

REWIND: 30 YEARS AGO

BY TIM PARKS



A dip into Wealdstone folklore.. those incredible eight days in 1985 that won Stones the Conference title

In two days time it will be an astonishing 30 years since the Stones effectively booked their place at Wembley to set up the historic non-League double.

Yes, three decades since the blue and yellow army marched on Enfield's Southbury Road ground for the first leg of the FA Trophy semi-final. Three decades since a superlative performance, and goals from Neil Cordice and Andy Graham, snatched the 2-0 away win that saw us through to Wembley after a nerve-jangling 1-0 defeat by Enfield in the second leg. Three decades since hundreds of

Stones fans danced on the streets of EN1, finally recognising that football's first-ever Conference-Trophy double could actually be on the cards.

But we're not going to trot out the old cuttings from that day. Oh no. Even more importantly, we have uncovered a stash of press reports which record the famous five-wins-in-eight days in March 1985, which set up the possibility of the club getting anywhere near the Gola (Conference) league title.

The Stones had triumphed against all odds when winning the

Southern League South title three years earlier despite a monstrous backlog of games. We played 21 matches in 47 days in March and April - unbelievable! - and lost just two of them, and in that mix was a five-wins-in-nine days spell as Allen Batsford's side played Saturday, Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday, Monday, Wednesday, Saturday for two gruelling months.

But these epic games in March 1985 will live longer in the memory. It was played against a backdrop of largely unfair criticism **CONTD OVERPAGE**

Match 1, Saturday March 23: Stones 3 Weymouth 2....

Jaded Wealdstone welcome the points

Wealdstone 3 Weymouth 2
WHEN a team is chasing the league championship, it is the result that really matters at the end of the day.

Wealdstone manager Brian Hall admitted that his side was still jaded after their surprise defeat against Yeovil in midweek — and it showed.

But when the final whistle blew, Wealdstone had picked up the two points they desperately needed, writes Paul Jacques.

Hall had more made more changes than the average London train commuter makes, and it needed the steadying influence of skipper Paul Bowgett to carry the team through.

"In the end we won the game comfortably enough," said Hall.
"After we scored our first goal we played with a bit more passion, the second goal should have sewn it up, but we let them back in and had to start all over again."

Wealdstone were caught cold after just seven minutes. Michael Doherty touched the ball inside to Bobby Shinton who fired home from the edge of the box to give Weymouth the lead.

Andy Graham flashed a header across the face of goal before Wealdstone equalised after 24 minutes. A long cross from Brian Greenaway found Nigel Johnson

Victory heals suffering from Yeovil hangover

in plenty of space and he guided a header past Len Bond.

For the next quarter-of-an-hour, Wealdstone's play had the mark of champions about it.

Steve McCargo hit a shot just wide and Neil Cordice cannoned a header against the bar from a cross by Gary Donnellan.

Johnson saw a shot well taken by the keeper and Donnellan blasted another effort over the bar.

At the other end Paul Cotter, holding the fort in the continued absence of Bob Iles, did well to save a header by Doherty and then turned round a shot from Steele.

In between, an effort from Wealdstone's Graham was parried by the keeper and hooked off the line by Nick Preston.

A minute from half-time, Wealdstone added their second goal. Donnellan broke quickly and laid the ball off to Neil Cordice who rifled his shot past Bond.

Eleven minutes into the second half, Weymouth clawed their way back into the game.

Peter Rogers broke down the right cut inside and crossed to Gary Borthwick who shot inside the far post.

Wealdstone responded and four minutes later Bowgett powered a header against the bar from a corner. The rebound fell to Cordice but he shot just past the post.

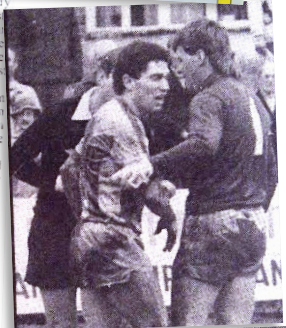
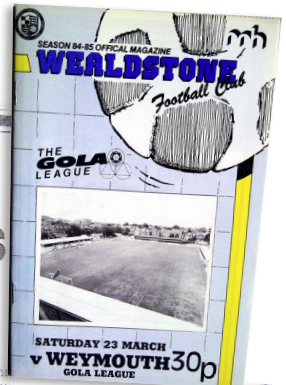
Wealdstone deservedly went back to front in the 65th minute. Graham won the ball and played it inside to Donnellan who made no mistake with only the keeper to beat.

Two minutes later Donnellan should have scored again but he shot tamely into the arms of the grounded keeper.

Graham missed a golden chance to make it four with five minutes remaining. He was found on his own inside the box but with time to spare he shot straight at Bond.

Weymouth went close to snatching an equaliser three minutes from time when Coombes headed over from a Borthwick free kick.

Wealdstone: Cotter, Davies, McCargo, Poyton, Bowgett, Greenaway (June 85), Hooper, N. Cordice, Johnson, Graham, Donnellan (Green 85)



BOOKED — Gary Donnellan (centre) gets his name taken as Weymouth keeper Len Bond makes his point.

REWIND: 30 YEARS AGO CONTINUED

towards Brian Hall's men, with our pragmatic but points-gathering style drawing few admirers. And when we lost 3-0 at home to strugglers Yeovil Town on Tuesday March 19 - despite the thrill of seeing Ian Botham turning out, and scoring, for the Somerset side - it seemed our goose was cooked.

The 600-strong Lower Mead crowd trooped home perplexed that the team they'd seen book a place in the Trophy semi-finals just three days earlier with a buccaneering beating of Frickley could wilt so meekly against Yeovil.

But behind the scenes, Hall was seething. And he clearly transmitted that anger to the team as the make-or-break week started with

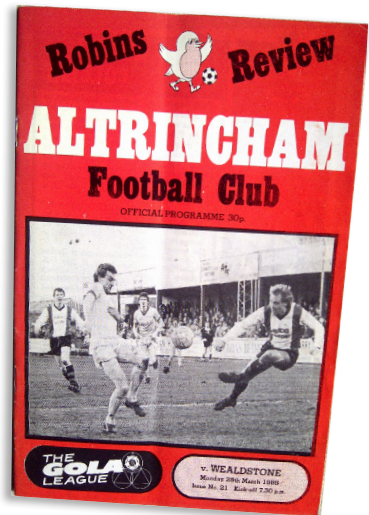
the Saturday visit of mid-table Weymouth to Lower Mead.

"I had to drum into them what a great opportunity this was to write their names in the record books, and how they'd look back on it with regret if they passed up this chance" said Hall in later years.

"I was desperate not to let them become sidetracked by dreams of playing at Wembley. That would take care of itself in the following weeks: we had to focus on the next period of games and it took a lot of organising and team planning."

Hall knew that his small squad would be stretched to

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Match 2, Monday March 25: Altrincham 1 Stones 2....

Cordice strikes to sink Altrincham 'Stones close the gap

Altrincham 1, Wealdstone 2
WEALDSTONE manager Brian Hall was not looking forward to Monday night's trip to Altrincham.

But his side turned in a performance worthy of champions to beat the Gola League leaders and close the gap at the top of the table.

"It was the crunch game and I did not really fancy our chances up there," admitted the Stones boss.

"Altrincham are no mugs. They are a good side and it was always going to be a hard, physical game. But my players were magnificent.

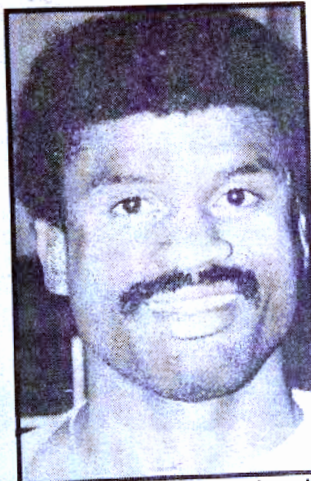
"It seems that the tougher the opposition the tougher we become and the better we play. It was a superb win and it has given the boys their confidence back again. They now realise they can beat the best."

For the first 20 minutes of Monday's match Wealdstone, and in particular in the Altrincham offside trap.

When Wealdstone did eventually master the offside trap, the chances started to flow.

Alan Cordice shot straight at the 'keeper from a Vince Jones corner, Gary Donnellan saw an effort held by the 'keeper and Lee Holmes blasted wide from a Cordice cross.

It took Wealdstone just 30 seconds of the second half to take the lead. And it



ALAN Cordice — hit the precious winner.

was Andy Graham who was on the mark again.

Cordice latched on to the ball on the right, headed for the bye-line, beat two players and fired in a cross which Graham met with a thunderous near post header that flew into the roof of the net.

The goal spurred Altrincham into action and they mounted a series of attacks on the Wealdstone goal.

Their pressure was rewarded after 54 minutes when Ronnie Ellis stabbed the ball home after a corner had been flicked on at the near post.

Two minutes later Cordice looked set to restore Wealdstone's lead, but he was pulled down from behind by Jeff Johnson as he raced for goal, a challenge which brought a booking for the Altrincham defender.

Cordice was again stopped on his way to goal in the 65th minute, this time in the penalty area. All he got was an indirect free kick, which Holmes tapped to Paul Bowgett but his chip was deflected over.

Ten minutes later Altrincham brought on Graham Bennett and the substitute almost scored with his first touch, a dipping cross-cum-shot from the left.

Wealdstone struck what proved to be the winner 11 minutes from time.

Steve McCargo pushed the ball forward for Cordice, who left his marker for dead and sprinted through to beat the advancing 'keeper with a venomous shot.

Altrincham put Wealdstone under the cosh for the last 10 minutes, but the Stones held out thanks to a combination of true grit and a little luck.

Wealdstone: Iles, Perkins, McCargo, Byatt, Bowgett, Wainwright, Jones, Holmes, Cordice, Graham, Donnellan (Johnson, 47).

THE TURNING POINT

by Colin Pope

TUESDAY March 26th could well go down in our history as the turning point of the 1984/85 season, and if we are destined to win the Gola League, then that night could be the clincher. It wasn't just the fact that we beat league leaders Altrincham 2-1; rather it was the manner in which we did it and we really justified the appreciative comments from the 1,400 home crowd.

But a special word to our Supporters. Chairman David Morrill told me on Tuesday that he found it difficult to find words which would adequately convey his delight, and appreciation at that vociferous band at Altrincham on Tuesday who, although naturally greatly out-numbered, played a tremendous part in our great victory, with their enthusiastic vocal support.

I can tell you that, from my travels around the country, it is very apparent that Wealdstone Supporters are rather a special breed, and that every single club in the Gola League is aware that we have an away following, particularly, which is the envy of them all.

And another goodly number of them made the exceptionally long trek to the North East on Wednesday night to rally the lads at Gateshead, returning home on the 1.10 am train, travelling all night to get to Kings Cross soon after dawn and for a lot of them, going straight to work! These Supporters really do deserve something, be it the FA Trophy or the League Championship, and we'd be a much poorer outfit without them and their mind-boggling enthusiasm. Lads (and Lasses) the Chairman is proud of you, and thanks you immensely.

It was always going to be difficult at Gateshead, with its unique lack of atmosphere, and in the event, and on a bitterly cold night, the result could easily have gone against us as Gateshead cracked a free kick against our bar in the closing stages. But three more away points puts us in a tremendous position.

I've mentioned these grand supporters of ours earlier. It is with a lot of pride that we give the names of those who made the trek to Gateshead and by the time we have played Scarborough on Sunday, many of them will have spent out £50 in a week watching the 'Stones'.

Steve Field, Tony Hayes, Gordon Mackay, Tony Maidment, Paul Walsh, Paul Fruin, Trevor Davies, Martin Allen, Phil Jeffreson, Michael Kane, S. Khanna, Dave Parish, George Pinkney, Mick Ferguson, Mark Stewart, Martin Lacey, Chris Ashton, Jim Bartrick, Matthew Gloor, Tom Wiseman, Steve Marshall. And of all things, long-standing supporter Ron More drove there and back, a distance of almost 600 miles! Accompanying Ron were old faithfuls Val Shearer, Tony Drew and Jim Minehane. With supporters like these we must be the luckiest club in Non-League football. Space prevents me from also listing those who went to Altrincham on Monday, but they included spritely George Clayton, aged an astonishing 84!!


All these supporters named above are asked to contact David Free, who is in charge of the gates, in the club office when convenient when they will hear something to their advantage!!

Match 3, Wed March 27: Gateshead 1 Stones 2....

Wealdstone beat Gateshead by two goals to one at the International Stadium on Wednesday night in the Gola League. Gateshead took the lead in the sixth minute after Bowjett's back-pass was intercepted and stabbed home by Donaldson.

However a goal either side of half-time by Neil Cordice gave Wealdstone the points.

Gateshead
FOOTBALL CLUB



Season
1984-5



20p



OFFICIAL MATCH DAY PROGRAMME

Gateshead
v
wealdstone

Wednesday
27th March
1985

Kick Off 7-30p.m.

at
GATESHEAD INTERNATIONAL STADIUM

Colin Pope's article in the Runcorn programme as the epic week reached its conclusion. He got the date wrong (it was Monday March 25th rather than Tuesday 26th) but great sentiments regarding our supporters. Nick Symmons tells me he was there too, arranging business trips to the North West and North East, and no doubt there were others who slipped under Colin's radar...

REWIND: 30 YEARS AGO CONTINUED

breaking point with the prospect of away games at Altrincham and Gateshead on the Monday and Wednesday night after the tricky visit of Weymouth. The 15-man part-time squad would be staying overnight in a small hotel at Whitley Bay before the Gateshead game, but successful negotiations with employers meant that at least everyone was available.

The big bonus was the excellent team spirit fostered by travelling and living together for pretty much a whole week. Hall was aware that if they came through this period unscathed, the benefits could see his side on the glory on two fronts.

Privately, though, the manager later admitted (from the five games) that he was hoping for maybe three wins, plus probably a defeat and a draw. Altrincham away was the crux: the Manchester side were four points clear at the top of the table going into this crucial period, and the bookies made them title favourites with Bath City and Enfield also more favoured than the Stones.

The three points awarded for an away win that season (with just two for victory at home) made those long hauls to Altrincham and Gateshead absolutely pivotal. The team knew it and the fans knew it, with 30-odd (more than those listed by Colin Pope in the programme) making the overnight train trip to Tyneside, adding to the 60-odd who were at Alty to see Andy Graham's terrific header wrap up the points.

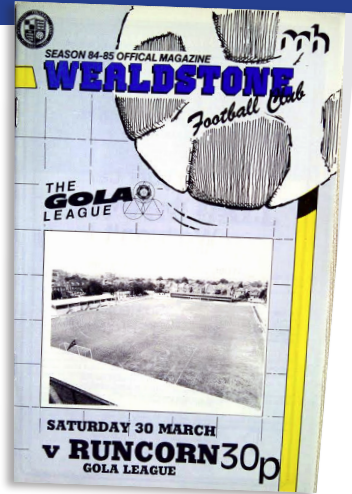
The weekend 'double-

header' against the powerful Runcorn and Scarborough sides, both at Lower Mead, put the seal on an astonishing week.

With both teams running out of free Saturdays, Scarborough decided (with the league's agreement) to stay overnight in Harrow after their match at Enfield on the Saturday, and face the Stones at Lower Mead on the Sunday morning.

As it turned out, the Yorkshire side did us a huge favour by winning 4-3 at fellow title-chasers Enfield in a real topsy-turvy game.

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Match 4, Saturday March 30th: Stones 1 Runcorn 0...

Cordice brightens Stones' dull day

Wealdstone 1, Runcorn 0

A SUPERB goal from Alan Cordice was enough to give Wealdstone two points against Runcorn and maintain Stone's push for the title.

Cordice struck after 27 minutes, robbing Runcorn full back Brian Kettle and then skipping past Bobby Fraser and Mick Roberts before hammering the ball past advancing 'keeper Ray McBride.

The first chance in a match that turned out to be a disappointing affair slogged out on a muddy Lower Mead pitch, fell to Runcorn's new signing Steve Crompton.

A Ray Woods free kick in the first minute fell to Crompton in front of goal, but the striker stabbed the ball wide.

More misery followed for Crompton, making his debut after signing from Worcester, when he was booked in the second half for aiming a kick at Steve McCargo.

Wealdstone were almost gifted an eighth minute lead by a bizarre own goal by Runcorn 'keeper McBride.

Attempting to check a quick throw the ball flew out of his hands, but hit

the foot of a post and was scrambled clear.

It was only Cordice's goal that brightened up a dull first half. And the second half turned into a similar poor spectacle.

Gary Donnellan livened things up briefly with a drive that McBride turned on to the bar and referee Emerson Griffiths caused a heart stopping moment in the Wealdstone defence when he allowed Crompton to streak through and hit a shot just wide, with Mark Carter standing in an offside position.

It was referee Griffiths who was the busiest man on the field, putting four names in his book.

Joining Crompton were Steve McCargo, for kicking the ball away at a free kick, and Fraser and Andy Brockbank, both for clattering Cordice to the ground.

Stones manager Brian Hall said after the match: "It was not a very exciting game, but it was never going to be.

"They are always a hard side to play against but we got the two points and that is all I could ask for.

Wealdstone: Iles, Perkins, McCargo, Byatt, Bowgett, Wainwright, Jones, N. Cordice, A. Cordice, Johnson, 45, Graham (Graves, 67), Donnellan.

REWIND: 30 YEARS AGO CONTINUED

This Sunday morning clash was only agreed the previous weekend - and it caused a bit of a quandary for yours truly, who was then secretary of SFC Wealdstone, the supporters' Sunday football team. We were chasing the Marathon League Div 4 title and had also run out of spare dates.

The league were less than helpful. "This is a Sunday morning league so you'll have to play at 10.30 like anyone else" said the intransigent League secretary when I asked if we could move it to an afternoon kick-off. Our players were adamant that they didn't want to miss the Stones game - every single one was a die-hard supporter and even now, 30 years later, all but a few of that team can still be spotted at the Vale.

So I phoned the secretary of our opponents (108 Sports Club) to ask if they would mind switching to a 3pm start and they agreed... it was just a matter of then pleading our case to the Marathon League and happily they relented. It was quite a novelty for everyone... and we ended the perfect weekend by winning the game 4-1 on our cramped Boxtree Lane pitch behind the Harrow Weald bus garage!

We went top of our table just three hours after the Stones had also shot to the top of the Gola League for the first time since November... and neither team would ever relinquish that position.

Match 5, Sunday March 31st: Stones 1 Scarborough 0....

Sunday soccer is just the tonic

Wealdstone 1, Scarborough 0

ALAN Cordice shot Wealdstone to the top of the Gola League with his second goal of the weekend at Lower Mead on Sunday. He struck with the vital goal after 32 minutes to knock the wind out of a Scarborough side that was still buzzing from a splendid victory at Enfield the previous day, *writes Paul Jacques*.

It was Wealdstone's first Sunday fixture since March 1974 when a crowd of 1,300 watched them beat Poole Town 3-2 in their Southern League Championship season. Scarborough's visit attracted a gate of 903 — well above Wealdstone's average — but two games in as many days had clearly put a strain on the players.

This Sunday experiment failed to produce a classic on the field, but cock-a-hoop Wealdstone won't worry too much about that. In the end, Scarborough could do little to prevent Wealdstone opening up a two point lead at the top of the table.

Boro started brightly enough with David Bowman shooting just wide, and John Hannah finding space in the Wealdstone box, only to see that ball hooked off his feet for a corner.

Scarborough had a narrow escape after 12 minutes. A cross from Brian Greenaway found Neil Cordice and he sent a powerful header into the back of the net, only to see the effort disallowed for offside.

There was no reprieve in the 32nd minute. Andy Graham touched the ball through to Alan Cordice who galloped clear of his marker, went round keeper Graeme Crawford and planted his shot into an empty net.

Indeed, it was Alan Cordice who proved to be the thorn in Scarborough's side. Harry Dunn, Graham Hartley and Kenny Dennis were all booked for fouls on the Wealdstone striker as Scarborough's frustration became more evident.

Scarborough, who won just two first half corners and only one after the interval, posed few threats to the Wealdstone defence.

Skipper Paul Bowgett was missing with flu, but Steve Perkins coped well at the centre of the back four.

Scarborough's best, indeed only, chance of the second half came in the 68th minute. A cross from Nigel Rose was met by Bowman but his effort was headed off the line by Roy Davies.

Wealdstone broke immediately and the ball was worked to Mark Graves a 52nd minute replacement for Andy Graham. Graves looked up and hit a fierce drive that beat Crawford but dipped just over the bar.

Wealdstone: Iles, Davies, McCargo, Byatt, Perkins, Wainwright, Greenaway, N. Cordice, A. Cordice, Graham (Graves 52), Johnson.



Wealdstone's Andy Graham gets in a tangle during Sunday's match with Scarborough at Lower Mead.

The Harrow Observer reports on the perfect finale to the Stones wonder week. Six weeks later the Stones were crowned Gola League champions... and on May 11th also won the FA Trophy at Wembley. Not a bad season really!