

# THE HELLIAR DYNASTY

HAS BEEN THERE EVERY STEP OF THE WAY

**The family tree of club historian John Helliard is inextricably linked to West Ham United. His dad printed matchday programmes for decades, while his great-grandfather worked for Thames Ironworks** DAVE EVANS, WEST HAM CORRESPONDENT

When you look over the lifetime of West Ham United, from its inception as Thames Ironworks to the point it became West Ham, its move to Upton Park in 1904 and now its transfer to Stratford, one thing has been constant.

That is the involvement of the Helliard dynasty. For four generations they have been part of the fabric at Upton Park with John Helliard rounding it off as the current club historian.

Who better to ask about the story of the club?

"My great-grandfather Samuel lived in Silvertown and played for one of the church teams – St Luke's," explained John.

"He was around 35 and he worked as a brass founder at Thames Ironworks.

"When the Thames Ironworks Football Club was founded, he was at the original meeting and although he never played for them, he knew a lot of players and so was invited on to the committee from the very start."

In 1900 Samuel started a printing business in his house and he was not only printing for local businesses, he was also doing some bits for West Ham.

It was a connection that was to last a lifetime.

"I believe he started printing the programme around the end of the First World War when West Ham joined the enlarged Football League Second Division," said John who seems to have a photographic memory about the Hammers.

"He also worked as a turnstile operator as did his two sons, my grandfather Frederick Samuel and Henry William, when they were old enough."

His father Jack even had a connection with West Ham during the war.

"In the army he signed up for the territorials in the Essex Regiment and there were a lot of players in the same unit like Archie Macaulay,

Ernie Gregory, Terry Woodgate and loads of others. Also there was Len Cearn, who became a chairman of West Ham."

So what about John's early life?

"I was born in East Ham Memorial Hospital and lived with my mother and father, but also my grandparents in Ranelagh Road when my father came out of the army.

"In the early 1950s my parents got a permit to buy a bungalow in Upminster Bridge so we moved there when I was about six and after the 11-plus, I went to St Bonaventure's School in Forest Gate."

All that time, Helliard & Sons printers, based where they are now in Barking Road, Canning Town, were printing the West Ham programme.

"From 1946, my father Jack took over writing the programme and when West Ham were promoted to the First Division in 1958, they decided they wanted a different type of programme," explained John.

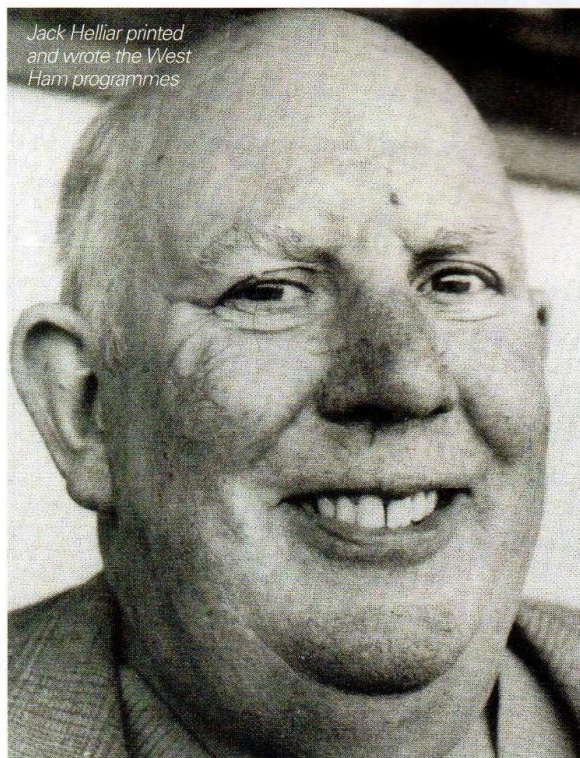
"It was him who designed the smaller type of programme and a lot of people on the stadium tours that I do now, say they still have those little 7x5 editions up in the loft," said John with a wry smile.

So what of John's time watching the Hammers? He was there for it all – the FA Cup win in 1964; the Cup Winners' Cup triumph in 1965 and even the World Cup final in 1966.

He was at the 1975 and 1980 FA Cup victories – basically he was there for every moment of success the club has enjoyed and he waxes lyrical about it.

"When West Ham played midweek matches

Jack Helliard printed and wrote the West Ham programmes





I would come down from school to the print works and go on to the match," he said. "I don't remember my first game, but I do remember matches from when West Ham were promoted in 1957/58.

"I saw Bobby Moore make his debut against Manchester United in September 1958. The story goes that Ted Fenton asked Noel Cantwell who should come in at wing half, Malcolm Allison or Moore, and Noel said that much as Malcolm was a good friend of his, it had to be 'Moore'.

"You always talk about Moore being a great player, but he could be a hard man when he wanted," said John. "I always remember playing Leeds in the League Cup. They were champions and a very hard team.

"Billy Bremner got the ball and Bobby put him into the Chicken Run, clumped him against the boards and you never saw Billy again and we won 7-0.

"That was the night John Byrne destroyed Leeds and he is another of my heroes, as is Trevor Brooking."

The one player who Helliar separates from all the rest though is Billy Bonds.

"He came after the World Cup win from Charlton for a lot of money in those days, but what Bill did for the club epitomises West Ham," said John.

"I always thought that Moore was one of the greatest players I ever saw and I watched his entire career at Upton Park, but I still think Billy was the greatest of all the West Ham players."

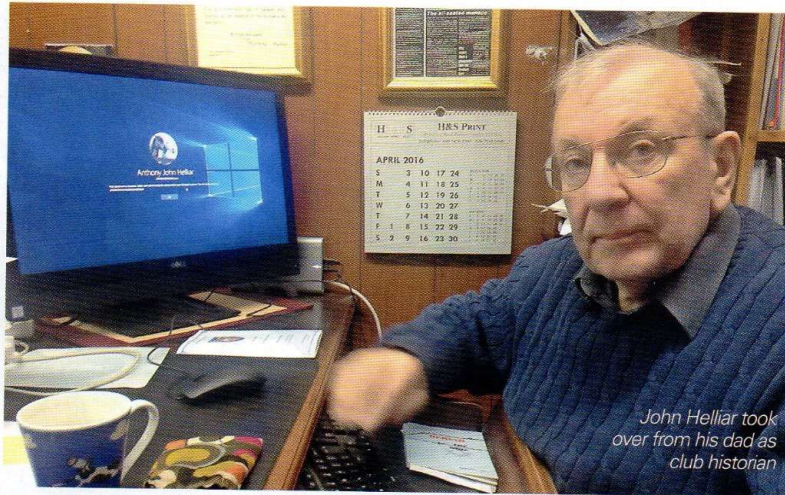
Things did not always go smoothly for he Helliar clan though.

"My father had been writing the programme from 1946 to 1983 when we lost the contract.

"We went over to see Len Cearn's at his firm in Stratford and apparently it was a decision by the other directors at the time.

"Jack Petchey came in and had different ideas, he brought in Brian Blower as a developer and they decided to go with Daybank Press."

Despite that, Jack Helliar continued to write the programme and with his wealth of knowledge about the club, he became the club



John Helliar took over from his dad as club historian

What can I say? I have got so many memories from the Boleyn Ground, it has been such a huge part of my life for so many years



West Ham 1959 programme

historian too, until his death in 1992. "I had been helping him out, so it was only natural that I would take over both as historian and writing in the programme," said John.

"Around 2000 they started doing stadium tours and after the first people they asked stopped doing it, they asked me to step in and I have been doing it ever since."

After a lifetime of being involved at West Ham, will John miss Upton Park?

"What can I say? I have got so many

memories from the Boleyn Ground, it has been such a huge part of my life for so many years," he added.

"The day my wife Betty and I got married, we were playing Norwich City and my father came to the wedding and had to dash off to the ground to complete his duties in the press room before coming back to the reception.

"Our eldest daughter Joanna was born in 1975, the year we won the FA Cup.

"My wife was pregnant again with

Samantha in 1980 when we won the Cup too!"

Son Giles was born in 1982, but John's wife steered him away from the printing business and football.

"It has been a long association with the club," he said. "It is fair to say that there is claret and blue running through our blood."

The Helliar dynasty have seen the Hammers every step of the way and now John will go with the club to the joys of the Olympic Stadium. ♦



West Ham army boys including Jack Helliar and Len Cearn's