

# INTO THE LIONS' DEN

**Shaun Keogh recalls his first tentative steps into football and Borodom. Stepping off into the fires of Cold Blow Lane.... Millwall. Scarey! It's a tale from another age. Thank goodness.**

**Y**ou would hardly call it love at first sight.

Cold Blow Lane was Millwall's home before the New Den became one of the first of the all brand new, state of the art football stadia built in the wake of the Hillsborough disaster. As I approached it on a November morning in 1968, I took in the fact that I was in a pretty grotty part of south London. The walls guarding the outside of the ground were made of 50 year old corrugated iron, covered in graffiti; the whole area seemed to smell of stale urine. And that was just the pubs.

Extremely unsavory gangs of youths stood on the corners eyeing everybody up and down looking for 'outsiders' - away supporters, so that they could dish out some of their local hospitality. It was an era when replica kits were not available, but you wouldn't have worn one then anyway. The only way of knowing who was an away fan would be the sight of part of a scarf hidden under a coat, a small enamel lapel badge, or perhaps overhearing a conversation and noticing that the accent was 'foreign'.

That's right kids, gather round the fire and I'll regale you with pleasant stories about the jolly japes that occurred in the early days of football hooliganism.

Lets get a few things clear at the outset, however. Anyone who tells you that it was 'all a bit of fun' or 'just lads being lads' is a liar, a thug and probably in prison; or should be. Looking back, I am suprised that I fell in love with the Boro and football that November day, because it was not a good day from beginning to end. Of course, Boro lost as well. But when I get crap from my mates and new acquaintances about 'How can I be a Boro lad with a soft southern shandy drinkers accent,' I can proudly stand up and say, "Listen,



pal, the first 20 or so times that you saw Boro would have been at Ayresome, surrounded by all your Boro mates, within walking distance of home and Mum's steak and kidney pie. You probably didn't go to an away game until you started shaving."

My first Boro game was in a violent suburb of south London where several Charlton Athletic fans are still missing, presumed dead following a game in 1948. Oh, and what's more, I didn't get to see anything but away games until 1971. (v Benfica, pre-season friendly, if you must ask). It is probably very difficult for the younger generation of fans to understand what it was like to attend a football match, particularly an away one, during the years 1968-1990. My southern accent was a positive asset when watching the Boro in London, but I was always fearful that Vince, with whom I have attended all but two of the Boro games I have seen, would say something loud enough to be heard and recognised as a Boro lad, ending with us both being mashed to a pulp.

It nearly happened at Millwall during an early 70's cup game. This was a time when fans used to change ends at half-time as well as the teams. We were making our way around to the opposite end, when a couple of local Neanderthals heard Vince singing along to that poptastic hit, Son Of My Father, which was being played over the PA. Next thing I knew, he was on the floor, being kicked and beaten by these soooo brave sarf London skinheads. I didn't realise what was going on at the time; I stood there watching it all happening, thinking that it was just a few of

