"Chapter One"

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Steve Cotterill

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Although Steve Cotterill was dismissed by Burnley (by mutual consent as the saying goes) when it became clear he had taken the club as far as he could, he will undoubtedly be given a tremendous reception when he returns to the Turf.

Inheriting a parlous position, with very limited financial resources, he kept the club in the Championship, worked incessantly to improve things, and even took the club into the play-off places on a couple of occasions. It is well documented that when he took over from Stan Ternent there were not even enough first-team players to form a team, but by the time he left, the majority of the team that triumphed at Wembley and took the club into the Premiership, had been signed by him. And yet, by and large, these were the same players who went on a run of 19 league games without a win, setting an unfortunate club record two seasons earlier. Even so, when the new season started after that terrible run, in the pre-season friendly at Turf Moor he was given a great reception and welcome when he walked onto the pitch. He was a fighter and grafter; he put his heart and soul into the club, and was much respected for that.

If Burnley fans had an early problem with Steve Cotterill, it was simply that they wondered how long he would be at the club, with his sky-high reputation. At the back of peoples’ minds was always the question; how long will it be before a bigger, wealthier, more ambitious club poaches him. We wondered if Burnley was just a stepping stone for him on the way to better things. Would budget restrictions, working on a shoestring, struggling to make ends meet, having to sell players, be the catalysts that would frustrate him and drive him away? Many of us felt it would be a matter of time before he went to perhaps even a Premiership club. Several ex-Premier clubs littered the Championship demanding a return to the top level – West Brom, Derby, Leicester, Southampton; Coventry, Crystal Palace, Wolves, Norwich, Ipswich, Leeds and Sunderland. Which one of them would tempt him away we pondered. Cotterill’s star was high and still rising, certainly at the beginning of season 2006/07.

The opening game that season was against QPR and as he jogged onto the field there was no sign of his popularity waning. Perhaps it was because people saw a man who wore his heart on his sleeve. What you saw was what you got. Who would forget how visibly upset he was at a dinner in 2006 when he stood and paid tribute to a young fan who had died and whose funeral he had attended. When Ade Akinbiyi was sold in January 2006 Steve’s head might just have agreed that £1.75million was too good to turn down, but Burnley supporters were acutely aware that in his heart he was distraught to see the sale of his talisman. Months later, he still referred to it. “I’d sooner a striker scored 30 goals than the rest of the team chipped in with goals, but people here don’t score 30. We sell them after 15.” Burnley folk appreciated a man who could work on limited resources, speak his mind and just get on with the job. It is a character trait embedded in Burnley people.

Steve Cotterill likehis successor Owen Coyle might be the first to admit he was never the world’s greatest player but then how often do great players make great managers. It is no job requisite. Most of the world’s great managers seem to have been average players, in fact some of them not even average. Perhaps it meant that they had to have other qualities to succeed in management. A will to work, single-minded ambition, the ability to give never less than 110%, a determination to use what talent they have, a willingness to learn the job, in most cases by starting at the bottom, and a fundamental belief in teamwork.

“What happens when you don’t have a lot of money is you end up with team players rather than star individuals,” he said. “If you have lots of money, you might have a lot of very good individuals, but then you don’t always get a team.” At Burnley he always argued that his players were team players, and it was he who first introduced the team ‘huddle’ before a game, and at some games, even afterwards – away at Blackburn in the FA Cup replay even though they had lost, and away at Luton after a particularly heroic winning performance. In that he way espoused the team ethic, Burnley legends Potts and Adamson would have been proud of him. The team ethic was the basis of their philosophies.

When Cheltenham Town beat Burnley in an FA Cup game, the name of Steve Cotterill went into Chairman Barry Kilby’s mental filofax. As a result of that he was one of those interviewed for the Burnley job when it became vacant in June 2004. At that time he was ‘between jobs’ and was spending time on a temporary basis at Leicester City assisting with coaching. Prior to that there had been a short spell at Sunderland with the professorial, sombre-faced Howard Wilkinson. Prior to that there was a short and controversial spell as manager at Stoke City. Talk to a Stoke City supporter and they will not smile at his name. They were not best pleased when he left so soon after joining, but then which supporters ever know the full facts behind any story? Was either of these clubs a happy time for him?

He started his playing career in the non-Leagues at Cheltenham Town, Alvechurch and Burton Albion. He then signed his first ‘big’ contract at Wimbledon after a £30,000 deal with Burton. This was a huge step going from non-League to first-class football in one go. Cynics might say that the Wimbledon brand back then was anything but first-class. His apprearances there were infrequent and he was sent on loan to Brighton. From there it was back to Wimbledon and then on to Bournemouth for his best years as a player. He was signed for £80,000 and in the next three seasons picked up three Player of the Year Awards, no mean feat. He was a great hit with the fans with his guts, bravery, honest play and 100% effort. A severe knee injury ended his career. There were the inevitable attempted comebacks, including a spell at Hereford but he never really recovered his form. The next step was to move into coaching and gather the necessary badges and qualifications. He was on his way.

In the mid 90’s he became manager at Sligo Rovers in Ireland and took them to their highest ever placing in the League of Ireland Premier Division. He also took them to the League Cup Final where they cruelly lost to Shelbourne on penalties. They played in Europe in the following season when they earned a creditable 3 – 3 draw against crack side Nantes and another good result, 0 – 0 against Heerenveen. He returned to England in 1996.

It was at Cheltenham Town that he made his name and people began to take note of his achievements. Cheltenham was a place more famed for tourism, horse racing, and an annual cricket festival. He put it on the football map. Since taking over in 1997 he has been their most successful manager. They were a non-League side when he took over in the Doc Martens League. Under his leadership they were promoted to the Conference. There was also an FA Trophy win at Wembley beating Southport 1 – 0. Then, from the Conference there was a promotion to the Football League Division Three, as it was then. After a season of consolidation, the next season there was a Millenium Stadium victory over Rushden and Diamonds in 2002 and this took them into the Football League Division Two. It had been five amazing years and by the fifth year his name was on various influential peoples’ lips. The title ‘promising young manager’ was bestowed on him by the Press and on other occasions ‘one of the most respected young coaches’. One newspaper went as far as to include him in a list of young and potential England managers. In 2001/02 the club reached the fifth round of the FA Cup, a tremendous achievement. The run included victory over his future club Burnley, and was only ended with a 1 – 0 away defeat at West Bromwich Albion.

He remembers his time there vividly and is fiercely proud of what he did. “We had one good stand, the other three were irrelevant. Leaking gutters, puddles and holes and everything; awful pitch, a turnover of £100,000 and 400 supporters; five and a half years and three promotions on, one Cup Final at the Millenium Stadium, million pound turnover, three new stands, fantastic pitch, brilliant. An absolute fairy tale and my mum was still alive to see it. I remember me and my assistant, Mike Davis, painting the players’ bar in a new stand we’d opened. My last game was seeing them win promotion at the Millenium Stadium. Wonderful, I wonder if you’ll ever get that again.”

When Cheltenham beat Rushden in the Division Three play-off Final it was the culmination of a season of records. They hit a club record points total of 78, a new high for goals scored, 66 and a best ever unbeaten run of 16 games. Added to that, striker Julian Alsop became the first Cheltenham player to score 20 goals in a Football league season. They reached the FA Cup fifth Round. As a result, crowds rose by 10%.

He was appointed manager of Stoke City in 2002 after the peak at Cheltenham. He took over at a club that had just been promoted from Division Two to Division One, (now the Championship) and his career seemed well and truly on the up. Supporters felt that the squad was strong enough to stay up in the new Division. Then, after just three months and a handful of games, quite out of the blue he left. It was announced he had joined Howard Wilkinson at Premiership Sunderland. It was Wilkinson who had encouraged him to take his European Coaching certificate and Wilkinson thought very highly of him. “He is one of the most promising coaches in England.” Stoke City fans were incensed; the news that he had joined Sunderland coming just hours after he left Stoke. The club announced it was shocked and surprised and that they had received no communication with Sunderland prior to his departure. It was therefore surmised that he had been in talks with Wilkinson and Sunderland whilst still Stoke manager, breaching the laws of the game. Stoke were thus managerless and felt betrayed. He was branded “Quiterall” and won no friends in Stoke.

If Wilkinson and Cotterill were seen as lacking in charisma by people in Sunderland, they would have preferred someone more flamboyant; no one could say they were not supremely equipped with coaching qualifications. When they joined the club they were only two of 13 Britons to hold the UEFA Pro Licence, Europe’s highest coaching qualification. Alas, there was no money available for them for new players and it had been six years since Wilkinson had last been a club manager. However, he talked of his experience and Cotterill’s ability being the catalyst for bright and exciting times. Both signed three year contracts; Wilkinson left the FA with their blessing and Sunderland Chairman Murray said there were no problems between Stoke and themselves.

“I have to adjust to being number 2,” said Cotterill. “I have been a manager for six or seven years. It’s my ambition to eventually become the manager of Sunderland.” Another comment to the Press indicated that when he heard he could join Sunderland with Wilkinson, Stoke was “eclipsed as soon as I had the chance to come to Sunderland.”

A piece in the Northern Echo gave an illuminating insight into Cotterill’s personality. It portrayed a man determined to get to the top, with the chance to take over at the club if he impressed. “He is a confident man with an arrogance that will not be welcomed by the waiting Press, but what he lacks in front of the media he more than makes up for in the dressing-room where he is known to be a tremendous man manager.”

Derek Goddard of the Gloucestershire Echo who covered the Cheltenham football team for five years and knew him well, decribed him as, “A very emotional coach and a very sensitive bloke. I first knew him as an 18 year-old and he was always a little cocky then. Then he left to go to Wimbledon, where he was plagued by injury. But he was always tetchy and cocky. He is not one to get on with the Press. He is one of those that if you ask him his name, he would want to know why you were asking. I think the men at BBC Radio Stoke will be pleased that he has moved on.”

Ambition fired Cotterill as it so often does with players whose careers are ended early by injury. “It has been a burning ambition of mine to manage in the Premiership. I gave myself a time-scale when I was about 35, because sometimes a time-scale makes you work harder, of managing in the Premiership by the time I was 42.” He almost managed this at Sunderland where he might have slipped into the post when Wilkinson left. The understanding amongst fans was that he was being groomed to succeed Wilkinson. But his stay was brief and without any achievement. Sunderland were relegated with a then record low number of points. In the 20 games they managed before they were sacked they won just 10 points from 20 games. But Cotterill remained unscarred, his confidence and aspirations were undimmed. At Burnley he felt that one day he could indeed become an England manager, or at least progress to the Premiership.

If his experiences at Sunderland were not particularly pleasant, he felt he had learned from them. “Your bad experiences in life are your best ones if you are intelligent enough to learn from them. Sunderland was a great club and to have managed them would have been fantastic but it never got to that. Maybe if the opportunity arose,” he added, “to manage in the Premiership I will be a lot better and a lot wiser.”

He is on record as saying that he would loved to have rewarded the people of Burney with a Premiership place having met so much good-will. At a meeting with a supporter’s group he said he was truly amazed that stories that northern folk really did leave their doors unlocked for their neighbours to pop in, was actually true. “There is so

much good-will in the area. A local guy, I won’t name him in case it embarrasses him, came to me with a cheque, made payable to me for £6,000. He knew I wanted netting round the new training pitch so that we wouldn’t keep losing balls. It ended up costing £9,000 and he came back with another cheque for an extra £3,000 to pay for it. He came back the other day with a cheque for £3,500 so that we can take the train to away games rather than sitting on a coach for seven hours. You can’t beat things like that. Another guy bought all the lads £2,500 worth of training watches, terrific gestures from those people.” Much as he would have liked to have brought success to the club he was careful with his ambitions and statements, never promising top two targets, but sometimes, carefully, mentioning the possibility of a top six place when things were going well.

When he took over at Burnley his brief from Chairman Barry Kilby was simple: to keep the club in the Championship. “I just had to keep them up but the chairman said that if I got relegated with them, I wouldn’t get the sack.” He found the place to be a very hard-working area that would not acept anything less than hard work from its football team. “It’s very, very working class and the only thing against it is the constant bloody rain. If we had better pitches at the training ground and the ball rolled in the right direction, the weather might not bother me so much.”

He was interviewed by Alastair Campbell shortly after he arrived. “If you walk down the road you don’t see Manchester United or Arsenal shirts, they’ll be claret and blue. Alastair Campbell seems pretty happy with what’s going on at Turf Moor but he told me the weight this club carries in the town. If I was to achieve half here of what I achieved at Cheltenham, I’d get the key to the town. To be honest I never got much recognition at Cheltenham. There was talk of me getting the freedom of the borough but somebody rang up and said to qualify I would have to do something for 25 years.”

In between Sunderland and Burnley there were 11 months when he looked at other jobs but considered them unsuitable. “I’d had a hard time, professionally and personally. My mum died just beofre I left Sunderland. Dad died at an early age so there was just me and mum and she meant everything to me. I turned down eight job offers. I didn’t want to be disrespectful to those clubs but if you want to be a manager in the Premiership you’ve got to be selective. This, Burnley, is the right one. There’s something about this North-West corridor. Burnley have the tradition and the chairman is a man I can work with. Everyone here, including the famous old players, has been very supportive and I’ve been reminded there are wonderful people in our game. I got a warm reception when we went to Sunderland. The people said I hadn’t been given a chance there and I appreciated that. It helped a lot. You have to aim as high as you possibly can but it would be too ambitious to talk of Burnley in the Premiership yet. And, there’s no point in me saying I’ll never leave here.”

He joined Burnley at a critical time. Stan Ternent had just managed, against all the odds, to keep them in the Championship. With no expectations of being ‘dismissed’ he chose not to renew several players’ contracts. Thus, when he left, the club was left with a threadbare first-team squad. Chairman Barry Kilby wanted a young and hungry manager. Cotterill was exactly that with several points to prove after his Sunderland experience. He quickly signed five players and it was noticeable that four of them were defenders; John McGreal from Ipswich, Frank Sinclair from Leicester City, goalkeeper Danny Coyne from Grimsby, and his ex player Michael Duff from Cheltenham. The fifth was a creative midfielder Micah Hyde from Watford. Later came the inspired loan signing of centre-back Gary Cahill. The defensive signings were crucial and formed an almost rock solid back four that gave a firm bedrock for survival in the Division again, conceding only 39 goals in 46 games. The problem was at the other end where only 38 goals were scored. It demonstrated perfectly the Cotterill philosophy; a philosophy that was based on not conceding goals, not losing and very much holding on to what you had got. With a collection of bargain basement boys, old heads, free transfers,

short term fixes and loans, this was never going to be a season, anyway, of scintillating football heading towards promotion.

Unfortunately that season Cotterill would experience the basic problem at Burnley. With no money, players had to be sold whenever any other club came with a decent offer. Courtesy of Robbie Blake, three consecutive 1 – 0 wins took Burnley to the heady heights of 8th place and supporters were warming to Cotterill and developing a new optimism. But then Blake was sold. Unsettled by approaches from Wigan, he eventually went to Birmingham for a reported £1.25million. When Burnley beat Wigan 1 – 0 at Turf Moor the game was memorable for the abuse hurled at manager Paul Jewell. Cotterill knew in that moment, when Blake was sold, that he would not see the Premiership with Burnley. It was a defining moment for him and supporters, an unfortunate reminder that Burnley would always stuggle financially, and that managing at this club would be with one hand tied behind his back. There would be a double blow when young star Richard Chaplow was sold to West Brom not long after.

But, there were notable highspots of the season; a 3 – 0 victory over Premiership Aston Villa at home in the Carling Cup; the 1 – 0 win over Liverpool in the FA Cup third round, and then the FA Cup tie against Blackburn Rovers. The win over Liverpool was totally unexpected and was one of those memorable Turf Moor nights reminiscent of the glory days in the early 60’s.

Basically, on a raw, cold night, manager Rafa Benitez totally underestimated what it would be like to bring his ‘shadow’ team to Turf Moor, a small, compact place but fiercely passionate and raucous. He brought a team consisting of two regular first-teamers padded out with bit-part players. He made the mistake of thinking that the little Championship club would roll over and surrender. With Blake having departed Burnley supporters too could be forgiven for thinking that this might be a valiant defeat rather than a memorable win. To our delight, however, Liverpool were poor, dispirited, disinterested and almost easily dispelled. Burnley won 1 – 0 with as bizarre a goal as you could wish to see. Traiore the full back, under no pressure at all, attempting to be clever a yard or so away from his goal-line whilst clearing the ball, performed a sort of slow-motion drag back as he turned, and then watched as the ball trickled in the opposite direction to that which he intended, slowly rolling over the line. It was no more than Burnley deserved although Benitez made wild claims that Liverpool had controlled the game. What else could he say to placate the 3,800 angry Liverpool fans who gave their team hell as they left the field at the final whistle? Only when Baros came on and when he ran at pace at the Burnley defence did Liverpool look at all interested. For Burnley, Chaplow, Camara and Jean Louis Valois threatened constantly making chance after chance. The game even ended with a bit of Burnley showboating. The result inspired a joke that did the rounds for weeks afterwards in the Everon side of Liverpool. “What’s the difference between Liverpool and a teabag? A teabag stays in the Cup longer.”

Next up were Rovers, the last time the clubs having met, was back in Stan Ternent’s time when both were in the Championship. This time, Blackburn were the established Premiership side with money to spend and star players. The anticipation was electric and Stever Cotterill had a new experience to add to his CV – a local derby like no other. Within hours of the draw he set out from his home near the Blackburn training centre at Brockhall to find a statue draped with a Burnley shirt. All police leave was cancelled on the day, riot vans were parked outside the ground, but the game itself was dour and drab whilst overhead police helicopters waited for trouble. Neither side wanted to lose or even concede a goal. “We didn’t play for a draw but we didn’t want to get beaten in front of our own fans.” Predictably it was a 0 – 0 stalemate. The only highspot was a fan threatening Robbie Savage on the pitch and the obligatory streaker.

Blackburn won the replay 2- 1 but in between the two games, something rare had happened at Turf Moor. Manager Cotterill was allowed to spend £600,000 on striker Ade Akinbiyi from Stoke City. Prior to this he had sounded out Les Ferdinand, due to leave Bolton Wanderers, but Ferdinand wanted to move back south. Cotterill spoke to him four times but in the end Reading signed him, with Cotterill adding the comment that once Reading expressed interest there was no way Burnley could match their wages. Akinbiyi was unavailable for the replay at Blackburn. 7,000 Burnley fans made the short journey. Although they lost there were two memorable moments. The first was Hyde’s stunning 20-yard goal that levelled the game. The Burnley end erupted. For Hyde to score at all was a rarity, but this goal was stupendous, as he controlled it on his kee, swivelled and crashed an unstoppable shot into the top corner over Brad Friedel. Extra time was the least that Burnley deserved but a second Blackburn goal 5 minutes from the end won the tie. Burnley players were crestfallen but Cotterill lifted them with a team huddle in the corner of the pitch that left an image that will last for years in the minds of all fans that saw it. It was a masterstroke of man management.

Less of a masterstroke was the debut of Ade Akinbiyi against Sunderland in March. Pumped up and raring to go after his delayed first appearance, due to injury, he was so up for it, he wasted no time in head butting a Sunderland defender after he had been on the pitch just three minutes. No one knew whether to laugh or cry at the absurdity of it. Less spectaculary, the season faded away. Blake’s loss had been critical. His goals were sorely missed. Akinbiyi was not the answer – just yet. He would score goals the next season, whilst at the end of this one, Burnley finished 13th. Of course there had been ups and downs; games that could have been won, should have been won, the usual number of last minute goals conceded, debatable referees decisions, bad luck and so on and so on. Every manager will point to them all. If Cotterill was disappointed overall, he need not have been. His collection of odds and sods had performed creditably in many games, he had organised them, cajoled them, and from the touchline orchestrated them. McGreal, Sinclair and Cahill had been inspired signings. The fans had warmed to him and appreciated his efforts. One in particular was Kevin Clarke who in March 2005, two thirds into Cotterill’s first season, summarised some of his achievements so far for the magazine:

When Saturday Comes.

“At the end of 2003/04 Burnley Chairman Barry Kilby decided to dispense with grizzled Stan Ternent. Stan’s idea of conflict management involved a smack in the face, his idea of team-building a week in Magaluf. But he had been a success, achieving promotion to the First Division and keeping the team there for four years. In the past two seasons though, Burnley had become a running joke, conceding more than 160 goals.

On his arrival at Turf Moor, the club had nine players and a pressing debt of £750,000 that needed to be paid to finance companies to stave off adminstration. Cotterill spouted the usual platitudes but also talked of building a team, and then a squad, of organisation and tramwork.Rather than the traditional pre-season jaunt to the Isle of Man for games against Wrexham and Stockport, Cotterill took the team to Austria to play friendlies at altitude against Bundesliga sides.

He began to earn fans’ confidence by rejecting substantial bids for our jewel, England Under-21 midfielder, Richard Chaplow. Free signings included Mr own Goal, Frank Sinclair, while 1960s sized fees were paid for Danny Coyne, £25,000 and Michael Duff, £15,000. Fans were heartened by the signing of a goalkeeper and three defenders.

“I watched videos of all last season’s games,” said Cotterill. The small squad was further bolstered by loan signings, the prize one being defender Gary Cahill from Aston Villa. Few had heard of him but he made a dramatic impact, helping the side keep seven clean sheets in the first nine games he played. As entertaining as Stan was nobody could imagine him chucking an 18 year old into the first team; he preferred 36 year old mono-paced David May.

After 28 games Burnley were eight points off sixth place with two games in hand.The star player Robbie Blake has gone to Birmingham, which would have been a disaster under Stan but is now seen as an opportunity to invest. Burnley have the second best defensive record in the League, have beaten Villa and Liverpool in the Cups and won at Stoke despoite their fans using every insult available towards Cotterill, despite suffering a number of injuries – Coyne and Chaplow out for three months. Cotterill advocates ice baths, masseurs and under-water pressure tanks to increase blood circulation and the First Xl has remained largely the same throughout.

Sinclair is now club captain, transformed from joke into rock-solid centre-half (nicknamed, The Power) and Cotterill has worked magic on others, none more so than left-back Mo Camara, who used to bomb down forward and then launch crosses into Yorkshire – apparently to the constant amusement of Ternent’s staff.Cotterill had him perform 1,000 crosses a day in pre-season, and now he attacks with intent and accuracy, to the extent of being renamed Moberto Carlos.

We have a gem, who in his short time here has already been linked with Leicester, Wolves and Portsmouth. But Cotterill says he is going nowhere and is building an infrastructure and planning an indoor dome with the Blake money. Burnley have more qualified coaches within the youth set-up than any club in the country and there is talk of Academy status. Cotterill will leave Burnley for a Premiership side in the next three to five years. We will not begrudge him that, as it is certain he will leave us in a better position than when he took over.

Kev Clarke March 2005

Clarke provided a good and accurate appraisal. In addition, as an aid to diet, players had club breakfasts and lunches. In the following season the individual coaching given to players certainly paid off with Ade Akinbiyi. In fact he became so prolific, he was sold to Sheffield United, this being the event that inspired Cotterill’s famous observation: “We don’t have players who score 30 goals; we sell them when they get to 15.” And yes Cotterill did leave after three and a half years. But it was not to a Premiership side, and when he did return to football after a lengthy interval it was to lowly Notts County before taking over at Portsmouth. How ironic that was. They were more destitute than Burnley when he had arrived there.

2005/2006 started with a defeat at Crewe Alexander. Defender Wayne Thomas and striker Noel Gifton Williams had joined the club. The capture of Thomas showed the lengths Cotterill went to, in order to sign players, when he flew out to Florida to catch Thomas during a family holiday. James O Connor joined Burnley permanently having already earlier been on loan. And Cotterill raided Bournemouth for three players, Wade Elliot, later to score the fabulous winning goal at Wembley in 2009, Garreth O Connor and John Spicer. The defeat at Crewe was further marred by racist comments that

Cotterill heard aimed at Burnley’s black players. “I don’t take too kindly to that,” he said. “I’d rather not say who it was directed at but we’ve got a few Stoke players here, which spiced things up a bit.”

In truth, other than an occasional convincing win, the season got little better. Only 14 games were won out of 46. Akinbiyi’s goals brightened things up and the win at Luton was one of the few memorable games. This was the game where with Burnley down to ten men when Jensen was sent off, they still managed to win 3 – 2 thanks to a heroic goalkeeping display from midfielder John Spicer who volunteered to take over after a two minute team meeting (there was no sub goalkeeper on the bench), and a marvellous Akinbiyi hat-trick. It was undoubtedly his game and has entered the list of ‘great’ Burnley displays when people proudly say “I was there.” He scored with two rasping wonder-goals from distance and a penalty. Even the Luton fans applauded Burnley off the pitch and the picture of the after-game huddle is an iconic reminder of a marvellous performance against the odds. Teams can often win when down to ten man, but when the man missing is the goalkeeper and one of the ten then has to go in goal for the second half, plus the main striker was once a figure of fun and scores a terrific hat-trick, then the victory is all the more special.

Steve Cotterill hailed the win as the greatest of his career. “I’ve been lucky enough to have some big wins in my career but this is the best. Ade is a gem. There were a few eyebrows raised when I signed him but I told him at half time to make sure he went out there and got the match ball. I love him and so do the players.”

There was a swift exit from the FA Cup and Aston Villa gained revenge and knocked Burnley out of the League Cup. Akinbiyi who had been knocking in the goals and certainly benefitted from Cotterill’s coaching was then sold for a fee totalling £1.75million. There was no way impoverished Burnley could turn down this offer. With his departure, the goals dried up. Gifton-Williams was no prolific scorer, there was no Blake of course, and there was only one more occasion during the season’s remaining 21 games when Burnley scored more than one goal in a League game. Just 10 goals were scored in those 21 games. It made for depressing reading, and even more depressing viewing. Added to this was a run of six consecutive defeats spanning February and March. At the end of this run club had sunk as low as 18th place. The season finished with them in 17th position but at least with two new added players – striker Andy Gray, ironically bought from Sheffield United, and midfielder Alan Mahon. Both were quality players and Gray would come good in the first half of the next season. But Mahon was an enigma, never fulfilling at any club his undoubted silky smooth potential. So when Cotterill described him as the “jewel in the crown” his words were as hollow as those famously uttered by Jimmy Adamson, 30 years earlier, when he talked about Burnley being “the team of the seventies.”

Nobody knew that the forthcoming season would test Cotterill, the Chairman, supporters and the board to the limit. But the signs were there. The win over QPR in early April was only the third win since the defeat of Stoke on Boxing Day – which also marked Akinbiyi’s last goal before he was sold. Just 16 points were won from the last 19 games.