



# GOODBYE ROBBO?

**N**ow that Venables has decided to go, we must accept that the writing is on the wall, and Robson will probably leave us at the end of this season.

The last time such a high profile and successful manager left us (Jack Charlton) a quiet and unassuming John Neal took over, and to his credit, kept a pitifully undercapitalised Boro in mid-table First Division mediocrity for the whole of his tenure.

I am not actually too bothered about Robson leaving or about who is going to step into his seat.

There is no denying the good that Robson has done for our club and our public profile, but from the beginning I am sure we all knew that Boro was a stepping stone for him.

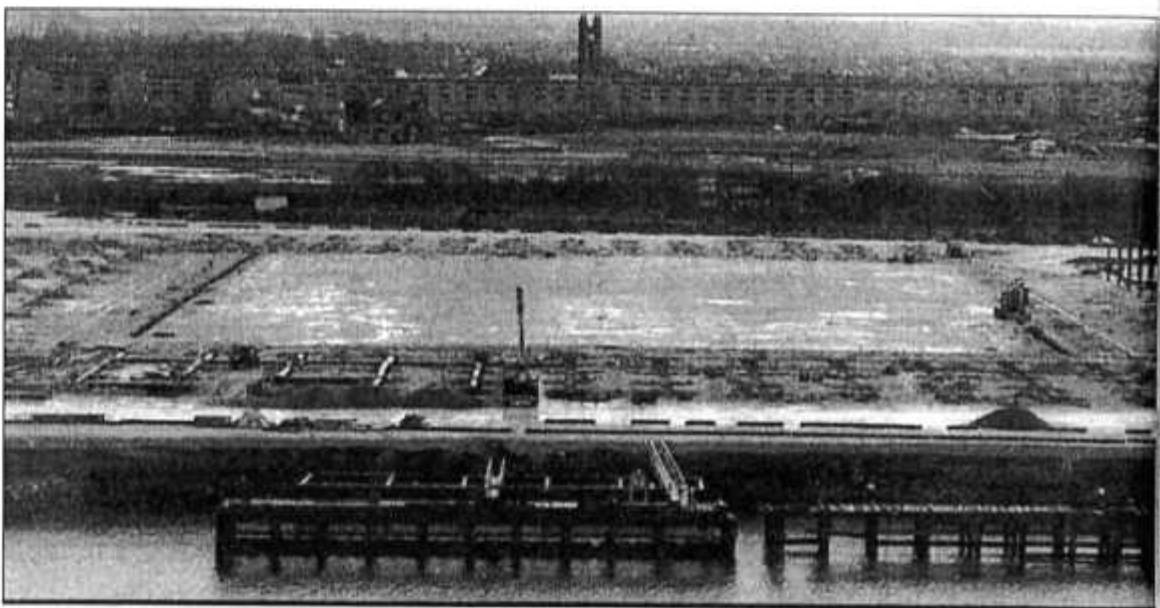
The thing is, that I have complete

confidence in Steve Gibson. This is not a man who takes anything for granted, and he probably had a short list drawn up from the day that Robson took over, just in case it didn't work out. Gibson cannot afford for Boro to be unsuccessful, he has too much at stake, and crucially, he is like you and I, Boro through and through. He is not a Michael Knighton who is going to bale out and find another club.

My only concern is that the probable imminent departure of Robson will unsettle the players, especially those, like Juninho and Barnby who came to Boro mostly on the strength of playing for Robson. To maintain the squad, keep Boro in the top half of the table and challenging for Europe, and to ensure healthy season ticket sales for next season (especially if one or both of the corners of the Riverside are

filled in), a high profile and respected (not necessarily experienced) man will be recruited.

So who is it going to be? Here's my tips; 10-1 Ruud Gullit, 20-1 Heine Otto, 25-1 Viv Anderson, Mick McCarthy, 100-1 Tony Mowbray, 150-1 Brian Clough(!), Graeme Souness, 200-1 Chubby Brown, Bob Mortimer (worth a fiver at that price), 300-1 Eric Cantona, Billy Horner.



## Frying tonight

Apparently, Barry Fry had Juninho watched prior to the first Birmingham Coca-Cola Cup game. Fry was quoted as saying: "The report on him was so frightening, I threw it in the bin." When you consider the outcome of the match, it would take a less than reasonable person to be too critical.

# BIGGER GATES

**I**t's sad that the Luton game was Pearsie's last appearance for the Boro. The man was worthy of bowing out on a much higher note. Still at least he got a good crowd for his testimonial, admittedly as much to do with the nostalgia factor of it being the last match at Ayresome Park.

It's interesting that most Boro fans rate John Hickton as one of their top three all-time greats, because only 10,500 could be bothered to turn up for his testimonial game against Sunderland.

Just like the secret of good comedy, testimonial gates are all about timing.

Hickton's testimonial was in the middle of a bleak Boro run of 12 league and one cup game without a win between February 5 and April 23 1977. Pearsie's game was during our current Robson Wonderland dream days, so a bumper gate was guaranteed. So spare a thought for John Craggs, the player who turned out for the Boro 472 times, making him third on the list of

most Boro appearances (behind Tim Williamson and Gordon Jones) for whom only a very poor 3,573 could be bothered to contribute.

Football fans. What a fickle lot. So here's a cracker for all you quiz buffs: Whose testimonial attendance was a stonking 31,643? Willie Maddren? Harold Shepherdson? David Armstrong? Wilf Mannion/George Hardwick?

Try Bill Gates. Gates was a fine utility player in his time, but without wishing to be disrespectful in any way was never the fans' favourite or what you may call a charismatic character. My brother-in-law tells me that his nickname was Dr. Death. But, like I said, it's all about timing.

Gates' testimonial against the then League Champions, Leeds United was held just after Boro's legendary 1973-4 season, when everyone wanted to be a 'Boro fan. And, once again, meaning no disrespect, Gates is probably the last Boro player of that period who needed

the money.

To his credit, during six of his playing years, he spent his spare time studying to qualify as a Chartered Accountant. Since retiring from football he has become a very successful, albeit elusive businessman, with a slightly richer namesake.

I have tried to track down Bill Gates in the last few months to put a longer piece together about his time with Boro, but was unable to find him. However, Adrian Bevington, who is responsible for most of the contents of the Boro matchday magazine tells me that Gates turned up unannounced at the Riverside recently. The resultant interview will appear in a forthcoming match programme.

The last known contact number for Gates that I managed to dig up was a number in Montserrat, which though I rang the number many times, it was never answered.

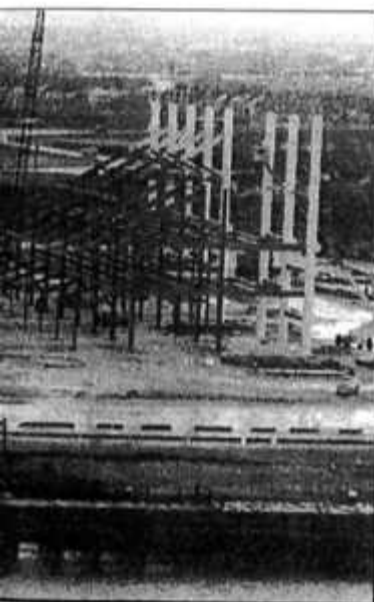
He was probably having a kick about on the beach with Rod Stewart.

**Keogh's Korker:** Name the three 'Boro goalkeepers who made over 300 League and Cup appearances. (Answer on page opposite)



No-one seems to have noticed that Jaime Moreno appears to have scored a perfectly good goal in the Coca Cola Cup replay against Crystal Palace. The incident happened very quickly, but I wonder if anybody else saw it the same way as I did?

In the dying minutes, Moreno's header bounced down off the crossbar,(above), which put a lot of spin on the ball, it hit the ground about a foot or more inside the goal, unfortunately, the spin ensured that it bounced straight out of the goal and back into play, promptly cleared by a Palace defender. Jaime was left standing looking like a bulldog who'd swallowed a wasp.



**Who'd have thought it, would you believe it, gawd blimey guv'nor dept:**

**I know we have heard so much about how wonderful our stadium is, but I still find it incredible that this is the site of our spiritual home only twelve months ago. Can you imagine life without the Riverside now? Neither can I.**

**PS** If anyone knows who picked up the signed photograph of Wilf Mannion after the Xmas Party raffle, could you please ask them to send it to me, as I had the winning ticket.

I was a bit late to collect it, as I was busy explaining my accent to someone who introduced himself to my back with the words "What's that bloody cockney doing here?". Someone no doubt put it in a safe place for me, but I'm still looking...