



Dickie Rooks today. Picture taken by Shaun Keogh,
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mss interview

Dickie Rooks

by **Shaun Keogh**

Dickie beau

DICKIE ROOKS was one of Raich Carter's last, and arguably most important, signings as Boro manager. Frustrated by his inability to establish himself as first choice Sunderland centre-half behind the legendary Charlie Hurley, Rooks was lured to Boro in August 1965 with the promise of first team football. His debut was made three games into what proved to be a disastrous year, ending in the horror of relegation to the (old) Third Division for the first time in the history of the club.

During the promotion season that followed, however, Rooks showed his mettle as a tough professional, marshalling his defence from his central position. Two seasons later, Stan Anderson's squad were everybody's favourites for promotion; they started the season with four wins out of five, and were not outside the top six all season. However, a poor final run-in meant that they were as good as out of the reckoning for promotion by the time that the last home game came along, and Stan Anderson made the decision to drop Rooks, as well as John Hickton, whilst relegating team captain Gordon Jones to the sub's bench. This decision, or rather – in Rooks' view – the way it was done, cost the club the services of a fine player, as is revealed for the first time in this interview. Now back living in his native Sunderland, Dickie Rooks was a hard-tackling, fans' favourite at Boro, recognised by the fact that he won the Player Of The Year trophy for two consecutive years.

We meet during a particularly enjoyable weekend for this writer. I meet Dickie at his home on a Friday afternoon. I

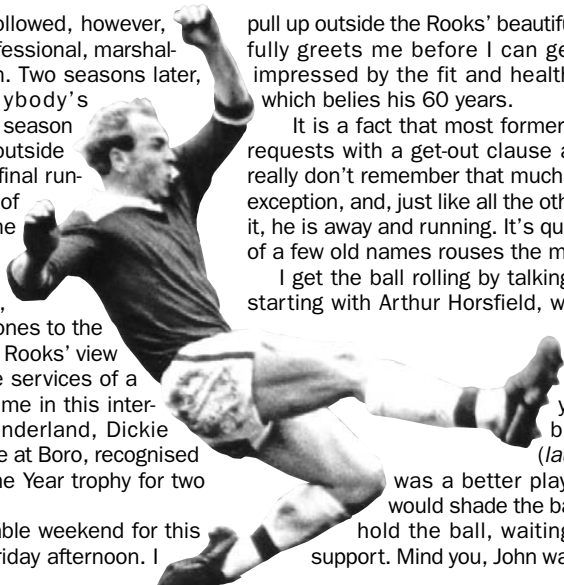
pull up outside the Rooks' beautiful bungalow and Dickie cheerfully greets me before I can get to the gate. I am deeply impressed by the fit and healthy appearance of this man, which belies his 60 years.

It is a fact that most former footballers accept interview requests with a get-out clause along the lines of "...Well, I really don't remember that much, you know..." Dickie was no exception, and, just like all the others, a couple of minutes into it, he is away and running. It's quite amazing how the mention of a few old names rouses the memory banks.

I get the ball rolling by talking about former team mates, starting with Arthur Horsfield, who I had seen recently, and whose regards I had just passed on to Dickie:

"Arthur was a good lad; you know, he and his wife-to-be used to baby-sit for us (laughs). At times, I thought he

was a better player than John O'Rourke. He would shade the ball better than John, he would hold the ball, waiting for players to come up in support. Mind you, John was quicker, but he was a more ►



Dickie Rooks

► greedy type of player, and sometimes when we had possession we would lose it too quickly because John would go on these runs. But he was a good lad; very important to the team that year.

"I played against Arthur a couple of times when I was at Bristol City and he was at Swindon. He could see I was fired up during the warm-up for one game and he gave me a wry look and said 'I'm going to have a hard day today aren't I?' and I said 'I'm afraid so Arthur' (*laughs*). At Boro we had so many practice matches, the first team against the reserves, so I knew how Arthur played.

"David Chadwick today would be a super footballer. He was like a little Stanley Matthews, he had a lovely swerve on him. He would beat people, help you and give support. But he didn't like to be kicked, and that sometimes affected his game.

Becoming a pro, making his debut and pre-Boro memories...

"I served my time as a carpenter and joiner before I went full time as a footballer. I was getting £16 a week at Sunderland, and £8 a week as a builder – £24 a week in total, good money. However, when I signed full time, I was only getting the £16 a week. After a year, Doris and I were married, and we had our son. Soon after, we got a rate bill for about £23, virtually a weeks wages, and we just didn't have the money to pay it. I said to my wife, I'm going back to building, we can't live like this.

"So I knocked on [Sunderland Manager] Alan Brown's door and told him that I couldn't afford to continue full-time. He said 'It's taken you all this time to come and see me?' He was the sort of man who liked to see what sort of players he had. So he doubled my wages, all back paid for a year.

"A little later, I made my debut at the age of 18 in a match against Benfica, when Eusebio was playing for them. It was the opening of the Roker Park floodlights.

"When George Hardwick came to manage Sunderland, he put me in, in front of Charlie Hurley, and I respect the man for that. He did a great job, saving Sunderland from going down. We went to an end of season dinner in London, and the Chairman got up and said thank you to the players and the manager for keeping Sunderland up. We got home the next day, and George had been sacked. That was a dreadful thing to do to George.

Signing for Boro, making debut

"I was disappointed at Sunderland. I'd get a game here and there, but when Charlie (Hurley) got fit I was out again. Anyway, I got a call saying Boro were interested, and I went to see Raich Carter (Boro Manager).

"Raich offered me first team football, but I wanted a bit of time to think about it, and he said to me 'We really want you son, we think you can do the Boro a power of good.' I asked again if I could have the weekend to think about it, but he put me on the spot – he was a very persuasive talker was Raich – so I signed there and then.

"This was a Friday, and the next day, he put me in to play at Ayresome against Huddersfield. Well, we got hammered 6-0. I'll never forget the *Gazette* that night, a big banner saying '6-0'. I said to myself during the game 'What the hell am I doing here?' I couldn't believe what was happening. I signed on the Friday and played on the Saturday, so I didn't know any of my team mates. I didn't expect to be thrown straight into a game the day after I signed. I hadn't even seen the Boro play, to make notes on my team mates.

"I came off the pitch that day, didn't know what the hell I was doing, who was playing where; we had no cover. The standard of football we was playing was nowhere near what I was used to. If that couldn't be bad enough, I found out when I got home that night that Charlie Hurley picked up a leg injury the same day, and was out for months. So, if Raich had given me the weekend to think about signing, I never would have gone to Middlesbrough because my place at



The good times: Dickie celebrates with Harold Shepherdson as Boro are promoted from the old Third Division in 1967

Right: Dickie goes up for the ball during a 3-1 win against Wolves in December 1965. On the left is the legendary Arthur Horsfield. Both Dickie and Arthur were on the scoresheet that day as Boro notched up a rare win that season

Sunderland, who, remember were in the (old) First Division then, was virtually guaranteed, at least for a few months.

"After the Huddersfield game though, I don't think I had a bad game for the Boro; it was the organisation that was wrong. Boro were so disjointed it was unbelievable. (*This could have been written about the November 2000 team, eh? SK*)

Cardiff, relegation, promotion...

"That night at Cardiff was the most disappointing thing in my life.

"We got a good start because we were 2-1 up, but that was when things went wrong, with the penalties against us. In the second half we got a free kick on the edge of their box and I scored and took it back to 3-3. It was a dreadful experience. To score a hat-trick away from home as a centre-half, and to not only lose but to be relegated as well... it was unbelievable.

"You've got to remember that for me, coming from Sunderland who were in the (old) First Division, to the Boro, who were in the (old) Second Division was a tough choice. Then, to find myself in the Third Division, was devastating. I was used to playing against players like Martin Chivers, Ian St John and Jimmy Greaves.

"We were all so disappointed on the way back from Cardiff. But there was also a determination to put right the many wrongs of that night, so once we were over the shock, we couldn't wait to get the new season underway.

"Stan only brought four key players in to turn it around – David Chadwick, John O'Rourke, John Hickton and Willie Whigham. Sometimes, a team just moulds itself, and the players feed off each other; that was our promotion squad. We had a terrific team spirit.

Being dropped, leaving Boro

"The only experience in my football career that was came close to the disappointment of Cardiff was being dropped by Stan Anderson. I had gone on record that year saying we would not be beat at Ayresome. He dropped me for the last home game, and we lost 3-2.

"The trainer, Jimmy Greenhalgh came to see me at my snooker club a few days before the game and told me that Stan had left me out. I thought he was pulling my leg, but I went and looked at the team sheet, and sure enough, I wasn't even substitute. I tried to find Stan, but he'd gone home. I just couldn't believe it; it is a players ambition to play all of the matches in a season, and here I was, just two games short of that.

"This game was of no consequence; Bury were already relegated, and we had only a very slim mathematical chance of promotion, if I remember rightly. So I asked Greenhalgh why Stan had left me out and he said 'He's resting you.' I was so angry. Why leave me out, when he knew how much I wanted to complete the season? What annoyed me most was that he never left me out when I was injured, and could have done with missing a game, and here he was 'resting' me, when I was fully fit and fired up. I tried to get hold of Stan, called him at home, but couldn't find him.

"Now I'd known Stan all my life from when I was a youngster and he was a senior player at Sunderland. I knew he was a moody bugger, but I couldn't understand why he had ►



Rooks **record**

Born Sunderland 29th May 1940

June 1957: Sunderland 34 apps, 2 goals

August 1965: Middlesbrough £17,000 150 apps 14 goals

June 1969: Bristol City £17,000 96 apps 4 goals

December 1974 to January 1976: Manager of Scunthorpe United



Dickie Rooks

done this, and I never got an answer directly from him. I wrote him a letter and told him that I couldn't play for him if he was still in charge at Boro the following season. If he had handled this matter differently, I would have stayed at the Boro, because I was settled and happy there.

"And yet, after all that, I liked the man. Stan knew me from being a boy at Sunderland, so I never thought that he would make an example of me. But it wasn't just that occasion. There was one time that he said he had bought Hickton to replace me at centre-back. I think he played John at centre-back a few times, but we were getting beat so he had to put me back in again and move John to right-back, before he moved him up front because of his lovely runs.

"I couldn't accept Stan's decision to drop me; I thought maybe he wanted me out of the way. I was getting a lot of press attention, and was supporters player of the year two years running. The second time I won it, I was already a Bristol City player, so had to come back to Middlesbrough to receive it.

Joining Bristol City...

"There always seemed to be this scout from Bristol hanging about, I particularly noticed him after a match at Ayresome against Bristol when I had a blinder and we beat City 4-1. Well, this guy was, it turns out trying to find out about me and my outside interests, to see if I was suitable for them. When they read in the papers that I was dropped, they came in for me.

"Doris and I went down to Bristol to have a look. They offered me more than three times what I was earning at Boro, so they really wanted me (*laughs*). They offered us a new house as well; we loved it down there.

"I eventually became captain, and we got to the semi-final of the Milk Cup, losing after extra time to Spurs in a replay at White Hart Lane. That was the nearest I got to playing at Wembley; a big disappointment. Mind you the directors there did us out of a few bob. They had told us as the cup run progressed that if we got to the semi final we would get £300, and another £300 for getting a replay. We only ever got one of those payments. It wasn't a massively big thing, but you can't imagine them getting away with that sort of thing nowadays, can you?

Career end (not for the squeamish)

"We were playing a mid-week cup match at Leicester, and it was a dreadful night – torrential rain, the pitch was flooded. I went in for a 50-50 ball with a sliding tackle, but as I was coming in, the other player turned slightly and I couldn't pull out of the tackle. His foot stayed in the mud and I heard my knee crack. I got some treatment, but played on. After the game, I got out of the bath, and my knee just ballooned. It should have been put in plaster straight away, but it didn't get done until a few days later; I'd had no x-ray.

"We found out much later that what had happened was that the bone had cracked and splintered, and a small piece of bone had snapped away at the point of impact and got lodged inside where the break was. After a time, that piece of bone fused itself to the rest of the bone and started growing from the inside. But of course, we didn't know this at the time, so I got back in training, and was jumping and tackling. The pain was unbelievable, especially when I come down to the ground after jumping for the ball.

"If that had been x-rayed and operated on a day or so after it happened, I was so super fit that I think I could have played until I was 50. But that was it, end of career. This was the first leg injury I ever had, and it finished me.

Brief spell as a manager...

"In the afternoons when I was a pro, I used to go to college to learn about the building trade. So when I had to stop playing, we left Bristol and I bought a DIY shop in Sunderland, which I was in for a couple of years. We were burgled just before Christmas one year, and I was heartbroken; we lost all of our Christmas stock, as well as orders that were waiting for collection.



Boro players in 1968 with their wives before boarding the team coach at Ayresome

So I said to Doris, I'm going to try to get back into football.

"I applied to manage Scunthorpe and got the job. It was a grind, because there is no money at that level, now as then. I was told I could sign free transfer players, but that was it.

"I had two years at Scunthorpe, and then I got an offer to go to Tanzania. While I was there we won their League and Cup. I was there for a year and a half just before the war broke out with Uganda, and all of the Europeans had to get away. I was stuck in Dar es Salaam for four days; it was a real problem getting away. When I came back from Africa I started my building business, and got involved in coaching.

Coaching...

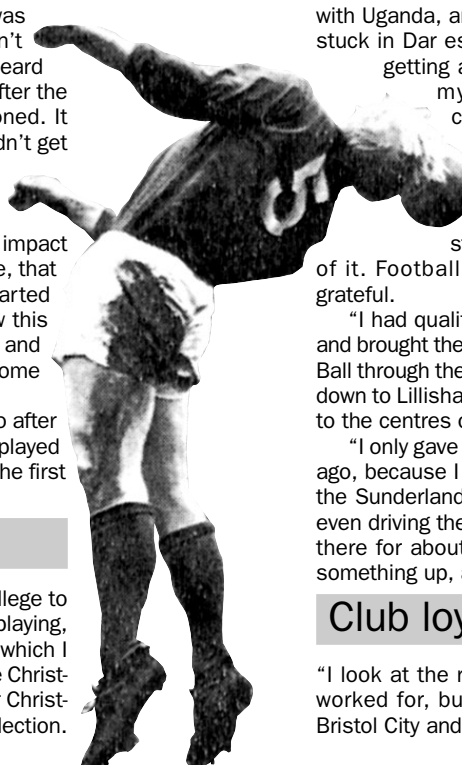
"I always wanted to stay in football after I stopped playing, just to put back what I got out of it. Football gave me what I've got, and I'll always be grateful.

"I had qualified as a full time coach. I coached for the FA, and brought the likes of Gary Bennett, Paul Bracewell and Kevin Ball through their coaching courses at Durham, then sent them down to Lillishall for their full licences. After a time, I moved on to the centres of excellence.

"I only gave up my involvement in football a couple of years ago, because I was diagnosed as diabetic. I was in charge of the Sunderland Centre of Excellence – training the lads, and even driving the minibus – up to the time Peter Reid had been there for about a year. Once I was diagnosed, I had to give something up, and the time was right to give up football.

Club loyalties...

"I look at the results every week, and I care for the clubs I worked for, but in this order: Sunderland, Middlesbrough, Bristol City and Scunthorpe."





Top: Dickie being presented with the 1967 and 1968 'Player of the Year' trophies

Epilogue

During the evening, I had made prior arrangements to meet up and have a few beers with Alan Foggon, staying in Jarrow overnight before driving down to Teesside for the Boro v Manchester United game. Ah; it's a tough life. I spent the night with Foggon, his wife Jackie and assorted friends in a staunch Skunk bar. Alan let everybody know that I was a 'smoggy' but it was a great night (although the later part of the evening is somewhat hazy) and I must have done something right because

Alan's mates presented me with a 'WE HATE SUNDERLAND' key ring towards the end of the evening.

I drove back to Teesside the next morning for the Manchester United match. Just before the game, encouraged by winning a tidy sum on my first bet in 20 years or so at Leicester the week before, my heart made me put a tenner on a 0-0 draw, but my head made me put a tenner on a 0-2 defeat. I have never felt so traitorous. Ah, what the hell, it's a long drive home, and by 5pm I had a bulging wallet to ease the hours and the pain of defeat away.

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When Rooks was dropped by Stan Anderson, a huge debate raged in the Gazette as to whether Anderson had done the right thing. These are a few excerpts from the letters on the 19th April 1969 edition:

Stan Anderson (pictured right) should stop trying to justify his selection for the Bury match. The manager was quoted as saying that 'The problem is up front - that's where the changes will be.' So now he has the affront to say that he has put his finger on the defences lapses - Dickie Rooks. What an insult to the most consistent man in the whole team.

F Wilson
95 Park Road South
Middlesbrough

Stan Anderson complains of being

treated 'like a leper' after the Bury shock, but after all, he did not personally tell Dickie Rooks he was to be rested. The decision was correct, the method of application left much to be desired.

W Keith
9 High Street
Eston

What a miserable finale to the season for Boro players and supporters:

1. They lose their home record
 2. Hickton asks for a transfer
 3. Rooks dissatisfied
 4. McMordie transfer rumour.
- If Boro had fielded their best side

against Bury, they had a good chance of completing their home fixtures with a convincing win, and both players and supporters would have been in a happier frame of mind.

Did the manager really expect to improve the side by replacing Jones, the captain, Hickton, the top scorer, and Rooks, the mainstay of the defence?

I don't think Stan is being slated for putting the youngsters in, but for dropping the wrong men.
P. Harrison
68 Shakespeare Street
Middlesbrough.

Dickie Rooks has a right to feel annoyed at missing his chance

of a full season's appearances. His absence was noticeable against Bury. There is little doubt that he has been our mainstay in defence.
J Humphrey.

This letter could have been written in the last few months, rather than 32 years ago:

Far too many people are criticising Boro for this and that, but not enough of them realise that a team needs vocal support. True, the team is not playing well at home...(but)...the away support is still tremendous. (however)...a large number of (home) fans don't encourage them enough.

It seems that Boro supporters only sing when they are winning.

Alan Dowden
61 Millbank Lane
Thornaby

