Who Wants It?

Colin Ward and 'Chubby' Chris Henderson

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Forget what you've read in the papers or seen on the TV – and that's plenty.
This is the true, uncut story of what being a Chelsea Headhunter was really about, as told to Colin Ward by Chris Henderson.

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INTRODUCTION

ONE GROUP OF FOOTBALL FANS, the Chelsea Headhunters, has assumed mythical status to other fans. To this day, the mere mention of their name strikes fear into many citizens. Chris Henderson formed the Chelsea Headhunters as well as the band Combat 84, the antithesis of middle-class England with its raw, uncut punk lyrics and affiliation to the philosophy of George Orwell. While the band never achieved lasting fame, the same cannot be said of the Chelsea Headhunters, who earned a reputation as the most dangerous thugs in Britain and were seen, along with the ICF, as the most feared in Europe, with governments taking an interest in them. After Stephen 'Hickey' Hickmott's shock jailing in 1986, Chris took on the mantle of organising a small group of Chelsea fans who travelled to matches by luxury coach. This style epitomised the travelling domestic fan who also tended to travel extensively abroad with England in the mid-1980s. No more British Rail Specials or budget coach journeys – this was the era of designer dressing and designed violence. Old meeting places were reinstated and flare gun and gas attacks were played out to a backdrop of the new post-punk music scene.

Chris and his gang were part of the second wave of high profile mass arrests, and their show trial was engineered to be the crowning glory of Thatcher's corrupt and systematic squashing of football hooligans once and for all. But it was the dramatic collapse of this trial that sounded the death knell for the undercover police operations and indiscriminate arrests and jailings.

Violence surrounded the Chelsea fans long before Chris Henderson came on the scene, but the media interest in the sinister reputation of the Headhunters made all those associated with the game public enemy number one. This is the captivating story of the era of music and football, when the way you looked counted as much as how you performed.

REVELLING IN IT

THE HUGE SCRAPBOOK WAS LAID OUT across the living-room table. The colour of the newspaper cuttings with their curled-up edges had long since faded and yellowed. The words shame, scum, disgrace and, with time, animals headed every article, almost as if those written about were not real people at all, but actors performing a role. As each page was turned, the musty smell of old newspaper stored too long in a winter loft wafted around the room. The jubilant defiance of youth shone out from every page. The cuttings depicted other times and places, many different fashions, but the actors had the same faces, only now they were older. Age hadn't diminished their influence or their place in history; nothing could do that.

Even now, as the pages were slowly turned, those reading the clippings laughed at the antics described and felt the same buzz as dramatic headlines were relived – mass anarchy, the end of a football match transformed into a pitch invasion, a fight, a kick in the head; preferably his, not yours. Nothing had changed. The headlines still shocked after 20 years. Youth culture was ever thus: measuring yourself against somebody else. In the case of hooligans, the tradition of going up against other firms would never change, even if the faces did.

Now the boys had received a wake-up call of monumental proportions. There wasn't one of them who didn't breathe in sharply when they heard the sentences. Life, ten years. Along with the pain came a condemnation from the Ministry (the media and conformist society in general) and a pat on the back for those who had dished it out. This wasn't some

petty skirmish outside the Fulham Broadway tube where a few guys ran and left the others to take a kicking. No – this was a lights-out Iron Curtain call of 1945 proportions. ‘You’re not telling us we’re telling you, we are the mob and we’ll chase you until there’s no breath left in your body, then as you collapse on the floor we’ll give you the full Monty attack.’ Not just the main faces, but every last one who’d dared to even be there observing. In the end, the guys who were going down were real bodies, first-class mates – not arseholes from somewhere else who deserved it – we knew and drank with them.

Every one of us could recount at least one tale of our exploits together. For years, there had been nothing but the firm and our mates and the belief that people who stand together are looked up to. We were lads, free to wander and enjoy ourselves in station concourses, mean, uncompromising, dirty streets and favoured drinking haunts, nodding acknowledgements to our mates.

The Ministry had spent years telling us our days were numbered, that something had to be done, but who could do anything? Weren’t we unstoppable? While they preached our demise, we laughed at their temerity to suggest that we were living on borrowed time. Now they were shutting the prison doors on the lads faster than we could run.

The graffiti ghosts of the 1970s who had proclaimed George Davis innocent of armed robbery from every bridge in London were needed again, yet everywhere the faces shook their heads, threw up their hands and cried *en masse*: go on you shitters, become spectres entering a twilight world of fear and loathing. Eventually a familiar face might emerge from the shadows, as if those who were imprisoned were calling upon you to make a stand.

We couldn’t hide – the siren call of combat was too strong for us, beckoning us forward. We weren’t tied to the mast as Ulysses was. All we could do was ask ourselves who ‘they’ were, whether they would be waiting and what they had in

store for us. If there was no hiding place. For years now, the Ministry had barked out their propaganda; that the politicians had all the answers while we shouted that Queen Victoria was alive and manning a market stall down Petticoat Lane – silly quotes from sillier old bastards. Well, now we'd better start believing them.

Paul Scarrott was a nutter in every sense of the word, undoubtedly two beers short of a six pack. He was completely barking long before the Ministry dubbed him England's public enemy number one. Scarrott was old school, and had been around long enough to still sing the Middle of the Road-derivative song: 'Oh Tweedle Dee, Oh Tweedle Dum; We are the Forest and we never run'. With his little moustache adding definition to a lived-in face and NFFC (Nottingham Forest Football Club) tattoos, including the word FOREST tattooed inside his bottom lip, he looked rough, yet despite his strong physique he was harmless in everyday life and completely useless in a row, although he worked as a bouncer in and around Nottingham and was a legend.

Scarrott never ran, usually because he was too pissed. His sole aim in life seemed to be to lay waste to Europe's drink stock and get himself arrested or punched out by our continental cousins. His reasoning was simple: 'We hate anyone who isn't British. They're scum and we let them know it.' Scarrott, like many other fans, used the word 'we' to describe his culture. While Scarrott wasn't the main protagonist, he became one of the most visible exponents of the soccer violence culture for many years – the *bête noir* of the *Daily Mail* and anti-Christ of the reasoning middle classes. In 1981, Scarrott tagged along with a group of Chelsea fans travelling to Switzerland. No sooner had he got off the ferry at Ostend than he walked across the road, picked up the nearest bicycle he could find and threw it through a shop window. 'You're all fuckin' collaborators,' he

shouted. ‘Pseudo-Germans, sit on your arses waiting for the English to liberate you.’ Then, calm as you like, he strolled back across the road as if nothing had happened.

Everybody wanted a pound for the amount of times Scarrott had felt the lash of a police truncheon, for the call of Europe, be it Nottingham Forest or England, was too much for him to resist. Even when he stayed at home, controversy and bad luck dogged him. During the 1986 Mexico World Cup, he had ordered a Chinese takeaway while watching the early group matches. When England conceded a goal, he threw his plate of food straight out of the window and happened to hit a passing pedestrian. Arrest and infamy – the only football hooligan arrested for a solo assault from his front room. ‘LOCAL SOCCER THUG KNOCKS OUT OLD LADY’ was how the press described it.

‘I can’t handle it any more,’ he once said when he came back from yet another police beating, this time in Belgium while watching his beloved Nottingham Forest play Anderlecht, where he’d thrown the beer bottle he was drinking from at an Anderlecht player and hit him. The locals shouted their displeasure, then ran over and gave him a kicking, while the local police watched until he’d received a decent punishment then dragged him out, arrested him and for good measure gave him a welting across his back. They produced him in court the next morning complete with dried bloodstains on his shirt. He received a six-month sentence.

‘Poxy Belgian wankers, no bloody gratitude to us English. It was their fault for selling me beer inside the ground.’

Every time he was released the tabloids hounded him and he never failed them. ‘Wankers. Ungrateful foreigners. Thick Froggies, that’s what those Belgian tossers are. Now get out of my way, I’m off to soak my bruises in beer from the inside.’

‘Why did you do it, Mr Scarrott?’

‘Went to Europe for a good time, had a sing-song while I got pissed with my mates and fellow fans, threw up then supported my team and somehow got into a scuffle. English people are born with natural courage. We have to charge, it’s in our nature,’ he would argue at the reporters who would nod in agreement, creaming their pants because they’d got their soundbite and a picture of a grinning unrepentant Scarrott, then walk away to slaughter him in print, even though his logic was so compellingly true that everybody who read it secretly nodded before tut-tutting and condemning Mr Scarrott.

Any reporter who wanted more or tried to look beneath the veneer of drink and a good time was always disappointed because that was it. The whole story could be told in two lines and was so bloody resonant that it didn’t need any more added. A psychology thesis: Scarrott, PhD in drunken hooliganism. In another age, perhaps a few centuries ago, he would have been revered as a hero, fit to sit alongside Sir Lancelot. Now his reward was repugnance, making him so reviled that he received a banning order from every Watney Coombe Reid public house in Britain. Drink and football, what a combination. As Scarrott summed it up: ‘I’ve never met anybody who refused to serve me when I’m sober, they only refuse you when you’ve spent 50 quid and filled your boots. They sell you wobbly juice all day then wonder why we go bonkers.’ As a thesis for a master’s degree it may have lacked depth, but for lads like Scarrott it made perfect sense. While we nodded in agreement the rest of England shook their heads, pretending that the beasts within them were tamed and under control.

Back in Nottingham, Scarrott was a well-known character and his local landlady in The Fountain public house, Pauline Clay, was quoted as saying that she loved him because he was charming and polite. His girlfriend was well spoken and he had a small coterie of good mates. The expression ‘football fever’ aptly summed up Scarrott, like anyone else

who ever invaded foreign soil in support of their country. Add beer to Scarrott, light the blue touchpaper, then stand back.

By the time he had his finest hour in 1988 at the European Championships, getting deported from Germany and as a result being tagged the looniest hooligan in Britain, he had been jailed on 13 separate occasions for football-related violence, including the infamous battle of Hampden Park where he was charged with inciting a crowd to violence.

'What are you supposed to do when 1,000 William Wallaces high on the malt stuff come charging at you – hum "Flower of Scotland" and hope they calm down? Get fuckin' real.'

For good measure, he had a Stanley knife in his pocket.

'Why did you have that blade on you, Mr Scarrott?' asked the magistrate.

'I use it for cutting cables at work, your honour.'

'Six months, with three suspended. Send him down.'

Funny moments, sad moments, surreal moments, which could never translate to the page or the television screen, try as you might. Mates stuck together in a time machine, never growing old. Peter Pan, every one. What do hooligans do in the close season? Like the enigma melted away, the tide receding. Who knew? Nobody cared because once we were off the front page, everybody thought we'd gone away for the last time. Then August came around once again and we regrouped and charged.

As I write, it is already a long time ago, but still the feelings are there: you need only sit in a bar with your mates and back they flood, intangible to everybody else. Seeking them out now is a farce for those who still try to chase the rainbow's end of the thrill, because what we had has gone forever. Some say it's still around, it never went,

but there was never any twilight. One day it was there and the next the fun was gone.

Everywhere we went we were looking for action, something different from what we'd done before, and everywhere it happened. It never disappointed us – what we craved never failed to materialise.

On the grey London brick of the railway near Stamford Bridge at the Kings Road end, sprayed black letters loom straight from the can with the paint dripping away at the edges, not like the graffiti art you see nowadays in the inner cities. 'Elvis is Dead' someone had sprayed, then underneath, in blue and a little neater, 'Yeah, but Eccles is still King of the Shed'. How do you think that made Eccles and the rest of us feel every time we saw it? In the days when graffiti wasn't fashionable, this was a fashion statement which sat alongside the Mary Quant pictures that adorned the King's Road hoardings. Elvis may have been the king of rock and roll, but down here he was only a prince.

To drop into the conversation that you knew Eccles made you special; to say, 'Shit mate, I know Eccles', gave you real hero worship. 'You were with him down at Parsons Green the other night? Wow!' Eccles marshalling the boys, sending them one way then another, hunting down luckless rival fans. There were four Leeds boys with their scarves stuffed down the front of their trousers, pretending they were locals. As if you couldn't recognise the Chelsea football face. Eccles sorted them and took their scarves for good measure, throwing them in a dustbin further down the road. People called him the General and followed him, hung on his every word, even trailed him to the toilet to take a piss next to him. Then your mates would look at you with respect because you saw him in the street and he addressed you by name and you called him back by his real name, Harkins: that was really something. It made you somebody. 'You're two bob,' we all shouted at the opposing fans, doing the head shine sign in thousands to signify what we thought of

them. Everybody else was a wanker, except for those in our group. Another time, another language: almost incomprehensible, beyond belief really.

‘Congratulations, You’ve Just Met the Inter-City Firm.’ Those West Ham boys made the calling card their greatest fashion accessory. They were in the pain and humiliation business, so why not carry a business card? The macabre existence of the cards was confirmed when one was found next to the dying body of an Arsenal fan after a fatal stabbing incident outside Highbury in the early 1980s. But it wasn’t macabre to us: we understood where they were coming from. Calling cards and Fancy Dan names for fans linked together by the love of their team.

But what to do about a name? Everybody wanted a name for their firm, but a name in itself was not enough – you needed the respect that went with it. The ICF inspired respect because they were the main firm, a firm others aspired to be like. For a period during the ’80s they were number one, and everybody measured themselves against the ICF yardstick. Never before in the field of football violence had such a myth been built up around any football firm. They revelled in it, even appearing on a television documentary, earning the eulogies of female *Daily Mail* reviewers who admired their togetherness and family spirit.

Chelsea needed their own name and calling card and after one successful sorting out in the West End, someone picked up one of those freebie newspapers that are littered everywhere and noticed an advert for a group of corporate headhunters: ‘That’s what we are, headhunters, seeking out the main faces of rival firms.’ From one-liners grow legends. The older fans were appalled by our descent into business card violence, but what did they know? They were still Ultravoxed out: dancing with tears in their eyes.

There has always been the feeling in youth culture that it might be over before you had the chance to participate in it. ‘If only you’d been here last season. Now that was a real tear up.’ Then they’d add that the away trip to so and so in ’72, or was it ’74, was so terrifying that they still got the jitters thinking about it, but there was always a pride behind the words, as if it had been the ultimate confrontation and nothing was ever going to better it. But the last punch-up was history. You were always looking forward to what was coming up.

Some Chelsea fans stood panting furiously, while others laid their exhausted bodies on the grass verge. Some stood around as though time were temporarily suspended. The police looked perplexed at the sudden immobility of everyone. It was the culmination of a fist-to-eyeball confrontation, a massive running battle at Wolverhampton which had started in the cavernous underground tunnel. Chelsea had run forward then stopped at the end of the tunnel, turned and gone back in. Those at the front had to fight, as they were getting pushed from the back. As the police regained a semblance of control, sweaty bodies sat on the grass trying to catch their breath, eyes wide open, tongues hanging out as the full force of what had happened in those few mad seconds began to dawn on people. Toe to toe, punching the other fellow in the face with him reciprocating, both sides fighting, the fear of going down and the crush of bodies behind.

‘I’ve seen better punch-ups.’

‘Yeah. Where?’

Then the anti-climax as nothing else happened, just the football and an endless line of thick regional accents hurling abuse at you, be they black, West or North country. Abuse is abuse whatever the regional burr on the delivery. Guys stood alongside fences staring at their opposite numbers,

issuing threats, real or imagined: ‘I’m gonna do you.’ Beating their chests and doing war dances when their team scored. Stupid fans from the north-east taking off their shirts and bearing their chests, sitting there with no shirts on in temperatures just above freezing to show us how hard they were. As if that was going to frighten us after we’d travelled 300 miles to their back yards.

One day, one of the shirtless wonders, with a slight potbelly hanging over his trouser waistband, walked over to the fence separating us. We could see our breath as we hurled insults at each other.

‘See cockneys, we don’t feel cold.’

‘That may be so, lard guts, but we’ll be able to give your belly a good spank before the rest of your team arrive for a hiding. Then we’ll see if you feel pain,’ retorted one of the smartly dressed lads.

After that it descended into a series of exchanges which we enjoyed and they hated because it reinforced the stereotype of the way London fans perceived everybody else.

Everybody experienced the boredom which was associated with the endless delays and waiting around. It seemed as if the police deliberately tried to make it boring for us. Our ethos was to keep moving – if we did there was a chance that something would happen, because then we were in the pole position to start trouble: the police always wanted you static so that they could control the speed of your movement.

The system, at first, was all in our favour because public transport was designed to keep people moving at low cost, enabling large numbers to outmanoeuvre regional police forces. Gradually, though, the greater numbers of police combined with a reduction in public transport spending switched the odds in the police’s favour. By the early ’80s, the days of huge set terrace battles were consigned to the

National Newspaper Library and the beery memoirs of the older punchers. Not that the Ministry noticed, as every confrontation was reported as if it were Hitler's attack on Warsaw with the blue-uniformed Gordons of Khartoum holding the line against total anarchy.

Then the Ministry flipped and for a short time it seemed as though every disaffected youth in England was battling it out on a Saturday afternoon.

Sometimes nothing happened at a match, but every trip was different and it didn't matter where you met, there was always the same edge of expectancy, especially when the big game faces put in a show to augment the regulars. Big matches meant big firms and if the opposition you were going up against were considered first division material (before the days of the premier league), then the old faces would come out of the woodwork.

Amongst these were the Chelsea Adelaide mob, who prided themselves on being *the* big game firm. 'We always show when it counts' was their proudest boast, and it always felt good to look along a line and see their faces. Nashy, Jointy, Muggsy, Skinny Richard, Untold, Kevin and Gary McG. One chilly day in November 1985, Kevin became famous for being made a scapegoat for football hooliganism, but his fame didn't only last for 15 minutes. He was to be blamed for every malaise in Britain and was branded as being dangerous, violent and outside the law by Judge Argyll on the newspapers' front pages. The judge's condemnation couldn't only have been for fighting outside a football match – it surely had to be for something much more, because nobody was killed or maimed by his actions. 'Life Imprisonment You Blood-Crazed Savage Maniac' barked the Ministry. Then *The Sun* added their own little footnote to history, calling Kevin a savage on the front page – the fact that he was of mixed race cut no ice.

One Friday evening, Manchester City in the old second division became known as the big match. To say that the Manchester City boys would be up for it was an understatement. Manchester United might have been known as the Red Army and have loads of game mobs, but Manchester City had a head honcho called Micky Francis, who had established himself as a top boy within Manchester City the way Eccles, Babs and Hicky were the big names at Chelsea, and Bill Gardner and Swallow were known at West Ham. Micky was a half-caste, he'd even given his little firm a fancy name: Cool Cats. In Moss Side they called the police Dibble, after Officer Dibble in the cartoon *Top Cat,* so the name had sprung from that. Some of the Chelsea boys said that they wanted to pull out his stupid, poofy black moustache with pliers, hair by hair.

At the time, both the London and Manchester police knew that this was a must-be-at event and made their plans accordingly. Everybody knew that every train leaving Euston for Manchester Piccadilly would be as dry as the Sahara and that anyone getting off there would be policed to extinction, looking at the inside leg measurement of a police horse while they kept you waiting between arrival and kick off. Getting home with horse dung spattered on your shoes and trouser bottoms was an occupational hazard when you travelled on the policed trains.

This called for a serious diversion, so the boys met early at Victoria then went on to a pub in Olympia for the big meet. Nobody minds taking a detour to make sure they avoid the police planning. The café trade that Friday was brisk and early as plenty of faces started appearing – games like this demanded them. It was reassuring to search out those who were considered game above and beyond the call of duty. The early bird catches the police napping and it's always nice to be one step ahead of Plod at the meeting point.

What a tidy little firm it was. Looking around at the faces, you knew that this was the business crew. A 70-strong Pimlico mob; Kenny Burke; Big Russ; Lewi; Rob Caffrew; Kenny Goodwin and the Mitcham lot; Giles and Skitzy; the lot from Canterbury; Paul Ryan from Ruislip and his mates from Hayes; Black Charlie from Kilburn and some of his lot; Stuart and his Hounslow crew. Most of the coach mob were on board *en masse*, ready for the train journey.

We could have been a thugs' seminar in the lobby of the Grand Hotel in Brighton for a marketing conference.

'Nice to see you, definitely expecting action.'

'Why else would we be here?' replied the lads in unison.

There were no peripheral idiots hanging on, rear steerers as they were affectionately known (You steam in the front of the pub, we'll stand outside and make sure none slip out the side door. Well, thank you very much for kindly offering to watch my back), no communication-cord pullers, seat slashers or smash-and-grab merchants, just serious guys ready to rumble. Micky Francis might have thought he had put together a tidy firm and the word going round the grapevine was that they fancied a go when Chelsea were due in Manchester, but every nutter in south London was here. Chelsea were going to oblige the Mancs.

Boys in the pub were armed with tear gas and smoke bombs, and Salford had his obligatory flare gun. He might not have invented the use of the yacht distress flare, but he had certainly made it his trademark: firing the gun off at 30 paces usually terrified the opposition. One of the lads painted a descriptive picture of the theatrical way he pulled the flare gun out: 'It's like a great conductor producing his baton.' When one of those explodes in the middle of a crowd the sparks are terrifying, and that's from *this* side of the barrel. Salford's best mate at England matches might have been Dave Blezzard, Man City through and through and known as Binman, but that didn't count for anything. Salford thought that the Cool Cats were 'Moss Side sooties' who