

John O'Rourke

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John O'Rourke was at the Boro for only 17 months. A short time, but long enough to earn a place in the hearts of Boro fans which continues to this day. Even now people on Teesside of a certain age will go all dewy-eyed at the memory of his goals in one of the most important seasons in Boro history.

Signed from Luton Town in the close season of 1966-67, O'Rourke was an old fashioned centre-forward, relying on service from wide playing wingers.



In the heady days of the 1966-67 promotion season, O'Rourke set Teesside alight with 27 goals in 39 League games. They included two hat-tricks, one of which clinched promotion against Oxford United in the final game of the season. He was perhaps a little unfortunate not to bag a hat-trick on his Boro debut in the style of Ravanelli, but had to settle for two goals in the opening game of the season, a 3-2 win at Colchester.

The contribution he made to Boro in that one full season he had on Teesside should not be underestimated. Boro needed to get back to the Second Division - and quick. Had they not made it that year; who knows what could have happened as a consequence? The club may have never recovered their League position and could even have gone out of business long before Steve Gibson was out of short trousers.

John O'Rourke welcomes me warmly to his home on the south coast, close to Bournemouth. He and his wife Deirdre built this home 30 years ago, and very charming it is too. His voice is a bit husky; he has recently been diagnosed as asthmatic. On occasions during our meeting he has to take a puff on his inhaler.

We spend some time chatting about former team mates, and I bring him up to date on the current whereabouts of people like Willie Whigham, Dickie Rooks and Arthur Horsfield. John is still in touch with David Chadwick, although he has not seen him since Chaddy moved to the USA in 1974.

O'Rourke was born in February 1945 in Northampton, his family moving to London soon after:

“Before I was born, my family were evacuated out of London during the war. We were from Rotherhithe,” then he adds with a wry grin: “But when we went back we went upmarket - to New Cross!” A slight pause and O'Rourke laughs as he adds: “Then we went up to the aristocracy - to Dagenham! I grew up there; we lived in a prefab.”

In his teens O'Rourke was invited to play with Arsenal as an amateur, and started the climb up the greasy pole of professional football.

Arsenal (1961-62)

"I realised that I had a lot to learn."

It is clear that O'Rourke has few, if any positive recollections of this time. "I was only a lad then, not under contract, just an amateur. I started in the youth team, and then I got into the 3rd team, where I scored a lot of goals. Because of that they put me in the reserves. Now, between the third team and the reserves, the difference is like night and day. I was only 16. I played that one reserve team match and I wasn't in the game at all.

"I didn't do a lot wrong, because I couldn't get near the ball. The game was so fast; the ball was pinging around everywhere. I realised I had a lot to learn.

"I did not get another chance and never progressed out of the third team. I couldn't see a future there."

O'Rourke sums up his feelings succinctly: "I didn't like it at Arsenal; I learned good basics, but I didn't enjoy it at all."

Chelsea (April 1962 - December 1963)

"I owe my career to Dave Sexton; he taught me so much."

An unhappy O'Rourke was soon approached by Chelsea manager Tommy Docherty. Chelsea had their own



problems at the time. In his first season as manager after taking over from Ted Drake, Docherty and Chelsea were about to suffer relegation from the top Division.

"Docherty went to Chelsea as a player, but after a year or so he became manager and he said to me 'If you ever want to leave Arsenal, I'll take you on.'"

This was manna from heaven for the disillusioned O'Rourke: "I did want to leave because I wasn't happy at Arsenal. I was only a kid, and I hadn't been offered professional terms.

“Arsenal didn’t object to me leaving, so I joined Chelsea,” he says, then adds with a wry smile and a chuckle: “I went from £7 a week to £15 a week, which was more than my dad was earning.”

O’Rourke was joining a set of players, most of whom are still well known names. Terry Venables, Ron Harris, Eddie McCreadie and Johnny Hollins are revered names in the history of Chelsea, as are the three Peters: Osgood, Houseman and Bonetti.

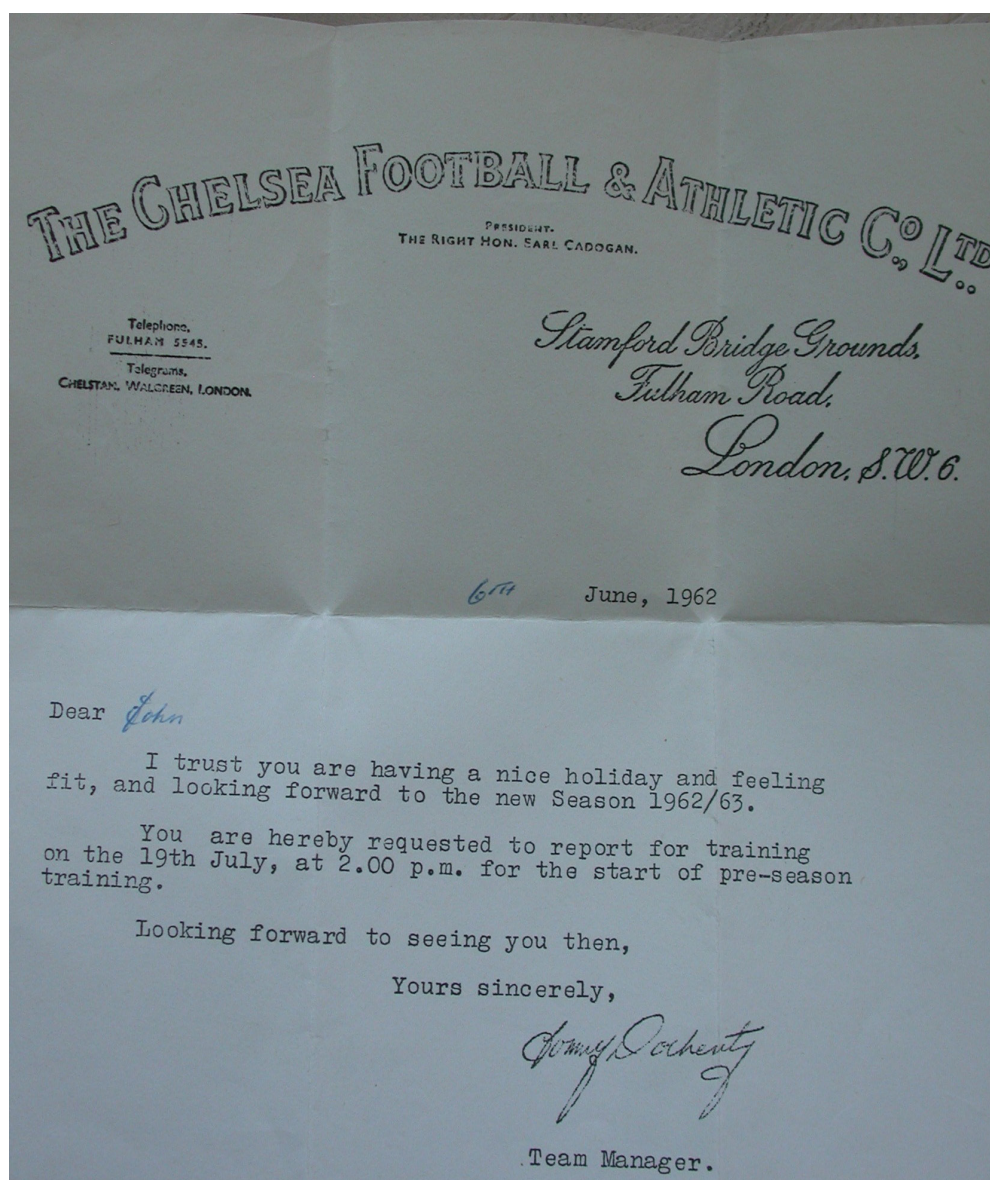
O’Rourke was thrown into the mix with these players, all eager to prove themselves at the highest level. This was clearly a very good period in O’Rourke’s career; his face lights up when talking about his time at Chelsea.

“I enjoyed it there; I met a lot of good people. Chelsea was entirely different to Arsenal

because everybody mucked in. My best mate there was Venna (Terry Venables) - he is still my mate. We used to come into work together on the train from Dagenham. I learned a lot from Terry, we used to stay back after training and work on our game. Terry had the brain of a 30 year old even then. He was - and still is - very sharp.”

O’Rourke also has high praise for Dave Sexton, his coach in those early years at Chelsea. Sexton was then in his first coaching role. He went on to manage Leyton Orient before returning to Chelsea to replace Tommy Docherty in 1967, leading them to win the FA Cup in 1970 and the Cup Winners Cup in 1971, with most of the team comprising O’Rourke’s team mates from his time there eight years earlier.

“I owe my career to Dave Sexton” says O’Rourke. “A great man; he taught me so much. We would be training down at Ewell (Surrey) and he would get us to come back to Stamford Bridge afterwards and we would be going through set play or skill routines till about 9 o’clock in the evening. He didn’t have to do that



for us; he would have to go home every night to Brighton on the train. That's how dedicated he was, doing stuff like that in his spare time for us. He was such a nice man."

O'Rourke's time at Chelsea, though clearly a happy time, was also frustrating as he tried and failed to break through to the first team. "I played once in the first team for Chelsea, in a League Cup game against Swindon.

"I thought I was doing well there. I had scored 16 goals in 16 reserve games. But they made me available on a free."

How did the now 18 year old O'Rourke react to this bombshell? His face saddens and he shakes his head regretfully:

"It broke my heart; I can see now that I was a late developer. All I wanted to do at that time was to play for Chelsea. At that time, it was a great club to be at.

Eighty per cent of us had played together since we were kids. The team spirit was fantastic and they were great guys. I loved Chelsea and did not want to leave. They were terrific lads there. I didn't dislike any of them, which is unusual in football."

Within a couple of weeks O'Rourke was on his way to Luton Town. This called for real character from O'Rourke to rescue his career or resign himself to scraping a living in the lower Divisions. He responded admirably.

Luton Town (December 1963 - July 1966)

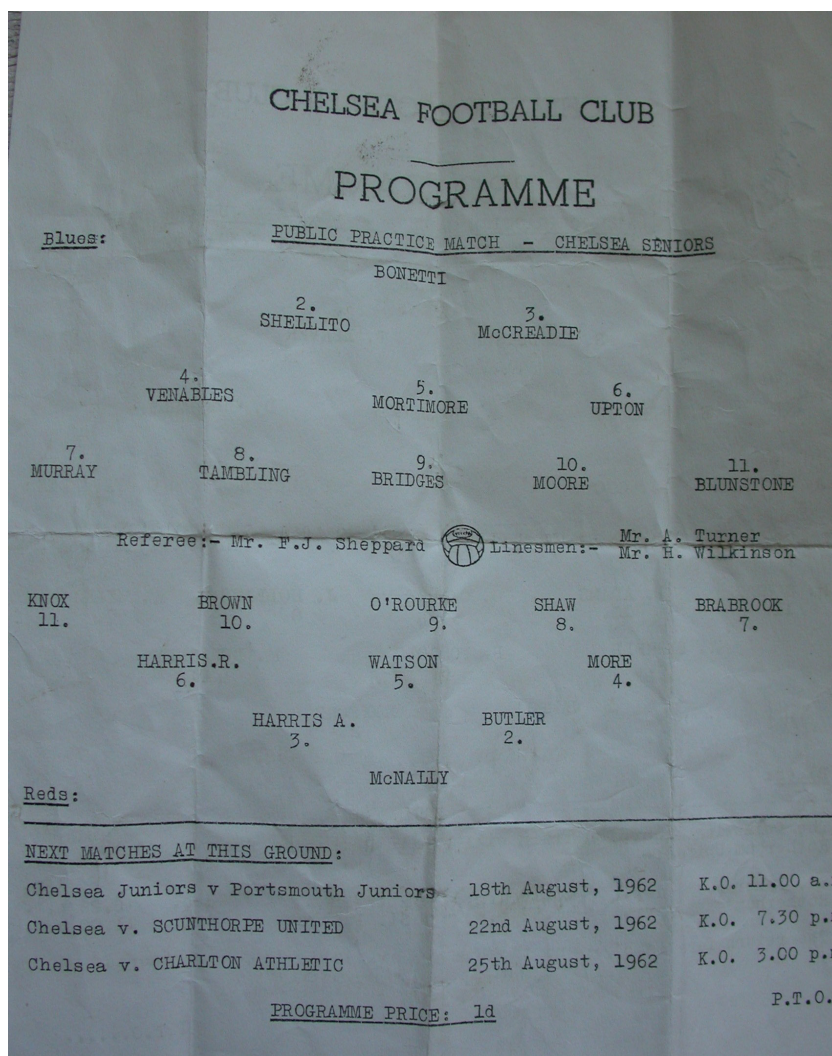
"I scored a lot of goals at Luton."

Luton Town have underachieved for most of their history. Save for 14 consecutive years in the top flight from 1982-96, they have spent a good deal of their time bouncing anonymously between the lower three Divisions.

They enjoyed an earlier, shorter period in the top Division until a relegation in 1960. This was the precursor to steady decline, ending in 1965 when they were relegated to the old Fourth Division (Now League Two) in the same year that Boro were relegated to Division Three (now League One).

Notable games in this time included an extraordinary FA Cup match in 1961 against Manchester City. Denis Law had scored a double hat-trick to give City a 6-2 lead before the game was abandoned due to fog.

How did O'Rourke respond to his new club?



“At Luton I had service from two good wingers - Ray Whittaker and David Pleat. I knew Ray from my Arsenal days, and I had played alongside David Pleat while playing for England Youth. I knew Ray was going to put the crosses in and I knew what David was going to do, so we had a good understanding of each others game and I scored a lot of goals.” At this point O’Rourke pauses to reflect then adds with a laugh: “Unfortunately, we had no defence. Bruce Rioch came up to the first team a year later, but he was still very young, he wasn’t a regular yet in the first team.”

It all sounds very familiar. Brian Clough told a very similar story of his frustration during his playing days at Middlesbrough, when he would be banging four goals in at one end while the defence was leaking at least as many at the other.

It was during this period that O’Rourke suffered a brutal injury that may well have ended his career, had he not taken matters into his own hands. O’Rourke takes up the story:

“We played a match against Brentford and I scored four goals in about 16 minutes. (This was February 1964, when Luton beat Brentford 6-2 away from home) The following season, third game in, we played them again and I scored within a minute, and the guy marking me must have decided I wasn’t going to do him this year as I had the previous season. So 10 minutes later I played the ball off - the ball had long gone - and he came in straight on my ankle. That was me out for six months.”

O’Rourke adds ruefully: “He did it on purpose.”

The injury caused O’Rourke significant pain over a long period of time, but matters were not helped by Luton insisting that he continue playing.

“They kept playing me, but I had to play a game, then rest - no training - and then they would put me in again. I was only about 19 and my ankle was not healing. I was really worried; my career could have been finished.

“One day I was in such pain that I took myself off to Luton & Dunstable hospital. I explained to them that this injury wasn’t healing and the doctor, having had a good look at it said right, hold on here a minute, we’ve got a bed for you; you’re staying here. I was shocked; I only popped in there to have it checked and maybe get a bit of reassurance. But he was a very wise man - he knew that if he let me out of hospital, then Luton would pick me to play, and my career would probably have been over within a short time.

“I spent six weeks lying in that bed, with one injection a week, but it did the trick. The club weren’t pleased but they could hardly come and force me to leave a hospital bed, but I can tell you now - that doctor saved my career by keeping me in hospital and I will always remember that and be grateful to him.”

O’Rourke adds with a shake of his head: “But the fact remains that if Luton had looked after it at the beginning and given me the correct treatment, I would not have had to go to hospital.”



John O'Rourke was to impress a lot of people during his time at Luton. His strike record of 64 goals in 84 League games gave him an average goals per game (GPG) strike of 0.76 - higher than any other Luton



player in their history. Even Malcolm McDonald, their most famous former player in post-war years scored only managed 49 goals in 88 League games, an average GPG of 0.55.

Despite the career threatening injury, O'Rourke remains positive about his time at Luton:

"I enjoyed my time there; it gave me a lot of good experience. But the reason I left - and it took me a long time to get away - was that I wanted to improve myself as a player.

"My motivation at that time, having left Chelsea, was that I wanted to prove Tommy Docherty wrong. That's all it was; you've got to believe in yourself; Anyway, I had put in a transfer request and then Luton told me that Boro had been in touch and wanted to talk to me."

Middlesbrough (July 1966- February 1968)

"I loved it there and I should not have left."



While Middlesbrough were relegated to the Third Division at the end of season 1965-66, Luton, with the help of O'Rourke's goals, missed out on promotion to the same Division by two points, although in the end they would have needed three points to pip Torquay, as Luton had an inferior goal difference. O'Rourke agreed to talk to the Boro.

"Stan Anderson came down to see me with (Boro Secretary) Harry Green. They then invited me up to see the place. I was impressed with Ayresome Park as the improvements to stage the World Cup games in the summer had been completed.

"I signed for Boro on the night of the match at Ayresome between Italy and North Korea. I remember sitting watching the match with Stan, and he got a tap on the shoulder from behind and it was Gerry Hitchens, who was a very famous footballer at the time."



Gerry Hitchens

In 1961, Gerry Hitchens, along with Denis Law and Jimmy Greaves was one of the first British players to be transferred to an Italian club. He played for AC Milan and Torino, as well as playing for England before and during the 1962 World Cup. O'Rourke continues the story:

"I was over the moon. I'd just signed for the Boro, and there I was watching a World Cup match with my manager who was a former England international, and then one of the most famous footballers in the world comes and speaks to us. It was quite a moment; it made me realise what a step up Boro was for me."

Twenty one year old O'Rourke got on with the job of getting fit for the new season ahead, which opened at Colchester in front of a small crowd of less than 4500.

"We won the opener at Colchester then we went for five games without winning and Stan called a crisis meeting. After that meeting it all took off again. If it wasn't for the injury I picked up which made me miss five games, I'm sure I would have got even more goals."

The passing of time has dimmed O'Rourke's memory of much of the season, although he fondly remembers many of his team mates. "I've got a lot of time for Gordon Jones. What a sweet left foot; he could put the ball exactly where you wanted it. He had no pace," he adds with a laugh, "But he could dig a bit. If the ball went past him, the man didn't!

"John Hickton and I complimented one another. He was a strong, powerful lad. He didn't have a lot of technique at that time, but he was a good defender learning how to be a striker."



Gordon Jones



John & Deidre O'Rourke, 2006

Some 30 minutes into our conversation, I stop the camcorder, as John's wife Deidre arrives home. After introductions, the three of us have a chat about John's time at the Boro and I produce some up to date photographs of some of John's old team mates, and a nostalgic conversation ensues.

During the course of this conversation, Deidre and John tell a story from their wedding day. The O'Rourke's tied the knot soon after John's transfer from Boro to Ipswich in 1967, and married in Deidre's home town in Kent.

On their wedding day, Deidre says that she and John were touched that a dozen or so Boro fans turned up to offer their congratulations, even though by that time O'Rourke was an Ipswich Town player.

During his time at the Boro, O'Rourke came in for a lot of stick from players and fans alike because he modelled clothes for a local outfitter.

"I got to know a girl from Cecil Gee's shop in the town, and then met Michael Gee who ran the business at the time. They asked me to model some clothes for them, and there was an advert they placed in all of the Boro's matchday programmes, and the Gazette, I think. They paid me in clothes -I never saw any money, it was all very light hearted."



Wedding day, 1967

With six games to go at the end of O'Rourke's first season, promotion was anything but certain; QPR looked likely to go up as Champions. The one remaining promotion place (Play-offs were not brought in until many years later) was being fought for by five teams - Watford, Boro, Reading, Bristol Rovers and Shrewsbury.

Boro sealed their place with a magnificent finish of five wins out of six, drawing the only game they failed to win, 1-1 at Brighton.

On the night of the promotion deciding match against Oxford United, O'Rourke's marker was one Ron Atkinson. "Ron couldn't run to save his life, so I had no problems there; if he didn't hit you first time you'd lose him," O'Rourke smiles.

"He couldn't run much when he was younger, and this was at the end of his career. He did well to have a career like he did, he had no mobility but he was strong and had good vision. I knew we were going to beat them though."

Arthur Horsfield and John Hickton each bagged a hat-trick during that promotion season. O'Rourke, surpassed this by hitting three hat tricks and scoring two goals in five other matches. However, O'Rourke's memory of his hat-trick in the promotion clincher against Oxford United is blurred by the passing of 40 years:

"The first goal was a diving header from left side. Chaddy put in the crosses for all of the goals that night, but I cannot remember much about them. I do remember very clearly though that people were



O'Rourke posing on Linthorpe Road, 26 November 1966. Part of the article reads:
"John's outfit yesterday that caused the heads to turn was a Mulberry co-ordinated three piece suit complete with stripes of red, blue, turquoise, pink, green, filwn and mauve-plus a turquoise shirt with a pale mauve silk tie." Mmm, nice...

The crowd are on the pitch, even though O'Rourke's second goal against Oxford has barely crossed the line



One of O'Rourke's three headed goals against Oxford.

running on the pitch after each goal and they had to clear them off before we re-started.

“At the end of the game I took my shirt off and threw it in the crowd, and I found out recently that the lady who caught it has given it to the club as a kind of permanent loan; they also have the match ball from that night.

“I remember we then went up to the director's box to see the crowd - it was the first time I'd been allowed up there” he says with a laugh.



O'Rourke has Rodney Marsh to thank for his one and only call up to the England Under 23 squad, which came while he was at the Boro. Marsh had to pull out due to tonsillitis and so one Sunday morning O'Rourke received a phone call.



“I was courting Deidre at the time, and we were at her mums place in Kent. The phone rang in the morning and it was Bill Nicholson, the Under 23's manager. He invited me on the tour to Turkey with the squad. Of course, I said I would love to come. Then he told me that the flight was leaving in a few hours, so got to Heathrow now.

“He had already spoken to my parents and they had packed a bag and got my passport, so off I went, there and then.

I drove from Kent to my mums at Dagenham then onto Heathrow.” He laughs as he recalls: “I was going through red lights and God knows what to get on that plane.”

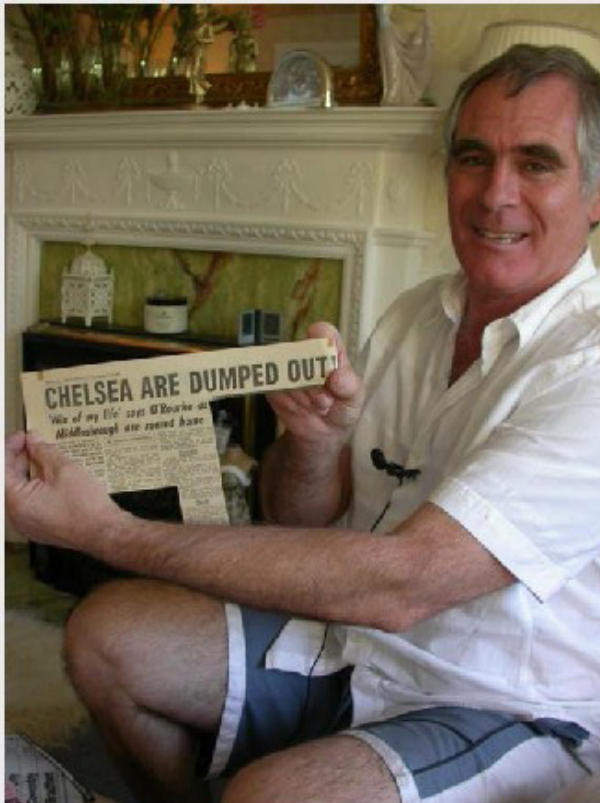
“I really enjoyed the tour, and I scored in the game I played in, against Turkey. But I was very disappointed not to be picked again.

“Jim Montgomery (then at Sunderland) was one of the keepers on the tour, and I found out the fatal flaw in his game.” O'Rourke shakes his head and laughs as he recalls a conversation he had with Montgomery:

“He said to me one day when we were training, ‘John, don't shoot from 30 yards out, because I can't see you when you're that far away! I never realised how bad his eyesight was until then.’”

O'Rourke remembers fondly a League Cup game at Ayresome Park in the early months of the new season after promotion





to the Second tier. It was against Chelsea - the club he never wanted to leave.

“That was a great night for me at the Boro. I was over the moon for us to beat them. I remember that a young lad called Smith scored an absolute belter that night. On a personal level, it meant a lot to me to beat Chelsea.”

David Smith was the lad O'Rourke refers to. Born in Thornaby, he only started in four games for Boro. He was transferred to Lincoln City, where he made 358 League appearances before moving on to finish his career at Rotherham.

Boro started their first season back in Division Two badly. Two draws in seven games left Boro hovering over the trapdoor back to Division Three.

O'Rourke scored in an encouraging 2-0 win at Hull that followed, but then a 6-1 drubbing at Birmingham spelled the beginning of the end for O'Rourke at Boro. A return of two goals in nine games was woeful considering O'Rourke's form the previous term.

“After that game, Stan dropped me. I understand it now, but I couldn't accept it at the time. As a young man I was very head strong. I asked for a transfer, as I did a number of times that season.

“Like any player, I wasn't happy being dropped. I went to see Stan after being dropped following a 4-0 defeat at Millwall and I said look this is ridiculous, you should drop the back four, not me!

“But Stan was a very astute and shrewd man, although it took me a lot of growing up to realise this. He said to me ‘Look, you set your standard last season. I didn't set it - you did. And you are not playing to your standard.’

“At the time, it didn't make sense to me. I told Stan that I had played better than, say, Eric McMordie, but Stan said ‘No, Eric played to his capabilities; he did his best - you didn't.’

“Forty years later I understand what Stan said and what he did, but I couldn't accept it back then. I loved it at the Boro and I should not have left, but we are all very headstrong when we are young.”



So the writing was on the wall for O'Rourke. Ipswich and Queens Park Rangers had shown interest, Ipswich offering Gerry Baker in a swap deal.

Stan Anderson meanwhile continued the development of John Hickton from full back to goal machine to ensure that the impending loss of O'Rourke did not hit the team's morale or form.

Hickton was the ace that Anderson held, knowing that the loss of O'Rourke would not be well received by the Boro fans. O'Rourke reflects on his departure:

"The biggest regret of my career is leaving the Boro. I should have bitten the bullet and stayed, and I probably would have had five years there and been in among the clubs record scorers. I loved the people, I liked the lads, I liked Stan. I should have stayed."

History shows us that Stan was right; O'Rourke had lost an edge on his game. But he soon found his touch at Ipswich.



Ipswich Town

(February 1968- November 1969)

"We had a good little side; we were grafters."

At the time O'Rourke joined Ipswich they were well in amongst the pack chasing the two promotion slots to the top Division. With the help of O'Rourke's goals, they were to be promoted that season as Champions.

O'Rourke describes his manager Bill McGarry as "A fair and honest disciplinarian." And recounts a tale of how McGarry made players understand that they must give him 100 per cent in every game:

"After being promoted, we had a pre-season friendly with a team from the continent. At half time we were 3-0 down; we had hit the bar, hit the post - murdered them. They had three breaks and scored all of them. McGarry went ballistic at half time; absolutely mad.

"In the second half, we played exactly the same game, but we got the rub of the green and we won the game 4-3.

"That week we got our wage slips, and I looked at mine and there was a £5 deduction. I spoke to the rest of the lads and some of them had £8 or £10 deducted and none of us knew why."

O'Rourke laughs as he remembers a personality trait rearing its head again: "I was still a bit headstrong so I got the lads together and we went to see the boss. He told us that the deductions were to reflect our first half performance. We told him 'But we won the game!' He said 'Yes you did, but this season, you are going to be playing in the First Division. You can't play for only half the match there and expect to get away with it.'

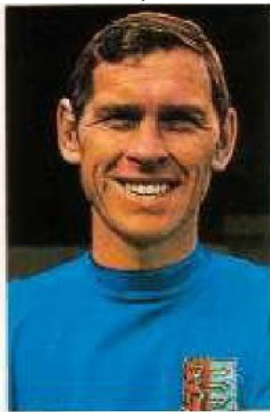
O'Rourke adds: "It was an important lesson for us all."

O'Rourke is still laughing at the memory, so I suggest that he wasn't laughing at the time: "Well I was actually, because the atmosphere wasn't unfriendly and the money went to charity. But McGarry could do things like that."

With Ipswich, O'Rourke realised his ambition to play in the top Division, and has fond memories of his time there.

"We had a good little side in that we had no stars but some good players. We were grafters. We had all come up from the lower leagues and had points to prove.

"We finished mid-table in our first season in the First Division, which was not at all bad. I wanted to play for England, but Alf Ramsey very rarely came to see Ipswich play. It was frustrating; getting in the squad was an achievement then, not like now when you play two good games and you get a call-up.



Ray Crawford



Colin Vdjohn

O'Rourke's problems were to increase with the departure of Bill McGarry to Wolves:

"When Bill left, Bobby Robson - who had just been sacked from Fulham - took over. It started to go wrong for me there because Bobby and I fell out over the way he wanted me to play.

"I asked for a move but they didn't want me to go - at £30,000, I was their record buy, and they were not a big spending club even then. Eventually, Noel Cantwell came and took me to Coventry."



Coventry City

(November 1969 - October 1971)

"I knew time was running out."

Coventry City must hold the record for the number of relegation battles they have survived from the top Division, before succumbing to the inevitable in 2001. Many Boro fans will tell you that Coventry should have gone down in 1997. They would have but for Boro's controversial three-point deduction, which sent the Teessiders down in their place.

I ask what it was that attracted O'Rourke to the Midlands?

"Jimmy Hill had put them on the map, and it was a step up at that time for me. I still had a burning ambition to play for England and I knew time was running out.

"We got into the Fairs Cup, and played Bayern Munich. On the morning of the away leg our 'keeper, Bill Glazier went down with food poisoning, and we had to play a young reserve keeper in his place. They

hammered us 6-1. We won the second leg 2-1, but if we had Bill in goal for the first leg it might have been different.”

I ask O’Rourke about a game he played in while at Coventry, when a goal was scored from an audacious set-piece. In a League match against Everton, the infamous ‘Donkey kick’ became hot news in the sports press.

“Yes that was a bit of fun” he laughs. “Willie Carr and Ernie Hunt stood over the ball about ten yards outside the penalty area, waiting to take the free kick. Willie Carr had the ball between his ankles. When the referee blew the whistle, Willie flicked it up into the air and Ernie - who was a fantastic volleyer of the ball - hit the ball before it hit the ground, up into the top corner. It was a manoeuvre that they had practiced and worked on in training.

“No one had done it before, and no one has done it since because even though that goal was given, the move was outlawed a week later as it was deemed that the ball had not travelled its full circumference backwards or forwards.”

O’Rourke’s goals had now dried up and once again he was dropped. 17 goals in 52 League games is a poor return for somebody who used to score for fun. He was to be offered a career life-line by the club that tried to sign him when he left the Boro.



Q.P.R.

(October 1971 - January 1974)

“I had to try to rebuild my career.”

There is a certain irony in the fact that O’Rourke joined QPR, the club that he and Boro had been chasing all through the 1967 promotion season, and had been promoted alongside.

While Boro finished a respectable 6th in their first season back in the second tier, QPR were promoted for the second successive season for their first season in the top Division.

Their glory was short lived, as they suffered immediate relegation. When O’Rourke joined, they were in the process of rebuilding their squad under the managership of Gordon Jago. O’Rourke recalls:

“I was happy to move back to London. My form was not very good, and to be truthful, my fitness had dropped. Leaving the First Division was not easy, but I had to try to rebuild my career.

“Rodney Marsh went to Manchester City half way through my first season. He was a selfish player, but goal scorers have to be. He said to me once, ‘John, I’m on the park for just one reason; I’m going to score as many goals as I can and I’m not going to pass to you unless I really have to.’”

So, I ask why did O’Rourke lose his place at QPR?

“I got injured the day they signed Stan Bowles, and that was the end of me there. They hit a good run while I was out for six weeks, and I couldn’t get back in. Stan was a different kind of player to me; he was the next thing to George Best. He had phenomenal skill. On the ball, I wasn’t in Stan’s league. I didn’t have the skill to beat four or five players that he had.”

Bournemouth

(January - May 1974)

“I was coming to the end, and I knew it.”

It is a sad fact that many players - especially those from the pre-millionaire era - experience a gradual decline down the Leagues. The legs and the spirit are perhaps unwilling, but the financial realities of life kept players in the slog ‘n clog of the lower Divisions.

Even though O’Rourke’s stay at Bournemouth was brief and not happy, he and Deirdre settled in the area and are living there very happily to this day.

“I was coming to the end, and I knew it. You do lose your fitness and speed. I fell out with the Trevor Hartley the manager, and he wouldn’t play me. I was probably still a bit headstrong!

“He then told me I was playing after a long period of refusing to give me a game, and in the heat of the moment I told him I wouldn’t play. The club jumped the gun and sacked me for refusing to play.

“I won my appeal and went back but it was never the same and they paid up the year or whatever was left on my contract, and me and Deidre went to South Africa for a year.”

South Africa/ English non-League

Through a journalist contact, O’Rourke was offered employment playing for Johannesburg Rangers in South Africa.

“Deirdre and I loved it out there; South Africa is a lovely country, the quality of life was fantastic.

“When we got back here I didn’t know what I was going to do for work. I ended up buying a paper shop while continuing to play part-time for local clubs.”

O’Rourke’s days as a professional were now over, but like many players of his generation, he continued to play wherever he could get a game.

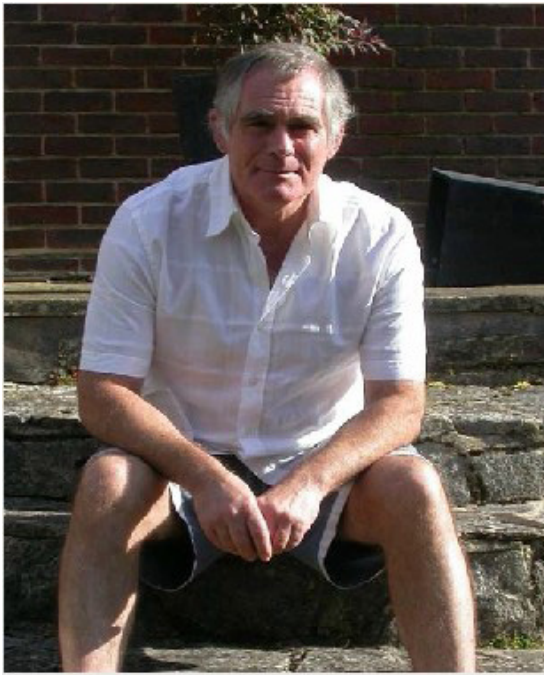
“I played for another six years, four years as captain at Poole Town. Then I played for Dorchester and Weymouth. I had two full time staff at the shop, so every Saturday I could get away to play football. I thoroughly enjoyed those years, and played till I was about 36 or 37.

“I was playing in mid-field and I loved it. But I couldn’t play two games a week by then, as I was on my feet all day in the shop.

“When I was at Dorchester, in the first game I played we had a young lad 17 or 18 years old called Graham Roberts. He went on to play for Spurs, Chelsea and England. He was an extraordinary player even then, and he was only a kid.”



*Graham Roberts - Spurs and
England*



So what is O'Rourke's take on the modern game, 30 years after he quit?

'There is a lot more negative playing these days, teams playing simply not to lose, rather than playing to win. Winning the World Cup without using wingers changed the game. 4-4-2 is not an attacking formation like playing with wingers is. Teams don't score as many goals now.

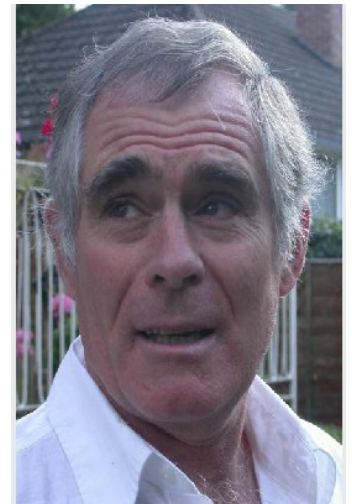
"If a player scores 15 goals a season, that's good enough now. But in my day, if you did not have that many by Christmas, people would be asking questions. The game has changed so much."

So what does O'Rourke think about the English national team, managed by former Boro manager

Steve McClaren and a former Boro Head Coach - O'Rourke's old mate, former England manager Terry Venables?

"McClaren has done Boro proud, although he does not seem to be everybody's choice for the England job. Maybe that's why he has got Venna in, to deal directly with the players.

"Venna should have been England manager years before they actually gave it to him in '94. He did a terrific job when he got there, you could see that the players wanted to play for him, and they were so unfortunate when poor old Gareth Southgate missed his penalty against Germany. Typical England, eh?"



Career record - League appearances only

	Appearances	Goals	Months at club	Goals per game %
Luton	84	64	31	0.76
Boro	63	38	17	0.60
Ipswich	69	30	21	0.43
Coventry	52	17	23	0.32
QPR	33	12	27	0.36
Bournemouth	21	4	4	0.19

The text and the newer colour pictures of John O'Rourke as well as the picture of Gordon Jones are owned by Shaun Keogh and must not be published, copied or reproduced without written permission from the author.

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