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WORKING CLASS FOOTBALL IN LONDON: THE FOUNDING OF THE WEST HAM UNITED FOOTBALL CLUB

Charles P. Korr
The East End of London has a strong attraction for social historians, urbanologists and sociologists.* From the pioneering works of Booth, Masterman, Mayhew and George Sims down to the recent studies of Paul Thomson, the unique character of the East End has been used as an example of a working class community within the context of a sprawling metropolitan center.¹

In a like manner, the East End has had a strong fascination for football writers and reporters. There has been an assumption made over the years that the working class character of the East End - the poverty and the harshness of life there - had combined to create the circumstances in which football became more important to the population than it was in other areas of London. Much of the recent literature on football has concentrated on the working class nature of the game and the corollary to this has been to assume that clubs that prospered in working class districts must have had a special relationship to the community that was not present in more affluent and socially mobile areas of the capitol.²

An analysis of the social implications of football should use the comments of the English playwright and journalist, Arthur Hopcraft:

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No player, manager, director or fan who understands football either through his intellect or his nerve-ends, ever repeats that piece of nonsense trotted out mindlessly by the fearful every now and again which pleads: "After all, it's only a game!"

It has not been only a game for eighty years: not since the working classes saw in it an escape route out of drudgery and claimed it as their own. It has not been a sideshow of this century. What happens on the football field matters, not in the way that food matters, but as poetry does to some people and alcohol does to others: it engages the personality.³

Hopcraft's description emphasizes the strong class element involved in sports in England and describes the development of football in England. However, football in London was atypical of the rest of England. In London the bitter fight over the introduction of professionalism brought class antagonisms to the surface.⁴

In the 4 May 1975 issue of The Sunday Times there was an article that explored the relationship between West Ham United and the East End. "What Wembley meant yesterday to the footballing Felton's of London El³" discussed the feelings of three generations of the West Ham supporters on the day of the Football Association Cup Final.⁵

"The East End has always been a closed shop to outsiders. Traditionally, it has been the most deprived area of London, with a history of cramped housing, poor transport and bad working conditions ... The secret really is that there a great hunger in the area for anyone with vision - in football or anything else."

The emotional loyalty of kids "with little else in their lives" is matched by the feelings of older supporters "that this club's roots are especially deep in the area." An important
distinction must be made between the club as a local institution and the local roots (or lack of them) of the individual players on the team. When an outsider plays for West Ham United he becomes a part of the "local" club and is accepted as if he were raised in the neighborhood. On the other hand, management and administrative staff all have roots in the community. In the words of one seventy-nine year old supporter, "the team has always been local, always ours." 6

This commentary on West Ham United contains assumptions that a social historian should examine and could use profitably. Is there a special feeling between this club and the community, or have outsiders created a view of sports in the East End to fit their own concept of what the working class ought to like and what their amusements should be? There is no doubt that, by 1975, there is a special feeling about West Ham United in the East End. One only has to wander around the neighborhood to see visible signs of pride in the club. This feeling is not recent, nor is it an attempt to be identified with a winner. Over the past thirty years the club has not been very successful on the field, but the level of its support has remained high. Long-time supporters are convinced that the club is a part of the community and officials of the club see this as a unique feature of West Ham United. In talking with supporters, officials, players, and outside observers there are a few phrases that are used constantly to describe West Ham - "a family club," "a neighborhood team," the "pride of the East End." 7
One of the contentions throughout this paper is that the intensity of the feelings about the club and its success did not spring spontaneously as the result of a club growing in the fertile football soil of the East End. Furthermore, even if the club played a working class game and had a working class constituency, that does not mean that its leadership was working class or that its supporters saw their allegiance as a sign of class sentiment.

The importance of the Thames, and the docks, as a source of work set the tone for life in the part of Essex that was usually characterized as the "East End." Dock work was casual labor and it was essential for the dockers to live close by their work. The Canning Town, Tidal Basin, and Custom House areas of West Ham saw the building of a great deal of cheap housing and West Ham became one of the more desirable living areas because the Victoria and Albert Docks had a high rate of employment.

The community that grew up around the docks was socially self-contained. Transportation was bad, and the residents did not have the money to seek amusements outside of the area. Social contacts and recreation depended on what was happening within a short walk of home. The public house was the social center for men, but the idea of the pub-ridden East End was not true - London (the governmental jurisdiction of the L.C.C.) had twice as many pubs per person as West Ham and Liverpool three times as many.

West Ham was, in governmental terms, not in London. It was an Essex suburb. It was not, however, a suburb in the modern sense of the word. It was even unique for turn of the century Essex.
It had become a manufacturing center, containing factories that had emigrated from London. Most of these were offensive industries, i.e., those producing dirt, fumes and chemical residues. \(^{10}\) It was the only local government area in the region where a majority of its work force was employed within the borough. Neighboring areas such as Barking, Ilford and East Ham had become bedroom suburbs for London. The increased clerical and administrative employment in London combined with shorter working hours, and better transportation and falling prices made it possible for more people to move to homes in the suburbs.

Despite the obvious differences between West Ham and the boroughs to the east of it there was something that held their residents together. It was an inescapable fact that they lived in the East - at least as directions were measured from London. In the minds of many Londoners there was little distinction made between the slums of Whitechapel, the working class areas of Stepney and West Ham and the middle class neighborhoods of Ilford and East Ham.

West Ham might appear to be a natural area for the growth of a professional football team. In George Sims' phrase, there were certainly large numbers "or urchins kicking paper balls in the back alleys" of the neighborhood. \(^{11}\) There is, however, a world of difference between recreation, even for adults, and the organized association football that was developing by the 1890's. James Walvin has shown in *The People's Game* that association football did not spring from the working class; it was a development of the public schools which was brought to the people. \(^{12}\) There was a
marked similarity between the "muscular Christianity" of the schoolmasters, games' masters, and settlement workers and vicars who went into the East End and the missionary in Africa who was carrying a different type of religion with him.13

By 1895, when the Thames Ironworks Football Club was formed there was certainly no shortage of clubs in the surrounding area. The Football Association guide listed over one hundred clubs in East London that were affiliated with it. This list did not include many "pick-up" teams that played Sunday football.14

It was estimated that "100,000 men and lads" played the game for some club in London, but the capital was still a backward area in terms of the quality of the football and the organization of the teams.15 London was the home of the Football Association, the governing body of the organized game. The F.A. was founded in 1863 and within five years it had become mainly a London and "Old Boys" group. It was a decade until the London clubs were seriously challenged for the English Cup. In 1881, both the domination of London and the public schools ended. The Blackburn Olympic (described by Gibson and Pickford, the leading football journalists of the period, as "A Democratic Club") came to London and won the Club from the Old Etonians. The Blackburn club contained a weaver, an ironmonger and some players whose occupation was listed cryptically as "football."16 It was this last group whose existence spelled the end of London's hold on English football and gave "the people" in Hopcraft's terms an opportunity to take the game away from the "gentlemen."17
Blackburn and other clubs in the industrial north found the way to succeed at football - to turn it into a craft or a profession. No amateur club would ever again win the Cup. The response of the established London clubs was not to compete with the north, but to play Canute in the face of the waves of professionals who took over the same. The London clubs, dominated by "gentlemen" and "amateurs," tried to stop the growth of professionalism by legislation and, failing that, decided not to participate.

The West Ham United Football Club Limited was registered as a company on 5 July 1900. In its memorandum and articles of association the first objective of the company was "to acquire and take over, or succeed to the concern and undertakings of the unregistered Association or Club known as the Thames Ironworks Football Club." The Thames Ironworks was located in the Canning Town, West Ham. It was the last major ship building firm in London, but by 1900 it was fighting a losing battle with yards on the Clyde and in the north of England. In 1860, the Works employed 6,000 men and by 1900 that figure was down to 3,100. Even at that reduced level, it remained the largest single employer of skilled workmen in the area and continued to compete for large government contracts until 1910.

The driving force behind the creation of the Thames Ironworks Football Club was Arnold F. Hills, the owner of the Works. The club represented a blend of Hills' two major non-business interests, sport and social welfare. He had inherited the business from his father and had joined the Board of Directors after his education
at Harrow and Oxford. He had been the English mile champion and had represented Oxford and England in football. As a young man he had shown his interest in conditions around the Works in a rather dramatic fashion. At age twenty three he moved into a small home in Canning Town very near the Works. He lived there for five years and many years later he wrote that the lack of recreational facilities was one of the worst deprivations in the lives of the residents of West Ham.\textsuperscript{22}

In 1895, Hills vigorously supported a plan to unify the borough of West Ham to the county of London. He pointed out that West Ham had most of the problems (overcrowding, filth) of the metropolis, but its tax base was so low that it could not enjoy the advantages such as good sanitation and open areas for play. In his words, "the perpetual difficulty of West Ham is its poverty; it is rich only in its population."\textsuperscript{23}

The creation of a series of clubs at the Works (string band, football, temperance, drama amongst them) had varied motives, but primarily Hills' belief that fostering a spirit of cooperation was both good business and socially responsible. He also started a company magazine (The Thames Ironworks Gazette) in 1895 as a "fresh link of interest and fellowship between all sorts and conditions of workers in our great industrial community."\textsuperscript{24} For the next twenty years, until Hill was paralyzed by arthritis, the Gazette was a combination of technical journal, company newsletter, popular history magazine, and general local news publication. The lead article in almost every issue was Hills' discussion of an
issue that attracted his interest. Another feature of the Gazette was a summary of the activities of the various clubs.

The football club was formed within the Works in the summer of 1895 and its origins showed little difference from other local amateur and industrial teams. The Gazette had a short notice about the formation of a football club and asked interested workers to contact the secretary, who was a clerk at the Works. The team used a nearby football ground for their practices and matches. The financing of the club came from the members' subscriptions and a small contribution from the Works. A Works' sponsored activity was in line with the policy that Hills had enunciated in the Gazette:

"The importance of cooperation between workers and management."

He was anxious to wipe away the bitterness left by a recent strike, an event he had regarded with sadness rather than triumph or hostility. "But thank God this midsummer madness is past and gone; inequities and anomalies have been done away with and now, under the Good Fellowship system and the Profit Sharing Scheme, every worker knows that his individual and social rights are absolutely secured."26

Hills set up a Central Council to coordinate the efforts of the many clubs, but insisted that the Council not restrict the development of the clubs as separate entities. Hills showed that he was aware that the clubs could serve a purpose beyond building character and wanted every club to "rally loyally around the Central Council ... and thus united ... the social movement which has already done so much will go from success to success.... It will
set the seal upon the business prosperity of the firm and crown the labours of the Works with the laurels of the road, the river, the racing track, the field, and the public hall.27

The first season of the football club was hectic and successful. Its committee had set up fixtures and had entered the club in cup tournaments. More than fifty men had joined the club which necessitated finding enough matches for two teams. In the committee's own words, it had been "somewhat presumptuous" and had entered the premier competition in England, the English Cup. They had no thought of winning the Cup, but there were two important reasons for entering: the competition would test the ability of the club at the same time as advertising the new club and if they were "lucky enough" to be drawn against a good professional club, it would add considerably to the funds of the club.28 During the season there was a move "initiated by the players" to have the governing committee composed of non-players. As a result, "a number of gentlemen were asked to fulfill this important function with the result that it has proved most beneficial to the club."29

The schedule of the club resembled more closely that of a professional team than it did those of the local amateur teams, or other industrial clubs. It had matches against one first division League team and two clubs from the Southern League, the premier professional league in London. The results of the season showed that the team was something special. It held its own against Chatham (a top professional club) in the English Cup, won the West Ham Charity Cup, and did not lose a match to any local club. Before
the season was over, the committee showed its ambition by having the club elected to the newly-formed London League. At the same time, St. Luke's, a prominent and long-established amateur club in the East End, failed to win a place in the new league.

The Secretary of the club had good reason for painting an optimistic picture for the start of the second season. The club had increased its membership and would field three teams. There were thirty first team matches scheduled and six cup competitions. The team added some new players including four first team men from St. Luke's and the Castle Swifts. The former was a parish team, the latter a company club sponsored by the Castle Shipping Line. After only two years, the Thames Ironworks Football Club had become the ranking team in an area that was described as "football mad." 30

The end of the second season saw another development which marked the club off from its local competitors. In March, 1897 Hills made the announcement that he "had finally found" a suitable piece of real estate in the neighborhood and on the sixtieth anniversary of the Queen's accession he would open a stadium with "a cycle track equal to any in London" and complete facilities for football, cricket, and tennis. 31

When the club opened its third season it had a stadium which it claimed "was good enough to hold the English Cup Final, ... smart new outfits," and a complete schedule of matches. The committee also insured the players against loss of wages that might be the result of injuries sustained while playing football. There were also six new players for the first team, none of whom came to
the club from within the Ironworks. An article in the Gazette showed the new focus of the club. The Secretary issued a reminder that any football player in the Works could join the club for 2/6. This "entitles them to take part in practice matches and training on Tuesday and Thursday evenings." There was no pretence that the new members would be active participants in the prime function of the club - to win matches against first class competition.

Even though the club was the most powerful in the East End and was on its way to winning the London League championship, the Secretary was disappointed. "The support we have received has not been so large as we should wish for, the gates not totalling near the number we might expect and certainly not so many as the quality of the play of our men should warrant." The Secretary could not understand why so many people will go to matches at grounds that "are much less pleasing and where the football is nowhere near as good.... Things will have to improve when people realize how splendid the ground is and good is the club." This appeal was directed primarily at men at the Ironworks. The suppositions behind the Secretary's remarks show what the club had become. It had built on the popularity developed by leading local clubs, but it had no particular constituency to whom it could appeal - it was not representative of any particular area of West Ham and it had only nominal ties with the Works. It had no trouble defeating its local rivals on the field and "was undefeated by any amateur team." (Italics theirs). The governing committee had decided that the way to attract supporters was to give them high quality football,
and by 1898 this meant professional football.

In 1898, the club joined the Southern League, second division and was determined to reach the first division as quickly as possible. The road to the top was made clear by the composition of the club that started the season. It had thirty players, only three of whom had been with the club the previous year. It no longer represented the Works in any real sense. Another significant feature about the new players was that very few had any roots in the East End. There are no records extant of the wages paid to the players in 1898, but it would require an enormous naivete to think that they were lured to Canning Town from professional clubs as far away as Middlesboro, Aberystwyth, and Inverness just to enjoy the sights of the East End.

This newly constructed club won the second division title, but the Secretary still had a dismal report to make in the Gazette at the end of the season.

The only thing needed to make this a success is more support from the men inside the Works. Up to the present we have received very little indeed and can only regret that so many followers of the game prefer to patronize other clubs to the disadvantage of their own (my italics). I hope, however, that next season will see a different state of things.

The Secretary's complaint would be easier to understand if there was any apparent reason why the men at the Works should have thought of the club as "their own."

By 1899 the club had reached the top of the football ladder,
the first division of the Southern League, joining established clubs such as Tottenham, Milwall, and Southampton. Again there was a big turnover in players, only five first team players returning from the previous season.

The club also engaged in a more aggressive ticket selling campaign, using both the Gazette and local newspapers. The price of season's tickets had risen from 5s to 10s in two years, but the club offered a variety of admission plans. Also, for the first time "ladies and boys are especially catered for" with a special reduced price of 5/6 for ladies ("tickets issued to the grandstand only") and 5/6 and 3/6 for boys. 39

If the efforts of the committee to put together a first class club did not have an immediate effect on attendance, it did draw a reaction from Hills. In June, 1899, his article in the Gazette entitled "Our Clubs" was a long description of his philosophy on sports. He admitted that he hoped that successful teams might attract better workers and good publicity to the business, but he did not want to get priorities reversed.

But in the development of our Clubs I find another tendency at work which seems to be exceedingly dangerous. The Committees of several of our Clubs, eager for immediate success are inclined to reinforce their ranks with mercenaries. In our bands and in our football clubs, I find an increasing number of professionals who do not belong to our community, but are paid to represent us in their several capacities. 40

The committee of the club would not have denied what Hills said, but they would not have accepted it as an accusation. They
were trying to build a competitive football club in order to get supporters. Two important words in Hills' comments had to be defined before the future of the club could be secured - "community" and "represent." Hills' position appeared to be that the club represented the community of the Works and should get its players and supporters there. If that were the case, why had he provided a ground that could hold as many as 120,000 people and allowed the club to recruit players and participate at a level that made professionalism inevitable?

Throughout his career at the Works Hills demonstrated a capacity for recasting reality in a form that was more consistent with the way he wanted it to be. By 1899 he saw that the combination of an attractive club with a broad enthusiastic following might not be compatible with amateurism. The "Oxford Blue" won out over the civic spirited sports backer and he drew back from the logical consequences of the club he had started. Once Hills became worried about the drift of the club he pulled out all the emotional stops and described it in apocalyptic terms. Hills concluded

Like the ancient Romans, in their period of decadence, we seem to be willing to be artists and sportsmen by proxy; we hire a team of gladiators, and bid them fight our football battles.... Now this is a very simple and effective method of producing popular triumphs. It is only a matter of how much we are willing to pay and the weight of our purses can be made the measure of our glory. I have, however, not the smallest intention of entering upon a competition of this kind; I desire that our Clubs should be spontaneous and cultivated expressions of our own internal activity; we ought to produce artists and athletes as abundantly and certainly as carefully as a carefully tended fruit tree produces fruit.\[41}
Hills' dilemma was a familiar one at the turn of the century—the middle class missionary who was repelled by the success (or "perversion") and the resultant takeover of his good works. However, in 1905, Gibson and Pickford pointed out the additional problem that had faced Hills, "that none but a good class team could fill the Memorial Grand." 42

The committee thought they were producing fine "fruit"—the combined labors of the best footballers whose "services" could be "retained." 43 In the view of the committee, what the community wanted was not local representatives on the field, but the chance to participate in a vicarious battle that would end in victory for their "gladiators." Clearly, the club could not prosper in the twilight zone of semi-professionalism. It had to choose between becoming a recreational facility for the Works or continuing to strengthen its appeal to the football fans in the local community.

Hills' solution for the problem was a backward looking compromise.

"The clubs of ours have to grow, but let them always represent our own people. It may be necessary, at the beginning, to introduce a little ferment of professional experience to leaven the heavy lump; but even then let these professional experts come into the yards to work as well as to play." 44

It was precisely the "heavy lump" that the committee could no longer afford.

Hills' proposal to bring players back into the Works was made up of equal parts of naivete and, what one contemporary football called, writer in another context called "shamateurism." 45 Hills was
troubled by the same questions that had divided the north of England from the south and had sent public school products scurrying to rugby football as their defense against the virus that was contained by the working class professionals who ruled the playing fields of association football.

In 1900, the Thames Iron Works bought out another engineering company and, in order to raise the capital, the Works became a public company. For the first time, Hills was responsible to shareholders. The Football Club was a money-losing operation and the only way Hills could justify it was by the role it played in the operation of the Works. His comments the previous year made it clear that he could not support it as a means of recreation or building company morale. The question became what to do with the club - to abolish it, to go back to a small company team, or to transform it. Hills' position must have been ambivalent. The club had not developed as he had planned, but it was still the product of his urging and generosity. If he allowed it to go under, it would be an admission of failure. There was also the question of the Memorial Ground. Like the club, its most salient characteristic was that it was there. The Memorial Ground had to be utilized or it would be a mute testimony to the failure of Hills' dreams for the community.

The solution to the problem of the football club was to keep it in existence, but to sever its formal connections with the Works. The creation of a limited company established by some members of the football club committee and other public spirited citizens was
the answer to Hills' dilemma. He did not use the opportunity to run and cut his personal losses, but instead he became a major shareholder and encouraged business associates and his workmen to invest in the club and he gave it the Memorial Ground to use at very favorable terms.

In 1906, Syd King, the Secretary of West Ham United wrote a short history of the club in which he commented on its early problems:

The charge that the club was out of sympathy with the local public was not repeated in 1903. A lot of prejudice had been lived down ... and I don't suppose that any club has had to fight harder for its existence than West Ham United.

King's comments are supported by those of Pickford and Gibson (two prominent football writers) who described West Ham as a club that had dark days despite the local talent that was available. "Indeed there is probably no club in the Metropolis which has experienced the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune more than they.... It was a club that did well on the field, badly at the gate ... and at the close of the 1903-04 season it was not at all certain that the club would continue."

The Articles of Association by which West Ham United was created were subscribed to by seven men, all of whom were residents of the Essex suburbs. Four of them were self-employed businessmen or artisans and three were secretaries or clerks. Two of the latter group had ties to the Ironworks.

The Articles meticulously detailed the purposes for the
establishment of the company, the foremost of which was "to conduct the business of a football and athletic club in all branches" and to promote a whole series of sports including cricket, tennis, bowls, and lacrosse. The company was "to carry on any business which the company thinks fits in with the above and is calculated to enhance the value of the company or to bring a profit to it."

There follows a long series of specific provisions which show that the founders of West Ham United had given serious thought to the management of the club and the ways in which its primary product (a football team) could be used to generate other revenues. At the foot of the articles is the provision that the company is "to employ amateur football players, ... and other athletes, and to hire, employ and pay professional football players ... and other athletes." 49

The capital of the club was £2,000 made up of 4,000 shares carrying a face value of ten shillings each. There was no rush to buy shares. The biggest financial boost to the club was a promise by Hills to buy one share for every one sold to the public. By 1902 only 1,777 shares had been sold and by 1910 less than 3,000 shares had been taken up. 50

In 1902, the first year for which stock records are extant, there were twenty-one shareholders who owned more than ten shares, besides Hills. Ten of these men served on the Board of Directors - ownership of ten shares was a qualification for the Board. With one exception, all twenty-one lived in the vicinity of the club and all of them were self-employed or semi-professional men. There
were ninety-two persons holding shares. The pattern of share holding suggests that many of the first subscribers might have bought a share or two from a friend connected with the old club or that they purchased a share to maintain some connection with the former Ironworks Club.

The Directors had the power to determine the future of the Club. Each year, one third of the Board had to resign, but any resigning Director could stand for re-election. The Board was also empowered to make nominations and it was clearly assumed that this would be the normal course through which men were elected to the Board.

There was to be a yearly general meeting of stockholders, at which there was a report from the chairman and the election of the Board. Voting was by shares, which could have given Hills enormous power. However, he allowed his shares to be voted by the Board. There could be periodic Directors' meetings at which time they could exercise all the powers of the company including the purchase of property, the issuance of stock, the appointment, suspension and removal of managers and secretaries, the investment of funds and the entering into contracts.

Members of the Board were prohibited from receiving compensation for service on the Board. They were part of an organization that had responsibilities which were regarded as a form of public service. Public notice and self-satisfaction were the main rewards to be gained. Directors could enter into contracts with the Club as vendors and suppliers, but the club did not have the resources
to make this a real temptation for a potentially unscrupulous director.

The Club's initial capital was limited, but the first couple of years were relatively successful. In 1901-02 it showed a small profit. The team did well on the field, finishing a strong fourth in the league. The sale of season's tickets doubled for the next year (to 110) and 500 additional shares of stock were sold. However, the next season saw a loss of £151. The Directors were shaken by their first losing season and saw the explanation in the "bad state of trade in the area and the bad start of the team," which had kept attendance below expectations. The big change had not been a fall in the size of the crowd (attendance was almost the same as the previous season), but in a wages bill that had gone up 50%. The following year saw an even bigger operating loss of £793 although expenses had remained constant. The big loss that year had been a drop in season's ticket sales.

On the eve of the 1904 season the Directors had cause to worry about the future of the Club. It had lost £900 in the past two seasons, it had an overdraft of £770 and assets of less than £200. The Club did not have resources or property to secure the overdraft. The local bank that extended the credit did so based on the reputation and word of the Directors - an example of their willingness to pledge themselves to the future of the club and the easy relationship between the bank and local merchants. However, the Chairman gave a promising look towards the coming season and in this instance he was not playing the role of an executive Dr. Pangloss. In the
spring of 1904 the Directors took the most significant decision since (or possibly including) the incorporation of the Club — they left the Memorial Ground and found a new site, the Boleyn Ground on Green Street in East Ham.

The move to the Boleyn Ground had symbolic and practical implications and immediately recognizable effects. The Boleyn Ground was everything the Memorial Ground had not been. Spectators could walk to it from the industrial suburb of West Ham and the residential areas of East Ham and Barking. They could come there easily from Canning Town and the working class areas surrounding the docks, the poorer areas of East London and from the suburbs of Ilford and Stratford because the ground was close to a rail station and the tram stopped less than a five minute walk away. It is significant to note that the front page advertisement in the yearbook was for the West Ham Tram Company. Many of the advertisements were for products and services which hardly could be considered directed to a poor working class audience. Among the advertisers were a local hotel (for billiards, drinks and cigars), a cycle (regular and motor) shop, house agents, caterers, printers and photographers.

There was more than convenience to recommend the Boleyn Ground. Its setting was radically different from the docklands proximity of the Memorial Ground. Boleyn Castle was the site of a Catholic school in a neighborhood surrounded by small shops and pleasant residential streets. In most ways, it was exactly the opposite of the squalid conditions that outsiders usually pictured as typical
of the East End, but it was much closer to the economic and social reality upon which the future of the club would be based.

The new ground also symbolized a visible break with the Ironworks. Even though supporters would remember the "Hammer" roots, the new club was making an appeal as a representative of a wider community. The central location of the ground was another way to play up the "new" identity of the club.

During the first season at the Boleyn Ground West Ham turned the previous season's £800 loss into a £400 profit. There was a small decrease in wages, but this was more than overcome by the 100% (from £331 to £662) increase in expenses for the ground. The important difference was in the gate money which had risen from £2,900 to £4,300. This was accomplished despite the fact that the club had not improved its record on the field.53

Before the season of 1904 the Chairman's report had been a combination of gloom (the past season's problems) and optimism, "with a new ground and new surroundings and with an almost new team, the success that we have long hoped for will at last be ours."54

The Directors were doing something besides hoping. They had raised more than £3,000 in loans and had obtained a new site. The only creditors named in the club's balance sheets were Hills' (£107) and the Thames Ironworks Club's (£85) and both of these debts were liquidated in 1905. The new loans came from the Chairmen, the three retiring Directors who stood for re-election and the new Directors.55 The end of the lease at the Memorial Ground had given the Directors a chance that they did not lose. From 1905 the
tone of West Ham United was set - a team competing at the highest level that depended on quality football to attract supporters, but also a team that physically established itself in the heart of an area where playing football was the usual recreation. The inclusion, for the first time, of local politicians as vice-presidents was another sign of the attempt to solidify community ties.

The club was guided firmly by members of the local business and professional class who were willing to invest some money as well as a lot of time. The Directors' job had turned into a civic responsibility. The local newspapers also responded by devoting more coverage of West Ham than to all other local clubs. West Ham, with roots firmly set at the Boleyn Ground and with new investments in the club, was committed to appealing for support to the broadest possible audience in the area.

A new pattern also emerged on the Board - virtually every retiring Director stood for re-election. They were consistently returned to the Board insuring a continuity of policy, but also effectively excluding outsiders from control of the Club. There is nothing sinister about this - there were (with the exception of one local publican who was nominated for six straight years and never elected) almost no nominations besides those made by the Board.

The Club continued to show an operating profit in every season from 1905 to 1914 and by 1911 the assets exceeded the liabilities for the first time. The first major investment undertaken by the Directors was almost £1,000 to improve the ground and two years
later a staggering £4,000 was authorized to build a new stand and improve the enclosure. The Directors felt that the best way to build greater support was to make the ground a comfortable place, a far cry from the picture painted of the football fan willing to put up with (even to revel in) the hardships connected with attending a match.

West Ham United was cultivating its relationship with the surrounding community, but this did not interfere with the recruitment of players outside of it. Once a player wore the Club colors he was accepted and even the transfer of a popular player did not cause much discontent. The supporters were interested in seeing a winning team on the field. Writing from a different perspective in 1892, Charles Edwardes described the importance of the result of the game: "The British public controls itself under trying circumstances when five favorites in succession lose at Epsom or Newmarket. This is not the case in football between league sides. One group must lose when the other wins." The team on the field at the Boleyn Ground was a recognizable extension of many of its supporters and what they did mattered.

The players lived in the community around the ground and they were not accorded "pop star" idolization. They did not make salaries larger than local skilled workers, and their life style was not different than their neighbors. During the season, "their "job" was of interest to their neighbors, but they could, and did, fit into the normal pattern of local life.

By 1905 almost all of the players were professionals, although
one star of the next few years was an amateur. The professional players all had working class backgrounds and appeared to have no pretensions about their employment. They had made a job out of a game.

The attitude of Charles Paynter, a former player who became trainer, manager and secretary of West Ham is indicative of how respectability settled into football. One of his first directives to the players was that they would wear collars and ties when they left the ground after practice and when they travelled. They were, in Paynter's terms, representatives of something more than a group of men playing football. They were part of an important club and were professional footballers. What had been a demeaning term in the vocabulary of public school amateurs became a term of pride in the minds of the men who played the game. It was a former electrician turned player like Paynter who gave a new dignity to the "People's Game," and with the pride and dignity involved came a set of values too often referred to as "middle class." 58

The values expressed by Paynter are another example of the convergence of lower middle class and skilled working class values at the start of the twentieth century. One only has to look at tastes in clothing and the changes taking place in holiday resorts to see other instances. Of course, the "creature comforts" that were added to the Boleyn Ground, as soon as money was available, demonstrated both an attempt to attract middle class supporters and a recognition of the changes in working class standards.

In the case of West Ham United, the "working classes" did
not "claim the game as their own" if this means their exclusive domination of the club. In a "football mad" working class district the club struggled for survival because there was no reason to watch other men play unless their game was markedly different than local matches. West Ham United needed something more than players and love of football to succeed, it needed money and management. A combination of an "amateur's" generosity and local businessmen's sense of community pride developed the foundation of a first-class professional club. It was not a case of condescension or the middle class using football to divert attention from social ills. There was a sense of cooperation that surrounded the club and its supporters and also a sense of what might be called "role." In this (the formation of the football club), as in so many other areas of English life working class participation was limited to work, either as players or supporters. But at least in this case, the work had an emotional element that turned it into pleasure.


4. The most direct defense of amateurism ("The radical law in every sport, for its own good, is that the professionals in status is subordinated to the amateur") was written by Sir Frederick Wall in *Fifty Years of Football* (London, 1935). Wall was the Secretary of the Football Association from 1895 to 1934. His book makes repeated claims that if professionals are ever allowed any voice in the management of the sport that it will be destroyed. For the opposite view see Gibson and Pickford, *Association Football and the Men Who Made It*. Their opinion was that professionalism was both good and inevitable and if there were any abuses caused by it they were "best remedied by mutual sympathies and proper control."

6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
9. Ibid., 23.
10. Ibid., 19.
18. In 1905, Gibson and Pickford predicted that no amateur club would ever win the Cup again. Association Football and the Men Who Made It, vol. I, 123. This prediction has been correct through the Cup Final of 1975.
19. Memorandum and Articles of Association of the West Ham United Football Club, Ltd., registered 5 July 1900.

21. The last major ship built by the Works was the H.M.S. "Thunderer" a dreadnought which fought at the battle of Jutland.

22. Thames Ironworks Gazette, 1895, No. 7 (June, 1896), 83, and No. 9 (December, 1896), 2.

23. Ibid., No. 3 (June, 1895), 65.

24. Ibid., No. 1 (January, 1895), 1. Another section from this lead article in the first issue of the Gazette gives a good insight into Hills' thinking, as well as a flavor for his prise. "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, such were the watchwords of a Revolution that failed - because the principles they express were trampled underfoot; but they may yet become the watchword of a high and holy revolution, which is securing to the workman his full rights, shall remind him of his responsibilities, and which, linking the kindred interests of Capital and Labour, shall lay fast the foundations of national prosperity."

25. Ibid., No. 3 (June, 1895), 66.

26. Ibid., No. 2 (March, 1895), 34.

27. Ibid., No. 7 (June, 1896), 83. The lead article in this issue, written by Hills, was entitled, "Our Clubs."

28. Ibid., No. 5 (January, 1896), 34. The chance of recognition and a "pay-day" is still the dream of many amateur clubs that enter the F.A. Cup today.

29. Ibid., 35.

30. Gibson and Pickford, Association Football and the Men Who
Made It, vol. III, 86. The phrase, "football mad" was used repeatedly by residents and supporters whom I interviewed over the past two years.

31. Thames Ironworks Gazette, No. 10 (March, 1897), 71.
32. Report of the Secretary of the Club in Ibid., No. 12 (September, 1897), 195.
33. Ibid., 196.
34. Ibid., No. 13 (December, 1897), 46.
35. Ibid., 46.
36. Ibid., 47.
37. Roster of players in the report of the Secretary of the Club in Ibid., No. 16 (September, 1898), 211.
38. Ibid., No. 18 (March, 1899), 284.
39. Ibid., No. 19 (June, 1899), 338.
40. Ibid., 295.
41. Ibid., 295.
43. Thames Ironworks Gazette, No. 19 (June, 1899), 338.
44. Ibid., 295. At the annual dinner of the Federated Clubs of the Thames Ironworks (5 February 1900) Hills proposed the toast. He wanted to "throw out a few suggestions" to make about the future of the clubs: The foundation of the clubs must be young men coming out of the Works, even though some clubs should develop outside the structure of the Works. If a club was to be connected with the Works, it "must always,
substantially as well as in name, be composed of Thames Ironworkers (Hear, Hear)." Ibid., No. 22 (March, 1900), 93.

45. The Football Annual: 1896, 13. The featured editorial was a defense of professionalism. The article pointed out the way in which "amateurs" in cricket and other sports were "paid more than any professional breathing."

45a. Hills' addressed himself to this point in a lead article in the Gazette, entitled "Reconstruction." He briefly described the business arrangements that had taken place and then he talked about the effects of the changes. Until this time, he claimed that his remarks were directed at the workers. "Now I have to address a larger audience.... The Thames Ironworks is a business, not a philanthropic institution.... we recognize fully that our first duty is to make the place pay, even though we may seem to hold particular views as to the best method for securing commercial success." Hills went on to discuss the profit sharing scheme and the eight hour day, two of the "radical" moves he had instituted at the Works. Thames Ironworks Gazette, No. 20 (September, 1899), 1.


48. Memorandum and Articles of Association of the West Ham United Football Club, Ltd., 5 July 1900.

49. Ibid.

51. Ibid., 30 April 1903. The figures are contained in the balance sheet for that year.

52. Ibid., 20 June 1904.


55. Balance sheet appended to Annual Report, June 1905. The information about the loans was obtained in interviews with Mr. Reg Pratt, the present Chairman of the Club and Mr. Eddie Chapman, the Secretary.


57. This point was made in virtually every interview I conducted with long time supporters of the Club and former and present officials and players. Arthur Hopcraft has some very perceptive comments on the "pop star" phenomenon in The Football Man, 13-82. Ian Taylor also discusses it in "Football Mad" in Sports: Readings from a Sociological Perspective (ed. by Eric Dunning), 357-61.

58. This story was told to me by a number of old time supporters and many friends of Paynters, including his son. The story is well known in the local community.

James Walvin is working on a study of working class entertainments and amusements, particularly seaside resorts.
Charles Edwardes includes a section in "The New Football Mania" which describes one view (not his own) of the relationship between football and politics. "Plenty of Timons abroad who regard football mania among the people as a bad symptom.... It's ruining the country. The young men talk of nothing else. Their intellect all goes into football. They can't do their work properly for thinking of it. Never saw such a state of affairs in my life. The lower middle and working classes [my italics] may be divided into two sets: Fabians and Footballers, and, 'pon my word, it's difficult to say which is the greater nuisance to the other members of society." Nineteenth Century, 32 (1892), 630.