

**'Moving to ground share at Vicarage Road was awful... the crowd at Lower Mead was our 12th man and that was lost in the wastes of Watford'**

**STROLL ON!** Mark Harrison holds off the challenge of Barnet's Keith Alexander in a 1988 Conference game at Lower Mead

**S**TYLISH defender Mark Harrison joined the Stones - then in our last season in the Vauxhall Conference - in 1988 making his debut in a 0-1 defeat away to Wycombe Wanderers. He soon established himself as a solid performer and his easy style earned him the nickname 'Stroller' shortly afterwards.

He started 238 games for Wealdstone and appeared off the bench only seven times, in total scoring 26 goals of which 15 were penalties. Most of the others were cracking long-rangers off his favourite left foot!

Mark lives in Woking with his third wife and three grown up

**MARK HARRISON** answers a few pertinent Wealdstone questions

BY ROGER SLATER



..... kids, and he works for a Printers in West Molesey.

**You joined Wealdstone at the end of January 1998 - Where from and what was the career beforehand?**

I started out at Rayners Lane then had four years at Hayes (with an ageing Gordon Bartlett in the side) before signing for

Maidstone. At Hayes it always felt like Wealdstone were our big neighbours.

The manager at Maidstone retired to the boardroom mid-season and John Still came in, so when Wealdstone put in an offer for me it was an easy decision to move on.

**Did you know anyone at the club when you joined?**

Wealdstone had been quite successful during my time at Hayes and although I only knew Tony Lynch from Maidstone and had never even spoken to the manager Tony Jennings, I wanted to sign.

**First impressions?**

Fantastic club with the best



support I'd ever experienced, Maidstone

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I'm not great at remembering particular games and opposition, I'm better with moments in matches.. but when I joined we were in the bottom three and struggling. With just a few games to go we were still coming up short (at least in terms of results) and in one particular game we badly needed a goal. We were bombarding the other team's goal but still couldn't score. The crowd were amazing behind the goal we were attacking, considering we were a struggling side they shouted and lifted us and late on Alan Cordice smashed in a low shot and the supporters went mad. That celebration and atmosphere remains a big memory for me. *(That must have been the 1-1 draw with Bath City before an 800 crowd on a Tuesday night in April 1983 - Ed)*

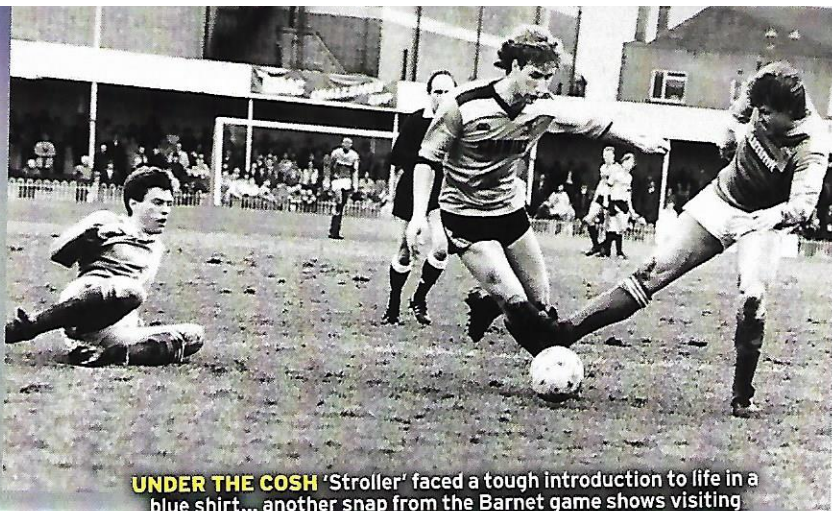
**You played through three seasons of transition at Wealdstone on and off the field, was that difficult to play through?**

The most difficult for me was the loss of the two managers during that time. I thought both Tony Jennings and Alan Gane were good football guys and good managers.

Then the move to Watford. That obviously came right at the end of my time but it was no fun playing there.

**What did you and the players make of the change? Was it hard to adjust?**

Vicarage Road was just awful.. I wasn't there long but the crowd at Lower Mead was our 12th man and that was lost at Vicarage Road with everyone so



**UNDER THE COSH** 'Stroller' faced a tough introduction to life in a blue shirt... another snap from the Barnet game shows visiting striker Gary Abbott turning Dennis Byatt (right) inside out while Mark (left) is clearly about to heroically slide across and clear...

spread out in a massive ground. Soulless.

**Looking back on those seasons, imagine you are back in the dressing room.....who are the players that stand out and why?**

In my early days there, Paul Bowgett and Dennis Byatt were formidable and very influential, the best partnership I played with... Later on Tony Lynch and Stevie Browne were as gifted with the ball as any players I've been on a pitch with.

**Stones fans are known for "sharing their opinions" – how aware were you of that personally or when it was aimed at team-mates? How did you handle that as player?**

I was either fortunate enough or good enough that I don't remember getting any stick from the fans!

**That "Stroller" nickname, Tee-shirt (and chocolate sweets!). Did you ever own the tee shirt?**

Yes! I bought a Stroller tee shirt at the time and wore it till it fell apart. It gave me a nice ego boost.

**Now then Mark, You're in the**

**bath with.....Rubber ducks, Boats, Submarines, your partner or....**

Who baths nowadays?! A nice shower with my wife would work though.

**There were some characters in the Stones side at the time – did the team socialise together or was it just football?**

It felt much more social under Alan Gane but I wasn't big on nights out so never really got involved.. if the boys were going out though you could be sure Tony Kelly would be the first up the bar.

**What are the best and worse memories of Wealdstone FC?**

My best memories at Wealdstone will always be home games at Lower Mead. It was intense and a great place to play.

My worst memory was the circumstances leading up to Brian Hall and Dennis Byatt forcing me to go following a changing room bust up between Dennis and Steve Browne.

Brian and I spoke for hours on the phone during the weeks between games and he loved talking tactics and I was surprised

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really that he didn't fancy me as a player because I thought I would have been right up he's street. Sadly I wasn't!

**Do you remain in touch with players and Managers from that era?**

I still play golf with Alan Gane at least once a month but no one else.

Tell us something we probably don't know about the club at that time?

Nothing to tell about the club but Dennis could fit a large packet of chocolate buttons in his mouth in one go! He demonstrated this on the coach going away.. probably no surprise though.

**Different managers and coaches have different ideas and styles.....who suited you best?**

As I said, I thought Brian Hall (pictured below right) would suit me best and I was excited when he returned but ultimately Alan Gane was the best fit.. he got me as fit as I'd ever been and was happy to talk tactics with players all the way home, I liked that.

**If you had to write a football CV at your peak, how would you describe Mark Harrison as a player?**

I was a defender full stop.

Too many defenders nowadays get sucked into the modern hype about playing out from the back. Just do your job and give it to the play makers.

**Did you play on after leaving Wealdstone?**



**FACES OF THE EIGHTIES...** So, how many current-day fans can you spot from this celebration picture 30 years ago? We can come up with a pair of Alberts (Dave and Jez), John Lloyd on the left, Steve Field on the far left, Big Dave at the back and Dave Croombs far right at the front...

Yes, after the 'Stones I had a brief spell at Harrow Borough and I'd wanted to play there under Mick Tomkys as he'd played with my dad at QPR but it didn't happen during his time. Then I had a very enjoyable and successful few seasons at Ashford in Middlesex before I stepped up again and had spells at Maidenhead and Molesey.

I actually carried on playing into my mid-forties.

**And now, are you involved in any way, Coaching, Management etc. or do you have any aspirations that way? Or are you now just a fan – who do you watch?**

I'm not involved at all

now..

I briefly assisted Dave Swindlehurst at Molesey and coached under 14s for a year in Ashford which I really enjoyed, but nothing since.

I haven't even watched a non-league game for years, partly because I was disappointed with the lack of quality I'd seen and partly because I missed playing so much.

**You are hosting a Dinner Party for five guests (anyone, dead, alive, real or fictional) – who do you invite and why?**

Brian Clough and Peter Taylor for starters.. surely the best partnership ever.

Oliver Reed.. not enough characters in life anymore.

Peter Sellers to make us laugh, and of course someone you may know, Roy Davies!! Apart from my dad, Roy was the biggest influence on my football career, a brilliant footballer and a great character.

**Does Wealdstone get in your blood or is that just something for the fans?**

Wealdstone definitely got in my blood and it's the fans and some of the loyal helpers there that make it special. There are few clubs where so many people stay around for so long.....

**Thanks Mark, it'd be nice to see you at a game soon...**

