



*Manchester United fans outside Buckingham Palace before the 1957 Cup Final against Aston Villa.*

## MANCHESTER UNITED MUSEUM

Mark Wylie

Manchester United Football Club is today one of the most famous names in football — a name known throughout the world. This is a far cry from rather humble beginnings. A team was started by a group of railwaymen at the Newton Heath depot of the Lancashire & Yorkshire Railway in 1878 as Newton Heath, (Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway) Cricket and Football Club. Financial troubles dogged Newton Heath until in 1902, with bankruptcy looming, the club was saved by wealthy Manchester brewer, J.H. Davies. Newton Heath promptly reformed as Manchester United and the combination of Davies' money and secretary Ernest Mangnall's tactical skill soon ushered in a golden age of two championships and a F.A. Cup win together with the move in 1910 to a magnificent new stadium at Old Trafford.

Since then there have been some great successes but also a number of barren years. Star players have come and gone but to many people it is one man — Sir Matt Busby — who epitomised the club. It was his teams that built up a reputation for exciting attacking football and attracted countrywide support. This support was undoubtedly increased after the tragedy at Munich when eight players lost their lives, stimulating a tremendous wave of sympathy for the club throughout Europe. Since the 1960s Manchester United has consistently been the best supported club in England with fans from every corner of the country. It is perhaps not surprising that Old Trafford gained the first purpose-built club football museum, opened by C. Martin Edwards, the Club Chairman, on 1 May 1986.

### Creating a Museum

It is thought that the original idea for a club museum came from one of the directors, the late Denzil Haroun. A director for twenty-three years he had actively involved himself with the various supporters' associations and clubs around the country. In the years before his death in 1985, he had made regular mention of the benefits of a club museum and visitor centre. The phenomenal support the club attracted together with the success of club 'open days' may have pushed his ideas more to the forefront. Principally amongst these ideas was that the museum should not just be a dazzling repository for club silverware, like those he had visited at Benfica and Real Madrid. Instead he wanted the club history to be displayed together with supporters' items, putting the trophies and gifts into a wider context. A museum would also be a valuable public relations exercise for a club continually at the forefront of media attention.

A committee was formed in 1984 comprising Michael Edelson (director), Ken Ramsden (assistant secretary), Cliff Butler (club archivist), Bobby Charlton, David Meek (Manchester Evening News) and Ron Crowther (ex-Daily Mail), together with museum designer John Hall of Hall Redman Associates. After appealing to the club's supporters for additional items the committee soon realised that the club itself had a vast range of memorabilia hidden away all over the stadium. This caused numerous revamps of the museum plans as more cases were added at the expense of graphics panels. Squeezed underneath the terraced seating of the scoreboard end of the ground the designers created seven large display cases together with a further four wall



*Newton Heath LYR pose for a team photograph, c.1894-5*

mounted cases and two free standing cabinets. To cope with the anticipated hundreds of enquiries about statistics and former players a computer database was proposed. However technical difficulties soon resulted in this idea being shelved. Access to the museum on the first floor was through the Sir Matt Busby Suite on the ground floor. On matchdays, potentially the busiest day of the week, the museum had to close since the Sir Matt Busby Suite was in use.

Once the committee had been formed the club started to actively encourage donations to the museum. An appeal was made in the club programme and this publication also aroused interest by featuring articles on some of the items won by or given to the club over the years. The appeal uncovered a huge variety of information and memorabilia from many different quarters giving Cliff Butler, the newly appointed curator, plenty of work. Old programmes flooded in, the families of ex-players contacted the club with offers of shirts and medals for display and through the Association of Former Manchester United Players a large number of 'old boys' were contacted about loaning or donating items to the museum. This was especially useful for some of the more recent items still owned by the players concerned, many of whom had them stored in drawers or hidden in their lofts.

Prior to this the club had an ambivalent attitude to its own store of memorabilia. Pennants dating back to the 1950s

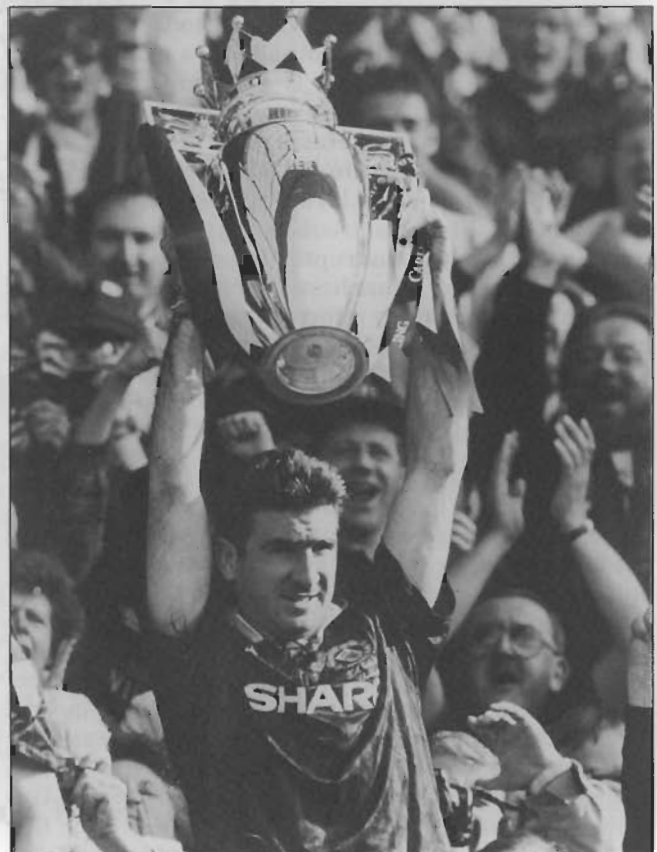


*An aerial view of Old Trafford in 1932.*

had been stapled to walls in the offices and executive suites or left rolled up in cardboard boxes; trophies were left to gather dust in unsuitable storage areas and many documents and programmes had simply been thrown into skips as redevelopment progressed around the ground in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. All this changed once it was realised that the club's supporters were very interested in these items and that they could be properly displayed.

### Displaying the Past

The displays are divided into sections each concentrating on different aspects of the club's history. The early years from 1878 to the eve of the First World War as the club rose to being a major force in the English game are covered in the first section. Whilst there are very few artifacts from the very early years of the club there are a surprisingly large number of items from United's Edwardian heyday. There are also specific displays on the many styles of kit worn by United's past and present stars; the F.A. Cup; United in Europe; Old Trafford; and a major display on the 'Busby Babes' and the Munich Air Disaster. The display on the Munich Air Disaster covers what many people regard as the most important episode in the history of Manchester United. Prominently displayed in this section are facsimile newspapers reporting on the disaster. This crash made Manchester United a household name not only in Britain but also across Europe. Because of the importance of this tragedy we have actively collected items associated with many of Busby's 'Babes' gaining a comprehensive collection of medals, shirts and blazers. The club's grieving supporters have not been forgotten as many poems, memorial sheets and badges together with scarves, hand embroidered with players' names and with black ribbon alongside the names of those who died, have also been collected for display.



*Eric Cantona – one of the many Frenchmen who have contributed to the history of Manchester.*

(SportsView)

Originally the displays were overwhelmingly dominated by post-war artifacts and especially those from the 1970s and 1980s. This led to one area of the club's history, 1914 until 1939, being virtually ignored. Only a couple of graphics panels hinted at the turbulent and unsuccessful times at Old Trafford during these decades. United were again close to bankruptcy and were very close to the ignominy of being relegated to the Third Division, but this is only briefly covered on the panels. Whilst items from this period are considerably rarer than from the post-war years it would still have been possible to have devised a small display of material covering the interwar years.

Despite the effect of redevelopment the club does have a very large collection of trophies either won in competition or given as a memento of a tour or friendly match. This comprises the majority of the items held by the museum although there are also substantial collections of programmes, pennants and shirts. Our pennant collection dates back to the 1950s and complements our trophy collection with many of the pennants and trophies being presented at the same matches.

The shirt collection is one that has been started after the museum was founded in 1986. Before this any obsolete shirts were either used for training sessions or simply given away or thrown out. This has meant that the club has in effect had to buy back its own history by purchasing old shirts from ex-players and collectors. The overwhelming impression of the museum displays is one of 'glory, glory, glory' with little mention of the downside. There is no mention of the 1915 matchfixing scandal that rocked the club, the twenty-six-year championship wait, the Docherty affair or the terrible reputation that United's travelling supporters gained in the mid-1970s. It is inevitable that a football club will have at least as many disappointments as successes but it is a side of the game that needs to be shown, although perhaps this side is one that supporters and perhaps club officials would prefer was swept under the carpet.

### A 'new' Museum

A resurgence of the club's fortunes in 1990 with a F.A. Cup win soon led to an expansion being considered. The downstairs Sir Matt Busby Suite was an obvious area to expand into since it was only used on matchdays. This time the history of the club was not the prime consideration, rather, the new display area was to be a 'Trophy Room' exhibiting silverware, and pennants with less of an attempt to place them in historical context. The displays were themed with cabinets on Youth at United; United on Tour; the League Championship; the European Cup Winners Cup; the European Cup; Pennants; Player Awards and International Caps.

The new area was opened in September 1991. This coincided with the appointment of a new curator, Mark Wylie, fresh from the Museum Studies course at Leicester University, taking over from Cliff Butler who had now become the club programme editor. The opening of the trophy room has been invaluable in allowing the organisation of temporary displays showing some of the vast numbers of trophies and pennants, medals and plaques previously kept almost permanently in store and seldom seen by the general public.

As in most museums the collections continue to grow. Each year trophies and pennants, whether won by the first team, reserves, or youth teams on tours, or in friendly or competitive matches are added to the collection. The club



*Young visitor dreaming about trophies in the museum.*

also actively collects medals, caps and shirts won by our former players to fill remaining gaps in our collections. A further collecting area is from our supporters themselves, in the form of tickets, scarves, rattles, fanzines and such like. Fanzines are a relatively new phenomenon only really coming to prominence in the 1980s. Not surprisingly a club with United's support can boast of no fewer than five different publications, including an anti-racist fanzine. Whilst they sometimes go over the top in both their criticisms of the club and opinions on other clubs they do allow an outlet for fans' opinions so long neglected by the club itself.

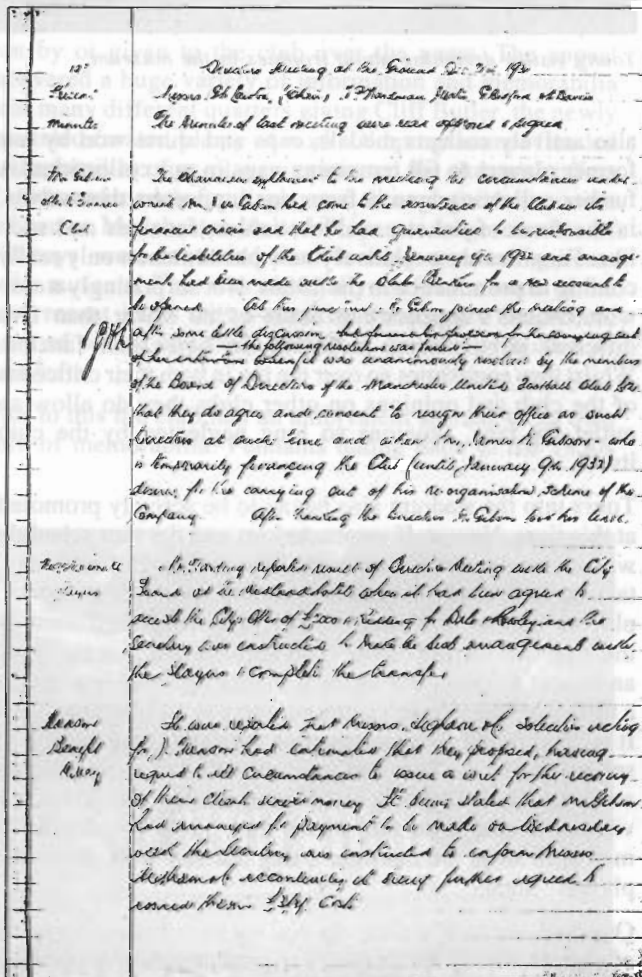
Tours into the stadium also began to be actively promoted at this time. New staff were taken on and the tour schedule was increased. Five tours went into the ground each day, taking visitors to the dressing rooms, manager's dugout, players' tunnel and press lounge. The continued success the club was having on the field together with, at the time, an almost unique view inside a football ground resulted in a threefold increase in visitor numbers to 145,000 by 1995. It is clear that the main attraction for fans is the chance to see inside the stadium and into areas that at most grounds are normally completely out of bounds. The tour gives our visitors a chance to see where their idols prepare for a match, to sit in the manager's dug out and walk down the players' tunnel.

Our own research has shown that we have four main types of visitors. Firstly the football fan, predominately supporting Manchester United but during school holidays and on matchdays there are often considerable numbers of visitors who support other teams. Secondly, with the rising number

of visitors there has also been a corresponding rise in the number of casual visitors tagging along with a football fan or visiting as part of a general excursion to Manchester. These visitors are often considerably less knowledgeable about the football industry than the 'average' fan. Our labelling and textual provision has to take into account these differences. Our third major visitor group are those from schools undertaking a National Curriculum based study of the club or football in general. This is a sector that is in the process of great expansion as more primary schools and teachers become aware of our education provision. The final main group of visitors are those seeking information. This can be in the form of statistics, player details, information on relatives who may or may not have played for United, or valuations of items in their possession. We try our best to help with all these enquiries to the best of our ability except with regard to valuations, which we are prohibited from assisting with. Our research also shows that approximately 30 to 35 per cent of our museum visitors are female compared to only 16 per cent of spectators on a matchday. I would suggest that this is quite a high proportion considering that football has been traditionally associated with males. However we also do hold some photographic and written evidence of significant numbers of female spectators right back to the early years of this century.

### Archives

Manchester United holds minute books dating back to 1903 which, in varying degrees of detail outline teamlists and salient points in the club's history. Unfortunately many



Page from club minute book outlining the takeover of a near-bankrupt Manchester United in January, 1931, by local businessman, J.W. Gibson.



Poster for the European Cup Winners' Cup Final, 1991.

club records from before World War Two have been destroyed, mislaid or thrown out. Whilst the destruction to Old Trafford caused by the Luftwaffe in 1941 is mainly to blame, subsequent redevelopment right round the stadium led to clear outs at frequent intervals, greatly reducing the amount of post-war documentation one might expect the club to have.

Because we are often dependent on the research of others the museum has built up a collection of books associated with the club. Most of these date from the 1950s to the present day, a period which has seen an increasing number of books being published about both the club and many of the famous stars of the day. Manchester United also holds a file of newspaper clippings separate from the museum's own collection of newspapers and scrap books compiled by supporters.

The museum also holds the club's main photographic archive although this is currently in a state of disarray after years of neglect. Since cataloguing the museum's object collection was the priority the photograph collection has had to wait. The club holds approximately 4,000 photographs mainly from the 1960s to the present day although with a substantial number of teamgroups from the 1980s onwards. There is also a very small collection of newsreels and a growing collection of videos, especially since the release of a quarterly video magazine about the club in 1993.

A lack of study space means that we are unable to accommodate researchers but staff will do their best to assist telephone and written enquiries for any reasonable requested information.

## The Future

For the future, a further expansion of the museum would in my opinion be very beneficial for the club although it is unlikely that anything would be considered whilst the current stadium redevelopment is in progress. Currently our museum struggles to cope with the volume of visitors on busy days during the school holidays or on match days. During the school holidays the number of tours entering the stadium and museum rises from five to eighteen per day with often over 800 people visiting the museum. Ideally a new larger purpose-built museum with expanded coffee shop and souvenir sales area and a separate entrance for tour parties would make the museum less congested and increase our visitors' enjoyment.

Finally, Manchester United Football Club is an important part of Manchester's culture and has helped make Manchester known throughout the world. Until relatively recently football culture has at best been neglected and at worst seen as a threat to public order. The items that now fetch high prices at auctions and are seen as collectable by museums were previously left solely for private individuals

building up their own collections. Football is now, for want of a better word, sexy, attracting attention from sectors of the community that would previously have ignored it. An awareness of the importance of professional sport and especially football in popular culture has led to the foundation of other football museums at Arsenal, Liverpool, Newcastle United and in Glasgow with others proposed for Preston and Carlisle. Sporting history and football history in particular have also become a serious study area for academics, whether looking at the development of professional sport or at football as an outlet for violent behaviour, for example. This widening of interest in football culture suggests that Manchester United Museum will offer an important resource not simply for the development of football in Manchester but for the whole country.

Manchester United Museum is open Tuesday to Sunday from 9.30 am until 4.00 pm. There are regular tours into the stadium until 2.00pm. Booking is essential for a tour as numbers are restricted. No tours on matchdays. Restricted tour on a pre-match day. Admission charge. Call 0161-930 2901 or 0161-877 4002 for more details.

## FURTHER READING

G. Dykes, *The United Alphabet* (Leicester, 1994).

S. Kelly, *Back Page United. A Century of Newspaper Coverage* (1990).

S. Liversage, *Busby Epitaph to a Legend* (Cleethorpes, 1994).

D. Meek, *Red Devils in Europe* (1988).

D. Meek and T. Tyrrell, *Manchester United: The Official History* (1988).

I. Morrison and A. Shury, *Manchester United: A Complete Record 1878-1992*, (Derby, 1992).

F. Taylor, *The Day A Team Died* (1994).

For a fan's eye view of supporting Manchester United there is S. Donoghue, *Red Fever. From Rockdile to Rio as "United" Supporters* (Wilmslow, 1994).

There are also numerous biographies and autobiographies of many of the 'stars' at Old Trafford, especially the 'stars' of the 1950s to the present day.

Richard Parkinson of *St Bees and Manchester*

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