

THE BIG, BIG INTERVIEW



BY TIM PARKS

WEALDSTONE v EAST
THURRO' UTD 06.04.19

George Duck is undeniably the greatest-ever goalscorer in Wealdstone history - and arguably the club's greatest-ever player. He was certainly the idol of fans in the 1970s when he netted an unparalleled 251 goals in seven seasons, including 64 in the 73-74 Southern League Division One South-winning campaign. He has won league titles and the FA Trophy, but now declares that his Wealdstone FC Life Membership is his greatest honour. This is the story of his remarkable career...

IN the midst of George Duck's greatest moment in football came a reminder about the player he might have become.

It was the evening of May 17, 1980, and George's then-club Dagenham had just won the FA Trophy Final at Wembley - George had headed the opening goal on a glorious spring afternoon to vindicate his decision to leave the Stones the previous summer.

"I was a real mixture of emotions" he admitted when I spoke to the now 67-year-old George (at length!) a couple of weeks ago. "I only left Wealdstone because it was my lifetime ambition to play and score at Wembley, and after seven years at the club I couldn't see that ever happening.

"So I left for Dagenham, rejoining the ex-Stones manager Eddie Presland, and by the end of the season the incredible had happened - I'd achieved my dearest wish.

"That evening we went to celebrate winning the Trophy at Chanticleer, the nightclub/restaurant next to the Spurs ground in White Hart Lane. That was a coincidence in itself as I'd been on the books of Tottenham as a schoolboy before convincing myself I wasn't good

George Duck



enough - I just walked away from my dream at the age of 15 and had beaten myself up about it ever since.

"And then, walking into the Chanticleer, who should I bump into but Dickie Walker, the Spurs chief scout who had brought me to the club a dozen years earlier. He just said: 'Georgie Duck! Where have you been?'"

Where indeed.

George's story is in some ways typical of the lack of care and nurture that young footballers received in the 1960s and 70s. It was sink or swim and survivors of that tough school needed the unwavering support and guidance of loving parents - but George, the victim of a broken home, had neither.

"My mother had tuberculosis and my dad just couldn't cope with me - my three older brothers were living with other family members - and I was put into care from a very young age. I also spent time in hospital until they were sure I'd not contracted TB. My mother recovered and

'Lower Mead was my Theatre of Dreams and the Stones fans were simply the best supporters I've ever played for'

came home, but it was never a happy household and I spent most of my time out on the streets kicking my plastic ball around. That ball was my best friend. I loved that ball".

Home was Tebworth Road in Tottenham, just around the corner from White Hart Lane.

Maybe the lack of stability at home contributed to his early lack of confidence, but outwardly you wouldn't have known it as he quickly became a star player for his Lancasterian Junior school team, and then Rowland Hill Boys secondary - both schools within a goalkick of Spurs' White Hart Lane ground.

"We grew up with the idea that Tottenham were the bees knees and would be a dominant force forever" says George. "This was in 1961 when I was nine, and Spurs had just won the League and FA Cup double.

"I was playing for the Tottenham & District team on Saturday mornings and

one week Spurs' manager Billy Nicholson turned up to watch! Could you imagine that happening now, just hours before a big home Division One game?

"What was even more exciting is that a few of our lads, me included, were invited to train at White Hart Lane. That was quite something in itself... but then one evening, while we were training on one of the ball courts at the Lane, Billy Nick himself came over to me and said 'how would you like to sign schoolboy forms for Tottenham?'"

"Well I was gobsmacked. Here was I, a lad who idolised the players and who had seen them win the title a few years earlier, handed the chance to actually play and train with them.

"But the lack of confidence kicked in again. Although I loved the coaching sessions, I didn't think I was good enough for Spurs.. and I just stopped going. I've got a letter at home from Eddie Heath, one of the coaches, asking where I'd been hiding

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I'd been hiding because they wanted me to come back and train.

"But I wouldn't be budged and it was a couple of years before I was enticed back playing again... this time it was a couple of my old school mates Ronnie Howell and Dickie Plume - who were at Millwall in their youth set-up - who gave me details to the Millwall coach Charlie Hume. Next thing, there we all were, 35 kids on a coach over to Wormwood Scrubs for a trial match. Very glamorous!

"But I must have been okay because I was selected for Millwall's South East Counties League side against West Ham at their Chadwell Heath training ground one Saturday morning. I think we lost 3-1 or 4-1 but there was this moment when I took the ball on my chest in the box and,

without breaking stride, crashed it across the keeper and into the corner. Charlie just shouted 'Class!' and basically told Benny Fenton (the Millwall manager) to sign me.

'Now, I had just left school at 15 and got my first job working as a dogsbody for Ruberoid, the rubber roofing firm, in the City but within three months I had signed apprentice forms for the Lions.

"Players today don't know they're born! Apprentices back then had to clean the senior players' boots, clean the dressing rooms and showers, and pick all the kit up before we trained ourselves. But I loved it!

"I was still growing and not physically very strong, but the training tough-

Amazing pictures!
Left: in 1967, Spurs were parading the FA Cup around the local schools and they knew Rowland Hill had won the District Schools Cup - so Spurs stars Terry Venables (far left) and Jimmy Robertson decided to pose with the schools' cup while Rowland Hill's 15 year old skipper George (centre) held the FA Cup! Far right is Spurs scout Dickie Walker who brought George to White Hart Lane the following year



George (left) trains with Millwall legend Harry Cripps as a 17-year-old

ened me up and I had some great players to watch and learn from.

"Keith Weller and Derek Possee - both from Spurs - were the best but you had some good pros like Harry Cripps and Barry Kitchener (who nearly got a move to Liverpool, who went for Larry Lloyd instead) while Eamonn Dunphy was a ball-playing midfielder, a good passer but he couldn't tackle and was outspoken - not the most popular in the changing room. He wasn't in the Millwall mould. He would brag about playing for the Republic of Ireland but the other players reckoned you only needed to keep the ball up half a dozen times to be good enough for an Eire cap!

"I was playing for Millwall's reserves in the London Midweek League, but the closest I got to the first team was a pre season game against Motherwell at the Den and then being 13th man for a couple of league games at Watford and Portsmouth.

"Then came the bad news - I was handed a free transfer. It was crushing. I had a couple of offers from York City and Southend and chose the wrong club... Arthur Rowley, the Southend manager was just a shouter and a ranter but who knows

what would have happened if I had scored on my League debut?

"He put me in for the first game of the season, at Peterborough and although it was a lovely sunny day there had been a downpour just before kick off and the pitch was full of puddles. In the first half our winger banged this great low cross into the six yard box and I thought 'brilliant, I'm going to score here' as I shaped to sidefoot home... but the ball hit a patch of standing water and shot straight through my legs! Amazing! That was my big chance, right there and I was just robbed!

'Rowley left me out for the next game, and the next, and I sort of fell in with the wrong crowd, the disaffected pros who would rather play golf and go down the pub than concentrate on playing football. I was young and naive.

"I think about it a lot; how I lost my way at that time but there was no-one to look out for you and look after you... I'm sure it wouldn't happen these days as footballers are assets and recognised as such by the clubs. We were pretty much ignored most of the time.

So I went back to just playing locally with my mates at Bruce Castle Park - not proper

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Nº 5704

GEORGE DUCK

Name of Schoolboy

This is to certify that you have this day been registered as an Associated Schoolboy with The Football League, Ltd.

TOTTENHAM HOTSPUR Football Club.

for the

Date 28.10.65.

To be signed by a responsible official of the club

It's official: George is a Spurs player at the age of 13

G2840/2/65

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games but a lot of good young players - and the Barnet manager at the time, Tommy Coleman tried to get me over to Underhill. I told him where to go. I was just so disenchanted with football.

"Not that my working life was any good- I'd taken on a window cleaning round in Edmonton with a mate but he soon dropped out... it was bloody hard work!"

"That was when Sid Prosser got in touch.

"Wealdstone? Who are they they?" I thought, although in the back of my mind I knew they were a big, recognised ex-amateur club. I was going to tell Sid to sling his hook too but he managed to persuade me that he was building a good team and had signed some very decent players. And to be honest I was planning to get engaged and wanted to be able to afford a ring!

"Well, I went over to the first training session at the Hamilton's training ground over the road from Lower Mead in my M&S jumper (I couldn't afford a tracksuit) and things just fell into place. I liked Sid - he was the first coach or manager who had taken a real interest in me and that changed my whole mindset.

"Then I played my first game at the ground and I just fell in love with the place. I really did. There was something

training session

All Wealdstone's contract professionals and all the top amateurs who were in the first team squad last season reported to Lower Mead Stadium on Monday evening for the first training session of the new season, writes Phil Sugden.

Among those who underwent a tough session on Hamilton's sports ground were new signings George Duck, from Southend, Les Boughey, from 'Spurs, and ex-St. Albans City amateur Phil Woods.

A big turn out of players included many trial applicants who will be taken in hand by reserve team manager Les Boyle and his colleague Edgar Francis.

Reporting for training later this week will be another professional, a forward from League club Colchester who manager Prosser is considering signing.

Amateur striker Bill Byrne, who had originally planned to emigrate to South Africa, was among the amateurs who trained. He has intimated that he will definitely be re-signing for the club.

So, too, will top amateurs Paul Latham, Alick Brown, John Beyer, Roger Livingstone and Roger Vint.

Midfield professional John Currie, who earlier refused the terms offered by the manager, is now accepted and signed a new contract.

Said Wealdstone P.R.O. Colin Pope: "Mr. Prosser and all club officials were very happy to see such an excellent turnout of players on Monday. Everyone was eager to get going and though they were given an extremely hard first training session, they all seemed to enjoy themselves."

Wealdstone F.C.'s revised pre-season friendly fixtures are as follows: Tuesday, August 1, Harrow Borough at Earlsmead, 6.30 p.m.; Thursday, August 3, versus Bishops Cleeve, 7.30 p.m.; Saturday, August 5, public training and practice game between the club's players at Lower Mead, 3 p.m.; Wednesday, August 9, versus Luton Town at Lower Mead, kick-off 7.30 p.m.

Mr. Jack Rogers

Mr. Jack Rogers, who had been associated with Wealdstone Football Club for more than 40 years as treasurer, vice-chairman, chairman and latterly a life member, died in Northwick Park Hospital on Sunday.

Mr. Rogers, who lived at 38, King's Way, Harrow, had been in poor health for some time and had spent several periods in hospital. He leaves a widow.

Wealdstone manager Sid Prosser (left) used as his newly-signed players (left to right) Phil Wood (ex-St. Albans), Les Boughey (Spurs) and George Duck (from Southend) during the opening night of training at Hamilton's sports ground, Wealdstone, on Monday evening



George (far right) at that first session at the Hamilton's ground opposite Lower Mead. Manager Sid Prosser is far left, with Phil Woods and Les Boughey (neither of whom signed) also in shot

about the wide, flat pitch, the quirky fat goalposts and the close proximity of the fans, especially behind the goals, that got into my head and soon I was looking forward to every match and every training session.

"Eddie Presland (Stones right back at the time) lived in Essex and he would pick me up in Tottenham along with Terry Dyson who lived just round the corner. Now, Terry was a Spurs legend, a left winger who had been in the double winning team of 60-61 and he had some great stories - while Eddie had been a first teamer at West Ham and Crystal Palace so it was

football chat all the way there and all the way back.

"Training or a game; into the bar afterwards for shandy and crisps; sometimes we'd stay until 10 or 11 on Saturdays when the wives and families came to watch" he said. "My missus Sue (we married in 1973), her mum Doll and my dad (also called George, who had also been a good youth player in his day) would be there and they were the best times of my life. There were people at that club who really cared. At most clubs you get a few mercenaries, those who just took the money and disappeared but there was a

George's introduction to Wealdstone.. with no kit!

"I remember that first training session so clearly - I didn't have any kit, so turned up in a Fred Perry tee shirt and M & S jumper because I couldn't afford a tracksuit... I felt a real ragamuffin but straight away I felt like I fitted in at that club".

Bizarrely, trialling for the club that same evening was 16-year goalkeeper Alan Hill who remembered the tall new striker with the green jumper all these years later... but then he would, because that teenage keeper is the same dyed-in-the-wool Stones fan Alan Hill who travels up from West Super-Mare even now for every home game.

"I wasn't good enough but I'll always remember that training session, rubbing shoulders with some proper footballers - and I still remember trying and failing to save a Bill Byrne thunderbolt!"

nucleus of terrific people at Wealdstone- players, fans, and officials- and that made it a special place to be.

"I also got re-aquainted with Willie Watson, who I'd known from youth football - me at Millwall, Willie at West Ham - and we've been close friends ever since. It wasn't long before we got another ex-West Ham lad (Ray) Ginger Fulton to sign too. The fact that the club was attracting quality players made it a great environment, right from the start.

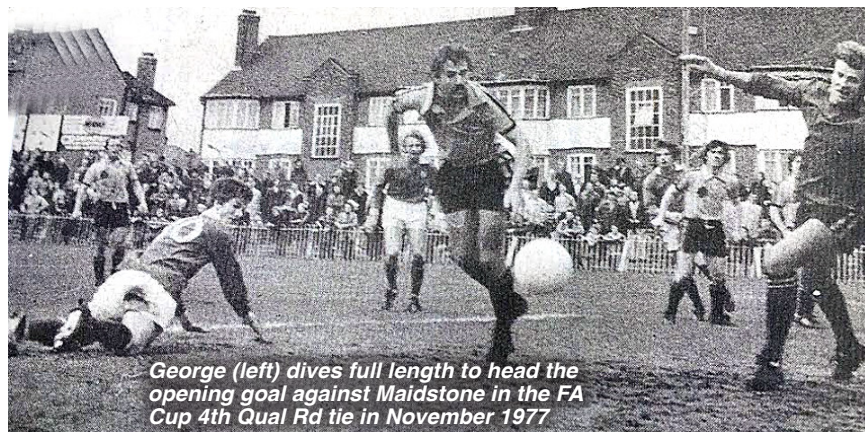
'But remember the lunch at Grosvenor Vale a few years ago, when you illustrated how long it took to score my first Wealdstone goal? It was no joke at the time... I went right through August without scoring, half a dozen games until finally I scored in a home win over Bideford. What a relief!

I told George that there was no concern from the fans at the time. Mickey Brown and Bill Byrne were scoring, George was looking sharp and dangerous and we knew Sid Prosser had signed a quality player...

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George (left) dives full length to head the opening goal against Maidstone in the FA Cup 4th Qual Rd tie in November 1977

who had turned down the chance of a full-time career.

'I didn't know that!' he said. 'I could just imagine the fans getting frustrated, and the club thinking they'd signed a dud.

'But tell you what, just after that Bideford game that broke my duck – pardon the pun – we had a Trophy match at Andover that could have been a disaster. Our goalie John Barr was going to meet us at the ground but he didn't turn up... Full back John Beyer went in goal and we quickly went 2-0 down. Calamity! But then Johnny Barr turned up, we reorganised and I went on to score maybe my best hat trick ever... the first a bullet header from a Mickey Brown cross, then a volley from outside the box and finally a chip over the keeper from an angle. I always remember the good goals!

'That got my confidence going, and soon after we had a London Senior Cup game at Lower Mead against a terrific Enfield side who had won everything in the amateur game. I scored again from outside the box and although we lost 3-2 I thought we had the makings of a great side.'

You must have had some regrets about staying in non League though, I asked him. I know a few league clubs were circling - they were bound to, after you got over 100 goals in your first two seasons!

'That honestly never really happened- I think that if you've had a chance at League football and dropped out, clubs are wary of

taking you on. And anyway, joining Wealdstone set me up for life (not financially, of course - although I never wanted to be a millionaire, just live like one!). It was my most important decision ever, throwing in my lot with Sid.

"Not just the football, but he put me in touch with Charlie Cook (not the ex-Chelsea star!) a friend of Sid's who got me a job as a Games Instructor at Willesden High school. I took my preliminary coaching badge with Tommy Lawrence, the former Enfield striker and went on to work there for seven years. And that was a great job to fit in with the football... we had midweek trips to Weymouth, Yeovil, Bridgend even and I never missed a game.

'And I loved working with the kids - one of them in the under-15 team was a centre forward called Dave Beasant. We soon put him in goal and of course he had a great career, winning the FA Cup for Wimbledon and earning a move to Newcastle.

'He never forgot me though.. Dave sent me tickets for their semi final against Luton at White Hart Lane and then came round to my house with tickets for the Final at Wembley!

'I told him 'David, you're going to win the Cup' and of course the twist to the story was that he became the first keeper to save a penalty in the Cup Final, keeping out that spot kick from John Aldridge as they won 1-0. Absolutely amazing!

Also playing for Willesden High was



The goal machine: George nets flying headers; goes around the keeper; and lashes them in on the volley. All part of scoring 251 goals for the Mighty Stones!



Luther Blissett, the Watford and England legend, in the year above Beasant and the kids used to come down to Lower Mead to watch 'Sir' play for the Stones. Said George: 'I'll always remember going into school the Monday after our controversial win over Hastings in the Fa Trophy and they were all saying: 'We saw you mentioned on Grandstand Sir! A hat trick of penalties and the other team walking off in protest! They were great days'

I asked George if he found it quite easy scoring goals against Southern League semi-pros after his time at Spurs and Millwall. 'No, it is tough scoring goals at any level and they weren't easy sides we were playing... a lot of old hard pros in most teams and it was a relief when the goals started flying in'.

What did you consider to be your main assets as a goal scorer? 'Remaining calm and cool in the box is the main thing. What I lacked in pace I made up for with my awareness of what was happening inside the penalty area. But I think I had a good touch, and I had a sort of radar when crosses were coming into the box... you had to anticipate where the ball was going to go and having an understanding with your team mate, knowing where he was likely to deliver the ball. I always had a picture in my mind of where the keeper and the goal was and getting the right touch was paramount. Being able to lose defenders in a crowded penalty area and finding a pocket of space was the key. You can't score goals standing still; you have

to be constantly on the move and defenders hate that. And you need confidence!

'You know, you don't have to hit the ball hard. Andy Nelson, a big old centre back at Millwall (who had won the league while at Ipswich) taught me about volleying the ball; you can use the pace on the ball and just transfer the energy. I was happy with either foot too and that was the result of hours of practise as a kid with my little white ball'.

And what about one on ones with the keeper? 'Ah, I loved going round the keeper! That was the ultimate as a striker, taking the ball round him and sticking it away. I always made a beeline for the keeper, which meant he had decide what HE was going to do... So I would dummy to shoot, commit him to a dive and just walk it into the net'.

And what about penalties? I remember you scoring 20 one season... 'I used to give them the eyes... a quick glance at one corner of the net when I knew he was watching me, then I stuck the ball away with pace in the other corner, so it was likely to beat the keeper even if he guessed right.

'That was always my penalty routine. The only time I remember just smashing it up the middle was my third attempt in the FA Cup second round match at Lower Mead against Reading in 1977. I angled my shot too far away from Steve Death's left hand and it hit the post, but fortunately he had moved too soon and I got a second go - which I stuck away, the same side. But this time the ref was not ready and I hadn't heard the whistle because of the noise! So I just closed my eyes the third time and happily it screamed into the roof of the net and we won, 2-1'.

THE BIG, BIG INTERVIEW



BY TIM PARKS

WEALDSTONE v DULWICH
HAMLET 20.04.19

The George Duck Story: Part Two

In the last home programme we kicked off the tale of the Stones' greatest-ever goalscorer: George Duck, who netted 251 times in just seven seasons, between 1972 and 1979.

Part One covered his youthful career as a Spurs schoolboy, and his short-lived pro career at Millwall and Southend before making "The best decision of my life" and signing for Sid Prosser at Wealdstone...

"One of the great things about Wealdstone was the banter and camaraderie - so different from my experiences in the professional game. I'd like to share some Great Wealdstone Memories...

"I'll never forget a 0-2 defeat at the very strong Bath side in October 1974 - me and Bill Byrne were both injured and had to sit the game out in the stand, and we had other players missing too, so to keep it at 0-0 into the last ten minutes was quite something. But then they scored a lucky goal and the big crowd erupted. And then an undeserved penalty in the last moments of the game.

"Our lads came off the pitch and John McCormick, our big, craggy Scottish centre back - who'd played in Division One for Crystal Palace under the Bath manager that day, Bert Head - took exception to the crowd's merriment and he wanted to go up into the seats and fight every last

It's February 1975 and George (far right) leaps to celebrate a goal by Adriaan Eglite (centre) after just 51 seconds against Grantham at Lower Mead. We won 1-0. Bill Byrne and John McCormick are the other Stones in shot



one of them. He was going mad, nostrils flaring, screaming: 'Attack the terraces!' - if he'd had a claymore it could have been dangerous!

"We managed to finally grab hold of him and he never lived it down - we never stopped laughing because it was so out of character. But boy, was he ever a hard player... there was one away game at Dover when he came off injured and I remember him stamping his foot down in the car park, just as we were getting on the coach for the return journey saying "Don't worry lads, I'll be okay for Saturday." But come the weekend he turned up with his leg was in plaster of Paris from his ankle to his thigh.. he'd broken his leg! Rest in peace big John.

"Then there was the time when we were training on a wet, filthy night at the territorial army drill hall just opposite the ground - it wasn't a big place and it had a big ornamental clock high on the wall above

the five a side goals. Well, Paul Fairclough, who was one for the ladies, was showing off a bit and hit this shot so hard that it smashed the clock. Obliterated it, leaving glass everywhere! Sid Prosser (the manager) was furious and shouted that 'Cyril' was 'all c***k and no brains' and we fell about laughing, it was hilarious. Sid blasted at us: "That's it, put the balls away, you're out running instead." Nice one Cyril.

"Barnet was a horrible place to go, a terrible pitch at Underhill and fans who always gave me stick.. they did make me laugh one Boxing Day, though. I'd scored and they were threatening they'd cut me up. 'Orange sauce, orange sauce, orange sauce' they sang - for a Duck, that's quite original.

"Football wise, one of my best memories was playing in Eric Burgess' testimonial against the Wolves first team in 1975. Eric's sister in law was Anthea Redfearn,



Above: George makes his point by heading a goal as Stones beat a strong Millwall side 3-1 in a London Challenge Cup replay in 1972.. having been let go a year earlier

Bruce Forsyth's wife and what a night that was! Brucie kicked off the game, but then it got serious and I had the pleasure of playing up front with Jimmy Greaves, who was my all-time hero at Spurs. Wolves played for keeps, and had John Richards, Mike Bailey, Kenny Hibbitt, Phil Parkes and all their Div One stars on show and they beat us 5-2 - but I managed to get both our goals (one header, one penalty) and I was told afterwards that Greavesie had sung my praises. That's one accolade I will take to my grave."

"The FA Cup run of 1977-78 was fantastic to be a part of. The club had never reached the Third Round before (or since) and the 3-2 win at Hereford United in the First Round replay was a great night... I have mixed feelings because as a striker you want to be getting among the goals and it was Pat Ferry (2) and Bobby Moss who stuck them away in that game. (Although it was George, as the heavily-marked dangerman, who created the space for that pair to score -Ed).

We've mentioned George's thrice-taken penalty over the win over Reading in Round Two, but his main memory of the famous game at QPR in the Third Round is tainted by illness. "I had a chest infection a couple of days before the game - I couldn't breathe properly and really I shouldn't have played, but the manager (Alan Fogarty)

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COR, LUV A DUCK!

WEALDSTONE 2
READING 1

By PAT GARROW

If you happen to be in the Harrow area and see men walking around 10 feet tall this week they're sure to be Wealdstone footballers.

They made club history by reaching the third round of the FA Cup with this well-deserved win over Third Division Reading.

And what a reward for the boys who were on a £50 win bonus. They now face Queen's Park Rangers at Shepherd's Bush - a draw that was hailed with delight by Keith Furphy, scorer of

Stones' opening goal. He said: "I was on Rangers' books, but didn't see eye-to-eye with Frank Wiley, now their manager. So I joined Wealdstone."

But the man who really left Reading up the creek was George Duck.

Leading scorer, Duck put Stones two up with a three-taken penalty after Lewis brought down Moss in the 62nd minute.

Reading put back a surprise later through Earle, their goal hero of the previous round.

But this wasn't their day. From the moment Furphy had scored direct from a sixth-minute corner, they never looked happy and finished the match having

managed to carry off with a knee injury.

Stones manager Alan Pearty said: "We did a bit of toying in midweek about not having a chance. We knew we had."

was insistent. I saw the video of their first goal the other day and I was on the spot and might have put in a challenge on Don Givens as he headed the ball goalwards - maybe if I'd been fit I might have done better. Although it was a soft header that put us behind.

"In fact I was ill for two of the biggest games in my time at Wealdstone - that one at QPR, and then for the home last-16 Trophy game with South Shields in 1974 when I had bronchitis. No chance of me playing in that one - we could only draw and then lost the replay - and I felt we had a really good chance of getting to Wembley that season.

"Other memories pop into my head unbidden... I remember the home game against Dagenham in the FA Cup 3rd Qual in 1975, on the way to playing Aldershot away in the First Round. That Dagenham side were one of the best in the Isthmian League but we were in



NOW FOR QPR!—Keith Furphy (in the hat) and George Duck toast their Wealdstone

such great form at home I knew we had a good chance... we pummelled them in the second half but it stayed at 0-0, then Bobby Moss (a truth athlete, a committed player with a knack for scoring important goals) got the crucial first goal and with ten minutes left I got the ball on the edge of the penalty arc at the Cinema End and hit it right-footed off my laces just inside the near past Ian Huttley. The crowd went absolutely mental!

"A year later, in the Fourth Qualifying Round we took on Maidstone United who were favourites. Jimmy McVeigh, who later played for us, gave them the lead but I managed to head an equalizer at the Cinema End.

"Then the second half was all Maidstone until Willie (Watson) got hold of the ball in midfield and showed what a terrific player he was, getting away from tackles and hitting a fierce shot that their keeper Derek Bellotti only half-saved. And who was there for the rebound? Me! I banged

the ball into the net and then went and stood on that stone wall at the Elmslie End, up against the railings with my arms outstretched while the crowd celebrated... what a brilliant moment!"

As the 1970s wore on George was still scoring 25-30 goals a season but it was becoming more and more of a lone furrow. Eddie Presland and his No.2 Terry Dyson paid the price for a terrible second half of the 1975-76 season - the team slipping into the Southern Prem relegation zone just a few months after a glorious autumn had taken us up to third in the table - and were sacked after a 4-1 defeat at fellow strugglers Hillingdon Borough.

"I felt bad for Eddie & Terry but then the new managerial team of Geoff Coleman and Alan Fogarty straightened things out. We had a few good seasons but I had this nagging feeling that my best years were slipping away and I desperately, desperately wanted to play at Wembley. And win a trophy.

"Tell you what probably tipped me into leaving Wealdstone - it was a phone call from Eddie Presland, who had taken over as manager at Dagenham with Terry again as his No.2, just after he had been beaten in the FA Trophy semi-final by Kettering. They had been beaten by a Billy Kellock goal - they had come that close to Wembley.

"Eddie called me and said 'George, you are our missing link. If we had you in the team we can get to Wembley next year - I'm convinced of it'.

"Well, I was still working at Willesden High School and every day we drove past the twin towers on the way to taking the kids to matches and training, and that pretty much made my mind up. I had lost faith in Wealdstone ever getting there and so when Eddie put an offer in, I told the Stones I wanted to leave. Nothing to do with travelling, as Wealdstone were moving into the Alliance Premier League that summer - that was just a coincidence - it was entirely down to my ambition and,

as it turned out, that decision gave me my greatest moment in football."

The reaction among the Stones faithful was one of resignation. George had been such a brilliant, selfless servant of the club for seven years and nobody begrudged him the chance of a fresh start - personally, I thought the team had become too reliant on one man to score the goals and that it might actually give the opportunity for youngsters like Nigel Johnson and Neil Cordice to shine.

The management weren't happy, however. George was told he couldn't train with the first team while negotiations with Dagenham were ongoing. He had the indignity of turning out for the reserves in a Saturday morning pre-season friendly with Hendon Reserves at Lower Mead - a game that I remember well as I was trialling for the Rubs and had the thrill of playing for 20 minutes on the same pitch as the great George!

Within the next couple of days he was transferred to Dagenham and the money

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GEORGE DUCK CONTINUED

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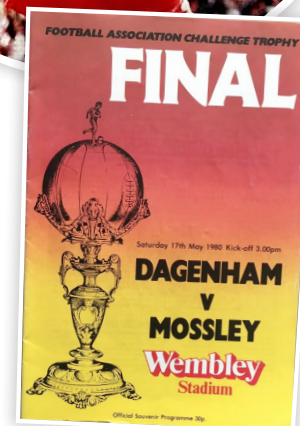
immediately used to sign influential midfielder Robin Wainwright from Hillingdon Borough ... a signing that turned out to have as much impact on the Stones fortunes in the next half-dozen years as George had at Dagenham.

"I hadn't realised the club transferred Robin at the same time" said George. "I was always impressed by him every time we played - great passer, great tackler, a very clever player and he should have had a longer career at Luton in the League. I played against him a lot of times"

But now George had to prove himself to a whole new set of fans. "If I was nervous about getting off on the right foot for Wealdstone when I was 20, it was actually harder as a recognised goalscorer in non-League at the age of 27", he confessed. "Dagenham had bought a player who was supposed to guarantee them goals - I had a reputation that I had to live up to, and those first couple



*Moment of glory:
George after scoring*



*Right: The
Wembley
programme
that glorious
afternoon*

*Fantastic pictures as George (No.9)
leaps to head Dagenham into the lead
at Wembley and then (main picture)
runs to take the acclaim of the huge
Daggers support*



of months were tricky as the team wasn't really gelling and I wasn't scoring.

"But, a bit like the turning point for me at Wealdstone, we had an early FA Trophy match away at Dorchester that could have been a banana skin but Eddie said to me 'You'll see a different Dagenham today - the players will all have their serious heads on. They'll be focused'.

"And that is exactly what happened. We won 1-0 and I got the goal from close range, and from that moment I was okay".

He was, of course, rather better than okay. George's goals helped lift the Daggers to fifth place in the Isthmian League (behind Enfield, Walthamstow, Dulwich Hamlet and Sutton) and he shared almost 70 goals with strike partner Ricky Kidd.

Dagenham travelled to Cheshire to smash Stalybridge Celtic 5-0 on their next

step to Wembley. And in the third round they forced a 1-1 draw at Burton Albion before winning the replay 3-1 at the Victoria Ground with Duck, Joe Dunwell and Chris Maycock the scorers.

George scored twice as the powerful Nuneaton side were removed 3-2 in the last eight.... and semi-final opponents Woking were simply blown away as Kidd (2) and Jimmy Holder set up a 3-1 away win, and Kidd (2), Maycock and Roche rubber-stamped the Wembley place in a 4-1 second leg win - 7-2 on aggregate!

Now, knowing George as we do, was his lack of confidence raising its ugly head again? Did he fear not playing his part in

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the Trophy final after not scoring in the whitewash of Woking?

"No, I think those demons were behind me by then. Despite not scoring in the 5-0 win at Stalybridge, that was one of my best-ever performances and I was just happy to set goals up for the others. Same story in the semi-final.

"But as for the Wembley final... I just loved the whole day. We were buzzing with confidence. We had a stack of good luck telegrams in the changing room, including one from Wealdstone via 'Guinness Ray' (Ray Corner) and I've since found out that there were dozens and dozens of Stones fans in the crowd willing me to do well, and finally win the Trophy.

"We knew Mossley were going to be tough opposition - and we knew that Northern Premier League clubs had won the Trophy every single one of the ten seasons it had been going except the one year when two Southern clubs were in the final. So the odds were weighted against us... and we didn't mind that.

"We had a couple of changes from our normal line-up - midfielder Mark Wright (father of the TOWIE star of the same name) had banged his head in a car accident two weeks before the game and missed out, together with midfielder Jimmy Holder who hurt his knee in the semi-final.

"That left an opening for Joey Durrell to come into the side in midfield. Joey was quick, left-sided (ex West Ham) with knees like pistons and we had an understanding, so when he made that early run in the inside right position I knew he would check inside before crossing with his left foot. That gave me just enough time to get between the centre-halves and when Joe's cross arrived where I expected it, it was second nature to leap and redirect a powerful header into the postage stamp (top right hand corner).

"As soon as I headed it, I knew I'd scored. My inner 'geography' told me where the goal was, where the keeper



George (far left, front row) celebrates with the Daggers... what you can't see, ringed on Ricky Kidd's head, is the hat with "Duck Walks On Water" written on it!

was and it was the best feeling in the world to know I'd headed the opening goal in a Wembley Final.

"I just took off on a run behind the goal to where all the Dagenham fans were, in that big arc of terracing, and I can't describe it, I really can't describe the feeling.

"It was the greatest moment in my career, undoubtedly. My formative days, my best days were at Wealdstone, but winning the Trophy was something I'd always wanted to do and it was a dream come true".

George might have had a hat-trick in the first half at Wembley as he overshadowed his strike partner Ricky Kidd. "Ricky was a feisty, stocky, tenacious player and he knew where the goal was. But he was gutted at not scoring in the Final and he let me know it!

"I had an early shot blocked on the line - I thought I'd scored - and then just on half time I got up to win a header and saw it stopped by an arm on the goalline, but the ref Ken Baker said I'd won the ball illegally.

"That might have been a crucial decision because Ian Smith equalized for Mossley just after the break. But happily Chrissy Maycock popped up with a winner in the last ten minutes and we'd done it.

"I was totally drained after the game. I could hardly stand up. But I'd played and won at Wembley. And scored a goal. Life couldn't get better than that!"

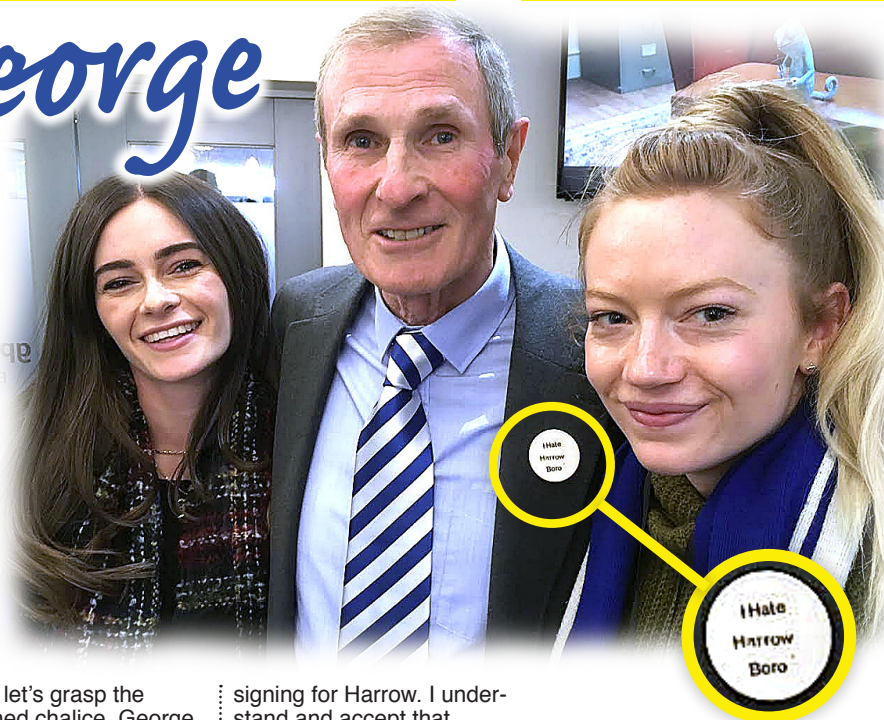
In the next programme Final Part 3: Why I joined H**w B*****h**

THE BIG, BIG INTERVIEW

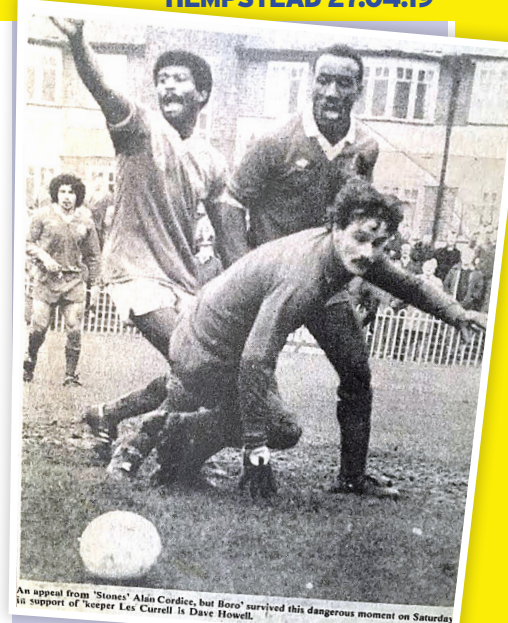
BY TIM PARKS

WEALDSTONE v HEMEL
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The George Duck Story: Part Three



Left: George was put on the spot a fortnight ago when match sponsor Jon Taffel persuaded him to wear an 'I hate Harrow Borough' badge in the boardroom... although the legend might have been distracted by Jon's lovely daughters Lucy (far left) and Charlotte. How apt that today's Part Three covers George's 'defection' to our arch rivals...



Alan Cordice (left) puts the pressure on Harrow defender Dave Howells and keeper Les Currell in the Rumble at Lower Mead, October 1981

In the last home programme we continued the story of Stones' greatest-ever goal-scorer: George Duck, who netted 251 times in just seven seasons, between 1972 and 1979.

Parts One and Two covered his youthful career at Spurs, Millwall and Southend before making "the best decision of my life" and signing for Sid Prosser at Wealdstone. Then came the difficult decision to join Dagenham in search of Wembley glory - which he achieved - and finally, the controversial move to local rivals H****w B*****h....

So now let's grasp the poisoned chalice. George, how could you then go and sign for Harrow Borough? What were you thinking? The King of Lower Mead joining our arch-rivals? It was tantamount to Stevie Gerrard signing for Everton... like David Beckham signing for Man City.... like Tony Adams signing for Spurs.

"To be honest, it was just a deal to suit Dagenham at the time and it's only in retrospect that I realise what I did. Let me say, in all honesty that I did not sign for Harrow Borough to spite Wealdstone... maybe it seems a bit naive but I didn't realise the intense rivalry. I was thinking more in terms of us moving from Leighton Buzzard to Harrow Weald at the time, so it suited me geographically" said George.

"I know there are a few supporters at Wealdstone to this day who will never forgive me for

signing for Harrow. I understand and accept that.

"But to give you a bit of the background to it, Eddie and Terry had been sacked in my second season at Dagenham and I was astonished. We were second in the Isthmian League behind Enfield with a real chance of winning the title.

"But there were always people harking back to the glory days under Ted Hardy, and when he became available again it was only a matter of time before they brought him back to manage the side.

"To be fair, Ted was actually a straight-up manager and after I said I was quitting in support of Eddie, he just said "Stay and play, George". I had scored 55 goals in my two seasons there and it seemed they wanted to keep me.

"But Dagenham were dead keen on signing Eddie Stein

from Harrow.... so keen that it was set up as a two-for-one exchange with me and winger Steve Jones (the son of ex-Spurs legend Cliff Jones) going to Earlsmead and Eddie going the other way."

I remember feeling quite shocked that George had signed for The Hairdressers. It never occurred to me that he would be facing us on the pitch, with Stones just relegated to the Southern League and Borough in the parallel Isthmian Premier Division.

Much water had flowed under the bridge since he had left Lower Mead and maybe we thought he would be a spent force in the red shirt of Micky Tomkys' men. Nothing was further from the unpalatable truth.....

Saturday October 24 1981: FA Cup Third qualifying round, Wealdstone v Harrow Borough at Lower Mead.

The Stones were enjoying life in the Southern League and looking to bounce straight back to the Conference, this

game coming after a run of 12 wins and a draw in 13 games.

A crowd of 1,138 were in attendance, seemingly most of them in the bear pit of the Elmslie End and howling for the heads of the opposition. There was real rivalry between the teams – Borough were building a decent team to challenge for honours and their number included former Stone David Pearce as well as the mercurial George, who was looking forward to returning to his old stomping ground.

"Lower Mead was my Theatre of Dreams. It was strange turning left into the away changing room, but apart from that it brought back nothing but anticipation. I wasn't really thinking about the fact I was playing against Wealdstone... I think only Nigel Johnson and Stuart Pearce were left of the team I had played in, and they were just kids really.

"The atmosphere was crackling and I scored an early header – then Dave

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Howell, our centre back, bulletted one in at the Elmslie End to put us 2-0 up with about two attacks. Wealdstone pulled it back to 2-1 – and really, they should have been well ahead – but then I managed to score another, going round Ray Goddard and putting the ball in from a narrow angle. I slid on my knees to the corner flag and celebrated – I was just delighted to have come back to Lower Mead and scored a couple of goals.”

The game ended in acrimony with Borough keeper Les Currell pelted with stunning accuracy by half a dozen eggs. The game was stopped and Stones chairman David Martle came over to the Elmslie End fans to appeal for calm, while stewards roped off an area immediately behind the goal.... And not long after play restarted, Dave Pearce netted a breakaway goal against his old club to complete the humiliation.

“But Wealdstone beat Borough the next time!” George laughed. ‘Just seven days later we met again in the FA Trophy in a strange twist of fate... and that time we had all the play but it ended 2-2. In the replay we got absolutely stuffed 4-0 at Lower Mead.”

The dream of repeating his FA Trophy heroics still beat loud in George’s heart, however.

The following season, with Duck & Pearce forming a deadly partnership, Borough steamed all the way to the semi-finals with a stream of impressive wins - including a 5-1 walloping of holders Enfield in the last eight.

It led to the famous second leg, dubbed ‘The Miracle of Earlsmead’ by barely-believing Telford fans. Despite the bitter cross-Harrow rivalry, you had to feel for George and his team when they suffered tragedy just a week before the first leg. Dave Howell’s cousin Mickey, playing for Hayes against Borough, died after a clash of heads.

“It was terrible for the staff and players, and we travelled up to Telford under a great cloud. Obviously Howellsey wasn’t



Left: A blast from George’s past. Who recognises the players flanking our ex-star? Yes, it’s West Ham legends Trevor Brooking (left) and skipper Billy Bonds... who were showing off their FA Cup in 1980 in East London when someone suggested that they set up a photoshoot with FA Trophy winners Dagenham. And who else would you choose to meet than Daggers’ main man George?

But he was totally controlled by their right back, Anton Joseph, and we just stopped playing. Telford had a great following there and when they got a goal back you could see the belief flowing through them”.

I reminded George about the dramatic game-changing save by Telford keeper Kevin Charlton right on the full-time whistle. “Ah no, don’t make me think about that” he agonized. “Telford had made it 3-1 on the day, 3-3 on aggregate, and I think the players were settling for extra time when we had one last chance – the ball came over and I hit it on the volley from the edge of the box. I couldn’t have hit it sweeter. I was on my feet about to celebrate when the keeper somehow reached the shot and turned it onto the crossbar.. it was like his arm came out of his sleeve an extra 18 inches! I think that was the best save I’ve ever seen and it couldn’t have come at a worse moment.”

I was standing behind that goal and can still remember the anguish among the Borough fans, who saw their Wembley dream evaporate at that very moment. The momentum was entirely with the Shropshire side, backed by around 1,000 travelling fans and it was no surprise when they scored twice more in extra time to win 5-1 on the day, and 5-3 on aggregate. Their special train was delayed but nobody cared! Especially not the Stones fans who were rocking the supporters coaches as the news came through on the way back from Weymouth!

“It was desperately sad” said George. “I sat in the changing room afterwards and the players were upset, but not as upset as they should have been. Me and Jonesy

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Above: Trophy misery for George. The Shropshire Star carries the story of Telford’s amazing comeback win over Harrow Boro

playing and we missed him – but it was an awesome performance that day that saw us win 2-0,,, and it might have been 3-0 when I had a goal disallowed for a tight offside flag” said George.

I couldn’t get to the Stones game at Weymouth the following Saturday, and instead arrived a bit late at Earlsmead fully expecting to see George book his second Wembley appearance in three years. Just as I came through the turnstiles, there was Dave Pearce right in front of me, wheeling away after scoring for Borough in the first five minutes.

“It was maybe the worst thing that could happen” said George. ‘Telford just had to go for it – you can’t sit back when you’re 3-0 down on aggregate. But what I really remember is that three or four of our players just couldn’t handle it. They went into their shells.

“Clever Forde especially, the winger who had been at Wealdstone the year before – he was our matchwinner, so clever and strong, players just bounced off him and me and Pearcey has said pre-match: ‘Just get the ball over to us, Clev, and we’ll get the goals’.

GEORGE DUCK CONTINUED

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had been at Wembley three years earlier and we knew what they were missing”.

The following season, 1983-84 was an amazing time to be a football fan in North London. Harrow, Wealdstone and Enfield were the undisputed top dogs.

“They were three great teams: said George. “Stones got to the FA Cup second round after beating Enfield in a replay, and Harrow got to the second round too but we both lost – us to Newport and Wealdstone to Colchester. We won the Isthmian League, me and Pearcey getting the goals, but didn’t take promotion to the Conference.”

Was that Boro side better than Wealdstone in the 70s? I asked him.

“That’s a difficult question, but I have an easy answer: No! Boro had very committed players in Harry Manoe, Ray Metz, Dave Howell, Steve Emmanuel, Derek Doyle, Les Currell... but the DNA was different at the Stones. We had better quality players playing pure, easy on the eye attacking football. Win the ball back quickly; get it on the deck; keep it out of the mud; play it wide; quality crosses into the box; get on the end of them; and then GOAL! The greatest feeling in the world.

“Here are a few of those quality players: John Morton, Willie Watson, Ray Fulton, John Henderson, Eric Burgess, John McCormick, Bobby Moss, Freddie Barwick, Steve Brinkman, Billy Byrne, Terry Dyson, Adriaan Eglite... I rest my case!

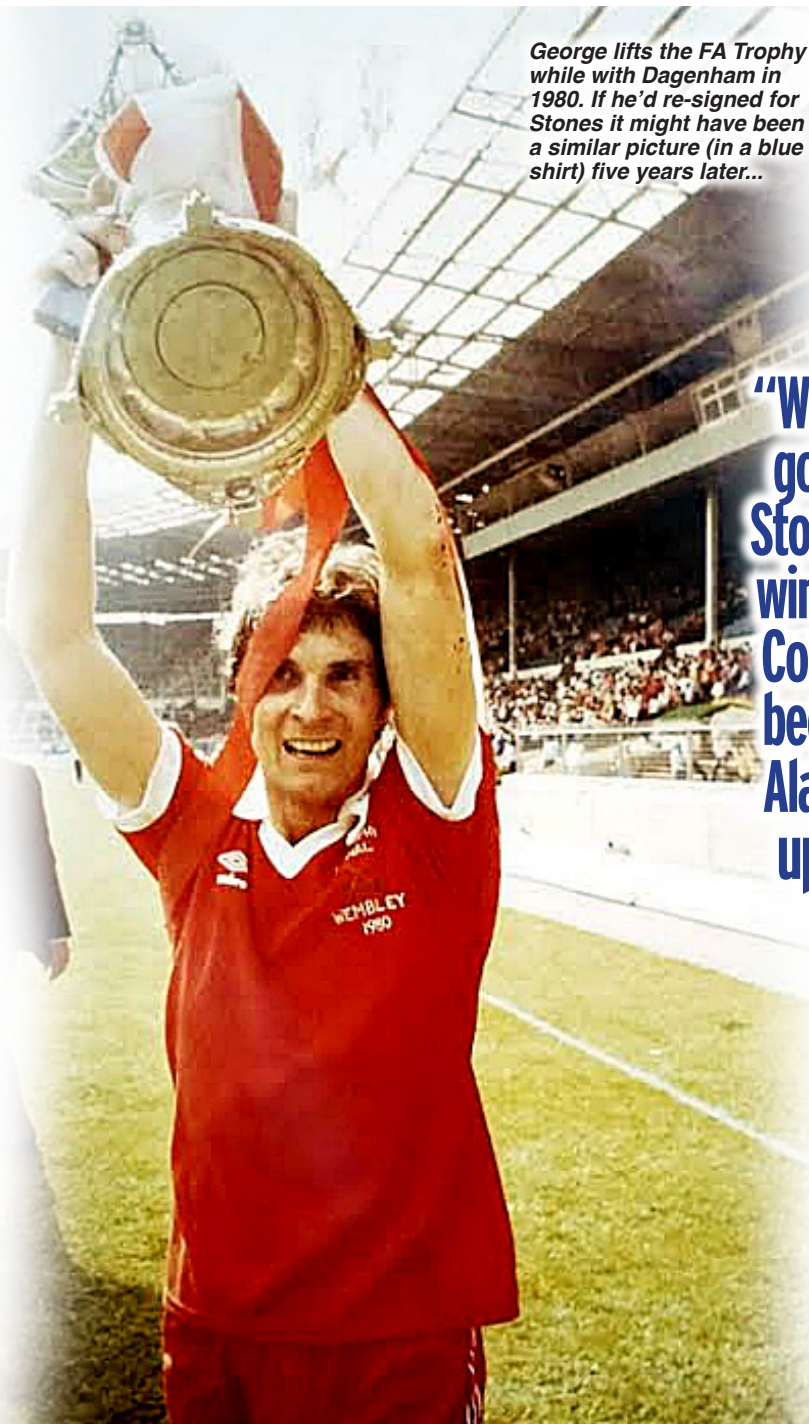
“And if the club had wanted to play the Wimbledon way I’d have been off inside a couple of years. I stayed seven years! That says it all really”.

George was now 32, had won two league titles and one Trophy winners medal but was still desperate for one last tilt at Wembley... but he passed up what may have ensured a glorious finale to his astonishing career.

“I think most people know this story by now, but in the summer of ‘84 I met the Wealdstone manager Brian Hall at the John Lyon pub in Harrow, with a view to me returning to the club. How I wish that conversation had gone differently!

“I knew he had built a good squad at Lower Mead and the thought of coming ‘home’ was a big pull. But then the question of money came up and I was dismayed to hear that the

George lifts the FA Trophy while with Dagenham in 1980. If he’d re-signed for Stones it might have been a similar picture (in a blue shirt) five years later...



“Would I have got into the Stones double winning side? Could it have been me and Alan Cordice up front?”

club were still paying half the money in a wage slip, and half the money over the bar.... I had never liked that situation and I don’t know, even now, why it was handled that way. Every other club used wage slips, simple as that.

“Brian Hall wouldn’t budge and so I went and signed for Eddie Presland again, who was by then the manager at Hendon... it was a massive mistake. Hendon just didn’t have the players and in the end we just avoided relegation – I scored a volley at Epsom & Ewell to keep us up in the last game.

“All the time I was looking over at Wealdstone enviously and wondering what might have been. I was

genuinely delighted for everyone at the club and I hold my hands up and say that was the biggest regret in my career, showing loyalty to Eddie again. I would have given everything to have just been in the Wealdstone squad and been travelling to Wembley. Would I have got in that double-winning side? Was I too similar to Mark Graves? Would the club have needed Andy Graham? Could I have played up front with Alan Cordice?

“No one knows the answer, but history might have been very different if I’d re-signed for the club at the John Lyon.”

Personally, I reckon George could very easily have filled AG’s shoes. In many ways he was a similar player – good touch and balance, and a devastating volley – and in one way he was better: In the air. George Duck, at 6ft, might not have been the biggest centre forward

around but his guile and accuracy meant he was unparalleled outside the League for a dozen years.

It was a shame George missed out on the Stones’ finest hour as his career drew to a premature close with Hendon the following season, following a collision with a goalkeeper that broke his cheekbone. “I just got to the ball first and nodded it past him, and he caught me with his fist – an injury like Gary Mabbutt’s for Tottenham around the same time. I was in Northwick Park Hospital for two days, with my cheek all caved in, and I had no feeling in that part of my face for years afterwards.

“I was lucky to only suffer a couple of injuries in all those years – the other was stretched ligaments just after scoring my 200th goal for Wealdstone – but that was enough to make me think I should pack it in.

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GEORGE DUCK CONTINUED



*'This is for you, Mum'.
George (left) breaks down with emotion
as the final whistle sounds at Wembley*

"Eddie Presland had left the club by then, and he contacted me to ask if I'd sign for his new club Dulwich Hamlet. I told him: 'Eddie, I can't keep following you. You've been sacked three times as my manager, shouldn't that tell you something!'

"I loved playing for Eddie but that was the final straw for me. I had decided to get into the cabbying game, had learned 'The Knowledge' and got my licence, so there I was in my black cab alongside Willie.... a job I had for over 30 years. Every day we stopped and chatted about football in general, and Wealdstone in particular and I loved it.

"Football is a drug and it will never leave me. But finally I have to say that I always felt a special bond with the Stones fans - they treated me like Royalty and I agree with Tina Turner when she says you're 'Simply the Best' supporters I ever played for throughout my whole career - and what a wonderful day it was when the club kindly hosted that special sporting lunch a few years ago for me and Willie.

"The unpaid, behind-the-scenes work that all the volunteers carry out at Wealdstone is wonderful. It's not un-noticed. You're all very special people."

George, now 67 years old, is separated from wife Sue and lives on his own in a retirement block in Abbots Langley, working part-time in the Budgens store round the corner.

"It suits me down to the ground" he says. 'For years I was a cabbie but I suffered an anaphalactic shock, out of the blue, a couple of years ago that is still unexplained. Several things can bring it on and I'd eaten an Indian meal while I had the flu - and I just passed out. I spent two nights in Watford General and had to give up my licence.

So now I play a bit of golf, watch a lot of football, keep up with the grandchildren (he has a son Chris and daughter Karen, who has three kids of her own, all girls) and do a bit of dog-walking for my neighbour.

"It's a good life. I don't get to talk enough about football but just wait till I get down to Grosvenor Vale!"

*(signed) George Duck No.10.
See you at the back post ...*