshell was dropped on us with the news of Lynchy jacking in as Club Secretary. This was related to his domestic circumstances, mainly the break-up of his marriage to Caroline. Also his house insurance company was refusing to pay up, they were saying his redundancy was a put up job done deliberately to claim off the company.

I wasn't going to let them get away with this, the last thing we wanted to do was make anybody redundant. So I wrote them a letter telling them Lynchy's sacking had been forced upon us and two other members of staff had been finished as well.

I talked things over with Cramsie. We reckoned Lynchy needed time to let things cool off and try and sort his life out. Walmsley had offered to do the Secretary's job, but this was out of the question. He had no real political experience or secretarial skills, like taking minutes. If it had to go to anyone, I was the obvious candidate.

There was no way I had time to do the job. My hands were pretty well full in the club already. I also had too many other commitments and couldn't do everything. I felt we weren't getting enough back up from the local labour movement, why should our committeemen be mugs. Unfortunately I would have to be one until Lynchy sorted himself out.

Me and Cramsie also talked about the way the club was going in general. It was obvious we were dying on our feet. The run up to Christmas was hitting us particularly hard, as well as the recession.

We agreed it would be too much of a risk for John to put his own money into our plans to get 'Mojo's' as our new premises. The club might eventually get compensation, but it was taking too long. Could we have bought the place and done it up as well?

In my opinion Cramsie would have been throwing his savings away for nothing. It was easy for me to encourage him to buy the place, I was skint, there was no need for him to be too.

The cooling off period for Lynchy seemed to do the trick. It didn't sort out his matrimonial problems, but he put those to one side and got back into the nitty-gritty of the club. He even showed a bit of well known dry humour after working out the club owed £2,000 in unpaid bills.

Lynchy reckoned we should put £1,000 on a racehorse, at least it would mean we would go down fighting, maybe even make a fortune. We had talked about this before in fun and it didn't seem such a bad idea. I actually said to Lynchy: "Let's get down the bookies," but he lost his bottle. I think he thought I'd lost my marbles.

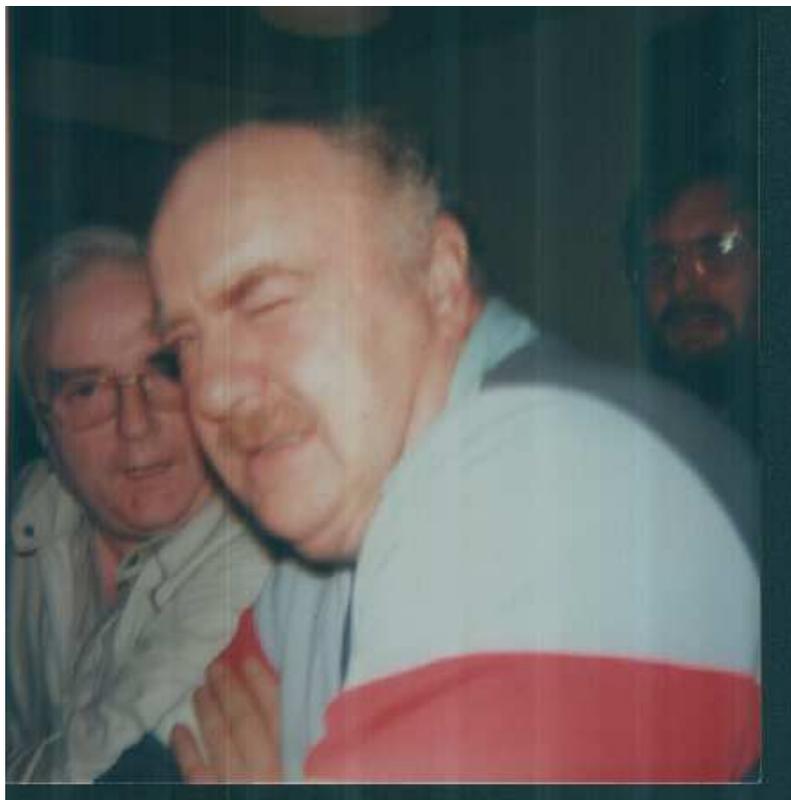
I was glad Lynchy was back because it felt like I was carrying the club on my shoulders due to everybody on the committee seeming to have problems of sorts.

Zaf was having trouble with his back. Walmsley had his bad accident with the bitumen, resulting in a stay in the Royal Preston Hospital. Then Cramsie had his car pinched from right outside his house. It was a good car, worth around £9,000 and obviously stolen to order.

Just to make matters worse, there were three computers in the boot including one John had saved for me. These were unlucky times for all of us at the moment.

At least I had a windfall through the lucky Riley brothers. John won the latest racing Nap competition, while his brother Norman won the side bet we ran in association with the proper nap.

I've won the Evening Telegraph's £25 'Quest' general knowledge competition quite a few times, under different people's names. Norman's name was the latest alias I was using and it came up that same week he and his brother won the racing prizes. I usually slip whoever's name I used a fiver when it came up, so Norman was in the money that weekend, like his brother John.



*L - R: John Cramsie, Alain Douglas and
Graham Chadwick*

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

The end of the road

This year had been a busy one for me as far as court appearances were concerned. It had either been the Magistrate's for my Poll Tax, or the County Court for my rent arrears. I believe I set a record in Blackburn for the Poll Tax, although it was helped by me being up before Sybil twice and Adam Patel a couple of times too. Sybil had to declare an interest in my cases, while poor Adam didn't know me from that said name. I said I knew him though and we were both Labour Party members, so he declared one too.

It was quite nice for a change to put one over the courts, thanks to the club. This happened when we put in for the Christmas and New Year licence extensions.

Me and Maggi went down the Magistrate's courts a couple of days before Xmas. We joined the throng of licensees waiting their turn to be given the nod by the magistrates. I noticed to my personal perplexity how people were having to swear on a bible.

During my many appearances in court for non-payment of the Poll Tax, I'd run out of ideas for excuses for not paying. Once while waiting my turn, I came up with the daft idea of saying I didn't recognise the authority of the court because there used to be royal coats of arms all over the place. These say 'Dieu et mon droit.' British justice always says it is 'beyond reasonable doubt,' or so we are led to believe. My argument would have been:

"Can anybody actually prove God exists?" After all he is the fellow called 'Dieu' on the coat of arms. I would have said:

"How can you prove I owe this amount of Poll Tax when you can't even prove whether there's a god or not. Yet you accept his authority in this court."

So I wasn't having any of that when it came to our turn and told them I was the Chairman of Blackburn Trades Council Club.

The court usher gave me a bible to swear on. I refused, telling him I'm an agnostic. The poor old lad didn't seem to understand what an agnostic was. So I told him I wasn't a Christian. He shouted over to the female magistrate that I didn't believe in God, I shouted: "Not necessarily," which put a smile on her face.

It wasn't the poor old usher's day because he had to go next door to find an affirmation card for me to swear on. This was all a pointless waste of time as the police didn't object to the club being granted the same hours as everyone else. At least it showed how old fashioned our Magistrate's Courts are in Blackburn.

I'm glad I got those extensions passed because we had a good time in the club over the festive season. I ended up working behind the bar Xmas dinner time. Walmsley was supposed to work that evening, but we said sod it and didn't bother. We took a bit of flack for not opening, but not so much. It wouldn't have been worth our while anyway.

There was a bit of a bonus in the new year. We managed to claw back £215 of the £400 we had stolen from behind the bar by the crazy lad from the Salvation Army.

I went to the police station to collect it, WPC Asiak dealt with me. She was very polite and apologised for us having to wait so long for its return. It did seem a long time, I'd almost forgotten about it myself. It was a welcome surprise.

When I took the money back to the club there had been another surprise. It seems the burglar alarm had been faulty. The reason for this was the discovery of a couple of wires having been cut.

Last time our wires were cut we had our worst ever robbery. Almost £2,000 was stolen from us, not to mention the damage. This nearly shut the club down, we certainly couldn't afford any more break-ins.

I decided to doss down in the club that night, so went home for my sleeping bag. I also wanted to try and catch the club glue sniffer. We were sure we had one now as empty canisters of lighter fuel kept turning up on the derelict top floor of the club.

We knew it was a young girl as she had been seen leaving the club and staggering down St Peter's Street, but she had always kept one step ahead of us. We only wanted to help her before she did her brain in.

She managed to keep up her elusive record again this night. I went through every inch of the club before bedding down after closing time. I also kept a check on the phone in case the wires were cut again. It ended up being a cold uncomfortable night for me, but nobody broke in and we sorted out the burglar alarm next day.

The club didn't need burglars to nearly shut us down this time. It was quiet during the start of the new year, hardly anybody was coming in the place. This was normal for the time of year, but we couldn't afford that.

What made matters worse was my reminder from the Labour Party General Management Committee arriving. It told me their next meeting and all subsequent ones would be held in the Borough Arms in the town centre.

They had finally stabbed us in the back. I decided I'd finished as my union's political delegate to Blackburn Labour Party. They'd left us when we needed them.

Following the Labour Party's decision to quit the club, we held a bit of a committee meeting. Me, Lynchy, Walmsley and both Cramsies had to accept the writing was on the wall for the club.

We decided to soldier on. It was worth remembering that every week we were open was a wage for Maggi, rather than £40 a week dole money. Plus we enjoyed going in the club and liked being in control of our own watering hole.

The only problem was it being very quiet in the club and a lot of bills were arriving all at once. Worst of these was going to be the brewery bill, followed by the gas and electric ones.

Our immediate problem though was the firm who supplied the personal hygiene service machines in the ladies toilets. They took away their gear and threatened to take us to court over an unpaid £800 bill. We managed to pay up, it made us realise we'd made a mistake having the equipment installed in the first place. You don't last long with bills like this one.

The reason Chrissie was invited to the meeting was to fill her in on the job we wanted her to do for us. This was to set up some kind of meeting with the Borough's Property Department to try and fix a decent rental deal for the club and also find out what compensation we were owed.

As usual Chrissie did the job for us and set up a meeting with Stuart Edworthy and Trevor Bishop from this department. Me and Lynchy went with her to meet them. Cramsie couldn't make it due to being ill in bed with his diabetes.

The meeting itself was a sickener. The two bureaucrats told us nobody had come in for the club. They gave us a new worry about us having to pay interim rents for the club building due to our lease having run out a long time ago. They said we hadn't really been paying the correct amount.

In other words we were up 'Dickey's Meadow'. They were talking about £3,000 a year just for the club bar. This would be liable from last April, whatever was decided. They could have been nasty and belted us with £12,000 for the year as we would have been classed as having the use of all the building.

It was looking like whatever happened we were going to owe the council a lot of money. If we accepted their terms it meant it was backdated to last April. The faceless bureaucrat in County Hall who decided to change the route of the Blackburn Inner Relief Road had signed the death knell of the Trades Club. We wouldn't be joining him on his picket line.

This meeting was developing into a horror story by now. They were even vague about us being entitled to any compensation. I had always been convinced we were entitled to this as we were a business and uprooting to new premises had to be worth something.

It had been a long standing conjecture as to when we would have to move from Union House, but compensation had always been talked about. We must get something, surely?

The three of us left the meeting as sick as dogs. Chrissie had another to go to. I wouldn't have liked to have been a Labour councillor who got on her wrong side that day. She would have given them a real tongue lashing about betrayal.

Me and Lynchy went in town, I went home afterwards. This left us with the problem of the letters we had been exchanging with the town hall through our solicitors. We had run up a £500 bill for nothing. This was due to us having letters arrive from the solicitors telling us there had been no progress with our lease discussions. Then a couple of days later a bill for either £30 or £50 would suddenly drop through our letterbox.

Things got worse when the council started sending us bills for their solicitor's letters, should we accept the new lease. It meant we were going to end up owing thousands of pounds in legal fees. Maybe this was the council's master plan. Squeeze us dry until we went bust, then they wouldn't have to pay us compensation anyway.

As a club committee we all seemed to be feeling the strain of going through our own personal crises. The Lynchs sadly separated. Lynchy moved to a flat up Pendle Drive, Caroline stayed at Lambeth Street, but bought a house near the Infirmary with her share of the money she and Lynchy got from the sale of their house.

At this critical time for the club, I was put on an executive job club in Preston. I managed to wangle my way off this by telling them I was up in court again for my Poll Tax. It was true too.

Ironically it was Sybil who I was up before, so that got me off it once again. This cat and mouse game ended eventually and they caught me. But this was after we'd won our battle and the Tories abandoned the damned thing.

Lynchy bounced back from his marriage break-up by finding another full-time job. It came just in time for him and fortunately for the club. Everybody was available for covering the bar and doing jobs. Just to emphasise Lynchy's change of luck, he won the racing nap in the same week he gained employment. This turned out to be the last one we would run. I didn't fancy running another, especially if the club went bust half way through it.

At least the club was able to carry on doing the job it was set up for. And it was my lads from the RMT who kept the flame burning. A strike broke out on the railway. We held a special meeting in the Big Room and co-ordinated picketing from here.

Strangely enough a more significant discussion took place in the bar downstairs after the strike meeting which would greatly affect the club.

I was having a pint with Dougy Bromley from the RMT about our plans to try for another premises for the club. I bent his ear about how we were thwarted in our plans to get 'Mojo's'.

Dougy told me the landlord of the 'Star and Garter', next to the railway station, was after coming out the pub. He asked could we not turn the Star & Garter into the Trades Club? it was only a watering hole after all.

It didn't seem all that bad an idea, certainly a better position right in the town centre. The Star was next door to the railway and bus stations, not to mention the main taxi rank. Where better? I was determined to look into this.

I had to pull my tripe out for this railway strike, even more than the one I took part in during 1989. I chaired the strike meeting, it was a particularly lively one as they always are in these circumstances.

On the strike day itself I was interviewed by Katrina Dick from the Evening Telegraph. At least I didn't come over like her surname. This was better than last time, seeing as I wasn't working for the railway anymore, they couldn't sack me for talking to the press. Everybody seemed to be up for the railwaymen. Even the dossers who normally sleep on Blackburn Station turned back when they saw the picket line. Like last time, nobody scabbed on the strike, apart from the burglars who had smashed their way in some time during the night.

After the picket of the station I went for a few pints with the lads in the Adelphi. One of them, Kevin Thornton, still owed me £3 from the last one when I bought him some photos the Evening Telegraph took of us in 1989 and didn't publish them because we wouldn't give interviews. He paid me two pints on, it would probably have been three back then. Still, better late than never.

Later in the Trades Club I was phoned by Branch Secretary Clifford Heaton. He asked me if I didn't mind addressing Hyndburn Trades Council that night about the railway strike.

That same evening I'd arranged a night out with Lynchy, he didn't mind it was going to be in Accrington. I found out later the meeting wasn't just Hyndburn Trades Council and a handful of local activists, but a public meeting with Mike Hindley the Member of the European Parliament and other speakers. I was to share the platform with them, there were even folk singers arranged.

This took me by surprise when I arrived at Accrington Library and there were between thirty and fifty people in the hall. I asked Mike and Hyndburn Trades Council Chairman, Mick Kneafsey, if I could go on first as I was slowly losing my bottle. I'd had a skinful after picket duty, me and Lynchy had been for a jar in Accy too.

Mike was very helpful to me, calming me down after my butterflies when I saw the size of the meeting. I went on first, then beat a hasty retreat. Lynchy said I spoke well, even though I said 'bloody' and 'knackered' in my speech. I still enjoyed the experience, so did the people in the meeting judging by the applause I was given once I finished speaking.

It was nice for a change to have my club duties distracted by real trade union issues, although the railway dispute didn't go on for very long. My immediate problem was the Trades Council Annual General Meeting and having to tell the delegates we were going to wrap the club up.

The club committee took this decision officially on the Sunday morning before the Trades Council AGM. We'd given up, or had our spirit knocked out of us at any rate. Our intention was to string the club out as long as possible, at least for the sake of Maggi's wage packet.

There hadn't been a proper Trades Council General Council meeting for ages. Maybe the club depression had rebounded on to the parent body, or vice-versa.

What used to bug me was Ian Gallagher the Secretary always putting 'club report' as an agenda item, I didn't mind all that much when the meetings were inquorate. Also there always seemed to be good football matches on the satellite TV on Monday nights, so I wasn't bothered about wasted journeys down to the club for meetings which didn't take place.

When I told the Trades Council delegates about the club's situation, nobody seemed particularly bothered. Or maybe they were kinder people than I've been to them.

There was talk of putting out a press release to say what the club had done for the labour movement in Blackburn. I persuaded the delegates in the meeting not to do this because of Maggi's situation and any future employment chances we might dash by giving the club what was now unnecessary publicity.

I wasn't sure whether I wanted us to go out like a lion or a lamb. I still felt a sense of failure, not just for myself, but for Blackburn and its people losing such an institution.

With the prospect of the club closing down, I started getting back into other labour movement activities. Lynchy was having a house-warming party at his new flat, so we did all the jobs the club needed on the Saturday instead of Sunday this week.

I told Lynchy I might not be able to make his party as I was going to try and hitch-hike to Parkside Colliery. There was a stubborn resistance to its closure, including Anne Scargill going down the pit shaft to show her solidarity. The least I could do was visit the picket line and show my own solidarity, so I did.

You meet some great people on occasions like this. I met a bloke called Pete on the Parkside picket line who lived nearby. When I told him I'd hitched it from Blackburn, he offered to drive me back home. An offer I couldn't refuse.

Pete even had a pint with me in the Trades Club when we got back to Blackburn. I even made it to Lynchy's party after all. Sadly we didn't save Parkside Colliery.

So we managed to string the club along until May 1993. Unfortunately I had the sad task of giving Maggi a month's notice, it was only a matter of time now. The lads on the club committee had done the best they could. We'd had enough and didn't see the point of delaying the inevitable.

Maggi accepted the situation and was grateful for our efforts to keep her job going as long as possible. At least it gave her a bit more time to try and find something.

We told her if she was offered an interview or had the chance of a job, she could take whatever time off she needed. It's always sad when this happens.

Our reason for this was the pressure we were starting to be put under over unpaid bills. Whitbread wanted £2,700 which we didn't have. We also started being belted off the Co-op Bank for unpaid cheques. Each time one bounced it was a £30 charge.

Just to make matters worse we kept receiving letters from the club solicitors demanding £600 for their unnecessary dealings with the council. It wasn't even worth contemplating what we owed them for their solicitor's letters. In the case of these liabilities they were getting what they wanted if we shut down, so they could whistle for their money.

The lads on the club committee weren't too bothered about this, neither was I. We all resigned en bloc as committee members just to make sure there was no comeback legally or financially on any of us. At the beginning of the year I didn't take membership subs off anybody either, just to be on the safe side.

Our strangest problem here was not knowing how you actually did go bust. I reckoned we would have to leave it with the brewery as they were our biggest creditor.

In a way it was only fair Whitbread should be the ones to wind us up. They had done all right out of us over the years. They only knocked off the minimum amount of barrelage for our write-off loan, plus we had been selling their beer since 1980. To a massive concern like Whitbread, we were indeed small beer.

On the 12th of May 1993 I had a cheap haircut at Blackburn College, then went for a pint in the club. Maggi was working behind the bar and told me she had been in contact with Thwaites' Brewery the day before and wanted a chat with me about trying to get the Star & Garter and turning it into the club. We phoned up the brewery and arranged a meeting with them for Friday.

First of all Maggi wanted to take a look at the pub, so we had a wander over. Dougy Bromley told me Frank the landlord had given up with the place and wanted out as soon as soon as possible. We had to go early as he tended to shut very quickly.

When we got there I introduced myself and Maggi to Frank and asked him a few pointed questions. He was very accommodating and showed us round the pub. When we left he shut the door behind us even though it was only one o'clock.

Maggi seemed quite pleased with the Star & Garter, reckoning she could make a go of the place. When we saw Lynchy later he said Maggi would have to put in for the Star off her own bat. The club might be seen as a liability by the brewery.

I reckoned Thwaites' would only be bothered about selling beer in the Star and wouldn't care about the club, only its ex-members. Maggi's club connections would be her best qualifications, especially if she brought all her customers with her.

Maggi deserved to get the Star anyway. I might have talked about it, but she took the bull by the horns and actually got the ball rolling. I suppose she had more motivation than me. I was already on £43.10 a week dole money. Maggi was still working and wanted it to stay that way for the foreseeable future.

When me and Maggi went for the meeting at the brewery, I'd put a suit on. She was quite well dressed by her standards, the obligatory pair of jeans, but black so they looked like trousers. I hardly recognised her. The person who dealt with us was called Pauline Lord. This was a break for us as Maggi knew her from when she worked in a pub up in Ingleton. This probably did the job for us. Maggi was pleased with my performance. I played on the membership aspect, convincing Pauline that if Maggi took the Star & Garter, the club members would follow.

There was only one real hiccup for Maggi. She needed to come up with a £5,000 brewery bond. This is standard practice for new people taking their own pub. The breweries can't lose.

I had an interest in Maggi getting the Star & Garter, not just because I saw it as the new Trades Club, but because Maggi said she would buy me a new Rovers season ticket. It was the least she could do, so she told me.

It was very pleasing to me if it came off as I was totally skint and the new season ticket had been at the back of my mind. How was I going to raise the price of a season ticket on the dole. A few weeks before I had been left £250 in my step-grandmother's will. This had already gone very quickly, paying off my many liabilities.

Thwaites' must know a good deal when they see one and told Maggi she could have the Star & Garter if she could raise the brewery bond. We decided to asset strip the club and give it all to Maggi as redundancy pay. She had a little bit of her own money, but nowhere near enough.

Unfortunately time was of the essence and we realised we weren't going to get decent prices for the stuff we wanted to sell. Biggest asset was our snooker table. I was expecting somewhere in the region of a couple of grand for it, £1,500 at the very least.

We were victims of the time here thanks to the recession and it had become a buyer's market. Consequently our best offer was a measly £300 from some mate of Zaf's. And the cheeky sod tried to talk him down on this lousy price. We were all disappointed about this as it meant less money for Maggi in helping her set up in the Star & Garter.

One way of raising the money just like that and paying off all the club's liabilities was the printing machine left behind in the old Labour Party office. It was too big and heavy to move, as well as being faulty. Also the Party had nowhere to put the damn contraption.

The thing was, we were told by Maggi's new partner Tracy, how the machine could be worth up to £7,000. This seemed too good to be true. The machine didn't exactly look like the cutting edge of technology, but if somebody was prepared to come up with £7,000 or even £700 that suited me fine.

I had a word with Phil Riley the Labour Party Secretary about what he wanted to do with the printer. His idea was some kindred or like-minded organisation should be given the printer, if they could get it out of the office.

They would also be expected to do the Party a favour, such as print the election leaflets when they were needed. I think Phil wanted shut really and to get out of Union House as fast as possible. I didn't tell him figures of £7,000 had been floated about, mainly because I didn't believe it myself. Besides I didn't want to con my own party. They might have let us down, but that was just their way. Two wrongs don't make a right.

I tried to do a deal for the printer with 'Lancashire Lowlife', the Blackburn nightlife fanzine based round the corner from the club. I was a contributor to this, having written them some of my weird stuff, but this plan ran aground and they went bust not long after. I began to feel a bit of jinx.

While meeting Phil, he got me to do a little job for him. This was to burn a load of Jack Straw's old correspondence. It wasn't just the printer which took up a lot of room in his old office section. There was tons of the stuff, old correspondence from way back when.

Being the nosey bastard I am, I had a look through it as I was burning the material. To my surprise I found not only copies of letters exchanged between Jack and myself, but a bit of material involving my dad and the job Jack did for him a year or two ago.

This involved my dad receiving a bill for some liability owed by a bloke down Brownhill with the same name. Jack sorted things out for my dad just like that. So it's not just criticism he receives from these quarters.



Last orders for the Trades Club

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

A star too far

Maggi had obviously been thinking about raising her brewery bond. One of the lads who came in the club once or twice a week during dinner times was John Tobera. He was a fellow Trades Council delegate, still on the Labour Party GMC, unlike me.

What John had going for him, in Maggi's eyes, was about £14,000 redundancy pay lying in his bank account from his job at The Sun Paper Mill. This place recently shut down mainly due to the M65 going through the site. Everyone here had been made redundant. The M65 and its Inner Relief road was affecting the club in many different ways, including people's livelihoods.

I noticed Maggi yapping with Tobera once or twice before the penny dropped. He had all the time in the world at the moment and probably enjoyed his new found freedom from work.

£14,000 may seem like a lot of money, but it's no good if you have no job to go back to. Sadly it doesn't last very long when you've no other income coming in. This meant he might listen to any proposals Maggi may have had very carefully.

Lynch also had a bit of loot going spare from the sale of his house on Lambeth Street, following his marriage break-up. It was looking like the Star & Garter was going to be a three-way partnership.

Maggi was in a bit of a dilemma over the brewery bond. She told me Thwaites' probably didn't want the full £5,000 as surety, more like £3,000. But if you haven't got it drastic steps need taking. Also Maggi is the type who likes to be led. Hopefully it wouldn't be down the garden path by the two Johns.

At least it made a change for her to have only two Johns this time, rather than the three from the club committee. And these two gave her a couple of grand apiece, so I heard, to get the business off the ground.

I was a bit dubious about this partnership, being wary of these kind of institutions anyway. The three of them had such diverse and conflicting backgrounds. Really I was a bit jealous over not being a part of the new business. I wanted it to carry on as the Trades Club in some form or another, albeit through the Star & Garter.

After all, I'd spent nine years on the Trades Club committee and enjoyed the power and prestige of this position.

If anybody really believes this load of cobblers, I'll eat my Rovers scarf. I was ready for a well deserved break and promised myself never to be involved with another licenced premises ever again.

The main problem with the three of them was their combined personalities, or lack of them. They were all introverted characters to a certain extent, none of them chatterboxes like me.

I reckon you have to talk to people when you work behind a bar. Punters go out to be entertained, otherwise they might as well stop in front of the telly with a few cans. If they go in a pub or club and nobody bothers with them, they say: "What a deadhole that was. I'm not going in there again."

Maggi was a lesbian, or gay woman to use a better term. Lesbian sounds like a Mediterranean country where everybody blows each other up over religious differences. She had recently split up with Mo, her partner who introduced her to Blackburn. She was now involved with Tracy and they intended to move into the Star.

Maggi's main problem was her being a bit on the shy side. She also enjoyed reading loads of books, annoyingly during the time she was behind the bar. Once she'd got her nose in a novel, there was a job shifting her. She should have been a librarian not a landlady.

Lynchy is the type who tends to ignore people if he doesn't know them. Even worse, he tends to ignore people he does know. He also bears grudges forever. Once you're Lynchy's enemy, you stay that way. Lynchy was different from the other two in that he'd been married and had a couple of kids.

John Tobera is an oddball to weigh up. He was single like me, but still living at home with his mother. He used to come in the club at dinner times and was quite a friendly bloke, although a bit cynical. When he came to meetings at night he was a different bloke all together; left wing by day and right by night, like the rest of them.

John was also a bit on the nervous side. He had no experience of being on the club committee, making no attempt to come on from the Trades Council. Maybe this was his best recommendation for embarking upon his new career.

After all life is one big challenge and they would have to pull together or all go under together. Even if the three of them screwed up, it was a better proposition than the club being shut. Hopefully the Star & Garter would be a new phoenix rising from the ashes of the old Trades Club.

June the 1st 1993 was the official day we moved from Union House. It was all hands to the pumps and strange processions of people carrying stuff down the road from the Trades Club to the Star & Garter.

A bit like the Jews heading for the Promised Land, certainly not the wise men following the wandering Star. At least we wouldn't be seeing any more of the other garters any more now we were leaving the red light area of Blackburn.

That same day I also phoned up Whitbread to tell them we were going to wrap the club up. I was put in touch with their Litigation Department who took down the details. They were very nice about it, sympathetic too. I was given the impression we were not the first of their outlets to be in a similar position, we certainly wouldn't be their last either.

Maggi had to go to court for her licence for the Star & Garter. I went with her, it was quite different this time as it was her in the dock not me for a change. She wouldn't be embarrassed this time as I had no axe to grind about swearing on any bible. Maggi wouldn't have minded as she was a Christian anyway.

I found it rather a symbolic occasion Maggi having her licence passed. She didn't see it that way, it was just part of the job. Only this time she was the gaffer, not me anymore.

She was very proud of herself. I could see it written all over her face. I put the licence plate up above the Star entrance when we got back to the pub.

While we were in court it was open season in the club. Everybody went on the piss, we gave it all away to the members and it became the mother of all piss-ups. Unfortunately people went through the club like a plague of locusts in their hunt for souvenirs and saleable items. Even the lampshades were taken, to my astonishment. The real sickener was the discovery later on of the straps being pinched from the Trades Council's banner.

I made contact with Whitbread's Litigation Department and agreed to keep an eye on the club building. This would mean me popping in to stop the vandals moving in. I reckoned I'd drop one of the two sets of keys in my possession with Whitbread, the other at the town hall with the council's Property Department.

The funniest thing to happen within days of Maggi moving into the Star & Garter was the club glue sniffer calling in. I'd only ever seen her a couple of times, but she looked like a new girl, having had a bath and put clean clothes on. I did recognise the tattoo on her neck though.

She told me she was on the straight and narrow after getting back in with her mum, just in time I reckoned. I never saw her again from this day. The doors of the Star & Garter must have been more secure than the Trades Club ones.

At least all the organisations which used the club came to the Star. As expected my lads from the RMT were very pleased about the move due to its position right next door to the railway station. Within a week or so of moving in we had an important meeting over British Rail's plans to do away with the 'Check Off' system of collecting union subs.

We did lose a couple of AEU branches, but this was down to their head office rationalisation programme. George Ormrod, my fellow Trades Council delegate and the grand old man of Blackburn trade unionism, was as pleased as punch about moving to the Star & Garter. He was in his eighties and found the transport aspects of the pub very useful, especially as he was still Secretary of one of the local AEU branches.

Surprisingly the District Labour Party came with us. This was down to their Chairman, Alain Douglas. He taught Trade Union Studies at the college and always supported the club.

Sadly he died not long after and the DLP left almost immediately. A lot of us went to Alain's funeral. It was more noticeable who didn't attend which was a bit unfortunate.

So everybody left the club premises for the Star & Garter, everybody that is except me. I agreed to keep my eye on the place until Whitbread cleared their equipment from the bar and back cellar. This was a bit of a boring job, until I found a barrel of cider in the cellar. There was just a little left inside.

It meant me going down the club and sitting in the bar waiting. Other people did call by, such as Abbey Leisure to collect their machines and the pool table. We gave them this because they had been good to us over the years.

I was hoping Whitbread wouldn't be too long in taking their gear out because the vandals were starting to put the club windows through. The burglar alarm had also been turned off along with the electricity. I didn't fancy the idea of finding someone electrocuted one morning.

For some reason I didn't think Whitbread were all that bothered about collecting their equipment, we were probably just a drop in the ocean to them, really small beer. As each day passed I'd phone them up, but meet a wall of disinterest. I didn't mind as my little bit of cider was lasting longer than I thought. It must have escaped the grand piss-up. I did, but wasn't all that bothered.

My days of loneliness were about to change fairly quickly. One morning Keith McClure came down the club to pick up some of his juke box records. This meant we had to shift a few of the empty barrels in the cellar to get at them.

To our surprise one of the barrels felt as solid as a rock. It was the Trophy bitter we ordered a few weeks ago, but turned out to be cloudy. I'd forgotten about this after cursing it at the time. This time the barrel had cleared, all 22 gallons of the lovely stuff, much to my utter joyfulness.

Me and Keith didn't go anywhere that morning. I used a bit of my ingenuity to serve it even though it couldn't flow through the pumps due to the electric being off. I bled it off directly from the barrel in pint glasses and spare bottles to let the foam settle.

I told a few of the unemployed club members such as George, John, Ray and Little Mo. They weren't bitter with me. I also told Lynchy and he came down for one last drink in the club with me. We had to drink the barrel pretty quickly as I'd had enough of the club by now and wanted shut of the club keys.

Whitbread's Shadsworth depot was only up the road from where I lived at the time. I took the club keys up there and was met by the usual blank expression people behind reception windows always seem to give you. When I told them I had the Trades Club keys and wanted to drop them off they went into panic and phoned the Strangeways Brewery in Manchester.

The person on the other end of the phone was quite irate with me, so I told them everybody on the club committee had resigned, including me and I had no business holding on to their property. I threatened to leave them on a table in reception or even drop them on the car park. I was beyond caring.

Luckily I was in Manchester for my RMT union's District Council meeting a few days later. This time they took the keys off me, otherwise it would have been the River Irwell. This left me with one more set which I intended to hand over to the council.

My last day in the club was on the 14th of June, 1993, a Monday. I took one last look around the place. It wasn't a pretty sight now, it never was really if the truth be told. This was compounded by the windows having been put through and somebody had got in through the Games Room. It was only a question of time before the place was torched.

But it was the end of an era, for me at any rate. I'd decided to hand the keys over to the council and arranged to see Trevor Bishop at the town hall's Property Department. Trevor was very nice about things and could probably see the disappointment on my face.

I felt like pulling him over what plans were in the pipeline for the club and what compensation the club should have received if we had survived but I didn't because I wanted shut.

I did just that and so ended my involvement with Union House. I was a free man at last.

Unfortunately I wasn't free in the eyes of some parties. Me and Lynchy both received nasty letters from the finance company who the club rented the telephone from.

This threatened us with court action, citing the fact me and Lynchy were the Chairman and Secretary of the club respectively and we signed the lease agreement. Therefore, in their eyes, we were responsible for defaulting on the payments and were liable, or so we were led to believe.

I told Lynchy to ignore it, they could take it up with Whitbread. The leasing firm didn't realise the club had been a limited company which meant limited liability. We all owed a £1 each technically. They could get stuffed.

Another problem arose very quickly with the Star & Garter which needed my attention.

One afternoon I'd been shopping in the town centre, when I saw Ray the electrician who used to go in the club. I sat down for a camp with him and he told me the Star was in tonight's Blackburn Citizen. Unfortunately the publicity was a bit unwelcome.

When I got home the Citizen was on my doormat. The offending article was an interview with Maggie saying she intended to turn the pub into some kind of gay bar. I saw her later and learned the facts of what really happened.

Maggi told me a journalist called in the pub and gave her a hard time over her sexuality. She said: "I wasn't going to deny anything, was I." The result was plastered all over the paper.

So it was home to my typewriter where I knocked up a press release for the Star & Garter. I tried to put the message across where the pub was aimed at all sections of the community rather than gay people in particular. I also said it was made up of ex-members of the old Trades Club.

The release I did ended up being too strong for Maggi while just the opposite for the two Johns. They didn't think it went far enough, they were incensed by the Citizen article. It didn't help when a lot of the old club members made fun of them over the story.

I took the attitude where I was an outsider and it wasn't my livelihood which might be affected. Besides I knew what I was doing when it came to handling the media. None of the three of them were as experienced as me in this field.

I typed out my press release, put it through the newspaper office's letterbox and hoped for the best. I'd missed the deadline for this week's edition, so the poor old Johns had to sweat it out.

The week later it appeared in the Citizen, only it wasn't the retraction we'd hoped for. Instead it was published in the 'Letters' column with Maggi's name and the Star's address. At least they printed everything I sent them. It did the job, I think.

My involvement in the labour movement took a bit of a nose-dive when I found myself a new girlfriend a matter of weeks after the club shut down. She is called Carole, but likes me to call her Caroline. She's gorgeous - far too good for me - so everybody likes telling me.

Most people find this the most surprising thing about my life. Nine years as a member of the Trades Club committee and everybody's idea of the ultimate single bloke. It's often been conjectured over what might have happened if the club had gone bust in 1984.

This book was supposed to have a happy ending, but such is the way of all flesh. Sadly the curse of the Trades Club carried on in the Star & Garter.

Lynch and Maggi fell out with each other within a few months of the pub opening. Lynch severed his connection with the pub by ending his share in the partnership. Now he does a bit of teaching Trade Union Studies at Blackburn College and runs some kind of job club. With Lynch gone the Star & Garter struggled along under the helm of Maggi and John Tobera. The labour movement in the town continued its decline like everywhere else.

Just to add the ultimate irony, Maggi and Tobera split up with each other and the Star went bust. Most of the club members had stopped using the pub by now anyway. Like the children of Israel we were cast like seed to the wind.

The saddest aspect of the club going is Blackburn's labour movement not having a place it can call its own anymore. A place where every organisation could pull together whatever their differences, like we did a few times over the years.

It also means the few remaining trade union branches still at large in our town, which don't have their own premises, are back to the bad old days of meeting in the back rooms of pubs in the town centre.

The Trades Council itself has led a bit of a nomadic existence since leaving Union House. The Star & Garter was obviously the choice along with the rest of us. When this went bust we had to temporarily move to the GMB office on Wellington Street St Johns.

Finally we moved to the GPMU office on Tontine Street and hopefully there we will stay, all being well. Maybe one day we might have our own club again. After all we may have lost our club, but we are still here. Not even the most anti-union Tory Government we'll ever see has destroyed us.

We can only go up from now on.



Caroline