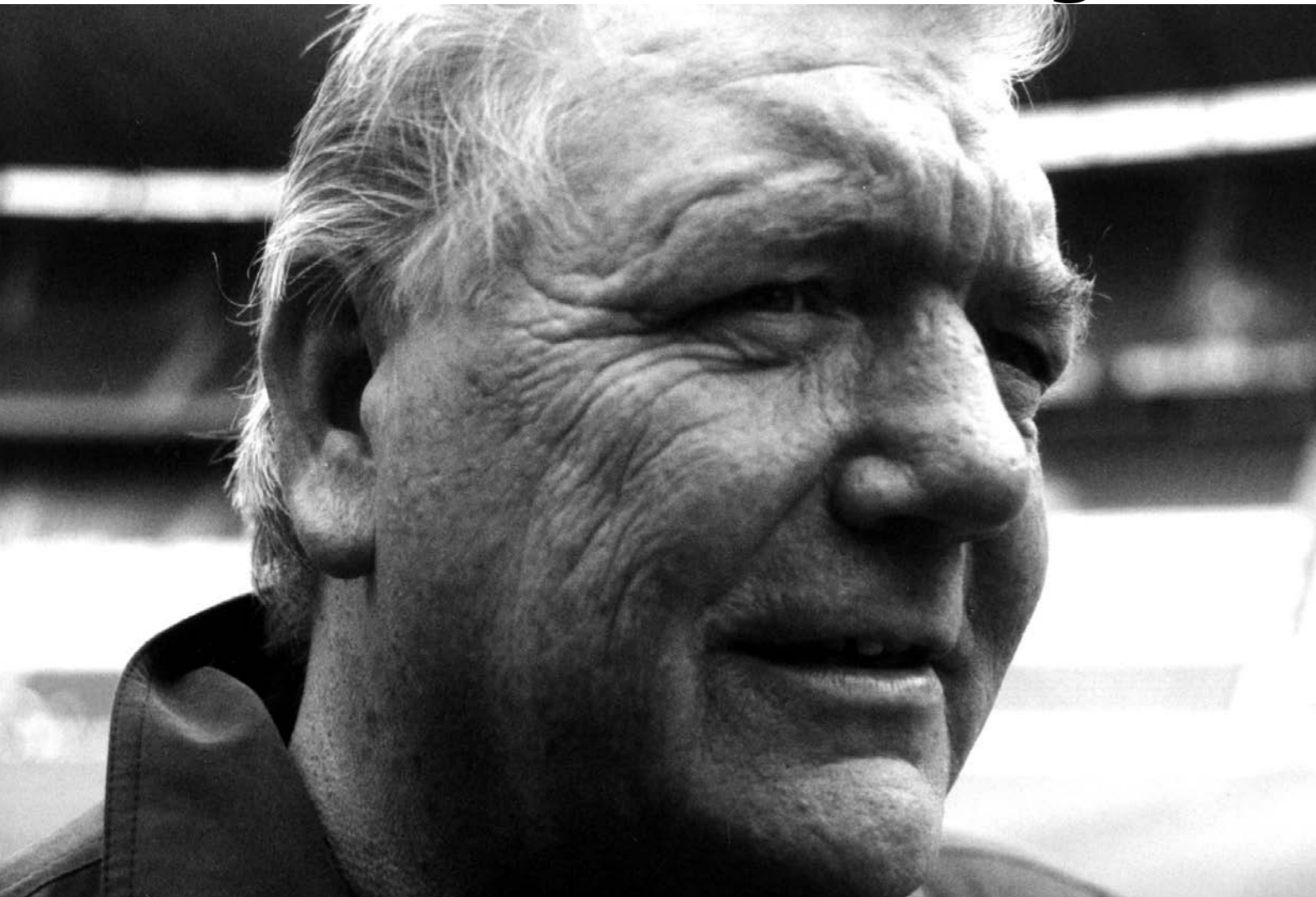


Dandy Lion & Murdoch



Bobby Murdoch

by Shaun Keogh

BOBBY MURDOCH was a big, strong player who won the praise of some of football's top names and was the Scottish Football Writers' Player of the Year in 1969. He initially joined Celtic in August 1959, and became a permanent member of the Parkhead staff in 1961.

Soon after Jock Stein took over at Parkhead, he made the inspired decision to move Murdoch from inside-right to right-half, where he became the anchor man of the celebrated Celtic side of the 1960s.

Stein said of the influential star, "As far as I am concerned, Murdoch was just about the best player I had as manager. I only let him move because he had run out of challenges with Celtic."

He made nearly 500 appearances for Celtic before transferring to Middlesbrough in 1973. Graeme Souness once commented: "He came along at just the right time, not only for me but for the whole team. His experience settled us down as we went for promotion and he also proved to be a big influence on my career. Bobby was a great passer of the ball and he had an excellent attitude. He would always pull me to one side to pass on advice or to tell me when he thought I was acting wrongly."

Murdoch never achieved his full international potential, winning only 12 caps for Scotland.

Pictured above right: Bobby and his son, Bobby Junior, and his grandsons, Paul (front) and, er... Bobby Junior.

However, Murdoch became a part of footballing history when, at the age of 23, he was a member of the first British team to win the European Cup. On 25th May 1967, Celtic beat Inter Milan 2-1 in Portugal, and the 'Lions of Lisbon' were born.

He made his Boro debut on 22 September 1973 in a 0-0 draw at Blackpool. From then, he missed only two games as Boro raced to promotion. Murdoch's vision and passing in midfield were a revelation at Boro. He was the only player that Jack Charlton added to his predecessor Stan Anderson's squad, which resulted in Boro's record breaking promotion to the old First Division.

Murdoch however, was unfortunate in 1981 to take over as Boro manager just as previous manager John Neal's squad was breaking up and cash was becoming very tight - Boro were heading for freefall.

Now in retirement in his native Rutherglen, Murdoch is still a regular and respected visitor to Celtic Park, where his son and grandsons (pictured above) are season ticket holders.

I am waiting in the Parkhead reception area when Murdoch hobbles across from the car park with his son and two of his small grandsons. Within seconds he is surrounded by young autograph hunters, all of them born 20 years or more after he left Celtic, but who all know



1. Murdoch and Celtic team mates celebrate yet another victory.
 2. Searching Ayresome Park for missing fans and players.
 3. In state-of-the-art 70s shirt and matching stylish haircut.
 4. Celebrating Boro's runaway championship of the Second Division after narrowly beating Sheffield Wednesday 8-0. All of the scorers are pictured L-R: Souness (who scored his only Boro hat-trick that day), Hickton (one goal), Armstrong (one goal), Maddren, Murdoch (one goal; he's in his suit because he was substituted), Boam, Mills (one goal), Harry Charlton, Foggon (one goal).

his name and now rugged features as if he were a member of the current Celtic squad.

Murdoch offers me a firm and friendly handshake, then whisks his family and me through security reception. Without me even asking, he immediately takes me for a tour of the Celtic museum, trophy room, boardroom, dressing rooms and finally to the heart of this awesome stadium – pitchside. We talk animatedly, and he patiently poses for photographs, even though his ankle is giving him pain after being on his feet for ten minutes. We settle into a hospitality lounge in the main stand underneath a massive portrait of Jock Stein, and on goes the tape...

When Jock Stein allowed you to go to Boro, he said that he only did it because you had run out of challenges at Celtic – tell me about the background to that...

I hadn't run out of challenges, but Jock was building a new team. I had just signed a two year contract with a two year option, and he stuck me in the reserves. I couldn't afford to be in the reserves, because you don't get appearance money or bonuses unless you are in the first team. I didn't ask for a move, but I told Jock that I didn't want to play in the reserves and he said that he would see what he could do for me. So he told three clubs – Boro, Preston, who were managed then by Bobby Charlton, and Sheffield United – that I was available. When Jock said that he would "see what he could do for you," did you expect it to result in a transfer to another club?

No – I didn't want to leave Celtic Football Club, but it was a stroke of luck really that I went to Boro; it worked out so well initially for me and my family on and off the pitch. My wife and I made a lot of friends there and my kids were brought up there, and the fans are a different class, so we all look back on the town and our time there with a great deal of affection.

Had you ever visited Ayresome previously?

I'd already played there in around 1966 for the Scottish League – the Football League beat us 2-0.

Was your body telling you that you're playing career was finished at the end of 1975-76 season?

Well, it was my ankles that were the problem. I had to have the ligaments strapped up all the time. I'd picked up a knock out here (Celtic Park) against Hearts in 1963, and that one injury stuck with me throughout my career.

So you were carrying that injury when you moved to Boro?

Oh yeah. If there would have been a transfer fee involved, I would have failed the medical; no question about that, because my right ankle was shattered.

(As an aside, I mentioned this to Jack Charlton when I saw him a couple of months after this interview took place, and he was mortified; he had no idea, even now 25 years later, that Bobby's ankles were so damaged that he would not have passed a medical, and that this is the likely reason that Jock Stein was happy for Bobby to go on a free transfer.)

I was playing in the reserves at Boro for half of that season, but there came a point in the following pre-season when I couldn't handle the pain any more. It was during one of the better summers that we had, and the ground was really hard. We had done a morning training session at Hutton Road, and we went back in the afternoon, to do just steady running as the ground was so hard. My ankle was all strapped up but I just had to stop, the pain was unbearable.

I spoke to John Coddington and Jimmy Greenhalgh (team coaches) and Jack (Charlton) about it afterwards. I told them "I'm finished". I was always aware of my injured ankle, and the staff at Celtic and Boro, especially Dr Phillips (at Boro) were great at keeping me in shape to play. I never had any injections, so some days were better than others. People seem to think that it was my knees that were giving me problems, but they

were fine. They're cracking up now mind (laughs) but it was my ankles that were the problem, and it is hard to repair ankle injuries.

Most Boro fans will not be aware of how your health has suffered all due to that one injury and its repercussions. You clearly still have mobility problems (Bobby walks with a limp), so what is the current situation with the ankle?

Five years ago I had an operation on my ankle, basically because I had no ligaments. The surgeons took some material out of my hip and fused it to my ankle. It was a very difficult operation, and I had to walk with a stick for four years – I've only just thrown it away – it was a terrible time.

I've got limited movement now obviously, but the searing pain that was there pretty much all the time has gone – it's just a permanent ache now. I try to keep my mind occupied with other things so that I don't get to think about it.

Do you get financial assistance from the PFA or any other body?

No, nothing. I'm not the type of person to phone them up you know. (laughs) I had to work very hard to get any benefits at all. I get a disability living allowance, but that's it.

There must be some regrets about taking over as Boro manager at a time when the club was falling apart?

Probably it was a mistake; perhaps I should have remained in the coaching role I had. People may forget, but we brought some smashing young players through the youth team to the reserves and the first team – Mogga, Stephen Bell, David Hodgson. When I took the manager's job, the club didn't have

the players capable of doing the job. The team was mostly youngsters. Money was real tight, and the club needed to sell rather than buy. Let's face it, I didn't take the job for the money. (laughs)

Do you know if there were any other applicants?

I don't know, but I didn't even apply myself! They just offered the job to me.

Tell me about the problems that you inherited....

Where do I start! One of the reasons for the problems at the club was that John Neal hadn't got the senior players to sign new contracts before their old ones had expired, so they all left the club; it was a very difficult situation. After the Wolves game (10th March 1981) everything became static, and John Neal knew he was leaving anyway.

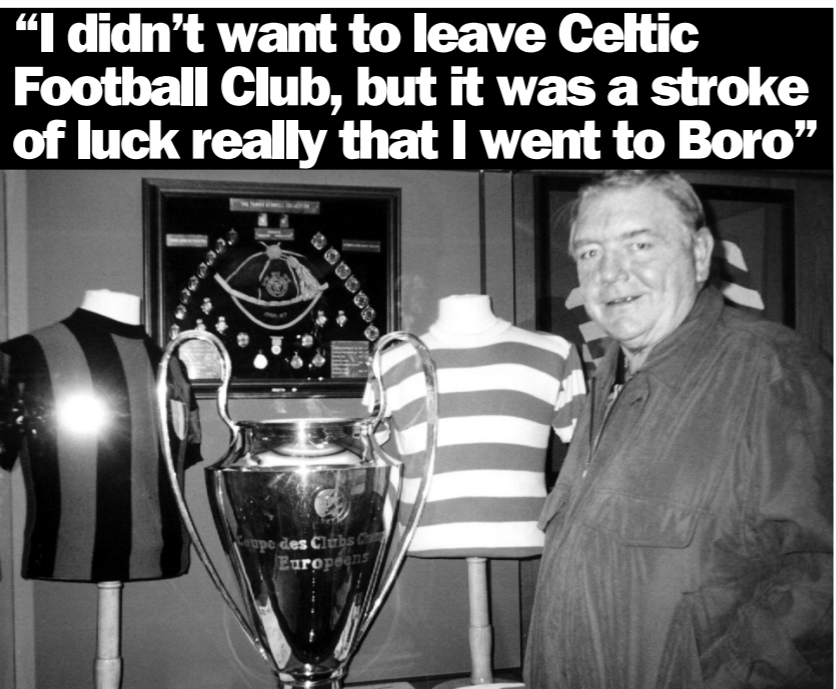
When I took over the job and saw the state of the club I had no chance – the players were leaving quicker than the fans. (laughs) It was not an attractive club at that time. For example, I tried to sign Ally McCoist, but he went to Sunderland. It was very difficult to sign good players.

We had mostly young players who you can talk to but they forget it all once they're on the park, so I needed big strong leaders on the park, but, like I said it was difficult to get players to come to the Boro. The players that I did sign were just like patchwork. The players that I did sign, no disrespect to them, but they were mostly patchwork. Ray Hankin and Dave Thomas I got from Vancouver Whitecaps through Peter Lorimer, who was the manager there at the time. Hankin made his debut in my last game in charge against Grimsby. Paul Sugrue I got through Bobby Lennox who was in charge at Kansas. I think most of them came in on a free.



Right: En-route to a 1960s-style luke-warm mud-black communal bath, alongside Willie Henderson of Rangers.

Second right: April 1999 in the Celtic trophy room, featuring the European Cup and related memorabilia, including players' shirts worn on that historic night. (Picture: Shaun Keogh)



"When I took over at Boro and saw the state of the club I knew I had no chance – the players were leaving quicker than the fans"

The 1981 north-east section start-out finals between Murdoch and the then Boro Chairman 'Amiable' Charlie Amer. The winner gets to keep his job... but not for long, pal.

BOBBY MURDOCH
Middlesbrough

“The experience at Middlesbrough sickened me – I’m sorry it happened that way”



Picture: Shaun Keogh

You gave Stephen Bell his debut...

Yeah... (pauses, shakes his head) that was a shame the way he went. He was good enough to get his debut that’s for sure, but we had nobody else anyway. I’d worked with him since he was 14 years old, he had all the skills but he got given everything too young. He was quick and wiry, but he just lost his head, he had too much money. He was a disaster, because he had everything in front of him. But you know, when you look at Proctor, Hodgson and Johnston – they were good enough at or around Bell’s age. The difference with them is that they kept their heads.

And then, after you took over, you lost those key players like David Hodgson and Mark Proctor...

When young players that you have nurtured start to leave the club it gets you down. The truth is that I lost heart; you can say that I was a failure because I couldn’t get to grips with it, but I had absolutely no back-up whatsoever.

I think the only one of your protégés who is still playing is Tony Mowbray...

I picked him for his debut at Newcastle when he was 18 and put him in against Kevin Keegan. Tony was going to give the game up when he was 16. I think he got fed up with the training and he was at college as well. Harold Shepherdson said to me, “Bobby, you should go and speak to his parents”. Well, Tony’s father was working offshore I think so I went to see Tony and his mother in Redcar, and told him to stick with it because he had a future in the game. I’ve got a lot of time for Tony.

Who else did you rate?

Darren Wood was a smashing player; exceptional. I admired Mark Proctor and David Hodgson too, because they were in the minority of players who would actually listen. (laughs)

Just to side-track for a bit, Hodge sent a player up here to Celtic recently; he’s about 17, and only come on as sub for Darlo. So that’s how it is for us at Celtic now; Rangers are signing internationals and we’re getting loan players from Darlington. (laughs)

Can you sum up your feelings on your time as Boro manager?

The experience at Middlesbrough sickened me; you put your trust in so many people and do a few favours, and they don’t come back... but the key players were leaving the club, and I wasn’t allowed to replace them. It was a bad end to my career; I’m just sorry it happened that way, but I’m far more content now.

Did you try to get in at any other club after you left Boro?

No. I haven’t even tried to get back into the game since I finished at Boro.

You did not get as many Scottish caps as perhaps you deserved – there are always stories being told that in those days, Rangers players were always picked before Celtic ones...

I had a problem anyway because Celtic were in so many competitions, I was playing Saturday and Wednesday every week, and then of course you pick up little knocks, so you’re not necessarily available for selection. You’re right though – in those days there was a time when Rangers players were picked before Celtic players, but I don’t think it happens now. Anyway, it doesn’t matter if you play one or 100 games – you’ve represented your country, and that is the greatest honour. ■

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Bobby Murdoch

factfile



Born Rutherglen, 17th August 1944
Signed pro for Celtic 1961
Free transfer to Boro September 1973
Became Boro youth team coach while still member of First team, 1975
Last Boro appearance 17th April 1976
Appointed Boro manager June 1981
Left Boro October 1982



■ **Celtic record:**
Total 484 apps; 105 goals
■ **Boro record:**
93 League apps; 6 goals,
7 FA Cup apps; 1 goal
13 FL Cup apps; 0 goals
Total 113 apps; 7 goals
Career Honours:



12 full Scotland caps
European Cup winners’ medal 1967
Eight consecutive Scottish League Championships from 1966 to 1973
Four Scottish Cup winners’ medals
Five Scottish League Cup winners’ medals
English Second Division Championship medal 1974

