

THE HISTORY OF THE POSH SUPPORTERS' TRUST

2002: Genesis. Building a shareholding in PUFC.

The Posh Supporters' Trust was conceived in 2002 against a backdrop of apathy and frustration surrounding Peterborough United. The club, owned by local entrepreneur Peter Boizot, had been for sale for over 12 months but, despite interest from numerous parties, only three or four had made substantive bids. Fans had read so many times in the local press that a deal would be concluded "within 48 hours" that nobody took much notice any more.

Leigh Porter, a 26-year-old customer services manager in the travel industry, decided to hold a public meeting to discover whether there was enough interest in forming a supporters' trust. On 8 November 2002 about a hundred fans turned up at Ebenezer's, the HQ of the Posh Independent Supporters' Association (PISA), to hear Leigh outline his views and plans. His master-stroke was to invite the Chief Executive of Posh, Geoff Davey, and two officials from CFU, the trust formed by fans of nearby Cambridge United. While Geoff was very supportive, it was Steve Greenall of CFU who galvanised the audience with his infectious enthusiasm, exhorting the fans to dig deep into their pockets. Aided by PISA's generous gift of £500, the new trust started life with £976.

Seven volunteers signed up to help Leigh: two teachers, a policeman, a financial consultant and three early-retired people. With one exception none had previously been involved with a supporters' organisation. At its first meeting ten days later the working group was joined by Matthew Holt from Supporters Direct, the Government-backed body that helps fans to form trusts. He offered advice on what form the Trust should take and how to choose its aims and objectives. SD provided all the legal costs of setting up the Trust and small start-up grants to cover room hire, advertising, printing etc. We agreed on: a name for the trust; where and how often to meet; the role to be taken by each member; and the date of the all-important launch meeting. In our total naivety we opted for 23 January 2003 (66 days later). We also decided to write to all 276 Posh shareholders, asking them to donate or sell their shares or gift us their proxy voting rights.

From that point on we had to apply to the Financial Services Authority to register as an Industrial and Provident Society – i.e. a totally democratic and transparent body, just like the Co-op. We would have to submit annual returns; members would have limited liability; and the full force of the law could be brought to bear on anyone who misappropriated the funds. Matthew Holt told us all about CFSS (the trust at Chesterfield), who expected a long haul to acquire a small shareholding in their club, but six days later owned the club!

After obtaining useful advice from Trust STFC [Swindon Town], the group decided at its third meeting on 18 December to postpone the launch until Monday, 10 March 2003, thus giving us

more time to set up a first-class event. We designed an application form and agreed on an annual subscription of £10 (£1 for juniors). Meanwhile, as the saga of the Posh takeover continued, we started to make contact with the existing owner and potential purchasers of the club, in order to build our profile.

Initially we received 45 replies from shareholders with promises of 46 shares and 27 proxies. Since Mr Boizot owned 99.6% of the paid-up shares, we would not have a significant holding, but at least we could attend AGMs and EGMs and ask questions once the shares were transferred to the Trust.

2003: Launch Meeting. Posh changes hands. Seat on Posh board.

The working group planned to start recruiting members at a 4th round F A Youth Cup tie against Manchester City on 22 January, but first we were thwarted by the club's failure to open part of its facilities and then – contrary to what had been promised – supporters were prevented from entering the bar in which we had set up a membership desk. This episode persuaded us to change the Launch Meeting venue from the club (capacity about 250) to much larger premises elsewhere. While still acquiring raffle prizes and auction items and also engineering personal appearances by current and former Posh players, our next task was to sell tickets to the Launch Meeting. We gave ourselves a month to do so, the main opportunities being home games against Cardiff, Stockport and Wigan. The first of these was postponed owing to a frozen pitch and the second only went ahead after two inspections! So we had to redouble our efforts to sell the tickets.

The Launch Meeting was eventually held on 10 March at The Cresset, Bretton. Over 300 supporters were joined by the entire first and youth team squads, coaching staff, and manager Barry Fry. Fans heard some stirring rhetoric from representatives of the Chesterfield and Cambridge trusts, and our acting chairman Leigh Porter spoke of his aspirations. Supporters were also given the opportunity to put questions to former Posh stars, including Steve Welsh, Lee Howarth and Peter McNamee. The highlight was undoubtedly the comedy double act of Jack Carmichael and Tommy Robson.

A vote to give the steering committee a mandate to continue to the first Annual General Meeting was carried unanimously. Finally, supporters were given the opportunity to bid for an impressive range of football memorabilia, plus gifts generously donated by former players, including England goalkeeper David Seaman. Some bold bidding by the Posh manager helped to take the total raised over the £2,000 mark.

By this time Posh had been on the market for 18 months and the threat of administration or demise by asset-stripping was becoming stronger by the day. The Trust steering committee kept pace with an ever-changing situation by talking to the existing owner and various potential

buyers. But subsequent events proved how much the football world is a roller-coaster. A week before the end of the season the club was bought by long-standing director Alf Hand and manager Barry Fry. It was later discovered that the deal had been underwritten by Mr Fry's close friend Colin Hill. Five months later it was announced that Mr Fry had "bought out Mr Hill's interest". However, the mechanics were that the ownership of the stadium and the football club had been split respectively between Peterborough United Holdings Limited (controlled by Mr Hill) and its wholly-owned subsidiary, Peterborough United Football Club Limited (controlled by Mr Fry). In a deal that was for some time shrouded in mystery, the club would pay a peppercorn rent for the use of the stadium for ten years. However this was achieved, there was a covenant requiring (a) that the site be used for sporting purposes and (b) that the City Council have the first option to buy it back if the club went out of business or wished to dispose of the ground.

The highlight of the Trust's year was the moment when, on 1 November, having held a press conference to announce that he had bought the football club from Colin Hill, Mr Fry invited our Chief Executive, Leigh Porter, to be his first directorial appointment on the Posh board. It was made clear to the club that the Trust's representative would have to stand for re-election as the supporter-director each year. At 27 Leigh became one of the youngest football club directors in the country.

Meanwhile the Trust, which by now had 500 adult and 130 junior members, built up its profile. It combined with the Supporters' Club to arrange a successful open day; it established a squad of ball boys (and one girl), obtaining sponsorship of the kit from a firm of solicitors; it negotiated a wide range of discounts with more than two dozen local businesses to provide tangible benefits to new and existing members; then to help the club save money, at the invitation of PUFC, it took over the running of the club shop on match days. In addition the Trust became more active in its fund-raising activities, including: the sale of books, football programmes and other merchandise; a balloon race; an annual New Year's Eve party; bucket collections; raffles etc.

Soon after joining the board Keith Jennings, who had been a purchasing manager in his working life, proposed that the Trust should offer a unique selling point to its members: discounts on goods and services from local businesses. By using their membership cards members could save more than their annual subscription. From then on, in his capacity as business development director, Keith proceeded to negotiate deals with a wide range of firms in the Peterborough area and has been adding to the list ever since.

2004: Gold Bond. Membership of professional organisations. Links with other trusts.

Towards the end of 2003 the Trust had launched an appeal to raise funds for new floodlights at London Road. By means of bucket collections, a New Year's Eve party and a balloon race, the Trust raised £2,000 and handed a cheque to Posh, in exchange for 1,000 shares in the club. This brought the Trust's holding up to 1,390.

In January the Trust introduced the 'Gold Bond Super Draw', which gave Posh supporters an opportunity to win big prizes and simultaneously raise funds for the Trust. The brainchild of Walter Moore (later to be appointed a director of the Trust), Gold Bond rapidly became its principal source of income.

Oakham Ales, Brewery Tap and Charters sponsored the newsletter for the first time, a relationship that has continued ever since.

The Trust began to forge strong links with other trusts in the East Midlands by attending regular meetings at venues all over the region, usually in football club boardrooms. The exchange of news, views and ideas became vital to our own development and, since a representative of Supporters Direct always attended, we also obtained legal, financial and other advice at first hand. At the Supporters Direct Annual Conference and various regional seminars we listened to eminent speakers from the football world, the legal and accounting professions and other fields, thus expanding our knowledge and understanding of issues relating to the governance of football clubs and the supporters' trust movement.

When Steve Cooper died suddenly, only 12 years after scoring the memorable goal at Huddersfield that propelled Posh to the division 3 play-off final at Wembley, the Trust, supporters' club and PISA organised a bucket collection to raise funds for his family and agreed to arrange at a later date a friendly match at London Road.

At the Trust's second AGM in October Peter Lloyd took over the chairmanship, while Leigh Porter remained as Chief Executive and of course the Trust's representative on the Posh board of directors.

Although the ownership of the football club had changed in September 2003, it took well over a year for the Trust to obtain from Companies House and other sources the relevant documentation. It took Peter Lloyd and other board members many months to conduct a forensic examination of the papers in order to understand the highly complex structure of ownership and control within PUHL and its wholly-owned subsidiary, PUFC.

We reasoned that, if the football club were to go into administration, the Trust had insufficient funds to come to the rescue on its own. Consequently it was necessary for us to create alliances with a number of local entrepreneurs who might be willing to provide financial backing. The board considered that the best way of promoting the Trust's aims would be to join the

Cambridgeshire Chamber of Commerce. Regular attendance at CCC breakfasts, lunches and other events enabled us to broaden our range of contacts and demonstrate a level of competence and professionalism in the business community.

For similar reasons the Trust joined the Peterborough Council for Voluntary Service and the Anglia Regional Co-operative Society. With regard to the latter, the Trust asked members to nominate its account number when purchasing items from Co-op stores, thus providing another source of income.

2005: Trust stall at fetes, Beer Festival etc. Contingency plan.

The Trust has only ever wanted to see a flourishing and successful Peterborough United. Like other supporters' trusts, it considers that fans should have a financial stake in their club and be able to contribute towards its welfare. In recent years supporters' trusts have either saved or resurrected many football clubs – Exeter City, AFC Wimbledon, Brentford and FC Halifax come to mind, among others. Given that the Trust was born when the future of PUFC was in doubt, it has always been one of our principal *raison d'être* to be in a position to step into the breach if the club folded. Although this has sometimes been misinterpreted as a desire for the demise of the club, the Trust board and members have, despite setbacks such as losing its seat on the PUFC board, always supported the Posh from the stands or terraces and provided unpaid practical and financial assistance in many ways.

On 1 May at London Road the Steve Cooper Family Fun Day provided, amongst other attractions, three separate football matches, including the Wembley '92 team versus a Sky TV celebrity side. All proceeds went to the Steve Cooper Memorial Fund.

Yet another income stream was established when we set up an on-line shopping account, Buy at the Posh Trust.

Since one of its aims was to promote the game of football in the community, the Trust decided to sponsor the under-7 competition at the annual Yaxley Festival of Football. It would be hard to forget the first appearance of the Trust's stall at an event: a handful of Trust directors turned up, including our treasurer, Richard Bellamy, who had kindly agreed to lend his gazebo. This could be erected "by a couple of people in thirty seconds", or so he claimed. Half an hour later, after battling against a gale force wind carrying dust from the fens, half a dozen of us gave up in despair, but after much hilarity! Thereafter, once we learned how to erect the gazebo, our stall became a regular feature at fetes and other events for the sale of merchandise, programmes and books, but most importantly for meeting fans and spreading our message. Our most ambitious foray was the annual Peterborough Beer Festival, which required us to man a stall for

all five days; there were plenty of volunteers, who enjoyed meeting members, other Posh fans and supporters of different clubs to “talk football” in convivial surroundings.

The Trust was particularly conscious of the need to prepare detailed contingency plans for implementation if Peterborough United folded. From our discussions with other supporters’ trusts we knew that extraordinary efforts would have to be undertaken, often within limited time constraints, to galvanise fans, raise large amounts of cash and negotiate with administrators, the local council and other businesses. This would require a substantial amount of planning, most of which would need to be finalised long before a crisis happened. Consequently the Trust built a huge database of contacts (national and local media, local government, potential investors, legal and financial advisers, fans who could be relied on to help, former Posh players and officials etc), plus ideas for fund-raising campaigns, venues for public meetings, prime advertising sites, actions to be taken etc.

2006: New Moy’s End stand (plus flats). New owner for PUFC.

Three years after acquiring London Road Stadium, Peterborough United Holdings Limited (the parent company of the football club) made a move. In March the Trust learned that PUHL had submitted a planning application to build a new stand at the Moy’s End and, directly behind it on the site of the car park, 135 flats. It was obvious to the Trust board that, apart from the new stand itself, the football club would not benefit from the development, unless the Trust, on behalf of the supporters and the club, made its views known.

After studying the plans in great detail, we lobbied the local and national press and had meetings with city councillors, planning experts and property professionals before submitting our own detailed submission to the planning committee. Whilst being in favour of the development *in principle*, we recommended that:

- (1) the profits derived from it could facilitate the funding of a youth football “centre of excellence”,
- (2) parking facilities for elderly and disabled supporters should be safeguarded, and
- (3) the new stand could provide a range of facilities for the local community.

The meeting of the planning committee was originally arranged for 25 July, but was postponed three times in 2006.

In recognition of his sterling work in connection with the Gold Bond Super Draw, Walter Moore was appointed to the Trust board.

When Sky TV made a series of “behind the scenes” programmes about PUFC, fronted by Ron Atkinson, the Trust declined to participate on the grounds that interviews could easily be distorted in the editing process. Viewing of the first few episodes persuaded us that our decision had been very wise.

Soon afterwards a “white knight” charged into London Road in the form of Irish property developer Darragh Macanthyony, who purchased the football club shares. The Trust met the new chairman in December and was encouraged by his ambition to make Posh a “community club”. For our part we compiled a wish-list, including *inter alia*: a re-launch event; a fans’ day; the appointment of a community director; a Posh museum; match-day ticket sales outside Peterborough; a campaign to attract new fans to the club; better use of the Family Stand concourse; and a share save scheme (as pioneered at Glasgow Rangers, enabling fans to buy around £600 worth of shares in the club over a period of five years).

2007: Moy’s End planning inquiry. “Posh Smile Tickets” initiative.

Soon after acquiring the club Darragh Macanthyony made an offer to buy the ground for £4m, but this was rejected by PUHL, who wanted £12m. As a result the chairman withdrew his offer and started to search for a site for a new stadium. Meanwhile the Trust board continued to monitor the proposed Moy’s End development.

In July six representatives from the Trust (including our own planning expert) attended the two-day public inquiry into PUHL’s application for planning permission. They felt truly sorry for the planning inspector as he struggled to understand the ownership of the club, the relationship between PUHL and PUFC, “A” and “B” shares, and where Colin Hill and Darragh Macanthyony fitted into the equation.

In his submission on behalf of the Trust Barry Bennett made a number of telling points, including the following:

- The development proposals provided only four parking spaces for disabled drivers.
- Whereas PUHL had always claimed that the new stand “would not cost PUFC a penny”, the Trust had discovered that the cost of fitting it out – i.e. providing fixtures, fittings, toilets, handrails and 2,000 seats – would amount to £1.015m. Not even PUFC had realised this.
- There was a danger that the developers could demolish the existing Moy’s End stand, erect the flats but fail to build the new stand, leaving Posh with a three-sided ground. Therefore, we recommended that the development should only be allowed if the stand were completed before any residential occupation took place.

- The arrival of a new chairman keen to build a completely new stadium meant that the new stand could conceivably be redundant within 2-3 years.

Two months later the inspector granted outline planning permission for the development, crucially subject to the stand being completed *before* the flats were occupied. But the prospect of a new stadium elsewhere in the city rendered the whole Moy's End issue academic for some time.

The Trust was proud to launch the "Posh Smile Tickets" scheme, allowing local community groups and disadvantaged fans to apply for free tickets to Posh home games. Whilst donating £500, the Trust also sought donations from interested parties. The first recipients were four children nominated by John Fox, the secretary of the Rudolf Fund.

2008: Trust Bus. New Posh Fans Initiative. Meetings with PUFC.

In another new initiative the Trust put on a bus service to the first home game of the New Year, serving fans from St Ives, Huntingdon, Chatteris, Doddington, March and Whittlesey. The experiment was repeated at later matches, but, despite a fare of only £5 a seat, it did not prove popular enough to warrant a regular service.

For some time the Trust had been monitoring an initiative taken by CFU, the Cambridge United supporters' trust, to attract new fans by "blitzing" housing estates with the offer of free tickets to a forthcoming home match. It had been found that the scheme was very popular and a significant number had become regular fans. Towards the end of the 2007/08 season, with the full co-operation of PUFC, the Trust launched its New Posh Fans Initiative. About two dozen volunteers delivered leaflets to houses in the Orton with Hampton ward of the city, offering a total of a thousand tickets to the Posh v Stockport County match, subject to a limit of six tickets per household. The response was overwhelming, with demand exceeding supply only four days after the leafleting. Since the tickets were provided free of charge by PUFC, the cost of leaflets and postage was covered by sponsors and the legwork was done by volunteers, the scheme did not cost a penny. It proved so successful that it has since been repeated numerous times. Furthermore, all those who received a free ticket are on a database, enabling the Trust to make contact with them again in the future.

The first monthly meeting took place between Bob Symns of PUFC and the three supporters' organisations.

At the Trust AGM Peter Lloyd resigned as chairman after four years in the post, to be replaced on a short-term basis by Tony Griffin.

The Trust decided to recognise the efforts of Posh players in the local community by awarding a Player Community Trophy. The first, very worthy recipient was Aaron Mclean.

2009: Wheelchair Enclosure. Success of New Posh Fans Initiatives.

The Trust, PISA and Forever Posh shared the cost of building the Wheelchair Enclosure, a shelter for the disabled in the Family Stand. The structure was kindly erected by VP Welding and R A Baker at cost price.

Tony Griffin resigned as chairman, with Peter Lloyd replacing him as acting chairman.

At the end of a second consecutive promotion season Peter Lloyd joined Chris Wayte (Forever Posh) and Adi Mowles (PISA) in presenting, on behalf of the fans, an inscribed crystal glass paperweight to Darragh Macanthyony on the London Road pitch.

The Trust undertook a survey of a New Posh Fans Initiative. Of 125 respondents, 14 had never been to a Posh game before, yet as a result of their experience had subsequently bought 96 tickets for other games, while two planned to buy season tickets. The figures for 89 people who "had been but don't go regularly" were even more impressive: they later bought 766 tickets and seven planned to buy season tickets.

At the AGM in October Peter Lloyd finally resigned after six years on the Trust board and five as chairman, being replaced by Barry Bennett as acting chairman. It was unanimously agreed that Peter should become the Trust's consultant and occasional spokesman. Since then he has been a vital link between the Trust and Supporters Direct.

2010: Council buys London Road Stadium.

In September the Trust joined forces with PUFC to apply pressure on the City Council to eliminate the dreaded prospect of having no stadium in 2013 (when the PUHL lease was due to expire). In co-operation with PISA the Trust played a vital role in encouraging the council to purchase London Road from PUHL when the opportunity arose. Once this momentous decision had been taken (giving PUFC security of tenure at its home of 76 years), attention shifted to the gradual replacement of three stands, starting with Moy's End.

At the AGM the Trust appointed a new chairman, Ady Woolley.

The Trust continued to organise New Posh Fans Initiatives. After the fourth of these events (at the home game against Swindon Town on 16 October) 3,800 new fans had come through the

turnstiles courtesy of the Trust and PUFC. Under the scheme “new fans” receive the offer of a discounted ticket for the next home game, together with a questionnaire that enables the trust to monitor how many become regular visitors to London Road.

2011: New Moy’s End stand. Funding milestone.

When the City Council and PUFC announced the new Moy’s End stand and the STEM Centre, the Trust’s Paul Froggitt began to monitor the development. His first concerns were safe standing and the loss of car parking capacity. Although PUFC declared itself in favour of safe standing, the City Council stated that it had no incentive to pursue the option if the club had not actively requested it. The Trust has resolved to ensure that, when the London Road end is redeveloped, both the council and the club should be persuaded to break new ground by being the first to install this type of facility in this country.

After the resignation of Ady Woolley (owing to business commitments), Barry Bennett finally became the Trust chairman, having served as vice chairman for many years, acting chairman on two occasions, not to mention periods as acting secretary and acting membership secretary.

Towards the end of the year a significant milestone was reached when, thanks largely to the Gold Bond Super Draw administered by Walter Moore since 2004, the Trust’s funds reached £100,000. Whilst such a “war-chest” would not *per se* enable the Trust to take over the club if the present owner ever had to walk away from London Road – arguably not even £1m would be enough for that – nevertheless it would be better placed to conduct an effective “Save the Posh” campaign than it would have been almost ten years ago. And, of course, since then the Trust has more contacts, more knowledge and more experience to call on. As ever, we hope that day will not come, but the Trust is like an insurance company – always ready to take action if the worst happens.

Ever since the Trust was established its board members have only been able to gain entry to the football club’s AGM through its own shareholding and by obtaining proxies from members or other wellwishers – an administrative inconvenience. When the former PUFC chairman Bill Wilde died he left 500 shares. At the club’s suggestion, these were purchased by six members of the Trust board, thus giving them all automatic entry to AGMs. If these individuals wish to sell them in the future the Trust has the first option to buy.

In its tenth year of existence the Trust works as hard as ever to support the football club and its fans. Those who attended the inaugural meeting in 2002 would have been euphoric to be told that, ten years hence, Posh would be a Championship club.

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