



Berwick Rangers Supporters Trust

Working for Club & Community

TRUST MEMBERS NEWSLETTER • WINTER 2009 • FREE TO MEMBERS • ISSUE NO. 13

A NEW ERA



£2

In this issue...



We sponsor a seat
or two!



Supporters Trust AGM



A tribute to
Brooks Mileson

www.berwickrangers.co.uk



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from the chairman...

Dear Members,

Welcome to the latest edition of the Trust's newsletter, and the first one of a new era in the recent history of Berwick Rangers FC.

As many of you will already be aware, last week saw the conclusion of the transfer of shares from the former Chairman, Robert Wilson and RCR Holdings (a company formed by Wilson, Darling and Forsyth), to a consortium comprising the Trust, the Supporters Club, Brian Porteous, John Hush and John Robertson.

The break-up of a large shareholding amongst several parties has now introduced a democratic structure that has been long absent. Having experienced Roy McDowell, Jamie Curle and Robert Wilson as 'untouchable' Chairmen, we now have a real opportunity to influence the future direction of the PLC as key partners. Out of around 300,000 issued shares, the Trust have 67,000, and with the Supporters Club shareholding it means that over 30% of shares are currently in the hands of supporters groups. It also means that the Trust are represented on the Board by right, not by invitation.

However, I wish to stress that we are there as partners. Berwick Rangers cannot thrive without the efforts of many individuals, each of whom contributing to the future benefit of the Club. Without this collective effort, we will struggle. I am delighted to represent the Trust on the new Board, and I think there is a real opportunity to bring the strengths of many to the benefit of BRFC.

I am also very pleased to support the appointment of Brian Porteous as Chairman - I think for Brian it must be gratifying to know that he has this position because it's felt he's the best person for the job, not because of the number of shares that he holds.

"There is a lot of hard work ahead"

There's a lot of work ahead, on and off the field, and the new Board are working to address immediate priorities (the condition of the pitch being one), and then look at longer term aims. Whilst the upturn in performances under Jimmy Crease has been very positive, there are many areas in which we fall short of being an efficient Third Division Club. We have to get these right, and lay solid foundations, before we can move on.

I'm very aware that communication has been a big issue, and I'll be urging the new Board to keep all supporters in touch with developments at every opportunity.

If fans have any comments they'd like to make, or ideas they want to put forward, please feel free to get in touch directly.

Best wishes,

NO-SEASON REVEAL

BY DAVID COOK

Not many people have the ability to cut through the bullshit, but the late Eddie Thompson, Chairman of Dundee United, achieved exactly that when he said "Chairmen come and go, boards come and go, but the fans remain. They are the constant". You could apply Eddie's words of wisdom to almost any football club, but they have a special resonance at Shielfield Park where, after a tumultuous and traumatic couple of years, supporters are finally on the brink of acquiring ownership of Berwick Rangers after protracted negotiations with the former controlling interest. My personal views on the outgoing regime are well known and I doubt that there is anything to be gained by repeating them, but I'm happy they've gone, and I know that that's a view shared by a lot of people connected with Berwick Rangers Football Club.

I also think that it's worth reminding people that the Trust board made a conscious policy decision to assume the role of opposition to the Wilson regime. That was a decision based on what we believed to be the best interests of our membership. It shouldn't be forgotten that living with that decision made life difficult over the years for a number of people on the Trust board. Berwick is a small town and differences in points of view can easily become magnified and degenerate into unpleasantness. The Trust's stance has been vindicated by the fact that many people have come to share our beliefs and are now pulling together in the same direction. Who would have foreseen that a year ago?

It's now time to look forward. The imminent takeover gives supporters a fantastic opportunity to make Berwick Rangers an integral part of the community. The Borough faces a difficult time, principally due to the rapidly deteriorating economic climate and weak political leadership. At times like this, it is vitally important to give local people something that they can be proud of, and the football club is perfectly positioned to assume a community leadership role. Fine words, but a lot of hard work to get there. The good news is that the Trust and Supporters club are working hand in hand with other consortium members, and for the first time in years there is a genuine sense of partnership at the club, cemented by the immensely capable leadership of Brian Porteous. There is a noticeable change in atmosphere on the terracing and behind the scenes at Shielfield, and the whole place just feels like a happier club. Berwick Bandits have also seen a change in ownership, and there are already positive signs of joint working between the football



club and the speedway promotion. If you wanted to borrow a phrase from the financial columns of the daily papers, you'd call these things the green shoots of recovery. Before anyone gets complacent, there is a mountain of work to be done to rebuild and reposition the club for a brighter, more successful future, and every supporter will have a role to play if they want to see the club make real progress on and off the pitch. You only need to look to the west at Stranraer's predicament to realise how fragile small football clubs are, and see how easy it is to lose them.

On the pitch, Jimmy Crease (pictured left with Chris McMenamin) looks to be doing a pretty decent job. His record at the time of writing is 4 wins and 5 defeats, which is a huge improvement on the lamentable achievements of Renwick and McGonigal, with their combined record of 5 wins in 51 matches. The team still needs a substantial overhaul before they can challenge for the play-offs next season, but Crease has created a well-organised, competitive and hard working side responsible for two of the most memorable victories in recent times - the 3-2 win over leaders Stenhousemuir on 6th December and then the incredible 3-2 victory over Montrose on 27th December when a 10-man Gers side overhauled a 2-0 deficit with a late Gribben winner to send the whole stadium into unrestrained ecstasy. The Gers

squad contains a number of players capable of playing an influential role in a play-off or championship challenge. Ryan McGurk has seamlessly filled Gary O's boots as a quality keeper; Jamie Ewart has been revelation at centre-half, and looks to be the outstanding central defender in the league; Robbie Horn has made McGonigal's claim that his legs had gone look exactly what it was - absolute bollocks; Gary Greenhill, when he can be persuaded to rise Lazarus-like from his sick bed, remains a beacon of calm assurance in the midfield; Stuart Fraser, sadly hobbled for most of the season, will also offer a major contribution if he can regain full fitness; Stuart Callaghan looks like a man reborn under Jimmy Crease, bossing games, taking daft risks and scoring spectacular goals; Darren Gribben, despite looking like he'd start a fight in an empty house, has real ability, and if he can work more effectively with the speedy but profligate Fraser McLaren, they could end up one of the Gers' most dangerous strike partnerships in recent years. Chris McMenamin has also added some quality on the right of midfield, but Rangers achilles heel has been their lack of pace, which has left them exposed against outfits like Cowdenbeath and Albion Rovers.

There are no miracle solutions for transforming Berwick Rangers, unless the club pulls off a plum cup tie against the Old Firm. To build on the renewed sense of optimism around the club, the Trust will have to work closely with the other members of the consortium and step up a gear in its fundraising and other activities. These are difficult times in the wider Borough, with job losses mounting and low wages. We need to be innovative about the way that we ask people to pay to watch Berwick Rangers and involve the wider community in the football club. We've already come up with some new ideas and these will be considered as part of a more professional approach to running the football club. Keep believing - we'll get there in the end, and if you think you can lend a hand, don't be shy about coming forward.



A new era - Berwick Rangers F.C. 2009

New owners out to arrest recent decline and place club on a firm footing

By Ewan Murray, The Scotsman

ON THE face of it, Berwick Rangers and Stranraer have a lot in common. Hindered to a certain extent when attracting players by having their home in a Scottish football outpost, aspirations realistically not beyond the Second Division and capable of attracting similar crowds. Those who have just taken control of Berwick, however, are anxious that financial prudence will ensure the comparisons end there.

Stranraer's estimated £250,000 debt have placed their very survival in doubt. Such troubles will send a chill through the boardrooms of all clubs in the Scottish Football League amid these harsh financial times.

There is a new-found impetus at Berwick, however. They may be second bottom of the Third Division and battling to make costs meet income, yet those who now sit round the boardroom table are in a positive mood.

After three months of red tape, banking verification and similar such delays, the share transfer which finally saw a power change at Shielfield has been completed.

"We felt the club needed a change," explained Brian Porteous, formerly a board member at Berwick but now the club chairman. "The previous chairman (Robert Wilson) in fairness had been in place five years and felt he had taken the club as far as he could."

Porteous is one of five board members who are personal guarantors, not only of Berwick's "small" bank overdraft facility but a 10-year loan. It has been inaccurately suggested that the club's Supporters' Trust are now in charge of matters; while John Bell, the Trust chairman, is one of those five men, the group's involvement is not in terms of significant shareholding.

In what is one of Scottish football's more complicated arrangements, Berwick's stadium is leased by their supporters' club from the local council; the football board in turn pay that club for the ground's use. Factor in an agreement with the local speedway team – with whom relations were previously frosty – and you can see why Porteous and the seven-man board have a busy time ahead. Turnover typically sits at some £300,000 against a playing budget in excess of £100,000.

"The situation was that the previous chairman and the trust did not see eye to eye," Porteous said. "There was a split, but we want to work with the Trust and have brought John very much on board. We want to work as one, the club's supporters' club, supporters' trust and the community in and around Berwick. And that community, through sponsorship, can play a huge financial part."



Porteous has progressed from occasional match sponsor to one of the figures Berwick's future will largely rely on. "It is a hobby, it costs me money," he smiled. "But it is addictive, you get hooked easily."

Soon-to-be published financial reports will show Berwick returned a profit of about £20,000 in their last financial year, a matter due in no small part to the sale of Danny Swanson to Dundee United.

That aside, Porteous admits, as is the case with so many clubs in Scotland, those figures would show a loss.

"That cannot keep being the case," he insisted. "We want to run the club as a business over the next two or three years. That means breaking even. Stranraer are in the limelight but various others have problems; banks themselves are not in a strong position.

"On the field, Berwick have endured something of a turbulent time. Having gained promotion to the Second Division after season 2006/07 – they lost out on goal difference 12 months earlier – a disastrous period and subsequent relegation has been followed by struggles in Division Three. Only an impressive December, on account of which Jimmy Crease won manager of the month, has put daylight between Berwick and bottom-placed Elgin City.

"The Second Division problems were a combination of facing a good few full-time teams and our manager, John Coughlin, leaving early in the campaign," Porteous recalls. "We took on a rookie after that in Michael Renwick, things didn't click, and the same happened with Allan McGonigal. In many ways we have to write off this season and use it to get things organised away from the pitch."

Being realistic thereafter, the chairman sees Berwick as competing strongly in the Second Division as a best-case scenario. Full-time football and costs associated with it would be a drawback beyond that.



Pot of Gold: A recent picture taken by Trust member Peter Unwin, maybe a sign of things to come?

TRUST OWNED OR CONTROLLED CLUBS IN THE UK:

Telford United, AFC Wimbledon
Cambridge City, Enfield Town
Exeter City, FC United of Manchester
Newport, Notts. County, Stockport
County, Scarborough United, Runcorn
Linets, Clydebank



The Supporters Trust held it's 5th AGM at The Pilot Inn, Berwick, at noon on Saturday 6th December.

With the Trust part of a of a supporter-led takeover of Berwick Rangers Football Club, the meeting took on extra significance. As a consequence, The Pilot was packed to the rafters to hear BRFC director and now chairman Brian Porteous confirm that the takeover was still on course but was taking time to complete simply because the banks were carrying out due diligence checks on new guarantors.

Following Brian Porteous's report, supporters were treated to an entertaining bout of reminiscences from club legend and bon viveur Eric Tait, who regaled his audience with colourful tales of his experiences at the club, with the focus on arguably the greatest 'Gers side ever, the 1978-79 championship winning team.

He also exhorted supporters to use the opportunities presented by the takeover to create a genuine community club which would provide real chances for local talent to make it into the first team.

Eric was hard act to follow, but James Proctor, Development Manager with Supporters Direct (Scotland) and a good friend of the Trust movement, built on the theme relayed by the preceding speakers to reinforce the message that getting it right off the pitch is as important as achieving success on the pitch.

The formal business of the AGM ensued and the key decisions were as follows:

- Trust membership continues to increase and currently stands at 213
- Trust auditors reappointed for the new financial year, but with a less onerous brief following changes to the audit requirements stipulated by Supporters Direct, resulting in lower audit costs
- It was reported that the Trust board had been reappointed in 2007 for a period of two years, and that the next full round of elections would be held in March 2010; there were still two vacancies on the Trust board and one of these was filled by Eric Deighton, who was co-opted on to the board at the meeting
- The Trust would be working in partnership with the Supporters Club to put together a programme of fundraising and other activities for 2009

The overall feeling from the meeting was extremely positive, with the emphasis on supporters working together in the best interests of the club. Further developments will be reported to the trust membership through this website and the regular communications bulletins.

A final mention to Stephen Scott of The Pilot and his staff, to whom many thanks are due for their excellent hospitality, including a fine selection of beers which kept the meeting adequately lubricated. If you enjoy a good pint of real ale from local and national brewers, make sure you call in. A full set of A.G.M. minutes can be downloaded from www.berwickrangers.co.uk

Greetings again to all our loyal members. The time for our periodic newsletter seems to come around ever quicker, but never the less here we go again, in what is a great opportunity to keep you, our paying members, up to speed with what is going on in the Trust as a whole, and what we, your elected board are doing on your behalf.

To visit the footballing side briefly, we find our team in a much improved position something we could only imagine a short time ago.

You will all be aware of the changing situation at the club, something we are all looking forward to.

The work of the Trust is perennial and our aims are clearly stated. As you may have seen elsewhere we continue to work closely with our friends in the Supporters Club and were very happy to help with their own initiative to 're-seat' the main stand at Shielfield by paying for the latest 100 new seats at a cost of about £2500. Hopefully you will agree that we have spent a fair chunk of your money sensibly on this, but as always, if you don't you can let us know. We are always delighted to hear from our members.

Membership numbers remain fairly steady, we've lost some for various reasons and gained some more for the same reasons. What pleases me is that we continue to gain more than we lose with our active membership standing at an all time high of 216.

We are about to enter a very exciting period for all Berwick Rangers supporters. The Trust is grateful for your continued support and we will be working hard with other consortium members to make Berwick Rangers a club to be proud of.

Keep the faith

Colin Pike (Vice-Chairman)



L to R: Karen Thorburn, Eric Tait, John Bell & Gordon Dickson



Brian Porteous



James Proctor

YOUR BENEFITS:

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Sponsor a Seat!

Your Supporters Trust have donated £2500 to an initiative being promoted by the Supporters Club to replace old and damaged seats in the main stand at Shielfield Park with spanking new seats, to improve levels of comfort for football and speedway fans.

The Trust's financial contribution will pay for 100 new seats to be installed. The Supporters Club have already fitted several hundred new seats to refresh the look of the main stand, a move which has been warmly welcomed by supporters.

Trust spokesman David Cook said: "We're delighted to provide funding towards a scheme which will go a long way to improving facilities for supporters. If we can help improve the comfort of supporters it may help persuade missing fans to return to Shielfield.



Members of the Supporters Trust and our friends from the Supporters Club.

We're looking forward to continuing our good working relations with the Supporters Club on other projects in the future".

If you would like to sponsor a seat, log-on to the Supporters Club website which is at: www.brfc-supportersclub.co.uk



Membership Update

Over 30 new members!

I am delighted to report that since our last newsletter our membership has continued to increase and has now reached an all time high of 216. During the period we have in fact had 31 new members (24 full, 2 corporate & 5 junior) but due to various reasons have also lost 16 members, 12 of which were annual renewals. It is noted that quite a few of the new members being signed up have been introduced by existing members - keep up the good work!

Members who have joined since our last newsletter are:-

Full Members: James Lax (North Baddesley), Martin Lax (North Baddesley), Gary Beckett (Maryland, USA), George Chapman (Blackburn), Peter Robinson (Sheffield),

Philip Rooney (Washington), Andy Gilchrist (Tweedmouth), Chris Eyre (Dewsbury), Micky Mallen (Kirkcaldy), Arthur Skingley (Liverpool), Anthony Bullock (Knottingley), Steve Southern (Bury St. Edmunds), Howard Cravitz (Essex), Paul Steeds (Millwall), Steven Purvis (Tweedmouth), Alan Skelly (Tweedmouth), Keith Swinney (Tweedmouth), Brian Crammon (Jarrow), Adrian Lillie (Whitley Bay), Eric Deighton (Berwick), Jamie Beecham (Chapel Allerton), Mel Barlow (Denbighshire), John Coyle (Denbighshire), Paul Muddiman (Oxon).

Corporate Members: The Pilot Inn (Berwick), Fantasy Prints Ltd (Berwick)

Junior Members: Harry Scott Crowe (Edinburgh), Lauren Mallen (Burntisland), Oliver Mulcahy (Dewsbury), Alfe Eyre (Dewsbury) Phoebe Dunsire (ShIPLEY, W Yorks)

Brooks Mileson RIP



Goodbye to a friend of our Trust...

We were sad to hear of Brooks Mileson's death at the end of last year, after a long and debilitating illness. Many of you will know of Brooks through his connection with Gretna, and his financing of the club from the Third to the Premier Division, with a Scottish Cup Final and European football along the way. A real football fantasy, and although ultimately a sad ending, many Gretna fans are hugely grateful for wonderful and irreplaceable memories.

I first met Brooks at a Gretna fixture in 2005. Following news of a donation he made to the Arabs Trust, I called Gretna to ask for a meeting with him, and was invited to go along to a home game.

I think our first conversation lasted a minute - I was immediately despatched to the Boardroom under the care of the Gretna Chairman, while Brooks took up position behind the goal. At the end of the game, we met again by the pitch, whereupon he took out his cheque book and donated £10,000 to the Trust - no questions, no expectations, just a belief in that what we were trying to do was right. He had a passionate belief in supporter representation and ownership, and a contempt for bureaucracy, blazers and boardrooms.

I called him a few weeks later to sound out a dilemma - we had wanted to put his donation into the football club for shares, but had been offered four times as many shares elsewhere. His response was typically focussed and direct: "Get them all", he said, and promptly posted a cheque for another £12,000. He later stood with us in the Duckett for an evening game, having driven from his work in Durham, and then heading back home to Gretna afterwards, and impressed all those who came into contact with him with his warmth, passion and generosity.

There's no doubt that Brooks was a real character, the kind that only come along rarely. It may never be fully appreciated just how much he contributed to Trusts and non-league clubs across Scotland and the north of England, not only in monetary terms, but also in advice, enthusiasm, and belief. But I know that we've lost a good friend to our Trust, the Trust movement, and to football generally. The best possible memorial is for us to keep his ideas and visions alive, and keep the mission going.

Rest in peace, Brooks. Our sincerest condolences go to his family and friends.

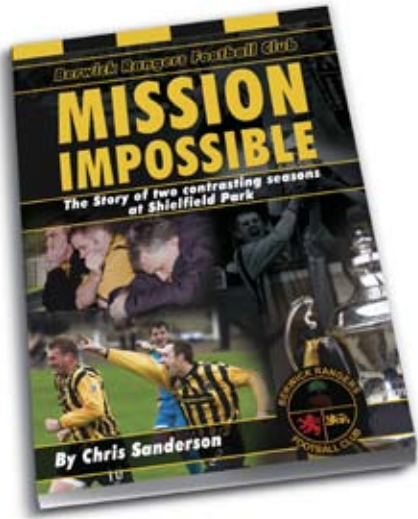
John



March 2005: Brookes presents John with a cheque for £22,000. Other committee members present were (from left to right) Bill Purvis, David Cook, Colin Pike and Gordon Dickson

MISSION IMPOSSIBLE

There are still copies available - now at the reduced price of **£4.99**. Copies are available from our website @ www.berwickrangers.co.uk or from the Supporters Trust Shop at Shielfield Park, Tyne & Tweed; The Pilot Inn; Berwick Tourist Information Centre; Eddie Hope's Newsagents; Ms.Greaves; Bridge Street Bookshop; Castlegate Newsagents.



HELP WANTED

Were you there when Sammy Reid scored against Rangers? Did you watch Eric Tait grab the goal that sealed promotion? Did you see Gazza turn out in the black and gold? Whatever your memories are of supporting Berwick, or even playing for the Dream Team, Tom Maxwell would like to hear from you. The freelance journalist and writer, who grew up in the town, is writing a book about Berwick Rangers' unique place in the history of Scottish football. If you have memories you'd like to share, you can contact Tom on maxwellusm@yahoo.co.uk

JOCK WALLACE

This is an extract from Scotland on Sunday... *The good people of the Community Council in the East Lothian village of Wallyford have seen fit to honour one of their own, namely Jock Wallace.*

A special plaque is being made to pay tribute to the former Rangers (and Berwick Rangers) manager who was born on September 6, 1935.

Wallace, of course, delivered two Trebles, the first title in 11 years and the Centenary Scottish Cup during his spell in charge and two League Cups in his less successful second spell.

Glad to see his hometown recognising his achievements.

VOLUNTEERS WANTED

BRFC Chairman Brian Porteous has reported that the club are desperately seeking additional volunteers to be trained as match day Stewards to strengthen the existing team. If you want to help fans enjoy the Shielfield experience safely and at the same time broadening your experience contact the club on 01289 307424 or e-mail club@berwickrangers.net



NEW BRFC WEBSITE

There are plans afoot to revamp the outdated club website. Our media officer, Paul Smith, will be working with other members of the Trust to deliver a professional website which is updated on a regular basis. If you have anything you would like to see on the website or you'd like to contribute yourself, please email Paul - trust@berwickrangers.co.uk. We are actively looking for people to help out with the day to day running of the website, so why not offer up some your time!

The Supporters Trust have committed a sum of money to help towards the cost of a more useful and more regularly updated official website.

Those of you that are familiar with Trust matters will be aware that we have our very own Hall of Fame, something which is unique within our football club.

The idea originated in 2007 when Trust members were asked to vote for their favourite eleven Berwick players. The only stipulation was that members had to have actually seen the players they voted for in the 'flesh' so to speak.

This resulted in a broader reach of voting than may otherwise have happened giving the range of ages that our members enjoy. Having said that it's still interesting to note that the oldest inductee thus far has been one Sammy Reid. Now, as you'll be aware, Sammy scored THAT goal back in 1967 and certainly had an impact on Berwick fans as you may be surprised to know he only played 21 times in the Black & Gold scoring 7 goals, so not a bad scoring ratio actually and that illustrates what sort of time band has been achieved.



Martin Neil - nearly 250 games

Then, last year members again got a chance to vote for three further players under the same criteria bringing the total number to date inducted to fourteen. This is actually something that a number of clubs now have and it was thought it was a useful way to allow the clubs fans/Trust members, one in the same of course, the chance to recognise past players achievements.

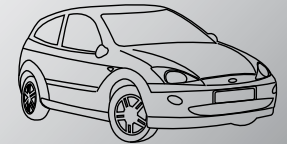
Without getting too far ahead of ourselves discussions have taken place about how to take this to the next level and by that we mean actually involving the players in terms of presentations, induction evening events etc. If you are sitting reading this thinking "how about....." then please let us know through the usual channels. Ideas are always welcome.

Onto this year, and again come the middle of the year you will again be asked to get your black & gold thinking caps on and give us another three of your favourites. Who was it said that nostalgia will never catch on!

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