

# Keep the hype, this is a real football club

Secretary, treasurer, programme producer, bar duties, and even pitch maintenance, Chris Gay has done it all for his beloved Chertsey Town

by **Clive Youlton**  
clive.youlton@trinitymirror.com

GAY by name and a sunny disposition by nature.

A spirited outlook on life has gone a long way to helping Chris Gay stick around as a committee member at a club like Chertsey Town over a mammoth 40-year spell.

No disrespect to the Curfews, but there are more glamorous Saturday afternoon destinations than Alwyns Lane - nicknamed Nowins Lane this term by some cruel observers.

But the 67-year-old has always considered Chertsey Town to be 'a real football club' - far removed from the razzmatazz of the professional game with its glamour and over-hyped status.

Gay thrives on the humdrum existence of non-league football, the only departure from the norm coming in the 'Spencer Day' era - make that Spender - when the support of a financial benefactor was as near to the high life as the club would get.

There have been marginally more ups than downs since 'Mr Chertsey' first visited the club for a Surrey Senior League match in January 1960.

That was the year Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* was released, when Gay emerged from behind his adolescent curtain to embrace football and support the club, although fleetingly at first.

Plenty of managers have come and gone in his time as match secretary and programme editor/producer but then there have been 28 first-team bosses all told, not to mention seven chairmen - none of them though stabbed in the back.

Gay has ridden the roller-coaster ride which has brought the club nine promotions/advancements in leagues during his tenure but never a championship.

There have also been six relegations long the way.

Born in August 1946 he was raised in Chertsey where he lived before moving to the Camberley area after getting married in 1970. He saw Chertsey Town for the first time in a

Surrey Senior Cup tie away at Molesey in the autumn of 1959. They lost 6-2.

That first Alwyns Lane visit followed for the match against Devas Institute (since disbanded) and he became a regular until midway through the 1963/64 season, when he took up refereeing.

He toughed that out for five years but lost interest in football altogether and gave the game the red card for a while.

"My enthusiasm was reawakened in late 1973," explains Gay. "My 'new' house was close to Camberley Town FC and, when renovating its tired features, I could hear the referee's whistle being blown on Saturday afternoons from my rear garden."

"I attended a game there when Chertsey were the visitors. At first I supported Camberley with the logic that it was now my home-town team, but this notion evaporated after 20 minutes."

"It seems Chertsey Town, like malaria, was latently hidden in my blood. In fact, I knew some of the players as it was a real home-town team at that time."

"I also knew a couple of committee members and was persuaded to come along to see the side at home. I ended up attending, then started to help about the place, steadily being sucked in."

Gay remembers the club was in a very poor state at that time.

"I recall the first thing I did was to pull down a dangerously hanging piece of corrugated tin from the roof of the stand which had a gaping hole," he says.

"I then swept out the stand and recall, on my first attempt, being shouted at from the away dressing room below because I was sweeping dust etc through the floorboards and down on to the then unprotected floor."

Being asked to get more involved seemed inevitable and in June 1974 he joined the committee as match secretary.

"That post was an innovation at the time, proposed by myself," he explains.

"The then secretary was Ron Gristock who did some sterling work for the club

and was a leading mainstay through 10 turbulent years and helped keep the club going."

"Ron was in his 80s by then and, due to eye cataracts, stepped down in February 1977 to have surgery."

"It was supposed to be a temporary withdrawal but he never did get back into harness, although he continued to support the club into the next decade."

"I was invited to take his duties, with the position becoming permanent at the June 1977 AGM."

"I had also become the match programme producer and, with the exception of one or two isolated seasons, have been burdened with that post ever since."

"I should think I have produced well over 1,000 editions in that time and been involved with a few hundred more in assisting others with the task."

Pitch maintenance, clubhouse bar duties, the post of treasurer and a myriad of odd-jobs have also been undertaken by Gay, who is aware of his limitations.

"I cannot claim to be a high flyer on the club's behalf, more a steadying influence providing a stable base," he reflects.

"My ambition on the park is for the side to comfortably hold its own at Premier Division [Southern League] status, one above its current level, to reach the first round of the FA Cup (and play a Football League club), which has never been achieved at any time, and to win a league championship. The last time that occurred was in 1963 in the Surrey Senior League."

"Off the park, I'd like to see the club be financially self-sufficient as well as well-run in an organisational sense and to extend its role in the life of the community of Chertsey would give great satisfaction. I would also love its bricks and mortar facilities to be the best in the district too."

"It has been hard to keep going at times and the club has no money."

"All its facilities and logistical efforts truly are created through volunteer effort and resolve. I am eternally grateful for what is given to



Terry Habgood Rock of ages: Chris Gay in front of the main stand, looks back on a remarkable 40 years of service to his beloved Chertsey Town.

us, even though the club is invariably playing catch up."

"Sometimes I feel forsaken, but in truth many donate time and money to the Curfews cause."

"The present main sponsors, Traylen Enterprises, led by Tommy and Emma Traylen, have made the difference over the past couple of seasons without asking for anything in

return. But so many others, without financial clout, have given their time in other ways."

"It is that sort of commitment that has helped me keep plodding on, waiting for better times to return to the club and fortunes to turn around."

So does he have any regrets?

Well, actually, yes.

"I have, over the years,

sometimes wished I had never become involved," he admits.

"But overall I'm glad I have been part of the life of the club. It has given me momentum in life."

"I have made contact with so many people and created friendships that otherwise would not have happened, as well as creating a gateway into many facets of life that

would have otherwise been absent. Having now entered pensionable age, I intend to step down from my executive involvement before too long but although still living in 'exile' just this side of the Hampshire/Surrey border, I will keep my loyalty to Chertsey Town FC for, hopefully, many a year to come."

Of that fact the club can feel very pleased.