



Paul Bowgett

In his own words: How it felt to be captain of the first Double Winners... lifting the league trophy in his coat... never wanting to let go of the FA Trophy... the fights... the hugs... the missed penalty at Wembley... not forgetting that horrible offside trap!



Paul Bowgett (ringed) meets Greenaway's corner perfectly.. but his header is fisted off the line (right)



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Paul Bowgett's name will forever be writ large in Wealdstone history.

The uncompromising centre back was skipper of the brilliant Stones team that clinched an unprecedented non-League double 35 years ago, lifting both the Conference Championship and the FA Trophy in one unbelievable week - and it was quite emotional talking to the man who embodied the spirit of that WFC winning machine.

We caught up for a chat last weekend and 64-year-old 'Bowg' admitted he's not seen a game for years. "But I watch out for the Stones' results on Sky every Saturday and it's fantastic to think the club might finally be back in the Conference next season. It's where it belongs".

Paul experienced everything the game could throw at him in his 1,000-game career at Tottenham, Wimbledon, Wealdstone, Hitchin, Baldock, Stevenage and Arlesey. He was still playing at the age of 38 and now, four years into a happy retirement in Old Stevenage, can weigh up the highs and lows with a satisfied twinkle in his eye.

"1985. What a year. And what a week when we won the double!" he said.

"We had two League games left at the beginning of May and needed three points for the title. Kettering and Barnet, both away. And then five days after the Barnet game we had the Trophy Final against Boston Utd at Wembley.

"Nobody wanted to have to go to Barnet and have to win with the Wembley game so close behind, so when Andy Graham scored that amazing goal to win 1-0 at Kettering we

were delighted. I was suspended that day (too many bookings) and couldn't play, so I picked up the trophy wearing my coat!

"Then there was the farce of the game at Barnet two days later.

"Nobody wanted to play, nobody wanted to get injured and with the big final on the horizon we just didn't compete really. We were awarded the trophy again having lost 7-0... Steve Mahoney, who was an old Stevenage mate of mine, kept running through and scoring and kept saying 'Another one there Bowg', 'Another one there Bowg' and I just said back to him each time: 'Wembley, Steve, Wembley'."

And then the day itself. I reckon that first half an hour at the old stadium against a very decent Boston side was one of the most intense, powerful performances I've ever seen from a

Wealdstone side. "Yes, we turned the screw. We had all the pressure" he said. "Our set plays were always strong but funnily enough it was a mishit corner from Greeners (Brian Greenaway) that set up Andy Graham for the first goal... then he played the perfect high corner to give me the chance to make it 2-0.

"I have to say that was probably the sweetest header I ever made in my career".

Paul leaped above Boston centre half Creaney to send the ball arrowing from 15 yards towards the top corner, with keeper Kevin Blackwell nowhere.

"I absolutely loved heading the ball, smacking it with my forehead and releasing that power. Creaney's head was on my stomach I'd got so high above him and I thought I'd scored until, at the last moment the ball disappeared over the crossbar" said Bowg.

There was a moment's confusion as Blackwell rolled around as if injured, left-back O'Brien (who

had punched the ball over the crossbar) pretended it had gone off for another corner and the other fullback was congratulating Blackwell as if he'd saved it.

Fortunately, the ref wasn't conned and he pointed to the penalty spot. No punishment for O'Brien - which would have been very different nowadays.

And now the big question: Why didn't the skip take the penalty himself? This was a man who'd scored 18 penalties in the 81-82 season and then shared the duties with Dennis Byatt, Mark Graves and Greenaway the next few years.

"Dennis just grabbed the ball and said 'I told you I was taking it'.

And of course, when he hit it straight at the keeper it made it worse. But we just kept on coming forward, making chances and we had a second goal before too long when Lee Holmes' header from another corner was deflected in."

After we'd pulverised Boston in the first half, Paul, did it get a bit nervy when they pulled that goal back just after the break?

"Yes, but a third one would have settled it down and I still don't know why Gary Donnellan wasn't allowed his goal when he headed it out of Blackwell's hands. Again the goalie rolled around and the ref was taken in.

"But, you know, we stopped playing the way we could in that second half. Nobody said 'okay boys, let's back off and let them play' but that's what happened. It's psychological. They had that late offside goal chalked off but we deserved to win."

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The Stones march out at Wembley with Bowg (2nd left) following boss Brian Hall

NEXT UP TO BE INTERVIEWED: IT'S BILLY CLIFFORD!

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What would have happened, do you think, if it had gone to extra time? I asked him.

"That's a good question. We would have been so down, devastated if they had pulled it back to 2-2. It would have been hard for us to get back on top - you had an idea of how good England were in 1966, how mentally strong, to come back from conceding that late goal to go on and win the World Cup in extra time.

"But it never came to that! We won it, and the feeling was indescribable".

Climbing the famous steps to get the trophy - following in those famous footsteps - must have been something?

"It was. My first thought was 'don't slip' because those shiny stone steps were so dangerous in studs. Then to show the trophy to the fans was a great moment.

These days the players pass it down the line but I wasn't letting go!

"And there's a great moment as I was coming down the steps, clutching that trophy. I saw this little Irish guy, I can't remember his name but we used to have a flag together outside the clubhouse (yes, I smoked in those days) and when I leaned over to have a word

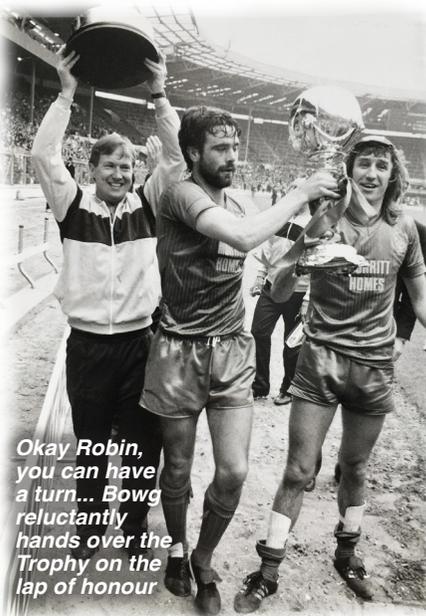
with him he stuck a roll-up behind my ear!

"I don't know what became of it but it had fallen out, I think, by the time we'd finished the lap of honour".

There is a photograph, I reminded Bowg, of him and manager Brian Hall cuddling the trophy. (below left). What were they saying?

"Ah yes; what a fantastic picture that is" he said. "I was just saying: 'Now you can step out of Allen Batsford's shadow'. Hally had taken over from Batsford a couple of years earlier but had always been seen as his no.2... this was Brian's moment and he was a great manager in his own right."

Paul, though, credits the pragmatic Batsford for saving his career. 'Batty' was at Wimbledon before Bowg's time, having steered the Dons into the Football League in 1977, and wasn't at



Okay Robin, you can have a turn... Bowg reluctantly hands over the Trophy on the lap of honour

Wealdstone when Bowg signed for us in the summer of 1980 - but his arrival wasn't far around the corner. Ken Payne brought him to the club, but Paul wasn't overly impressed with the man who'd been promoted from reserve team boss.

"I'd dropped down from the Football League with Wimbledon, had just got married and with a baby on the way. It didn't look like a good decision!

"We had some talented players, some strong individuals but the dressing room was chaotic. Ken wasn't strong enough to deal with it - there were too many divisions - and a lack of bonding in the changing room is like a disease.

"Then Allen came in and was a good organiser. Very black and white was Batty. We had patterns of play, what to do and when, and it looked like we'd got out of trouble until that terrible last day of the season when we lost to Leamington and were relegated from the Conference.

"Allen Batsford called me into his office that summer and basically told me to sort myself out and play to my potential... or I was off. Well, that was a shock. From being a pro to not being

wanted at a club that was headed for the Southern League.

"But it was the shock I needed. I knuckled down, and then Allen said he was making me captain, and that I could be a leader".

Nine months later, Stones were back in the Conference having won everything on offer in the Southern League - and Bowg's stock was so high that he was invited to train with the England non-League side.

But it was in the Spring of 1985 and the timing was lousy. After finishing third and then fourth in first two seasons back in the Conference, the bad weather caused an almighty backlog and the Stones were forced to play five games in eight days as our challenge for the title intensified.

The England training week coincided with this and Bowg's international chances were scuppered. "We weren't all great mates - I even had a punch-up in training with Dennis Byatt after he had clobbered little Paul Waites - but we all had each other's backs and those five games underlined the bond between us. I think it actually won us the league."

Those eight days started with a tight 3-2 Saturday home win over Weymouth. "Then we drove up and back to Altrin-

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BOWG ON.... his time at Tottenham

"I was scouted by Spurs' Alf d'Arcy, the ex Enfield player, when I was 20 and playing for Letchworth Garden City in the Athenian League. He'd come to see our opposition centre forward but I marked him out of the game! I played 50 or 60 reserve games for Tottenham in the Football combination between November 1977 and March 1979, but had my big chance in October '78 when I was down to make my debut at West Brom in the First Division. On the coach there, Steve Perryman said to me: "Big day for you Bowg, the game's on Match of the Day tonight".

But unfortunately the manager, Steve Burtenshaw, changed his mind at the last moment and played Gerry Armstrong at no.5 instead as he was scared of putting me up against the fearsome Cyrille Regis. I was sub, we won 1-0 and that was my opportunity gone"

BOWG ON.... his penalty technique

I scored 18 penalties one season, nearly all thanks to Alan Cordice being fouled in the box. As for technique.... mainly I tried to hit the ball

low and hard to the keeper's left. That first summer I signed (1980) we had a penalty competition to see who would be taking them with the goallie, Ian Cranstone deciding. We had some stylish penalty takers. Like Willie Watson whereas I just hit the ball as hard as I could. They went top left hand corner, top right hand corner, straight up the middle... Ian said I was the winner "because I've got no idea where he was going to put the ball". I didn't know either!

BOWG ON his Stones debut

My league debut was a memorable one: home to Telford United, managed by Gordon Banks. We won 4-0, I broke my wrist crashing into the Elmslie End wall and then I scored a penalty despite the pain. I missed two games, then played half a dozen with my wrist in plaster up to the elbow and covered by an inch of cotton wool. I used this weapon to good advantage! Wouldn't get away with it nowadays.

BOWG ON signing for Wimbledon

"Tottenham didn't want to renew my contract and I had a couple of offers from Northern clubs.

And a chance to play for Portland Timbers in the US league. The Dons were in Division Three and it seemed closer to home ... until I drove from Stevenage to South London. Portland would have been quicker!

BOWG ON... his family

Born and bred in Stevenage, the Bowgetts live in the pretty old part of town. Married 40 years this summer, Paul and Christine have three sons - Joe, 40, Danny 37 and Tom, 31. The two younger boys both played for Hertford Town and Arlesey, Danny up front and Tom at left back but they have both now stopped playing.

BOWG ON... that horrible offside trap

"I didn't always see eye to eye with Dennis (Byatt) but we had a great partnership for half a dozen years. He was a big guy but, for my money, he was the best one-one-one defender in non League. Nobody got past him, and he was quick over distance too. But we were best remembered for our offside trap - we enjoyed driving people nuts! We'd catch them offside from the goalkeeper's long kicks, free kicks, anything

really. I'd call out 'Bowg' and that would be the signal for Polly and Dennis to step up ten yards, leaving me with the forward. I'd step back towards my goal and he'd come with me, ready for a tussle but then - all in the timing - I'd step past him just before the ball was played. Offside! "It wouldn't work now because someone else would run through and the first guy would be deemed as not interfering, but it worked every time, match after match."

BOWG ON.... the funniest incident

"Apart from Dennis's five-second own goal against Weymouth at Lower Mead - volleying the ball over Bob Iles virtually from the kick-off - I reckon the midweek game at Frickley in freezing fog takes the biscuit. We were grinding out another away win when somebody started up a bonfire in a skip behind the goal. You couldn't see a thing but the referee told us "there's no way this game is not finishing". Just then Bob Iles launched the ball down the field, nobody could see where it was heading - and it hit Alan Cordice on the back of his head and knocked him over!"

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cham for a day for the Monday night game and pulled off a great 2-1 win. It was back into work on Tuesday, then we all got the train up to Newcastle on the Wednesday, and then the metro across to Gateshead's ground. And another 2-1 win thanks to Neil Cordice. For some reason, we then went to stay the night at a hotel in Whitley Bay after a few hours in the local nightclub... and that's when it all kicked off after a group of about ten lads followed us back to the hotel.

They said our boys were dancing with their girlfriends. Polly (Steve Perkins) and Vinnie Jones saw them off - you wouldn't want to mix it with either of them. Polly was so easy going normally but when he saw the red mist...

"The boss, Hally wanted to make it a final warning for Vinnie, who'd been in trouble with him before, but I managed to talk him round. And we needed Vinny because we had such a small squad that nearly all of us played in every one of those five games."

The squad traveled back down on Thursday, and then went to work on Friday... before ending the week with home games against Runcorn on Saturday (won 1-0) and Scarborough (won 1-0) 20 hours later on Sunday morning! How on earth did they survive all those games?

"Our legs were dead" laughed Bowg. "And it wasn't as if we were playing on perfect surfaces. The pitches were rough in those days, but unless you had limbs hanging off you just got on with it. Nobody wanted to miss a game in case you lost your place in the side".

The squad was ridiculously small - basically just 15 players - but one of the newcomers, Andy Graham, really made his presence felt.

"Hally loved Andy as he was big and physical, and loved flicking the ball on for Alan Cordice. You had to feel for Mark Graves, who was really unlucky to lose his place and not really feature in the run-in, and Wembley of course".

Which of those strikers would Bowg be least comfortable playing against?

"That's a tough question. Probably Alan because he'd need one touch and then he was away from you. I never had great pace so to be honest Andy Graham would be the

one I'd mark as I'd enjoy the battle. Mark Graves had a great touch and was clever at finding space so you couldn't lose concentration for a second against him."

After the glorious highs of '85, perhaps the slow descent of Wealdstone FC was inevitable.

"The years after that, the club was in a state. A whole succession of bad managers, and so many players who had no respect for anything or anyone. If there's one thing I hate about players, it's bragging about where you've been and what you've done - and then failing to produce it on the pitch.

"I'll admit that my own game went downhill and perhaps I got sucked into that negativity. For me, the lowest point was when the club had to ask two supporters to make up the numbers for an away game at Altrincham that season we were relegated. Fair play to the lads, they did really well but to do that at Altrincham, where we'd had so many great battles in the past, showed how far we'd fallen."

Bowg left the club in the summer of 1988 when Baldock Town asked him to take over as player-manager.

They'd just been promoted to the Southern League Prem and the centre-back had a good couple of years until his back went and Ian Allinson took over as boss - then it was off to Hitchin Town in the Ryman Prem for another couple of years until, at the age of 38, he was playing for his local club Stevenage under Paul Fairclough on their march up the Ryman League.

Then it was back to Baldock -and even Arlesey - for a final swansong.

"Nowadays I get my exercise playing golf, and I even tried walking football but never again...

"One of my mates asked me over to play at the local sports centre, with teams split into fives and the first team we played had a female player - my first touch of the ball saw her overstretch and damage her knee. She was crying in pain at the side of the pitch - and as soon as the game restarted I went to tackle another player who managed to put his shoulder out, and was screaming in agony too. People were saying to my mate "Who is this bloke?!"

It's Paul Bowgett, what did you expect!



Bowg lifts the Conference trophy at Barnet...after a 7-0 defeat!