



# Leyton Orient Supporters Club

Having now passed the fortieth anniversary of the formation of the Leyton Orient Supporters Club, we present a short history of the club and some of it's achievements, as recollected by Chairman David Dodd



A helpful force at the O's for over forty years

## How It All Began

As is the case at most football clubs, there has been a supporters club or association of one form or another at Leyton Orient through the years, at least as far back as the 1930's.

The present day O's Supporters Club was formed back in the summer of 1977 when Charlie Hasler who went on to become O's award winning groundsman, together with other fans, persuaded the then Orient Football Club Chairman Brian Winston (now OBE) that the fans needed a base at the stadium in which to socialise on match days and to raise funds in the process. There had been a small clubroom in the undercroft of the East Stand, now used as the Community Hub, built by supporters in the 1960's, but it had restricted access on match days and lacked the capacity to meet members demands. This was the Supporters Club to which I was elected as a committee member in 1971. At that time the club was under the chairmanship of Stan Gimson with his wife, Ruth, serving as secretary.

However, around that time it was decided by the directors of the football club to disband the Supporters Club and replace it with a new club – the Sportsman's Club.

The Sportsman's Club was a social club based at Orient's then training ground at Spring Hill, Upper Clapton, E5. The club was operated under the control of Brian Blower of the Commercial Department and for a number of years was a popular venue offering a regular programme of social functions. With the advent of the Sportsman's Club the old East Stand clubroom was adapted to become a lounge for the use of the players and their families and was given the name 'Club 91' or, as was more generally known, 'The Players Bar'.

Being located several miles from Brisbane Road the Sportsman's Club at Spring Hill was impractical as a match day facility for O's fans and so it was that in the summer of 1977 the new Supporters Club came into being. A small management committee of fans was formed to which I was appointed Chairman and, I suppose, would be project manager. We were given an old and very basic timber constructed cabin to serve as our clubroom and charged with the responsibility to set it up ready for members use. It was approximately double the size of the previous East Stand premises and was located on the corner of Brisbane Road and

Buckingham Road in what at one time had been the infamous 'hooligan cage' – an area in which troublesome fans could be held pending arrest or for a cooling off period! The clubroom had the advantage of opening directly on to Brisbane Road thus making it easily accessible to members before and after home games. The 'Bloomfield Court' apartments now stand where the clubroom was sited.

Myself and several of the new committee, including our Vice-Chairman Frank Woolf who was later to become O's Commercial Manager, worked through the winter of 1977/78 on a tiny budget of £1000 – £500 given to us by Chairman Brian Winston and £500 loaned to us by the commercial department – to get the room fitted out and ready to open for the start of the 1978/79 season. Being such a basic building we had to arrange the installation of electric and water supplies, make safe the flooring and fit carpet, fix the leaking the roof, find affordable furniture and various fittings and turn our hands to painting and other tasks. A licence to sell alcohol was obtained and a bar was installed by Truman's brewery. We sold Ben Truman Bitter, Truman's Special Bitter and Carlsberg lager on draught and from the opening day in August 1978 for the Anglo-Scottish Cup game against Mansfield Town the club became an instant hit.

## Building The Membership

To establish a membership base and generate some much needed funds we began to invite applications during the 1977/78 season, before the clubroom was ready to open. Once fans had seen that a clubroom was finally on site and that preparatory work was proceeding well there was a good early response. The initial adult membership fee was 25p. Memberships quickly grew to and beyond the 1000 mark and with more members living in the closer vicinity of the stadium at that time we opened the club three or four nights per week, Sunday lunch times and for all first and reserve team games. We formed men's and women's darts teams, Sunday football teams and a cricket section. With this growing popularity it soon became evident that the new clubroom had inadequate capacity to



meet the members' demands on match days. We extended the club as much as we possibly could within the confined area in which it was located and eventually planning permission for a major extension was obtained in the late 1980's.

## LOSC To The Rescue

A building fund to finance the extension of the clubroom was established and many members came forward with donations. However, in the early 1990's the football club faced severe financial difficulties when Tony Wood OBE, who by then was the O's Chairman, was no longer able to sustain the club following the collapse of his coffee broking business in war torn Rwanda. Such was the crisis that the Supporters Club played it's part in helping the club's survival by transferring the building fund of £76,000 to the O's. This relieved immediate cash flow and overdraft issues and enabled player and staff salaries to be paid. A difficult decision for the Supporters Club to be confronted with but the welfare of the O's had to have priority over the extension of the clubroom.

## Aims and Objectives

Since it's formation the objectives of the Supporters Club have been to provide good value matchday bar

facilities for members together with services such as coach travel to away games and to develop goodwill between the membership and the football club.

## Social Scene

An additional aspect of our operation has been to arrange various social events at the Supporters Club and at outside venues. These have been numerous and wide ranging and have included themed party nights, cabaret nights, stag nights, our highly popular quiz nights, forums with most O's managers and chairmen, reunions of former players, indoor bowls, and even for a short time line dancing! In 1997 we introduced the annual 'Star Man' player awards dinner staged at the Prince Regent Hotel, Chigwell.



Hosted superbly by committee member Simon Fellman (*left*) the dinners have enabled us to invite many former O's players as special guests at the events.

Linked with the dinner, LOSC also makes monthly Star Man champagne award presentations based on members votes after each game.



*Familiar faces on stage at the 2013 Star Man dinner*

## Donations To LOSC

Through the ongoing support of members for these activities donations to the O's by the Supporters Club since our formation in 1977 have now passed the £1 million mark. These donations have helped to fund many different projects through the years including the purchase of a mini bus in 1980, the fit out of the West Stand dressing rooms back in 2007 and their



*In September 1979 David Dodd presented the first Supporters Club donation of £5000 to O's Chairman Brian Winston OBE*



*O's Chairman Barry Hearn accepts a cheque for £40,000 during the 2006/07 season as the first of three installments for the LOSC project of financing the fitting out of the new West Stand dressing rooms*

subsequent refurbishment in 2018, the purchase of ground maintenance equipment, funding for the repairs to the East Stand in 2019, a sales office for the commercial department in 1991 and numerous other projects.



*In November 2018 Chairman Nigel Travis and Vice Chairman Kent Teague are presented with a cheque for £27,000 to help finance repairs to the East Stand*

## Ale Arrives At The Club

It was in 1993 that we first experimented in bringing real ale into the club. An initial firkin or two perched precariously on our then small bar proved irresistible to the many members who were getting tired of being served keg beer. There were no cellar or chilling facilities save for ice blankets to keep the ale in condition but the idea caught on and since those somewhat primitive efforts the Supporters Club has developed a reputation for offering a wide variety of real ales at the club bar on matchdays and at our many gala nights.



*Mike Childs ready to serve pints at the old club in 1998*

We now have eight ale pumps set up each matchday and as each cask runs out a different replacement is put on. Often for Saturday matchdays we sell fifteen or sixteen casks. In fact, for the final game of the 2018/19 season versus Braintree Town our members managed to drink us dry of twenty one casks of ales and ten kegs of lagers, aside from copious quantities of bottled beers. There was of course special reason to celebrate as the O's were confirmed as National League Champions!

## Awards In Plenty!

Our commitment to real ale has resulted in the club winning many CAMRA (Campaign For Real Ale) local branch and national awards. This has been made possible over the years through the knowledge and superb efforts of Bar Manager and club Secretary Mike Childs, now assisted by Peter Norwood and Mark Harrison. The club has featured for a number of years



*Mark Harrison of the club committee (left) accepts the CAMRA East London branch 2019 Club of The Year award from Andy Kinch*

in the national Good Beer Guide and other similar publications. Various galas are arranged each year and ale lovers, both local and from further afield, including many with no particular football interests or affiliations to Leyton Orient, attend in large numbers. The support from CAMRA members is greatly appreciated. We tend to focus many of our galas on tap take overs by smaller or newly founded micro breweries whose ales are often lesser known and not so readily available to the drinking public. However, we don't forget old connections and always include in our schedule the very popular annual Christmas gala featuring ales from the Mighty Oak Brewery of Maldon, Essex.

## Farewell To The Old Clubroom

The final day of the 2003/04 season was a sentimental one for those members who had been regular users of the original clubroom in Brisbane Road since it opened in 1978. The clubroom was about to be demolished in preparation for stadium development. Eager to have



*The old club prior to demolition in 2004*

mementoes of the old place lots of members took part in a spontaneous auction that Simon Fellman our 'man on the mic' conducted. All kinds of items were bid for – often reaching ridiculously high amounts as members vied with one another to secure a keepsake of the clubroom – a plastic clock which sold for ten pounds, the tobacco stained glitter curtains, the mirror ball and disco lights that were bought for the Orient themed garden shed of club member Dick Richards, the massively heavy 33 inch TV, squares of the club carpet – most stained with years of ale spillages, chairs that had been purchased twenty five years earlier and plenty more. Virtually everything was cleared and hundreds of pounds were raised for the club funds all in a spirit of nostalgia for the old clubroom and to help support the fit out of the new premises.

## Into The New Club!

For the following season of 2004/05 the Supporters Club took back the old East Stand clubroom as a temporary base whilst work on the new West Stand proceeded. A year later at the start of the 2005/06 season the Supporters Club opened our present day much larger air conditioned premises in the new West Stand. The new club helped us to attract an additional influx of members taking the total, including overseas members, to around the 1500 mark. Since the opening day the club has been hugely popular but, despite the



increased capacity over the old clubroom, we struggle to accommodate the many members and guests who like to use the facilities on matchdays.



## O's Somme Memorial

A project that the Supporters Club has been immensely proud to be associated with came about during the early 2000's through the efforts of club Deputy Chairman Steve Jenkins. Steve, with his interest in the history of the O's has worked tirelessly to bring to greater public prominence the contribution made during the Great War of 1914-18 by Clapton Orient Football Club, as the O's were then known. Forty one players and staff of the club enlisted into the 17th Battalion Middlesex Regiment, more usually known as the Footballers' Battalion, of whom three players, Richard McFadden, George Scott and William Jonas, were killed at the Battle of the Somme in 1916. Diligent research by Steve led him to write a very successful book on the subject, They Took The Lead, and this was followed by organized trips comprising hundreds of O's fans and others to the Somme area of northern France to visit the players graves, memorials and other places of contemporary significance. Annual services of Remembrance organised by Steve at Brisbane Road on the match day nearest to the November Remembrance weekend have become standard events and in 2011 a memorial to the Clapton Orient personnel who served in the Great War was commissioned and unveiled in the village of Flers in northern France. The substantial granite memorial costing some £15,000 was financed by fund raising initiatives organised by Steve and the Supporters Club





*The O's Somme Memorial at Flers, Northern France*

together with donations from O's fans who wished to support the project. Much help and support for the memorial project was given by former O's player Peter Kitchen whose interest in the history of the Great War and in-depth knowledge of the Somme area of France proved to be invaluable. A stage play, The Greater Game, based upon Steve's book evolved and had successful runs at London's Southwark Playhouse and Waterloo East theatres in 2016 and 2018 respectively. An added outcome of Steve's research has seen the bringing together for the first time, family descendents of the three fallen Clapton Orient players, while another development has been the formation of an O's Somme band, the 17th Pals' Battalion Band. Led by Steve Jenkins the band plays at various ceremonial events in addition to their duties for the O's.



*The 17th Pals' Battalion Band*

## The LOSC Committee

The Supporters Club is managed by a committee of O's fans who from the outset have worked on a voluntary basis – a principle that has been strictly maintained throughout the years. The committee is elected by the members at the Annual General Meeting. Many O's fans have volunteered to join the committee over the years and the longevity of service by most demonstrates remarkable dedication and loyalty to the club. The committee as at the summer of 2019 comprised:

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**David Dodd**, Chairman

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**Stephen Jenkins**, Deputy Chairman,

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**Michael Childs**, Secretary & Bar Manager,

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**Simon Fellman**, Social Secretary,

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**Keren Harrison**, Membership Secretary,

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**Malcolm McCarthy MBE**, Meetings/Staffing Secretary

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**Helen Reddick**, Webmaster

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**Committee Officers:** Linda Broughan, Matthew Chinnery, Roy Clifford, Lee Dearing, Stephen Dearing, Mark Harrison, Tim Haydon, Noele Howarth, Peter Norwood, Martyn Rolfe, Jolyon Travis, Keith Underwood.



Some of the committee at the 2018 Star Man dinner

## You Can Help Too!

Supporters Club members are encouraged to volunteer their services as committee members or to help the club in a less committed fashion. Without new volunteers coming forward the concept of the club being operated by fans for the fans would be lost. Likewise, new members are always being sought in order to grow the numbers and to help the club to progress. Application forms are available at the club or by visiting our website [www.orient supporters.org](http://www.orient supporters.org) where more details about the club may be found.



## And Finally,

Over the years numerous friendships have been formed through the Supporters Club. Marriages and partnerships have evolved and business and social activities have developed among the members. The club has long enjoyed a reputation for it's friendliness

and a visit is an essential part of the match day experience for many O's fans and guests, including a growing number of overseas visitors.

The Supporters Club has always attempted to work closely with the owners and management of the parent club and continue this policy with the present O's board headed by Chairman Nigel Travis and Vice-Chairman Kent Teague.

To further strengthen the association with the parent club the Supporters Club purchased a substantial 50,000 shareholding in Leyton Orient Football Club Ltd in 2006/07.



As we move into our fifth decade of the present day club, I must place on record that it has been a privilege for me to oversee the operation and development of the Supporters Club and to act as Chairman for so many years.

However, our achievements as a club would not have been possible without the hard work and loyalty of our committee and the enthusiastic support of club members to all of whom I express my warm appreciation.

**David Dodd,**  
Chairman  
Summer 2019