

THE GOOD OL' DAYS

'So what yer gonna put in that bottle of yours? Nobody borrows books from the Library anymore? The new Museum opened later than planned? Colosseum is attracting international stars rather than homegrown? Top of town is so vibrant, the lower High Street has been forgotten and is now completely dead?'

'Poor old Watford, that's all you go on about, Eddie.'

'Listen Jim, I've been in Watford all my life and I just don't recognise the place. Where is Cordells, Clements, the Market? All bloody gone. The Parade and High Street is a desolate waste ground of nail bars, coffee shops, and charity shops. Christmas shopping on the High Street – pah!'

'Places change, Ed. You've got those books by the Watford Observer – you know the ones with all the photos of the twentieth century. Places change. People change.'

'Look, when I was a lad, you could have a beer in the Tantivy. Walk through the gates into Cassiobury Park. Watch the 'Orns for a bob-or-two; take a rattle in and make a noise; and still have enough to buy a programme and a carpet-burger from the smelly van outside the ground.'

'Yeah, and they tasted sh...'

'Now Jim, no need for language.'

'Well, they were bad burgers. Needed a couple of Benskins just to take the taste away!'

'Hey, do you remember when we stuffed the Saints 7-1 on that rainy night in September 1980. And Luther didn't even get a sniff that night! I remember Welland being bloody upset as Saints beat us down at The Dell the week before in the first leg and came to the Vic very confident in finishing the job. I saw Welland the other day. He still talks about that night!'

'Ed, Football was real football in those days. None of the prima-donnas of today. Mud pitches, cold steel crash barriers on the terrace...'

'And carpet burgers for dinner.'

'The good old days.'

'Hang on a minute, Jim. Were they really the good old days? Maggie Thatch and all that unemployment. I lost my job at Scammells not long after she put her nose in.'

'Nah, that was la'er-on. I seem to remember about the time of the poll tax.'

'I got done for that. And the wife left me. Went with that guy from Baileys, what was his name? A bit of a yuppie.'

'Bit dodgy more like. Hey Ed, didn't he end up in prison after kidnapping that woman from Radlett?'

'I'd forgotten about that. I thought the ex would come back to me, but no. She stood by him. He got released and they flew off to the Costa Blanca never to be seen again. Daniel! Daniel was his name!'

'You're getting confused by that Elton John song, mate. Age is catching up with you, Ed.'

'His name was Daniel, I tell you. I was 'appy to see the red taillights that day I can tell you.'

'C'mon. What yer gonna put in this bottle? What message? And why are you burying it 'ere in Cassiobury?'

'Cos that's what the Council wants people to do. One day they will move the bandstand again or probably demolish it when they decide to build houses in the park. The housing company will find the chest containing the bottles and read all about the good old days.'

'I've got an idea, Ed. Why not put on the note some predictions and then in a hundred years' time or whenever, the finder of your bottle can decide whether you were right?'

'Ok. First up, extending the Met Line to Junction Station. A tunnel under the park and swinging round to Junction just ahead of the Nascot tunnel trains and mainline.'

'Orns winning the Premier League.'

'Yep, sounds good. How about a Watford University on the West Herts College site. And demolition of Sutton Road car park!'

'Clarendon Road open to trams only; and Cassiobury Park declared as a UNESCO 'eritage site?'

'Changing the direction of the ring road!'

'Err, Ed. You've gone a bit too far there!'

'I suppose. D'know this is a bad idea. C'mon, let's go and 'ave a pint. The 'Orns kick off in an hour or so.'

'Look, Ed. Just write one thing and let's get it buried with the rest.'

'Alright. But don't look.'

Jim turned his back and Ed, having written one thing on his paper, corked his bottle and placed it in the open chest.

'Thank you, Sir,' said the Council official.

Walking to the Vic, Jim asked what Ed had written.

'I wrote, there once was this place called Watford. My home for all my life. I loved it. Audentior. Never was there another time when Watford wasn't greater with boldness; except for where the gates were concerned.'

'Funny that Ed, I put, RIP Cassiobury Park Gates!'