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Opening Extract from...

We Ate All the Pies

How Football Swallowed Britain Whole

Written by John Nicholson

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Introduction

IT was 30 July 1966 when, as a five-year-old boy, I realised the power of football for the first time. England were in the process of winning the Jules Rimet Trophy live on our 12-inch black-and-white television but outside our house in Hull, our next-door neighbours, the Coates, were cutting their grass, and ignoring Bobby Moore's triumph.

My mother peered out and tutted, 'Look at them, doing that, on a day like this. There's something wrong with them.'

Dad nodded sagely. 'It's unpatriotic if you ask me, cutting your grass while England's playing in a World Cup Final,' he said, peering over his glasses at the action out on their front lawn.

'You're right, Eric,' she said, unusually agreeing with him. 'It wouldn't surprise me if they were German, on the quiet.'

'Aye, probably changed his accent or something,' said Dad, his paranoia increasing, 'or he might be Scottish!!'

Mam frowned and wagged her finger at me. 'Don't you go speaking to them, our John. We don't want you talking to people like that. Isn't that right, Eric?'

'Aye. You never know with people like that, could be up to all sorts,' said Dad, ominously, as Nobby Stiles kicked Wolfgang Overath, maybe as revenge for the Luftwaffe bombing his chippy.

Previously, these neighbours had been blameless in my parents eyes, certainly not regarded as odd, possible enemies of the state, Germans or, worse still, Scottish, but because they were not in the least bit interested in watching England playing football, they were now some kind of outlaws.

Even at the time I thought this was a bit odd. You don't *have* to like football. Not wanting to watch England kick a ball around doesn't

mean you want to assassinate the Queen, establish a fourth Reich or even wear a kilt.

But football is not a normal sport, it is a cultural phenomenon around which all manner of attitudes, beliefs, hopes and desires are wrapped and, even as a boy, as I witnessed it being used by my parents as a stick to beat the neighbours with, I realised it was something very special and it began to affect me from that day onwards.

Football. Football. Football. You love football. I love football. The world loves football. Why the hell are we all so obsessed with football?

When you stop to think about it, it's astonishing how much it preoccupies so many millions of us virtually every day of our lives. It's not a recent, media-driven phenomenon, it's always been like this. Huge crowds of people have watched the game since its inception over 140 years ago.

It can't just be twenty-two people with varying degrees of talent kicking a ball around a rectangle of grass that makes it so compelling. It must be something else; something that pulls us in and holds us captivated.

So what is this football dark matter? That's what *We Ate All the Pies* is all about. I wanted to know how and why football has managed to consume my life so completely and why it's done the same thing for millions of people for over a century.

Along with rock 'n' roll, it was the enduring, profound influence in my formative years.

It's been a major part of, not just my life, but of me. It made me who I am.

Football isn't just the game on the pitch; while that is at the core of it, there is a huge cultural vortex that swirls around those ninety minutes. For me, and I'm sure for many people, the various cultural activities that surround the game, like planets orbiting a sun, are every bit as enjoyable as the on-pitch action, often much more so.

It's easy to forget just how huge football is in the UK. Go anywhere in Britain and you'll find a football team. Put a very big duffle coat on and go right up in the north of Scotland; there you'll find Wick Academy who are the most northerly football club in the

UK, located on a latitude line north of Moscow and stuck right on the Caithness peninsula. And this is no modern dalliance; it was formed in 1893 and currently plays in the Highland League, a collection of clubs based in wonderful, remote, small towns north of the Grampians.

Then fly over 890 miles south to the other end of the land to Mousehole FC (pronounced Mowzle), a tiny club south of Penzance in the deep south west who play at Trungle Parc and compete in the South West Peninsula League. It's at the bottom of the football league pyramid but they don't just have a first team but a reserve team as well!

Go anywhere in the UK and you'll find a football ground of one size or another; from Tow Law on the bleakest, windswept moors of County Durham to bucolic Newport on the Isle of Wight. At times it's almost invisible because we take a set of goals, a pitch and some sort of stand so for granted.

The amount of clubs that form the complete English football pyramid alone is enormous for a relatively small country. After the four top leagues there are another seven steps from the Blue Square Premier League right down to local leagues such as the Northern Alliance League or the West Sussex Football League.

There are a total of ninety-one different leagues and 1,600 different clubs and all of them are in theory capable of rising to the Premier League via promotion. Who knows, maybe Stobswold Welfare from the Northern Alliance second division could, in a mere twelve or thirteen years, winning their league each year, be playing Chelsea in the Premier League, if Chelsea and the Premier League still exist in twelve or thirteen years, which is by no means certain.

Add to that the leagues in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and it's surprising there's room for anything else in the UK except football pitches.

But it's not just the actual playing of football that comprises the culture of the game; there are just so many football-related activities in this country that are important in moulding and shaping our lives. Whether it's a pint and pie before a game, whether it's slobbering out on the sofa watching six hours of games and punditry or whether it's

collecting memorabilia and buying shirts, it's all a massive part of the football fan's life.

Then there's going to the games. Millions do it every week at all levels of the game. Football is so popular in England that the Championship – the second tier – is the fourth best attended in Europe. Overall attendance figures are only a few million less than in the peak post-war years, when football was virtually the only affordable working-class entertainment and there was no health and safety legislation stopping you cramming 83,000 people into creaking old wooden stands designed to hold no more than 40,000. Having your internal organs crushed on an iron crash barrier was a rite of passage back then.

On top of the high, high attendance figures are the millions watching on TV too. Indeed, the highest viewed programme in the history of British television isn't, as you might assume, an episode of *EastEnders* or *Coronation Street*, not a Morecambe and Wise Christmas special or the relentlessly mawkish coverage of Diana's funeral. No, it is the 1966 World Cup Final. Some 32.3 million people watched that on just 15 million TV sets. Sixth on that list is the Chelsea vs Leeds 1970 FA Cup replay at 28.49 million. By God, we like watching football on TV in this country.

The game is so endemic in our lives that we probably don't even realise it most of the time. For example, if you're a serious football fan, the chances are that whatever the time of day it is when you read this, you have already thought quite a bit about football, especially if your club has got a game in the next day or two.

You may well have checked your club's website, looked at TV listings for tonight's games, read match reviews, interviews or predictions in a newspaper or on the internet. Maybe you've played a football game on your computer games console or perhaps you've tweaked your fantasy football team or picked up a football magazine at the station for the train journey into work or maybe you've filled in your pools coupon. You may have posted a comment on a football-based blog or message board or are about to play for your local pub team or just have a kick-around in the park. And all of this before you even meet your mates at work or down the pub and spend several hours agreeing, arguing and laughing about all manner of football matters.

How do I know this? Don't worry, it's not because I'm following you around, it's just because we all do it. All football fans concern themselves with some aspect of the culture of football practically every day of their lives, and not just briefly. It is the very fabric of our existence, the framework around which we build each new day. And all because of that ninety-minute game between twenty-two men in polyester clothing.

Go anywhere in the world and someone will be kicking a ball around. From the rubbish heaps of Rio to the back gardens of people called Dave from Billingham, there'll be people hoofing something spherical and inflated, be it a ball, a small fat child or one of those hamsters the herdsmen of the Mongolian steppes make air-tight, put a hot stone inside, inflate and cook from the inside out. They make a great, edible football.

And where someone is kicking a ball around several more people will be talking about it being kicked around, because football is massive not just due to its high participation levels but because many more people love to talk about it, think about it, name their children after its players and tattoo strikers' names across their shoulders.

This phenomenon has always fascinated me, so in *We Ate All the Pies* I'll look at what we love, why we love it and how it makes us who we are through my own experience of football over the past forty-eight years. I'll try to pick it all apart and see how we got to where we are today and why the game endures as Britain's big love.

There are plenty of doom-mongers out there who will tell you the game is going to hell in a handcart, though how you get a game into a handcart and what the hell a handcart is anyway is never fully explained. Why are they reserved purely for taking things into hell? Does nobody do anything positive involving a handcart?

You'll also hear people say the exact same thing about rock music too, of course. As Pete Townshend said, 'Rock is dead, they say; long live rock.'

However, in a simple twist of fate, moaning about what is wrong with football and rock 'n' roll is one of the most popular things about football and rock 'n' roll.

So what are my qualifications for undertaking this marathon task

of delving under the bedclothes of football? Well, for ten years I've been writing about the game for the sprawling, off-beat, influential and hugely popular website Football365.com.

My column has a by-line, 'A Very Northern Mind'. This isn't because I write about northern football, but because it was thought I brought a northern sensibility or, perhaps more accurately, insanity to proceedings.

I was born in Hull, grew up on Teesside, went to college in Newcastle and now live in Edinburgh, apparently getting further north as I progress through life. I have been a Middlesbrough fan since 1970. I am happy to be a northerner. I love the north: the timbre of its vowels, the feel of its weather, its epic how-do-you-like-me-now nature; its gritty industrial grandeur and its wild Viking and Celtic heart with an admirable dedication to intoxication. I feel it in my bones, in my water.

I had to leave Teesside to fully appreciate it and my love affair with the place has always been conducted from a distance. When I was growing up there, it was impossible to get a perspective on the region. These days it seems a lot clearer.

Stand on a cold February afternoon on South Gare, a spit of land that juts out into the Tees, guarding the entrance to the river with the multi-coloured lights of Teesside's fading steel works and chemical industries twinkling like fireworks in the distance, as dark rain clouds gather in a cold sky like billows of ink in clear water. It is a unique, potent mixture of raw industry and raw nature; brilliantly contrived and brilliantly natural all at once; innate and man-made power side by side.

That is my Teesside: mythic, epic, rough-hewn, challenging and frankly, a bit pissed, and you will come across all sorts of references to people and places in the north east of England in this excursion into the belly of British football because it's what I feel and know best. It's also where I ventured out into the world with an armful of albums and an armoury of cheap guitars.

I've always seen a connection between football and rock music; they plug into the same socket in my psyche. Both are at their best when uninhibited, wild and intense. The best gigs and football

matches are not far apart as an experience. From my first concerts in the mid-1970s at places such as Middlesbrough Town Hall and Newcastle City Hall, seeing the likes of Alex Harvey, Uriah Heep, Hawkwind and Bad Company, the whole experience and culture got right into my DNA.

My parents had brought home Beatles, Searchers, Gerry and the Pacemakers and Dusty Springfield records when I was small and putting eight singles at a time on our Dansette record player had always been an important part of growing up.

The first record I bought with my own money was The Kinks' 'Supersonic Rocketship', which was luckily quite a cool choice. At the time I had no idea how significant a decision that was to be in later life, when buying a good first record showed you were cool from an early age. I mean, you couldn't respect someone whose first record was something such as 'Granddad' by Clive Dunn now, could you?

I followed it up with 'Run Run Run' by Jo Jo Gunne, a fantastic record by Jay Ferguson's now long-forgotten band. I played those two singles and their respective B-sides over and over along with my parents' early Beatles records, which they'd bought and loved 'before they went all weird'.

Albums, on the other hand, were expensive for us nippers so we only got them for Christmas or if we'd had a serious disease and had only just avoided an early death. My first Christmas album was *The Best of Status Quo*, an early compilation on Pye of their 1970–72 period before they became the massive denim-and-hair band of the mid-1970s.

I loved the riffs on that. I followed it up the birthday after with Wings' *Band on the Run*, which I considered a record of much sophistication and it's one which has certainly stood the test of time. But it was the Christmas of 1973 which delivered a hugely important album into my juvenile synapses. *Meddle* by Pink Floyd. If you're familiar with the album, the first side is songs – and some crackers too – and the second side is 'Echoes', a twenty-minute sonic epic full of great riffs, enigmatic lyrics and all sorts of weird sections of noise.

It blew my mind.

That record altered me. I can remember how it felt. There was

a pre-*Meddle* Johnny and a post-*Meddle* Johnny. It exponentially expanded everything I thought music could be. I would sit and listen to 'Echoes' in the dark wearing a massive pair of padded headphones – the kind which are ironically rather fashionable again – the volume up to distortion point. It took me away from Stockton-on-Tees, took me to another place in my mind, and I liked where that was. I also learned aged just twelve that it was a place you could go to in your head at any time in a state of meditation or contemplation.

Later, when I experimented heavily with psychotropic drugs, it was to this familiar place that they took me; my own corner of the universal mind, a place behind the sun, just a step beyond the rain. Which is just as well, really, as it rains an awful lot in the north east of England.

But it didn't stop there because in a perfect synergy, *Meddle* also connected to my football world. On the first side is a track called 'Fearless', which concludes with a recording of a football crowd, allegedly Liverpool's Kop, singing 'You'll Never Walk Alone'. This might not sound much today, but at the time, the blend of progressive rock and football was a thrilling juxtaposition and proved to me that the two things need not inhabit separate universes.

By the time I was sixteen, I had an album collection approaching 500; by the time I was twenty it was nearer 2,000. It's now over 8,000 in total across all formats. I ate up rock music in all its forms and deviations. Even at a young age – around thirteen or so – I was mad about jazz-rock. I'm not sure if Mam was putting drugs in my baked beans but the first album I bought with my own money was *The Inner Mounting Flame* by the Mahavishnu Orchestra.

I was just a kid but I found the music just breathtaking; high-speed, frenetic and overdriven guitar in a complex stew of rhythms, electronic keyboards and violin. I should have been listening to pop music but somehow jazz-rock had captured my pre-pubescent soul. However, as soon as puberty kicked in I embraced the heavy rock trinity of Zeppelin, Purple and Sabbath to better soothe my newly lustful psyche. Massive riffs and male puberty form a perfect match now as then, and it was inevitable that I'd end up as an axe victim.

My first example of what Ian Hunter called a six-string razor was made by a company called Satellite. This may have been because it

was constructed out of space debris. It was sixty quid in the mid-1970s, which was a bloody fortune, and a bloody fortune for a piece of crap, as it turned out.

It wouldn't stay in tune, the action made your fingers bleed and the jack socket malfunctioned, making it cut in and out all the time. But it was a guitar and I learned G, C and D and thus could play the blues, albeit a mutant messy form of blues. A love affair was formed right away and I would never be without a guitar again: playing on my own, playing in bands or just recording stuff for my own pleasure, it's been a crucial part of life ever since and not a day goes by without my picking up my old Fender Squire and cranking out a riff or lick or two. As I write it sits six feet from me, plugged into a Marshall and waiting for me to finger it lovingly once more. It remains an irresistible mistress.

As a kid I was completely, totally, utterly obsessed with rock music. It occupied every waking hour that wasn't committed to school. I crammed up on it, reading the *NME Book of Rock* cover to cover and back again, memorising the discography of bands I loved and others I had never heard yet but liked the sound of, such as Irish proggers Fruupp or blues-rock innovators The Electric Flag. I knew the evolution of line-ups of bands, where they were from, what were their best-regarded albums, what label they were on and the year of their release.

In exactly the same way, I was utterly obsessed with football and would read the *Rothmans Football Annual* from cover to cover, learning all the clubs' colours, grounds, along with players, FA Cup winners and any other fact I could cram into my brain. It all seemed to go in and stick. I was the only kid in my class who knew that Exeter City played at St James Park or that Workington Town's best league finish was fifth in the Third Division in the 1965–66 season or that Barnsley won the FA Cup in 1912.

I had no reason to know these facts, I just enjoyed knowing them in the same way I enjoyed knowing that Jimmy Page did session work on Tom Jones records and that David Coverdale came from Saltburn.

I watched all the football I could on TV, which wasn't much. I devoured all football and rock literature I could, be it comics or books

or magazines. I went to see Middlesbrough play from 1972 onwards, addicted to the match-day experience.

I wasn't to know it at the time but all of us born in the 1950s/early 1960s are lucky people. We saw England win the World Cup, and we witnessed the golden days of working-class football in the 1960s and 1970s, an era of outrageous skill and outrageous aggression, when players were still part of the community, not separated from us by the tinted windows of wealth.

We grew up when football was more tribal, more about your local culture and your local club. It wasn't an arm of the entertainment industry and we were not customers making a 'leisure activity' purchase. It was our art, our culture, our civic pride. This lasted till the mid-1980s in the top division and indeed still pervades the lower echelons. However, the increase of hideous violence inside and around the game, the playing out of one tragedy after another, and the steady but relentless commercialisation of the game changed things. We set off down the road to where we are today: a world of millionaire players and billionaire owners.

Unlike many of my generation, I don't wring my hands too much about this. Change is inevitable. We have all changed in the last forty years, we live differently now and want different things out of life, so it's no surprise that football should also have changed. Its flexibility and adaptability to society's needs is the reason it remains on top of the sporting tree. It is a social and emotional landscape as much if not more than a purely sporting one.

It's also undoubtedly the case that the footballers of today live like the rock stars of the 1970s. Only without the badly conditioned hair, high-end narcotics and twelve-hour bus rides across the Midwest to play Peoria, Illinois. But they have the groupies, the outrageous wealth, the adulation and the unpleasant diseases from the girl in the Marriott hotel.

In many ways we have the best of all worlds today. We have the Premier League with its comedy cavalcade of money, mercenaries and the marvellously talented. It bears little relation to the game I grew up with, but as long as you accept it for what it is, it can be tremendous entertainment. The old school game that we grew up

with still exists in the lower leagues and in the Conference, where it is still an unpretentious local game, played for local people, often by local people.

Issues about the distribution of money from top to bottom still need addressing and wages remain seriously out of whack with income, but football persists, it is resilient and as the figures prove, still massively popular.

Personally, I've given up worrying about the effect the Premier League has on the game as a whole, preferring to see it as an amusing soap opera to be enjoyed rather than bemoaning the latest billionaire takeover or 30 million quid transfer. It will probably implode at some point but it won't kill football because the people love football too much and will always want to watch and play it. Even if clubs go bust, they will be resurrected, start again and work from the bottom up. It's inevitable. Football is a Terminator that you cannot defeat.

It's the same with rock 'n' roll. We sixties kids grew up with rock music as it grew up itself. In perhaps ten short years from 1965 to 1975 the vast majority of the best rock 'n' roll was recorded. It was a thick seam of gold that was mined in such a short space of time. We took it for granted, thinking that this was always how it would be. But we were wrong. They were halcyon days of utter originality.

Periodically someone comes along and thinks they'll sweep away the old guard, make the past redundant. But rock, just like football, is a resilient beast and refuses to leave the stage just because some people think it's briefly no longer fashionable.

We rock 'n' roll acolytes are in it for the long haul. We don't care if you think the bands we like are now uncool, cool, fashionable or cringe-worthy. We really don't. It's our art and it will prevail.

Oddly for a football obsessive, I'm not really very competitive and I simply don't care what other supporters think of my club. People occasionally think they can write in to Football365 and insult the Boro, calling them rubbish or boring or whatever, but it's water off a duck's back to me – I keep a duck handy for just such occasions. I've never understood why people care so much what other anonymous people think or say about their team but, as you'll learn, I'm not a normal football obsessive.

It was the same over music at school when punk arrived. Kids newly adorned in punk clothing – often little more than a pair of black drain-pipe jeans and an old T-shirt with a safety pin – would deride us long-haired, cheesecloth-and-denim hordes, as though their disapproval would change how we felt.

Well, I suppose for some it did, but for me, I just thought, in my non-competitive way, just because you now hate Steely Dan, it doesn't alter the fact I think they are musical and lyrical geniuses – why would it? I'm not you. It also seemed to me that kids would like a band for a few months then go off them and take up with a new obsession. I wasn't like that. I've never stopped liking a band once I get into it. I don't love *Meddle* any less now than I did at Christmas 1973. Maybe that's really conservative, narrow or just consistent, I don't know. But it makes total sense to me.

In the twenty-first century football is a less visceral but safer place. We have lost the intense atmosphere that games could have in the 1970s, trading it in favour of not getting our head kicked in. Well so be it. I have no hatred for other clubs or countries and their fans – so much so that someone once said I was a football hippy – and along the way in this book, I hope to illustrate why this is. I've certainly watched a lot of football while stoned and occasionally while wearing tie-dyed T-shirts, not to mention purple loon pants. No one should mention purple loon pants, except in a blackmail letter.

Football acts as a pressure valve for society, allowing people to release tension and transfer negativity from their everyday lives on to footballers, managers and just about anything else inside a football ground. It's a place to feel part of something and a place to get away from everything. Football facilitates all manner of emotional responses and needs, which is another reason why it's so hugely popular. It's a big-tent philosophy. It fills up our lives and, some would say, keeps us down; it's an opiate for the masses. There's no time for revolution when you're worried about relegation and your striker has ruptured something.

Like the fickle music fans who flit from band to band, for some football is a passing interest that they pay attention to only when the big games roll around; to others it is a fundamentalist religion to

observe which they worship several times a day via a series of rituals, incantations and superstitious practices.

There are newspapers and Teletext, a service which seems to exist only for footballers and their managers, the rest of us having got on board with computers fifteen years ago. There are websites to be read each day for news about your club. There are fellow travellers on the football road to commune with, preferably over some alcohol, and there are memories to wallow in and future glories to hope for. Then there's the mocking of other teams, players and fans and the humiliation of defeat to be assuaged and all of this in just one waking day. It's a wonder any work gets done at all when there's so much football to fret over.

Football is a universal language. It's oddly easy to communicate with anyone no matter what language they speak when there's some football to watch. You can get into a fight or make a friend within a few minutes of watching football, be it on the terraces or on a TV in a bar anywhere in the world. More usually it is a unifying thing, bringing people from vastly different cultures together in their love of football, be it at a game or in a bar.

It's the same with rock 'n' roll too. I once walked into a diner on California's Pacific Coast Highway, ordered coffee and eggs and sat back to look out across the infinite blue Pacific Ocean. Mist swirled in and out and around this little wooden shack near Big Sur and it felt like I was somewhere just west of heaven when this guy walked in. He's a hundred foot tall and wide and covered in hair and tattoos. This was before tattoos were fashionable and they were sported only by sailors and Hell's Angels and the mentally insane. This guy looked like he was all three.

He sat down opposite me. The chair creaked under his vast bulk. He looked like a bear that had recently stolen a Hells Angel's clothes. He grunted. *It was* a bear, I thought, maybe it's Big Foot! He grunted again and then pointed at me. I looked down. I had on a Jimi Hendrix T-shirt. The bear slowly appeared to smile from behind a beard.

'Cool. Very cool,' he said in a rich voice. If a redwood could talk, it would have talked like this guy.

So we got talking about Hendrix and other great guitarists. He'd

seen Jimi in 1969 and was a big fan of British musicians such as Peter Green, Clapton and Jeff Beck. We didn't talk about anything else. Just rock music. Then we shook hands and went our separate ways, never to meet again. Without that connection, that would never have happened.

Later that month, I was in a bar drinking – a bit of a theme throughout this book – this time somewhere in Ventura, California. The 1994 World Cup was just starting and even in the football-averse USA, tribes from all the participating countries, and a lot of English too, all gathered to watch games in bars. It was fantastic. All united in their love of football. I made friends that day who remain friends today. That's what football can do.

Other sports are just not loved on this humongous scale. No other sport attracts the kind of crowds that football does every day of the week year in, year out. Even clubs that are unsuccessful, have never won anything and have a ground located on a windswept moor so cold that your extremities go an unpleasant icy blue colour will routinely pull in two or three thousand hardy souls. People will say, 'Oh, we don't get much of a crowd' if only 1,500 people turn up, but most other entertainment venues in your town would be delighted with 'only' 1,500.

Even when football is low-skill, poor-quality and boring; even when it is physically uncomfortable to watch and you may end up being punched by a mad man; even when all of these elements are in play, a football match can still attract a crowd bigger than you can reasonably expect to attract at a provincial theatre on any given night. And they have warm, plush seats.

What used to be largely a game played on Saturdays and Wednesdays is now played seven days a week, even on Thursdays, which to those of us of a certain age feels as unnatural and creepy as buying underwear for your mother or listening to Gary Glitter records.

And still we can't get enough of football's sweet, sweet lovin'. It is astonishing that 75,000 people will pack into Old Trafford to watch Manchester United without any guarantee of it being a good game, good value or of even being very comfortable. It's not like going to see

Springsteen, where you know they'll play to a certain standard. Any football game can be so boring as to make you want to claw out your eyes. There is no guarantee of quality even with the best clubs and yet still they come, paying upwards of £50 per head twice or more a month.

Football has the capacity to inspire, to thrill, to make you howl with laughter and weep bitter tears. It brings joy and misery. It brings glory and heartache. It is all human life, rolled up into ninety minutes and played out across the world to millions and millions of people, eager to feast on the experience.

I don't believe it's just me upon whom it has exerted a life-changing influence. I'm sure it has done this to millions of people worldwide, perhaps without them even knowing it.

Football is Britain's big sporting love and has been since the inception of the game in the 1860s. We have hungrily devoured all things football from Victorian newspaper reports to hideous polyester duvet covers from the club megastore plastered with a tasteless picture of the latest greasy, amoral, poorly educated millionaire.

We have gone to matches in shockingly large numbers for over 140 years; we have made up obscene chants, abused thousands of referees and linesmen, eaten indefinable protein wrapped in pastry and drunk hot brown liquid of dubious origins. All because of Association Football.

So now you know about me, where I'm coming from and where we're going to, get yourself a big drink, put your feet up, put on a good album, feel free to don a football shirt and a scarf, or if you're more continental-minded, let off a few distress flares and discharge a firearm at a fleeing referee. We're about to take a journey into the culture of the beautiful game.

For those who are about to rock, I salute you.

Johnny
May 2010
Edinburgh