

Up There Cazaly!

A historical look at Tonbridge Angels through the eyes of their supporters with original text by the late Brian Cheal. Part 7: Season's 1955-57, featuring the season of Ron Saunders



1955/56

The biggest news was that Jimmy Constantine was appointed to the training staff and would cease playing. Now 35 it was said that he had never really recovered from the illness, a near fatal perforated ulcer, which had struck him down at the beginning of 1954, although no one would have guessed from his exuberant performances.

The doctor had ordered him to retire from playing but did anyone believe that he really would retire. Did Connie believe it himself. He was, of course, quite irreplaceable.

Tonbridge were now without a goalkeeper and they signed a bubbly 22-year-old Scot called Tommy Bickerstaff from Third Lanark. Defender George Roelich was signed from

Bristol Rovers. The other newcomers were forwards led by George Beattie who was appointed player-coach. Signed from Bradford Park Avenue, he had previously played under Doug Hunt at Gloucester City.

Experienced winger Johnny Johnson was signed from Millwall and Paddy Leonard, formerly of Bristol Rovers, from Colchester. Alan Thrippleton from Millwall, Gordon Boseley from Tottenham and John Kenny from Portsmouth, were young players of the kind that the manager believed represented the future of the club.

During the season Michael Sweeney, a diminutive but energetic wing half or forward came to Tonbridge from Sligo Rovers. Brian Costello, a forceful wing half or inside forward, was signed from Leyton and Reg Miller, a centre forward came on loan from Watford. Norman Golding, a young winger on National Service at Aldershot was signed and showed great promise as did local winger Freddie Morris. Also during the season Peter Peters left the club to join Dover and another forward, Johnny Dougan was signed from Brighton.

Although three more points were gained than the previous season there was a drop of one place to third from bottom but with Bath City and Merthyr Tydfil a long way behind everyone else there was never a serious danger of finishing in the bottom two.

There was an improvement defensively. Tommy Bickerstaff had a good first season, missing only one Southern League match. Len Gibbons and Bob Hailstones were an excellent pair of full backs, the latter playing in every first team match, whilst the half back line of Harry Robshaw, Tim McCoy and Phil Bauld was sound, industrious and effective.

TOMMY BICKERSTAFF



Tommy Bickerstaff joined Tonbridge in June 1955 from Third Lanark and stayed at the club for seven seasons making 259 appearances before leaving to join neighbours Tunbridge Wells in March 1963.

He started his goalkeeping career at the age of 13 when he played for Glasgow Schools. He was capped for the Scotland Juniors in 1951. As a youngster, he was also on Celtic's books for a while.

Professionally, he continued with St Mirren in seasons 1952-54 and Third Lanark in 1954/55 in the Scottish First Division. From Scotland he moved south to Crystal Palace before commencing a long association with Tonbridge in the Southern League.

Tommy played 259 games with Tonbridge and was awarded a benefit match in March 1960 against an All Star XI, before moving on to Tunbridge Wells and then on to Ramsgate. He was the Rams' first team goalkeeper until November 1965, when during a game against Ashford he injured his back so severely that he was forced to quit as a player.

For the next 18 months, Tommy worked at Ramsgate as their Club Secretary but he had set his heart on becoming a manager.

TEAM 1955-56



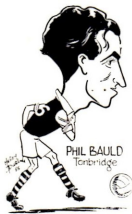
Bob Hailstones



TOMMY BICKERSTAFF
Tonbridge



Len Gibbons



PHIL BAULD
Tonbridge



TIM MCCOY
Tonbridge



HARRY ROBSHAW
Tonbridge



PADDY LEONARD
Tonbridge



GEORGE BEATTIE
Tonbridge



RON BENNETT
Tonbridge



GORDON BOSELEY
Tonbridge



JOHNNY JOHNSON
Tonbridge

Photographs by permission of The Tonbridge Free Press

Tommy Bickerstaff continued

His chance came at Stevenage Town in 1967, joining a club that had just gained promotion to the Southern League Premier Division, the top level of non league football. Tommy steadied a Stevenage club that was deeply in debt. The team held its own in the Southern League but the off-pitch problems continued and they were forced into liquidation at the end of the 1967-68 season.

As events turned out, Tommy stayed in football and he was offered the manager's position with Cambridge City where he served from 1968 through to 1974. In 1969/70 Cambridge won promotion to the Southern League Premier Division. The following season they finished runners-up to champions Yeovil Town. In relative terms, the next three seasons were less successful and Tommy was sacked by Cambridge City in April 1974. He had been in charge for over 350 games in all competitions.

After his footballing career was over, Tommy went on to become landlord in a Stevenage pub and also became a part of the touring crew for singer Marty Wylde.

Tommy, who had been affected by dementia, died peacefully in Stevenage in January 2016, aged 82.

But, oh Connie, how you were missed! He did in fact play in four first team matches scoring four goals but, in his general absence, only the bottom two teams scored less than Tonbridge's 53 from 42 games. George Beattie, who left abruptly in December to join Gloucester City and Paddy Leonard were joint leading scorers with six apiece. Peter Geersdale who scored 19 goals for the Reserves was not given a chance in the first team. Reg Miller looked as though he might be the answer with a hat trick in his first game, a 4-1 win against Gravesend, but after just eight matches a bad knee injury ended his season.

Jim Taylor, who had served the club since its inception, as first team trainer departed to start his own business and this was the vacancy filled by Jimmy Constantine. Harold Fletcher took on a similar role with the Reserves. Admission prices rose by 3d to 1s 9d (8.75p).

The first team travelled to Llanelly to open their Southern League campaign with the following side: Bickerstaff; Gibbons, Hailstones; Robshaw, McCoy, Bauld; Johnson, Beattie, Boseley, Leonard, Bennett. Beattie scored both Tonbridge goals in an entertaining game but Llanelly managed three. There were very few highlights in the league campaign. In November Phil Bauld's 40 yard shot which opened the scoring in the 2-1 win over Dartford was one of the best seen on the Angel Ground. The other candidate for goal of the season came in the Reserves' 2-0 win over Bedford when Martin Valentine picked up the ball in midfield and ran through the entire visiting defence before cracking in a tremendous shot.

The Reserves, suffering from a reduced playing staff, were often fielding a weakened side and finished seventh.

Alan Thrippleton scored on his debut against Gravesend in the Southern League Cup but his Tonbridge career proved a short one. Ron Bennett also scored in an exciting 2-2 draw but in the return the Fleet went through winning by three clear goals. In the FA Cup the Angels were drawn away to Betteshanger Colliery. The miners agreed to switch the game to the Angel Ground and Tonbridge

romped home 8-2, Connie scoring three, Beattie and Johnson twice each. The other goal was scored by John Kenny on his first team debut. This brought Maidstone, then in the Corinthian League, to the Angel and it was the Stones who progressed to the next round by the only goal after a very poor Tonbridge performance. A crowd of 4,809 produced receipts of £458. After £73 tax and expenses were deducted, £260 was left to be shared by the clubs.

Another trip to Gravesend ended interest in the Kent Senior Cup but the Shield brought a visit from Tunbridge Wells. 4,400 were present on an early September, Monday evening to see if the Angels could beat their neighbours who started firm favourites. Vince Wright had an outstanding match for the Wells and it was he who started the move which led to Gibbons heading the ball into his own net whilst trying to clear.

In the second half Tonbridge played really well. Leonard equalised after 67 minutes and only the brilliance of goalkeeper Stan Gullan kept them at bay until the 80th minute when Valentine scored the winner.

Valentine had an outstanding game in the semi-final when Sittingbourne were beaten 3-0. Dougan, Valentine and Leonard scoring the goals. This meant a trip to Canterbury for the final. The team was Bickerstaff; Gibbons, Hailstones; Leonard, McCoy, Bauld; Dougan, Boseley, Constantine, Kenny, Bennett. Alex Hamilton had a fine match for the home side but goals from Johnny Dougan, Gordon Boseley and Ron Bennett saw the Angels through to end a troubled season with a fairly comfortable 3-1 win.

During the season Stanley Berwick, a Sevenoaks builder and Stanley Edwards, a Tonbridge newsagent, joined the board of directors. Stanley Edwards became director in charge of the Reserve team travelling with them to away matches. His enthusiasm for and dedication to the Metropolitan League side was to prove invaluable.

If it was a difficult playing season it was a very hard season indeed off the field as the club's financial situation became most grave. In November the players wages were cut. Early 1956 was a very difficult time as there were only two home games in two months.

Stanley Berwick

Mr Stanley Berwick was elected to the Board of Tonbridge Football Club in 1954, he became Vice-Chairman and succeeded Mr W. H. Cripps in 1958. Mr Berwick was the



head of a well-known Sevenoaks building firm and was a msn who gave an enormous amount of his time to civic matters whilst still finding the time to head the Board of Directors and supervise the running of the club. Following his appointment as Chairman of Tonbridge, immediate financial difficulties arose and the Board dwindled to only three members. Despite this, Mr Berwick agreed to finance the installation of floodlights at the Angel Ground. Only his determination to keep professional football in the town kept the Angels in existence. No man commanded the respect and admiration at the Football Club than Stanley Berwick, who was also a former Chairman of Sevenoaks Urban District Council and gave faithful service to organisations such as the Toc H, Rotary Club and the Hospital Management Committee.

The Tote Crisis



Kent & Sussex Courier 12/8/1955

The tote ban which had Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells United Football Clubs and their supporters worried about the future last weekend, remains. But, as a result of several meetings held in the past few days, alternative schemes which meet the requirements of the law are likely to be substituted very shortly.

They will ease a situation which, if there had been no solution to it, might have very seriously affected senior football in the two towns.

Following tomorrow's public trial at the Angel Ground, Tonbridge Supporters' Club will hold a meeting and ask members to accept a new scheme.

Tunbridge Wells United supporters are considering an alternative scheme to put before their members.

It has been a week of rumours and much activity on the part of

supporters' club officials and of boards of directors. All were thrown into confusion by the sudden order by the police banning the clubs' totes, which have been the lifeblood of the parent clubs for some years.

Meetings were held on Saturday at Gravesend and Gillingham, attended by representatives from a number of Kent clubs as well as from Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells.

They discussed the position created by the ban and suggested alternative schemes. These have been the subject of consideration by the two local committees and boards.

It would be a very serious matter for senior football clubs if no solution was found. Locally, it is believed that neither Tonbridge nor Tunbridge Wells United could exist and face the present wage bills and commitments on the support each receives through the turnstiles.

Facts substantiate this belief.

At Tunbridge Wells last season the supporters' club handed over £7,416 to the football club, nearly twice as much as the receipts from gate money, programme sales, etc., totalling £4,064.

At Tonbridge the supporters' club handed over £7,000 to the parent body. In addition the supporters are buying two houses which have been converted into flats for players and in recent weeks have been paying the whole of the players' summer wages.

The Tonbridge tote, which has to be closed by Monday, had a membership of between 10,000 and 11,000 and prize money amounted to about £350 weekly. The Tunbridge Wells membership was rather less, as was the prize money.

In a statement issued this week, the directors of Tunbridge Wells United emphasise that it is only possible to provide the standard of football to which supporters were accustomed last season because the supporters club subsidised the football club to the extent of nearly 200%.

"Those who support Kent League football will know how the standard of play has improved during the last few years," the statement continues.

This has been due to the financial assistance which has been forthcoming from the supporters' clubs as a result of money-making schemes. Better class players have been attracted by the favourable terms it has been possible to offer them, with a consequent improvement in the level of play."

The decision of both clubs about new schemes are expected to be made this weekend.



Kent & Sussex Courier 19/8/1955

An alternative scheme has been found by the Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells United supporters' clubs to counter the ban which the police have imposed on the tote scheme, which has been running for some years.

For "tote" read "pools". Then you have the method by which the clubs hope to be able to continue to raise money legally for the two football clubs and to keep them financially sound.

Tunbridge Wells supporter, and chairman of the club for seven years, Mr E. Goodman has decided to have nothing to do with the new scheme, under which collectors will be paid 1s. 9d for every £1 collected.

Mr Goodman has been one of the main collectors since the club adopted the tote scheme.

"I have definitely decided to give it up", he told the Courier this week. "I have been a sportsman all my life and I am certainly not going to take money for it now. I have never been paid for my sport and I never want to."

The ban on the tote caused the biggest upset in local senior football circles for years. It came at a time when all arrangements had been made for the season, which opens tomorrow (Saturday), with the

football clubs committed to contracts and facing large wage bills.

The Tote Crisis continued

Hurried special committee meetings and consultations with other clubs finally led to consideration of a pools scheme and the decision to adopt this scheme at Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells.

Announcements were made to this effect at the trial matches at the Angel and Eridge Road grounds on Saturday.

So, too, was the decision of the Tonbridge board of directors, who announced an increase in the charge of admission for Southern League matches from 1s 6d to 1s 9d.

"It is with reluctance that this has been done," said Tonbridge manager Douglas Hunt, "but we have had to do it, and it follows the actions of other Southern League clubs to increase the prices of admission."

The real reason for the increase is that the football club is unlikely to receive the same sort of financial assistance from the supporters' club as in the past, as the new pools scheme is subject to a 30% tax under the Betting Act.

The amount received from attendance at the matches and the sale of programmes, etc., is in no way sufficient to keep the football club on an even financial keel. With support for the new scheme an unknown quantity, the club felt bound to make the increase.

Tunbridge Wells United has decided against making any increased charge for admission to senior matches because, owing to an increased tax which it would attract, the club would derive very little benefit from it.

Briefly, the new scheme is this. From a list of 70 teams, dividends will be awarded to those holding the three highest scoring home teams, the three highest scoring aways, the highest winning home and the highest winning two aways and the highest winning away with the highest winning two homes.

After payment of tax, operating expenses and commission to the promoters not exceeding 2.5%, the balance will be divided in prize money between the four groups of forecasts.

The new scheme has been opened this week and the first pay-out will be in respect of matches played on August 27.

Appeals of support of the scheme were made at Tonbridge by Mr. John Werrin, treasurer of the supporters' club and by Mr Tom Louch, secretary of the United FC at the trial matches on Saturday.

Without the Supporters Club there would be no football club at all. They donated £7,000 in 1954, bringing their total donation since 1948 to £28,000 and paid the summer wages in 1955. In the first decade they would have donated over £40,000 to the parent club, Incidentally the cost of running a Southern League club at this time was in the region of £400 per week. Their "Tote" weekly fund raising scheme which was their financial lifeblood was declared illegal at the start of the season. This had potentially disastrous consequences not only for Tonbridge but for many other small clubs who ran similar fund raising schemes. Fortunately their very able and resourceful treasurer John Werren worked out a new scheme but it was an extremely worrying time.

Surprisingly Harry Robshaw, Tim McCoy and Phil Bauld were all released at the end of the season as was Ron Bennett. If not quite as outstanding as Ross, Woodward and Fleming, the half back line had been the cornerstone of the side. Robshaw, thoughtful and hardworking, joined Yeovil who converted him to a right back, a position he held with distinction for another four seasons. McCoy went to Dover and Bennett to Margate. Ron Bennett had made 93 first team appearances scoring 23 goals and had been a most effective outside left. Len Gibbons, who also had a fine season declined terms and joined Hastings.

THE COURIER



Tonbridge team pictured after winning the Kent Senior Shield at Canterbury on Saturday

FLUCTUATING ENCOUNTER AT CANTERBURY

Angels win the Kent Senior Shield

CANTERBURY CITY 1 : TONBRIDGE 3

TONBRIDGE won the Kent Senior Shield after a hard-fought game at Canterbury on Saturday. Their victory was well deserved. And so there will be one trophy on the Angels' side-board after a not too successful season in the league.

In fact, at the beginning it was a centre-forward position. He did not get a goal, but his presence was felt in the way that the others played and his enthusiasm was catching as well as in their first goal.

As the game progressed Canterbury fought hard and gave Tonbridge some harassing moments. But they became a very tired team—little wonder when it was realised they had had three cup games in the past week.

City won the toss and used what little wind there was. And how they went into the attack! Tonbridge must have wondered what had hit them in those early minutes and some of their clearances . . .

Our wonderer at times how it was that they managed to keep the ball out of their net—certainly not by consistent defence measures. Each and every attack in the Tonbridge defence looked hard and hopes for the best at that moment of the game and they managed to keep the City at bay. Hooper was a constant source of anxiety to Hillston, and was always dangerous while

Immediately on Tonbridge scoring their first goal City redoubled their efforts although the Angels were by now getting their measure.

A centre by Hooper was well taken by Bickens at although, at the same time, Pope was trying hard to bundle him into the net and when the ball went to the other end there was a nice piece of work between Constantine and Kenny but at the crucial moment Constantine hit the ball high over the bar.

Shortly after there came a period when, despite a terrific onslaught by the Angels, the City defence stood firm. Bosley, Constantine, Kenny and Bennett all had a shot at goal and yet it seemed there was always a defender in the way of the ball. It just would not go into the net.



Alderman W. N. Rule presenting the Kent Senior Shield to Gibbons, captain of the Tonbridge team, after their 3-1 victory at Canterbury on Saturday

SWIMMING
Monson S.C. and water polo

JUNIORS AT CRICKET

Southern League 1955/56

		P	W	D	L	F	A	GA	Pts
1	Guildford City	42	26	8	8	74	34	2.18	60
2	Cheltenham Town	42	25	6	11	82	53	1.55	56
3	Yeovil Town	42	23	9	10	98	55	1.78	55
4	Bedford Town	42	21	9	12	99	69	1.43	51
5	Dartford	42	20	9	13	78	62	1.26	49
6	Weymouth	42	19	10	13	83	63	1.32	48
7	Gloucester City	42	19	9	14	72	60	1.2	47
8	Lovells Athletic	42	19	9	14	91	78	1.17	47
9	Chelmsford City	42	18	10	14	67	55	1.22	46
10	Kettering Town	42	16	11	15	105	86	1.22	43
11	Exeter City Reserves	42	17	9	16	75	76	0.99	43
12	Gravesend & Northfleet	42	17	8	17	79	75	1.05	42
13	Hereford United	42	17	7	18	90	90	1	41
14	Hastings United	42	15	10	17	90	76	1.18	40
15	Headington United	42	17	6	19	82	86	0.95	40
16	Kidderminster Harriers	42	14	7	21	86	108	0.8	35
17	Llanelly	42	14	6	22	64	98	0.65	34
18	Barry Town	42	11	11	20	91	108	0.84	33
19	Worcester City	42	12	9	21	66	83	0.8	33
20	Tonbridge	42	11	11	20	53	74	0.72	33
21	Merthyr Tydfil	42	7	10	25	52	127	0.41	24
22	Bath City	42	7	10	25	43	107	0.4	2

Southern League 1955/56

Date	Opponents		Comp		Res		Att	Pos	Goalscorers
Sat 20/08/1955	Llanelly	a	SL		L	2 3		14	Beattie 2
Thu 25/08/1955	Bath City	a	SL		D	0 0			
Sat 27/08/1955	Kidderminster Harriers	H	SL		D	1 1	2887	16	Beattie
Wed 31/08/1955	Gravesend & Northfleet	H	SLC	Pre i	D	2 2			Bennett pen, Thrippleton
Sat 03/09/1955	Bedford Town	a	SL		L	1 4	5751	20	Thrippleton
Mon 05/09/1955	Tunbridge Wells United	H	KSS	QF	W	2 1	4400		Leonard, Valentine
Wed 07/09/1955	Gravesend & Northfleet	a	SLC	Pre ii	L	0 3			
Sat 10/09/1955	Betteshanger Colliery Welfare	H	FAC	Pre	W	8 2	3000		Johnson 2, Constantine 3, Beattie 2, Kenny
Mon 12/09/1955	Guildford City	H	SL		D	0 0	1800	17	
Wed 14/09/1955	Bath City	H	SL		W	4 0	1633		Boseley 2, Bauld, McCoy pen
Sat 17/09/1955	Gravesend & Northfleet	a	SL		L	0 2	3444	17	
Sat 24/09/1955	Maidstone United	H	FAC	1Q	L	0 1	4809	18	
Wed 28/09/1955	Weymouth	H	SL		W	3 0	1314		Johnson, Beattie, Thrippleton
Sat 01/10/1955	Cheltenham Town	a	SL		L	1 2		16	Beattie
Sat 08/10/1955	Yeovil Town	a	SL		L	0 4		17	
Sat 15/10/1955	Exeter City Res	H	SL		W	4 2	2200		Jeffrey, Boseley, Beattie 2
Sat 22/10/1955	Dartford	a	SL		L	0 1		15	
Sat 29/10/1955	Merthyr Tydfil	H	SL		L	0 1		15	
Sat 05/11/1955	Chelmsford City	a	SL		L	0 2	3119	16	
Thu 10/11/1955	Headington United	a	SL		L	0 1		16	
Sat 12/11/1955	Dartford	H	SL		W	2 1		15	Bauld, Sweeney
Sat 19/11/1955	Kettering Town	a	SL		L	0 5		16	
Sat 26/11/1955	Gloucester City	H	SL		W	2 1	1748	15	Boseley, Roelich
Sat 03/12/1955	Worcester City	a	SL		D	1 1		15	Bennett
Sat 10/12/1955	Chelmsford City	H	SL		W	1 0	1800	14	McCoy
Sat 17/12/1955	Llanelly	H	SL		D	0 0			
Sat 24/12/1955	Lovells Athletic	a	SL		W	1 0			Constantine
Mon 26/12/1955	Hastings United	H	SL		W	3 2	2200		Leonard, McCoy, Bennett
Tue 27/12/1955	Hastings United	a	SL		D	1 1			Leonard
Sat 31/12/1955	Bedford Town	H	SL		D	1 1		9	Boseley
Sat 07/01/1956	Gravesend & Northfleet	a	KSC		L	1 2	2494	9	Kenny
Sat 14/01/1956	Guildford City	a	SL		L	1 4	3600	10	Leonard
Sat 21/01/1956	Gravesend & Northfleet	H	SL		W	4 1		12	Miller 3, Blowers og
Sat 28/01/1956	Hereford United	a	SL		L	1 5	2329	13	Morris
Sat 04/02/1956	Weymouth	a	SL		D	2 2	1500	12	Leonard, Morris
Sat 18/02/1956	Yeovil Town	H	SL		L	2 4			Bennett, McCoy pen
Sat 25/02/1956	Exeter City Res	a	SL		W	2 0			Golding 2
Sat 03/03/1956	Barry Town	H	SL		W	3 1	1500	13	Kenny, Golding 2
Sat 10/03/1956	Merthyr Tydfil	a	SL		L	1 2			Miller
Sat 17/03/1956	Kettering Town	H	SL		L	1 3	2581	14	Miller
Wed 21/03/1956	Barry Town	a	SL		L	2 5			Bennett, Bauld
Sat 31/03/1956	Headington United	H	SL		D	1 1			Morris
Mon 02/04/1956	Kidderminster Harriers	a	SL		L	1 2			Ashworth
Sat 07/04/1956	Gloucester City	a	SL		L	0 1		17	
Sat 14/04/1956	Worcester City	H	SL		D	1 1	1000	17	Dougan
Sat 21/04/1956	Sittingbourne	H	KSS	SF	W	3 0			Dougan, Valentine, Leonard
Sat 28/04/1956	Cheltenham Town	H	SL		L	0 1	755	16	
Mon 30/04/1956	Hereford United	H	SL		D	2 2	1296		Leonard 2
Wed 02/05/1956	Lovells Athletic	H	SL		L	1 4	787	20	Bennett
Sat 12/05/1956	Canterbury City	a	KSS	FINAL	W	3 1			Dougan, Bennett, Boseley

Player Statistics 1955/56

Name	SL	FAC	SLC	KSC	KSS	Total	Goals	Career Apps	Career Goals
Ashworth, Fred	2					2	1	49	1
Bauld, Phil	36	2	2	1	3	44	3	73	3
Beattie, George	18	2	2		1	23	9	23	9
Bennett, Ronald	34	2	2	1	2	41	7	93	22
Bickerstaff, Tommy	41	2	2	1	3	49	(9)	49	
Bird, Eddie	1					1		1	
Boseley, Gordon	28		1	1	2	32	6	32	6
Constantine, Jimmy	2	1			1	4	4	119	88
Costello, Brian	4					4		4	
Dougan, John	12			1	2	15	3	15	3
Gibbons, Len	36	2	2	1	3	44		66	
Golding, Norman	12					12	4	12	4
Hailstones, Bob	42	2	2	1	3	50		106	
Jeffrey, Tony	7					7	1	8	1
Johnson, Johnny	14	1	2		1	18	3	18	3
Kay, George	1					1		1	
Kenny, John	23	1		1	2	27	3	27	3
Leonard, Paddy	36	2	2	1	2	43	8	43	8
McCoy, Tim	39	2	2	1	3	47	4	102	4
Miller, Reg	8					8	5	8	5
Morris, Freddy	7					7	3	7	3
Peters, Peter	1	1				2		82	10
Robshaw, Harry	36	1	2	1	3	43		89	3
Roelich, George	5					5	1	5	1
Rosier, Cecil	3					3		23	
Sweeney, Michael	5					5	1	5	1
Thrippleton, Alan	3	1	1			5	3	5	3
Valentine, Martin	6				2	8	2	12	4

() = clean sheets

+ 2 own goals

1956/57

After three disappointing seasons Doug Hunt faced a hostile audience at the Supporters' Club Annual General Meeting. He quietened them by simply announcing his list of summer signings. It was a most impressive list.

The biggest name was that of Duggie Reid signed as player coach from Portsmouth. A tall, craggy Scot who appeared to have been hewn out of a granite mountain, he made 309 appearances in a variety of positions during nearly 10 years at Pompey, scoring 129 goals. His strong, skilful and extremely wholehearted play had made him a great favourite and helped them to a brace of league championships. At his prime he had been a regular at inside right and gained the reputation of having the hardest shot in the Football League. Now, aged 38, he made 20 First Division appearances in his final season at Fratton Park.

From Everton came goalkeeper Harry Leyland and centre forward Ron Saunders, both of whom had made First Division appearances. Saunders was listed at £2,000. Leyland never played a competitive match for Tonbridge. After appearing in the pre-season trial games he was transferred to Blackburn Rovers for a small fee which almost cleared the club's debt. It was also a profitable move for Leyland. He was ever present in the Blackburn side which gained promotion to the First Division the following season and appeared for them with some distinction in the 1960 FA Cup Final against Wolves.

Freddie Kearns had joined from West Ham as a full back from Shamrock Rovers but after the Hammers converted him to a centre forward he won a cap for Eire. He joined Tonbridge after a season with Norwich. Dick Walton, an experienced full back formerly with Leicester City and Leyton Orient, was signed from Exeter City and another former Orient player, Les Lusted from Aldershot. Outside right Norman Hooper, a Goudhurst man who had been such a thorn in the flesh

when with Tunbridge Wells, signed from Canterbury. Don Campbell and Austin Dunne came from Raith Rovers and Colchester respectively. Another big capture was Micky Reid who scored 114 goals in three previous seasons for Yeovil.

Understandably the team took time to gel and it needed another two signings to turn it into a real force but although ultimately unsuccessful the season was indeed memorable producing some of the finest football ever seen at the Angel Ground. There were six new men in the following line-up for the first game of the season: Bickerstaff, Walton, Hailstones, Leonard, Reid (D), Lusted, Dougan, Kearns, Saunders, Reid (M), Valentine. A crowd of 2,700 saw their favourites go down by the only goal of the game to Worcester City. Whilst the defence had looked fairly sound the attack never settled and showed no threat until the closing stages when Duggie Reid moved forward.

For the first few matches Duggie Reid did not look entirely happy at centre half whilst the forward line seemed ill fitting. Saunders, Kearns and Micky Reid all looked as though they would have been happiest at centre forward whilst the lack of a grafting inside forward was very marked.

After a 1-0 home defeat, a 2-2 draw against Chelmsford at New Writtle Street was enough for Tonbridge to progress to the next round of the Southern League Cup under that competition's uniquely baffling rules but after two draws and two defeats from our first four league games early season optimism had all but evaporated as the Angels prepared to visit Isthmian League Kingstonian for a FA Cup tie.

With Lusted and Walton both injured, changes would have to be made anyway, but Doug Hunt decided this was the time to rearrange the team. Austin Dunne came in at left half with Kearns dropping back to take the number two shirt. Dougan moved to inside left and Norman Hooper, after some

impressive performances in the second team was brought in at outside right. There was also promotion for Cecil Rosier who came in at centre half as Duggie Reid moved up to inside right, Micky Reid being the unlucky man to be left out. He was just one centre forward too many and was soon transferred to Bedford.

What a transformation! After sharing four goals at Kingston, the next two home games brought 11 goals with only one in reply. In the cup replay the Kings were well and truly humbled to the tune of 6-1 with three goals for Ron Saunders, two for Duggie Reid and one for Dunne. Three days later Saunders bagged another three against Llanelly with Reid and Hooper completing the scoring. After a rather unlucky 3-2 defeat at Headington another Isthmian League side, Tooting and Mitcham visited the Angel in the FA Cup. Although having a considerably inferior league record to Kingstonian they proved much more formidable opposition. Even so they would have been beaten but for defensive lapses which allowed them to share six goals and gain a replay which they deservedly won by the odd goal in three.

Another early exit from the FA Cup and only one league win in six attempts. The stage was not exactly set for a performance which was described by Bill May as "undoubtedly the finest display of football ever given by a Tonbridge team." The visitors were third placed Bedford, a very formidable outfit. With both Walton and Lusted restored to the team, Kearns reverted to the attack at the expense of Dougan with Golding taking over the left wing spot. There was also a change at centre half where Vivian Felton, known to everyone as Vic, who had been signed in the week from Crystal Palace made his debut.

Tonbridge made a great start and the visitors' goalkeeper Pope was soon a busy man making a particularly good save from a Saunders header. Their centre half Craig was made painfully aware of Duggie Reid's shooting power, requiring lengthy treatment after getting in the way of a free kick. Bickerstaff had not had a save to make when Yates opened the scoring with an 11th minute header but, five minutes later, the Blues were level when Saunders headed in a Hooper centre. Bedford replied with a sustained spell of skilful attacking football but Tonbridge defended resolutely, with Felton particularly impressive and managed to reach half-time with the score still level.

After the break it was the turn of the visitors to defend as Tonbridge took charge and Pope made several fine saves. Eventually he was beaten in the 65th minute, when Golding's fierce shot rebounded off one post onto the other and was handled by a defender. Pope, perhaps not very wisely, got his hands to Reid's penalty but could not stop it – a brick wall might have. Reid's cross field pass enabled Saunders to make it 3-1 and



Saunders scored his third and Tonbridge's fourth from Leonard's cross to round off a superb display. Bedford's very experienced team appeared as though they did not quite know what had hit them.

The quality of Tonbridge's football was something that would be talked about for a long time. It would set a standard for the rest of the season, a standard which was extremely high but one which would be approached on many occasions, particularly during the next three months which saw the Angels shoot up the table. A settled side helped and there would be very few changes before the next year except in the number eleven shirt which saw a succession of occupants during the next month.

On the following Wednesday, Tonbridge made the long journey to Devon and gave another fine performance against Exeter City Reserves before losing to a last minute penalty. Reserves in name only as for this match, Exeter fielded exactly the same side that took the field against Brighton in a Third Division match three days later. A point gained from an excellent game at Weymouth was sandwiched between home wins over Barry and Bath, but then the Angels had to admit defeat at Kettering where Thomas scored the only goal running onto a header from former England centre forward Tommy Lawton. It was suggested that this was the first time in six games that Vic Felton had

been beaten in the air.

By the end of October, Tonbridge had risen to 13th position with 11 points from 12 games and now the last two pieces of the jigsaw arrived. Joe Ball and Jimmy Kirk, both from Aldershot. Ball, short and chunky, immediately solved the problem outside left position. Kirk would take longer to claim a first team place but his signing must have allowed Doug Hunt to sleep more easily. Since Leyland's departure, Bickerstaff had been the only experienced goalkeeper on the books and it was fortunate that he had managed to avoid injury. A tall, well built Scot, Kirk had seven and half years with St Mirren, three seasons with Bury and a season each with Colchester where he played with Paddy Leonard and Austin Dunne and Torquay before his brief spell at Aldershot. He had a very busy Metropolitan League debut at Chelsea where he gave an excellent account of himself, despite being on the wrong end of a 3-1 score and saved a penalty, something he would become known for in the years ahead. Joe Ball made his debut in the home Southern League cup tie against Gravesend and impressed everyone making a contribution to all three Tonbridge goals. Gordon Boseley celebrated his return to the Angel by scoring his side's lone reply.

November and December 1956 produced some of the finest football ever seen from a Tonbridge side. From 3rd November,

when Merthyr Tydfil were beaten 3-0 at the Angel, until Boxing Day the Angels only tasted defeat once, by the odd goal in five at Worcester. In addition to a 5-1 Kent Senior Cup win against Chatham, when Saunders scored four, Tonbridge played nine league games, winning six and drawing twice with a goal aggregate of 23-8, a run which took them to eighth position.

The Merthyr match was watched by a crowd of 2,468. In the following week's programme it was stated that while this was a slight improvement, the club needed regular first team attendances of 3,000 to break even.

A tremendous game of football at Cheltenham produced only one goal scored by Saunders which sent the Robins to only their second league defeat of the season. After a 2-1 home win over Exeter and a draw at Barry, league champions Guildford City came to the Angel and were trounced by 4-0 with Freddie Kearns scoring twice. Four goals were shared at Yeovil and Tonbridge bounced back from defeat at Worcester with the Cup win over Chatham. A week later the visitors were fourth placed Lovells Athletic who were given the same 5-1 treatment.

After just two minutes, Saunders back-heeled Hooper's low cross for Joe Ball to open the scoring with his lethal left foot. Paddy Leonard increased the lead after 25 minutes, five minutes later it was 2-1 but then Kearns quickly restored the two goal advantage. In the second half Duggie Reid produced one of his thunderbolts from over 30 yards and Les Lusted rounded things off with the fifth.

After a 3-0 home win over Chelmsford on Christmas morning, Tonbridge had completed exactly half of their League fixtures with the following record: P21, W10, D5, L6, F45, A24, Pts 25. Kettering appeared to be running away at the top but after a poor start Tonbridge's form had been exceptional and there was every reason to suggest that a really high league position could be attained. It is an appropriate time to look at the players who had brought such high hope to their supporters.

In goal Tommy Bickerstaff, such a buoyant and popular character, had grown in confidence as the men in front of him had settled down since the signing of Vic Felton. Felton had brought a calm authority to the defence. A cool, polished performer, commanding in the air, his performance against top centre forwards, Tommy Lawton and George Lowrie, were a glowing testimony to his ability. At the same time Walton and Hailstones were establishing themselves as one of the club's best ever full back partnerships. Bob Hailstones would go on and on, for many years establishing himself as one of the all time great clubmen of Tonbridge but this particular season probably saw him at the peak of his form. A tenacious tackler, with good powers of



Austin Dunne



Freddie Kearns



Duggie Reid

recovery and excellent ball control, he was also blessed with a cultured left but whereas Hailstones, with that familiar wave of dark hair flopping over his temples, always looked as though he was working hard, as indeed he was, the fair haired Walton, whilst working just as hard, made everything look so easy. Dick Walton was the purest of footballing defenders who relied on brains and skill and was always constructive. He hated to waste a ball whilst he could read a game so well that his defensive covering was quite superb. As well as being fine defenders both of them like to come forward to support the attack, which they did to good effect. In the mid-1950's this was most unusual and they were really quite ahead of their time.

The wing halves were also proving an excellent combination, Paddy Leonard's unpredictable attacking flair contrasting with the sound play of the dependable Les Lusted. Duggie Reid had recaptured his zest for the game since moving to inside right. He was the great attacking general already ready to open up the play with a raking cross field pass as well as keeping his own winger supplied, whilst the crowd loved his "cannonball" shooting. Certainly his shrewd prompting brought the best out of Norman Hooper who was having a fine season.

Joey Ball, fast, two footed, with a powerful shot had made an immediate impact giving the attack much needed additional punch. He and Hooper were a direct pair of wingers who could both score goals themselves and supply the ammunition for their colleagues. Ron Saunders was the chief beneficiary scoring goals consistently throughout the season. A calm, unhurried, penalty area predator he soon aroused the attentions of Football League scouts. Meanwhile Freddie Kearns, denied his favourite centre forward spot, grafted away at inside left and still managed to score some vital goals.

Rarely, if ever, can Tonbridge have fielded a finer first eleven. It must have been most gratifying for Doug Hunt at last seeing his team produce the football he wanted on a consistent basis. The three goal win over Chelmsford was an appropriate festive celebration. It was also a fine performance but a victory achieved at great cost. All the goals came in the first half which Tonbridge dominated. Saunders scoring twice followed by a Ball spectacular, and the Angels continued the control the game until midway through the second half when Walton injured this back and had to be taken to hospital. A few minutes later Reid was kicked in the eye and followed his team mate into the casualty department. The nine remaining fit men showed great skill and determination. Not only did they hold onto their lead but on several occasions they came close to increasing it. Fortunately both Walton and Ball were back in the side after a few weeks but by then their colleagues were taking turns to be injured almost it seemed by rota. Seldom was Doug Hunt able to send out his first choice side during the second half of the season. Also Dick Walton, although having two more seasons with Tonbridge, was never completely free from back trouble.

1956 ended with a one goal victory at Kidderminster but Tonbridge would have to wait until 23rd February for their next league win. Of the 19 matches left only three would be won with seven draws and nine defeats. The defence which had become so miserly was breached 42 times in the second 21 games whilst only 29 were scored.

Only two league games were played in January and three in February as Tonbridge made further progress in cup competitions. Between sharing four goals with Gloucester and losing by four at Guildford, Dover were

beaten at the Crabble in the Kent Senior Cup by a Hooper header. During this match Saunders fell heavily and dislocated his shoulder frustrating the Brighton scouts who were watching him.

The Southern League Cup brought another trip to Chelmsford and victory by the odd goal in three, whilst in the Kent Senior Shield, Snowdown Colliery were beaten 3-1 in a mud bath at the Angel Ground. Despite appalling conditions the game was an entertaining one notable for a superb individual goal from Les Lusted and Cliff Payton's first goal for Tonbridge. A tall fair haired centre forward Payton, originally with Brighton, had been signed from Accrington Stanley just before Christmas.

The return to league action brought a four goal defeat at Bedford but goals from Saunders and Hooper were enough to see Tonbridge through a Kent Senior Cup tie at Ramsgate where Lusted limped off with a groin strain. Neither he nor Leonard were able to play the following week when Weymouth were the visitors for a league match. John Bainbridge and Joey Ball proved capable and hard working pair of deputy wing halves as Tonbridge romped to a 5-0 win. Norman Hooper was devastating scoring twice and being involved in the other goals scored by Saunders, Reid and Valentine.

After a point at Gravesend, March, during which eight games would be played, began with a 1-0 defeat at Bath. Tonbridge had slipped to 11th with 31 points from 29 matches but with games in hand over all but one of the teams above them. Unfortunately the injury list and the fixture list were both mounting.

There was little thought of league placings on Saturday, 9th March, however, for the Kent Senior Cup Semi-Final draw had paired Tonbridge with Tunbridge Wells United, so local pride as well as a place in the Final would be at stake when the two sides met at the Angel. Under player-manager Jim Taylor, the Wells had a strong side which was challenging for Kent League honours. For them Vic Watson was unfit whilst Tonbridge were without Joe Ball but with Eddie Viles and Martin Valentine to deputise two well matched sides lined up thus: Tonbridge: Bickerstaff, Walton, Hailstones, Leonard, Felton, Lusted, Hooper, Reid, Saunders, Kearns, Valentine. Tunbridge Wells: Newton, Pavitt, Longland, Smith, Taylor, Viles, Trusler, Bean, Morgan, Sperrin, Boxall.

The crowd of 6,730 helped to create a tense cup tie atmosphere. The game itself was hard and uncompromising and rather short on skill but most of the little constructive football on view came from Tonbridge. Reg Newton, a recent signing from Brentford, was the busier of the two goalkeepers and looked a very useful acquisition. He was a lucky man in the 25th minute when, after Smith had



Standing: J. Bainbridge, J. Constantine (Trainer) F. Markwick (Director), J. Dougan, F. Kearns, R. Hailstones, T. Bickerstaff, A. Dunne, R. Saunders, P. Leonard, T. Jeffery, D. Walton, S. McLaren. Sitting: N. Hooper, C. Rosier, S. Edwards (Director), H. Cripps (Chairman), D. Hunt (Manager), D. Reid,

RON SAUNDERS

Ron Saunders spent just the single season at the Angel Ground but achieved legendary status with a total of 39 goals from his 53 appearances before moving on to Gillingham for the princely sum of £750. His goal haul included two hat-tricks in three days in a 6-1 rout of Kingstonian in an FA Cup replay followed by another treble as the Angels won 5-0 against Llanelly. Saunders recorded another hat-trick in September in a 4-1 win against Bedford Town in a display described as the best ever by a Tonbridge team to that point. Saunders went on to have a fine Football League career before progressing into management with great success.

On his death on 7th December 2019, the legendary football writer Brian Glanville penned the following obituary for The Guardian:

The combative nature of Ron Saunders, who has died aged 87, brought him much success in football management, but it also deprived him of what would have been his greatest achievement. Having taken Aston Villa to the First Division title in 1980-81, Saunders led his team to the quarter-finals of the European Cup the next season, only to resign abruptly after a major fall-out with his chairman.

Villa continued their run in the competition under his assistant Tony Barton, and a few months later won Europe's most prestigious trophy without Saunders, defeating Bayern Munich 1-0 in Rotterdam. Few doubted that the victory had been based on the house that Ron had built. Yet it was a triumph he could never claim as his own.

That European Cup win of 1982 would have been an appropriate reward for the eight years that Saunders spent in charge of Villa, during which time he had brought the club up from the Second Division to win two League Cups and their first league championship since 1909-10. But volcanic arguments with chairmen – in this case Ron Bendall – were a recurrent theme throughout his managerial career.

Saunders showed no regret at leaving Villa before the club's finest hour, even if he must have felt it. Although he went on to manage two other top-flight Midlands clubs – Birmingham City and then West Bromwich Albion – he was unable to replicate the success he had achieved at Villa Park.

Saunders was born in Birkenhead on Merseyside, and joined First Division Everton in 1951 as a determined centre-forward. But he made only three league appearances in four years at the club, and before long his playing career appeared to be in freefall. For two years he played for non-league Tonbridge in Kent, but then in 1957 he came to the attention of Gillingham, in the Third Division South, who signed him up. After scoring 20 league goals in the 1957-58 season, he was transferred to Portsmouth, who were playing in the First Division, for £10,000. "They knew they weren't getting a world beater," he said later, "just a bloke who was prepared to go in and play where it hurts in the penalty area."



Saunders was a success at Portsmouth, scoring 145 goals in 235 league appearances over six years. But when he was dropped by the manager, George Smith, from an August pre-season friendly with Arsenal in 1964, he demanded a transfer, moving first to Watford (1964-65) and then Charlton (1965-67). He ended his playing career at Charlton having scored 207 league goals in 392 appearances for his various clubs.

As a manager of many teams, he began humbly enough in 1967 outside the league with Yeovil Town, famous for their FA Cup exploits and a sloping pitch. After two years he briefly, though productively, took over at Second Division Oxford United before Norwich City, also in the second tier, appointed him in 1969. There he showed his qualities by taking Norwich to the Second Division championship in the 1971-72 season, ushering them in to the First Division for the first time in their history.

He got on well with the players, and in 1973 Norwich made it all the way to the League Cup final, which they lost 1-0 to Tottenham. But it was perhaps inevitable that sooner or later he would fall out with the dominating chairman, Arthur South, and he resigned in the same year.

Manchester City speedily appointed him, but again he was to fall out with the chairman, Peter Swales. Saunders went in 1974 following a 2-1 defeat by Wolves in the League Cup final and after just five months in office. "I'm shocked, flabbergasted and humiliated," he proclaimed. "I did not deserve the sack."

City's loss was emphatically Villa's gain. They were in the Second Division when he took the reins in 1974, and he not only raised Villa to the First Division in his first season, he also guided them to victory in the 1975 League Cup, winning the final 1-0 against his old club Norwich. After a season of consolidation in the top flight, Villa then had four consecutive top 10 finishes, winning another League Cup final in 1977 as they beat Everton 3-2 in a second replay.

The 1980-81 season, which ended Villa's 71-year wait for a seventh league championship trophy, was the culmination of some careful team building by Saunders. He used only 14 players throughout the campaign, with seven of them – Des Bremner, Gordon Cowans, Ken McNaught, Dennis Mortimer, Tony Morley, Jimmy Rimmer and Kenny Swain – ever present. Putting the emphasis on stability, he made sure each player got to know the play of his team-mates inside out, and there developed a remarkable cohesion and spirit in the side, which he resisted tinkering with.

As Liverpool proved unable to continue their previous league dominance, the title challenge became a close fought race with Bobby Robson's Ipswich Town, who were outdone only in the last throes of the season.

Smooth progress in the European Cup during the following campaign appeared to be lining Saunders up for a claim to be one of the most successful of all English managers. But then came the row with Bendall. Villa had dropped to 15th position in the First Division by then, and Bendall insisted on changing Saunders' contract from a "roll on" three-yearly one to a fixed three-year deal. There were bitter exchanges between the two and Saunders walked out. "I had always thought I'd spend the rest of my career with Villa," he said afterwards.

Saunders straightaway joined First Division Birmingham City, where he experienced his first real failure as a manager when the team were relegated in his second season there. He took them straight back up in 1984-85, only then to clash with the chairman, Keith Coombs, over an unfulfilled promise of £250,000 to buy new players. As the club sank £2m into debt, Ken Wheldon, a scrap metal millionaire, took over as chairman, and Saunders' days were numbered. He left in 1986 after "four years banging my head against a brick wall".

Briefly he contemplated retirement, but soon joined First Division West Bromwich Albion, who were also in a parlous state. Saunders could not prevent them from being relegated, nor could he bring them back up again, and so after 18 months he was sacked, complaining that "they treated me like a peasant".

It was to be his last managerial post even though he was only 54. He entered a self-imposed retirement in Solihull, to where he had moved when he first joined Villa. Although he later accepted invitations to Villa for commemorative occasions, in general he preferred to stay out of the limelight. "The moment I left West Brom I put football behind me," he said. "I don't pay much attention to it any more." Instead he concentrated on enjoying his family life and on trying to get his golf handicap down.

In later years he suffered from dementia, and since last year had been living in a care home.

He is survived by his wife, Breeda (nee Quigley), whom he married in 1955, and by their four children, Ronnie, Karen and twins, David and Maria, six granddaughters and four grandsons, five great-granddaughters and three great-grandsons.

Eddie Bird had conceded 10 goals in two return trips to Tonbridge. If had, of course, been Connie's day.

And so to Easter Monday and the Kent Senior Cup Final against Folkestone at Priestfield Stadium, Gillingham. Maidstone and District Motor Services ran coaches whilst British Railways put on a special train, price four shillings from Tunbridge Wells, High Brooms and Tonbridge or just three and ninepence from Paddock Wood. A limited number of stand seats were available for three shillings and there were some complaints that this plus a two shilling admission charge was excessive. In the event Tonbridge supporters were well represented in a crowd of 6,000.

Tonbridge had lost the race to get Duggie Reid and Fred Kearns fit for the match but Paddy Leonard and Vic Felton made it and Leonard, captain in Reid's absence, led out the following side: Kirk, Walton, Hailstones, Leonard, Felton, Lusted, Hooper, Dunne, Saunders, Valentine, Ball. Unfortunately the team as a whole was well below par from the first half hour when Folkestone were outplayed. Had one of a number of misses actually gone into the net during this period the result might have been different, but Whiteley gave Folkestone the lead in the 35th minute following only their second attack and when Thompson increased the lead on the hour, Tonbridge had very little left. It was most disappointing as Folkestone were not particularly impressive but they had shown more determination and deserved

their win. At least it was a fitting reward for a great man of Kentish football, Wilf Armory who was retiring after 15 years as team manager. Fortunately for Folkestone and for football, if not always for Tonbridge, Wilf would return in the 1960's to lead his club to further success.

The following Saturday Tonbridge travelled to Hereford but never remotely looked like pulling back the deficit from the first leg of the Southern League Cup Final, despite a spirited second half performance. Before a crowd of 4,492 goals by Thompson in the 29th and 37th minutes put the cup well beyond Tonbridge's reach.

After 54 minutes Saunders headed in Walton's cross but three minutes later Williams made it 3-1 on the day and 5-2 on aggregate. Constantine and Saunders both headed against the crossbar whilst Saunders and Walton brought outstanding saves from Groves, the Hereford goalkeeper.

Two league games remained, both at home against Dartford and Headington. The Darts led by three goals at half time and then Saunders limped off with a groin injury. The 10 men fought back bravely with Constantine reducing the arrears in the 80th minute and Ball made it more respectable with a goal in the last minute. Cliff Payton scored for Tonbridge in the 1-1 draw against Headington. Tonbridge had finished 15th with 40 points from 42 games, 14 won, 12 drawn and 16 lost, scoring 74 goals and

conceding 65, their best defensive record so far. Ron Saunders had equalled Jimmy Constantine's record by scoring 39 goals in first team matches. Duggie Reid scored 18, Norman Hooper 13 and Freddie Kearns 12. Obviously runs in so many cup competitions plus injuries had its effect on league performances in the latter part of the season and the high position for which had been hoped was not to be. Nevertheless it had been a season of many highlights and there had been some splendid football. Doug Hunt, who at times must have wondered where his next side was coming from, deserved great credit for their efforts. Of 60 first team games Norman Hooper and Freddie Kearns each appeared in 54, Paddy Leonard and Ron Saunders made 53 appearances each and Bob Hailstones 51.

To reach two cup finals without taking a "pot" was, of course, a great disappointment but there was still a chance to collect some silverware. We looked to the Reserves who, after a patchy start had done splendidly to finish third with the following record P34, W21, D5, L8, F83, A62, Pnts 47. Champions Chelsea "A" had only two more points whilst Bedford only took the runners-up spot on goal average. Before losing at home to Dartford on Good Friday with a weakened team, they had won eight consecutive matches, scoring 28 goals and conceding five, but in the end, excessive first team calls almost certainly cost them the championship. The highlight of their Metropolitan League campaign, which produced so much good

football, was probably the superb game at the Angel against Chelsea. With the score at 1-1 it was the visitors who were challenging most strongly for the winner but they were eventually beaten by a brilliant individual effort from Norman Hooper.

A John Kenny hat trick helped Tonbridge to a 5-0 win over West Ham "A" in the first round of the Metropolitan League Professional Cup. The second round brought another home tie and five more goals against Luton Town "A" and this time a hat-trick for Johnny Dougan. In the semi-final Dartford Reserves were disposed of by 3-1, again at the Angel. The final, played on a home and away basis, paired Tonbridge with Guildford Reserves who, although in a moderate league position, had won the League Challenge Cup.

The first leg was played at Guildford where despite fielding a weakened side, a stout hearted performance earned a 1-1 draw. On Friday, 3rd May the return was played at the Angel with the home side represented by: Bickerstaff, Roberts, Pont, Kenny, Rosier, Relf, Hooper, Dougan, Payton, Campbell, Morris. Centre half for the visitors was a young man called John Carragher who would sign for Tonbridge just over 16 years later.

Certainly Tonbridge lived up to the occasion with as fine a display of football as they had given all season whilst the visitors made a worthy contribution to an entertaining match. The first half was an even contest although the Angels had taken an early lead when Payton finished off a Kenny-Hooper move with a fierce shot. In the second half Tonbridge got more on top and two goals from Hooper reflected their superiority.

All that remained was for skipper Bob Pont to collect the trophy, his last act as a Tonbridge player for he had not been retained. A regular and reliable member of the reserve team for three seasons he had never managed to break into the first team and joined another Metropolitan League side Eastbourne United. It was also the last game for Cecil Rosier who became the only Tonbridge player to play in all three Metropolitan League Professional Cup winning sides. A quiet, unassuming man he had been a great servant to the club and thoroughly deserved his medals. Now he was released and joined Sittingbourne. After retiring from semi-professional football he played local football in the Tonbridge and District Football League for many years until one evening his wife declared it was time to call it a day and put his boots on the fire!

John Bainbridge, who had never regained a regular first team place after breaking his leg, was also released and joined Ashford. Martin Valentine, who scored 14 goals in 46 first team games as well as making many brilliant performances for the reserves, had completed his National Service and returned to his native Scotland.

Ron Saunders was transferred to Gillingham for a free described as "over £700". Unfortunately Freddie Kearns, who would have been a natural replacement asked to be released because he wished to return to the Norwich area, his wife's home. The club agreed and it was rumoured that he would join Eastern Counties League club Yarmouth, but in fact he returned to Kent and joined Margate for whom he became a prolific goalscorer for several seasons from the centre forward position.

There were rumours that the club was trying to sign the Tottenham centre forward Len Duquemin. This was first denied by Doug Hunt, who scoffed "we could never afford his wages", but at the Supporters Club AGM he admitted, at last, that the club was still trying to come to terms with Duquemin. The press leak had added to the difficulty and the negotiations eventually proved fruitless.

Southern League 1956/57

		P	W	D	L	F	A	GA	Pts
1	Kettering Town	42	28	10	4	106	47	2.26	66
2	Bedford Town	42	25	8	9	89	52	1.71	58
3	Weymouth	42	22	10	10	92	71	1.3	54
4	Cheltenham Town	42	19	15	8	73	46	1.59	53
5	Gravesend & Northfleet	42	21	11	10	74	58	1.28	53
6	Lovells Athletic	42	21	7	14	99	84	1.18	49
7	Guildford City	42	18	11	13	68	49	1.39	47
8	Hereford United	42	19	8	15	96	60	1.6	46
9	Headington United	42	19	7	16	64	61	1.05	45
10	Gloucester City	42	18	8	16	74	72	1.03	44
11	Hastings United	42	17	9	16	70	58	1.21	43
12	Worcester City	42	16	10	16	81	80	1.01	42
13	Dartford	42	16	10	16	79	88	0.9	42
14	Chelmsford City	42	16	9	17	73	85	0.86	41
15	Tonbridge	42	14	12	16	74	65	1.14	40
16	Yeovil Town	42	14	11	17	83	85	0.98	39
17	Bath City	42	15	8	19	56	78	0.72	38
18	Exeter City Reserves	42	10	10	22	52	89	0.58	30
19	Merthyr Tydfil	42	9	11	22	72	95	0.76	29
20	Barry Town	42	6	11	25	39	84	0.46	23
21	Kidderminster Harriers	42	7	10	25	60	83	0.72	20
22	Llanelly	42	5	8	29	39	123	0.32	18

Southern League 1956/7

Date	Opponents		Comp	Res	Att	Pos	Goalscorers
Sat 18/08/1956	Worcester City	H	SL	L 0 1	2700		
Mon 20/08/1956	Hastings United	a	SL	D 0 0		14	
Sat 25/08/1956	Lovells Athletic	a	SL	D 3 3			Dougan, Reid M, Saunders
Wed 29/08/1956	Chelmsford City	H	SLC	Pre i L 0 1		15	
Sat 01/09/1956	Kidderminster Harriers	H	SL	L 2 4	2200	20	Valentine, Saunders
Wed 05/09/1956	Chelmsford City	a	SLC	Pre ii D 2 2	2835		Hooper, Saunders
Sat 08/09/1956	Kingstonian	a	FAC	Pre D 2 2			Reid D 2
Wed 12/09/1956	Kingstonian	H	FAC	Pre r W 6 1			Saunders 3, Reid D 2 (1 pen), Dunne
Sat 15/09/1956	Llanelly	H	SL	W 5 0	2073	18	Saunders 3, Hooper, Reid D
Wed 19/09/1956	Headington United	a	SL	L 2 3			Kearns 2
Sat 22/09/1956	Tooting & Mitcham United	H	FAC	1Q D 3 3		20	Valentine 2, Saunders
Wed 26/09/1956	Tooting & Mitcham United	a	FAC	1Qr L 1 2			Saunders
Sat 29/09/1956	Bedford Town	H	SL	W 4 1	2121	18	Saunders 3, Reid D
Wed 03/10/1956	Exeter City Res	a	SL	L 1 2	570		Saunders
Sat 06/10/1956	Barry Town	H	SL	W 3 0		15	Saunders, Kearns, Reid D
Sat 13/10/1956	Weymouth	a	SL	D 1 1		14	Kearns
Sat 20/10/1956	Bath City	H	SL	W 1 0		12	Reid D
Sat 27/10/1956	Kettering Town	a	SL	L 0 1	4340	13	
Wed 31/10/1956	Gravesend & Northfleet	H	SLC	1 W 3 1			Saunders 2, Reid D
Sat 03/11/1956	Merthyr Tydfil	H	SL	W 3 0	2468	10	Hooper, Reid D, Saunders
Sat 10/11/1956	Cheltenham Town	a	SL	W 1 0		7	Saunders
Sat 17/11/1956	Exeter City Res	H	SL	W 2 1		7	Reid D, Kearns
Sat 24/11/1956	Barry Town	a	SL	D 1 1		7	Saunders
Sat 01/12/1956	Guildford City	H	SL	W 4 0		7	Valentine, Kearns 2, Saunders
Sat 08/12/1956	Yeovil Town	a	SL	D 2 2		7	Reid D, Warren og
Mon 10/12/1956	Worcester City	a	SL	L 2 3		8	Reid D pen, Kearns
Sat 15/12/1956	Chatham Town	H	KSC	1 W 5 1	2018		Saunders 4, Reid D
Sat 22/12/1956	Lovells Athletic	H	SL	W 5 1			Ball, Leonard, Kearns, Reid D, Lusted
Tue 25/12/1956	Chelmsford City	H	SL	W 3 0			Saunders 2, Ball
Wed 26/12/1956	Chelmsford City	a	SL	L 0 3			
Sat 29/12/1956	Kidderminster Harriers	a	SL	W 1 0		6	Saunders
Sat 12/01/1957	Gloucester City	H	SL	D 2 2		6	Saunders, Kearns
Sat 19/01/1957	Dover	a	KSC	2 W 1 0	3000	7	Hooper
Sat 26/01/1957	Guildford City	a	SL	L 0 4	2814	8	
Wed 30/01/1957	Chelmsford City	a	SLC	2 W 2 1	731	8	Reid D, Kearns
Sat 02/02/1957	Snowdown Colliery Welfare	H	KSS	1 W 3 1	2400	9	Payton, Lusted, Ball
Sat 09/02/1957	Bedford Town	a	SL	L 0 4	6000	9	
Sat 16/02/1957	Ramsgate Athletic	a	KSC	QF W 2 0		11	Saunders, Hooper
Sat 23/02/1957	Weymouth	H	SL	W 5 0	1750	11	Saunders, Hooper 2, Reid D, Valentine
Wed 27/02/1957	Gravesend & Northfleet	a	SL	D 1 1	3247	10	Kearns
Sat 02/03/1957	Bath City	a	SL	L 0 1	2900	10	
Sat 09/03/1957	Tunbridge Wells United	H	KSC	SF W 1 0	6730	11	Kearns
Wed 13/03/1957	Yeovil Town	H	SLC	SF W 4 1			Leonard, Saunders 2, Reid D
Sat 16/03/1957	Merthyr Tydfil	a	SL	W 2 1		10	Hooper, Saunders
Wed 20/03/1957	Kettering Town	H	SL	D 1 1	2381		Saunders
Sat 23/03/1957	Cheltenham Town	H	SL	L 1 2		11	Hooper
Tue 26/03/1957	Llanelly	a	SL	D 0 0		9	
Sat 30/03/1957	Hereford United	a	SL	L 0 4	2640	12	
Wed 03/04/1957	Hastings United	H	SL	L 2 3	2000		Valentine, Leonard
Sat 06/04/1957	Folkestone Town	a	KSS	SF L 1 2		14	Valentine
Mon 08/04/1957	Gloucester City	a	SL	L 1 6		14	Valentine
Wed 10/04/1957	Hereford United	H	SL	D 2 2	1404	14	Valentine, Hooper
Sat 13/04/1957	Hereford United	H	SLC	FINAL i L 1 2	2418	14	Valentine
Wed 17/04/1957	Gravesend & Northfleet	H	SL	D 0 0	1443		
Fri 19/04/1957	Dartford	a	SL	L 2 3	1950	14	Saunders, Valentine
Sat 20/04/1957	Yeovil Town	H	SL	W 6 0	2400	13	Constantine 2, Lusted pen, Ball, Saunders, Hooper
Mon 22/04/1957	Folkestone Town	N	KSC	FINAL L 0 2	6000		
Sat 27/04/1957	Hereford United	a	SLC	FINAL ii L 1 3	4492		Saunders
Mon 29/04/1957	Dartford	a	SL	L 2 3			Constantine, Ball
Wed 01/05/1957	Headington United	H	SL	D 1 1	1032	15	Payton

Player Statistics 1956/57

Name	SL	FAC	SLC	KSC	KSS	Total	Goals	Career Apps	Career Goals
Bainbridge, John	7					7		83	
Ball, Joe	25		5	4	2	36	5	36	5
Bickerstaff, Tommy	36	4	5	4	1	50	(13)	99	
Campbell, Don	4		1			5		5	
Constantine, Jimmy	3		1			4	3	123	91
Dougan, John	5	3	1			9	1	24	4
Dunne, Austen	17	4	2	1		24	1	24	1
Felton, Vic	30		5	5	1	41		41	
Golding, Norman	2					2		14	
Hailstones, Bob	35	4	6	5	1	51		157	
Hooper, Norman	37	4	6	5	2	54	11	54	11
Jeffrey, Tony	1					1		9	1
Kearns, Freddie	37	4	6	4	2	53	13	53	13
Kenny, John	10		2		1	13		40	3
Kirk, Jim	6		2	1	1	10	(3)	10	
Leonard, Paddy	36	4	6	5	2	53	3	96	11
Lusted, Les	29		5	5	2	41	3	41	3
Morris, Freddy	1					1		8	3
Payton, Cliff	5		1		1	7	2	7	2
Reid, Duggie	31	4	5	4	1	45	18	45	18
Reid, Mick	4		1			5	1	5	1
Relf, Dennis	2					2		2	
Rosier, Cecil	4	4	1		1	10		32	
Saunders, Ron	37	4	6	5	1	53	39	53	39
Valentine, Martin	22	4	4	2	1	33	11	45	15
Walton, Dick	36	1	6	5	2	50		50	
() = clean sheets	+1 own goal								

Stats: Dan Couldridge