Jack and Bobby

A story of brothers in conflict

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Аннотация

The history of modern British football can largely be written through the stories of Jack and Bobby Charlton. Both were in the World Cup winning team of ‘66, and each has remained deeply involved in the game ever since.The book traces the parallel lives of Jack and Bobby Charlton, following them from their schooldays through to the present day.The brothers both played prominent roles in the finest hour of English football, the 1966 World Cup triumph. Each played for the dominant club of their era, and summed up the style of their respective teams.Bobby was at Manchester Utd during their glory days under Sir Matt Busby. He survived the Munich air crash and went on to become a fast, graceful attacker who set grounds alight with his power, speed and athleticism in a team that played free-flowing, attacking football.Jack came to professional football late, working in a coal mine before Leeds signed him. Don Revie’s Leeds side was renowned for its uncompromising and physical style, and Jack was himself a tough, durable and aggressive defender, who once caused uproar by admitting he had a ‘black book’ with a list of footballing enemies who he would target on the pitch.The two retired from football in the same year, and since, the contrast between

them has been marked. Bobby's forays into management at Wigan and Preston were distinguished only by their brevity, while 'Big Jack' took the Republic of Ireland team to an unprecendented level of success, reaching the quarter finals of the World Cup in 1994. Bobby has been a key figure in the ongoing success of Manchester United over the past decade, working on recruiting players and as an FA diplomat.But, despite their continued successes, the relationship between the two has been strained, sometimes barely even polite, and the book will investigate the reasons for this, including in-depth interviews with many of those the two have been in contact with over the years.Note that it has not been possible to include the same picture content that appeared in the original print version.

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To James Perry,
whose devotion to Torquay United should have resulted in a long spell in Broadmoor

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Introduction

The images of that Saturday afternoon in July 1966 have become forever ingrained on our national consciousness: Jack Charlton falling to his knees at the final whistle, his face buried in his hands as if in grateful, exhausted prayer; his brother Bobby crying freely as he climbs up to the Royal Box to collect his World Cup winner's medal. It was a display of emotion that perfectly captured the mood of triumph and relief that swept across the country.

'Nobody can ever take this moment away from us,' said Bobby to his brother as they hugged each other at the end of the match. He was absolutely correct. Whatever else they have achieved in life, the two Charlton brothers will always be best remembered for their part in England's glory of 1966. Indeed, their contrasting roles on the field symbolized the virtues of England's performance during that unique campaign: Jack, the rock of the defence, ungainly but uncompromising, lacking sophistication but never valour, as tough and honest as the mining stock into which he was born; Bobby, the fulcrum of the attack, gliding across the turf like a thoroughbred, destroying opponents with his explosive goals, long-range passes and incisive runs. Never, it seemed, were there two more patriotic footballers, willing, in Churchill's phrase, to give 'blood, toil, tears and sweat' in the national cause.

The bond between the brothers, forged at birth and reinforced by their mutual choice of a career in football, must have seemed unbreakable that day at Wembley. Any belief that they were close to each other can only have been strengthened by a host of other striking parallels about their lives. Both played the game obsessively in their youth and turned out for the same local YMCA side. Both joined major city clubs, Leeds and Manchester United, at exactly the same age, 15, and each won a cabinet-full of domestic honours. In 1965, they became the first brothers this century to play together for England. The links continued after the triumph of 1966. Both retired from First Division football in the same year, after careers of outstanding loyalty – each holds the League appearance record for their club, Jack with 629 for Leeds, Bobby with 606 for Manchester United. Both started in League management in the same 1973/74 season in the Second Division. Later, they both became major figures on the international stage, Jack as a brilliantly successful manager of the Republic of Ireland, Bobby as a roving ambassador for top-class sports bids, such as the campaign to bring the 2006 World Cup to England.

Brought up in a close-knit working-class mining community where the values of respectability were paramount, both have led lives of restraint and dignity. Given their celebrity status – Jimmy Hill once described Bobby, not unjustly, as 'the most famous Englishman in the world' – it would have been easy for either of them to have fallen into the destructive pattern

of heavy drinking, financial chaos and private dissolution that has characterized the lives of too many sporting greats, such as George Best, James Hunt or Denis Compton. Yet there has never been a whiff of scandal about their personal lives, both of them enjoying remarkably strong, happy marriages, as well as becoming millionaires through football and business. As John Giles, of Leeds, Manchester United and Ireland, put it to me: 'I think Bobby and Jack have been great ambassadors for both football and for working-class England, because they have always behaved impeccably throughout their careers, handling fame and fortune in a way that most people could not begin to comprehend. They have never put a foot wrong, never become big-headed or gone astray. There is an underlying decency about them which stems from that background.'

That spirit of honour extended to football, where they were seen by most of their colleagues as hard-working professionals, fiercely competitive by nature, who would never let their side down. 'The great thing about Jack,' says his former Leeds colleague Willie Bell, 'was that he would absolutely never give up. I have seen Jack with blood running down his face and, even then, he would not come off the field. He would never surrender, even when we were down, and that attitude rubbed off on the rest of the team. He was just a great professional.' It is a view echoed by David Harvey, the Leeds and Scotland goalkeeper, who told me: 'It was very reassuring to have Jack in front of me. He was a bit of a Godfather, looking after me really well. He was

so commanding, always shouting at the rest of us and organizing the defence like a military policeman. He always played to such a high standard. His consistency was first class, no matter what the occasion.'

Exactly the same views are expressed about Bobby. His teammate David Sadler says, 'Bobby had a terrific appetite and energy for the game and always worked so hard for the team. He took the knocks, which are part and parcel of football, and just got on with it.' Martin Buchan recalls him as an ideal professional, even at the end of his career: 'He was so utterly dedicated, dedicated to both United and to football. He was a wonderful example to any youngster coming into the game. I remember once, in his last season, he was left out of the team and when he got the news, he did not storm out of the ground, as a lot of other players would have done, but instead put his kit on and did several laps around the pitch, just so he would remain fit. That was the kind of man he was, always working so hard.' It was because of this outlook that both Bobby and Jack fitted easily into Sir Alf Ramsey's England team of the 1960s, where so much emphasis was placed on the work ethic.

Yet, for all such superficial similarities, the really fascinating point about Jack and Bobby is how utterly different they are. Almost every person who knows them says that they are 'chalk and cheese' – so dissimilar that it is hard to believe that they are from the same family. 'The difference between them is enormous,' says Ian Greaves, the former Manchester United

player, who went on to be a highly successful manager at Huddersfield, Bolton and Mansfield. 'You would not take them for brothers at all. I remember Jack in his early days at Leeds: loud, ebullient, down to earth and very, very stubborn. All he wanted to do was party and fight. He was so unlike Bobby, who was very quiet, shy, polite.' Joe Carolan, another Manchester United player, agrees: 'Jack is a different kettle of fish altogether from Bobby. Bobby was a gentleman, whereas Jack would kick you straight up in the air. Jack would never shut up on the field, but you hardly ever heard a word out of Bobby.'

This chasm between Bobby and Jack covers every aspect of their lives, from the playing styles to their political outlook. In truth, it is not just that they are different, but that they are almost opposites. On the football field, for instance, Jack was the Roundhead, Bobby the Cavalier. Bobby's entire game was focused on scoring goals, Jack's on stopping them. Bobby's football vocabulary was dominated by words like creative, opening, expansive and flair, whereas Jack's was filled with terms like keeping it tight and closing them down. A 0–0 draw was a triumph for Jack, a disaster for Bobby. Where Bobby was hailed by international critics for his attacking genius, Jack was seen as the epitome of rugged English defending.

In action, Bobby was lithe and fluent, while Jack was angular and hard. Hardly a soul would pay to watch Jack Charlton play; millions did to watch Bobby. Even the most cynical professionals admit that when Bobby was in full flow, there was

no more beautiful sight in football. In 1969 *The Times* football correspondent Geoffrey Green wrote this famous description of Bobby's approach: 'It is the explosive facets of his play that will remain in the memory. His thinning, fair hair streaming in the wind, he has moved like a ship in full sail. He always possessed an elemental quality; jinking, changing feet and direction, turning gracefully on the ball, or accelerating through a gap surrendered by a confused enemy.' Contrast that lyricism with the words of Bobby Moore about Jack: 'Some days we would be going out and I'd look at him and wonder how this big giraffe played football. We used to argue black and blue because I wanted to get the ball down and play the game and he wanted to hoof it away to safety.' In the same way, Bobby played far more within the rules of the game. During his long career, he was only booked twice, and both of those were in dubious circumstances when he had not committed any foul but was deemed to have shown dissent. 'He was like a giant who would kick anything. If you were in the way, you went with it. He was hard, really hard,' says Tony Allen of Stoke and England.

Jack and Bobby were from the Milburn footballing clan of Northumberland. But their football reflected the two different sides of this family. So Jack followed in the footsteps of his four uncles, who were all uncompromising defenders with top-class clubs, and his great-grandfather Jack Milburn, who was known to local fans as 'Warhorse'. Bobby took much more after his mother's cousin, the great Newcastle and England striker Jackie

Milburn, whose brilliant goals in the 1950s made him perhaps the most loved of all Geordie footballers.

Physically, Jack and Bobby do not look like brothers at all. 'Bobby is handsome, whereas Jack is ugly,' is the rather brutal verdict of former Liverpool winger Peter Thompson. Jack is gangly, 6' 3", thin, with a long neck and telescopic legs and 'looks like a cactus', according to Brian Labone, his England rival for the centre-half position. Bobby is much shorter, just 5' 9", and, when he was a player, he was built like an athlete. 'When we were in first in the dressing room together,' says Bob McNab of Arsenal and England, 'what really struck me about Bobby was his magnificent physique. We worked out at Arsenal more than at most other clubs, but it really impressed me how strong Bobby was. I could not believe what he looked like. Besides his supreme gifts as a footballer, God gave him a great body to go with it.' In contrast, McNab claims that Jack was 'a big, horrible bugger, not likely to win any fashion competition'.

There is just as big a contrast in their personalities. Jack is explosive, gregarious, self-confident, and voluble. A brilliant after-dinner speaker, he loves an audience and speaking his mind. 'He would argue anything with anyone,' says his wife Pat. Forgetful and disorganised, he cares little about his appearance and became notorious in the football world for his untidiness in both the dressing room and hotels.

Every one of these traits is absent in Bobby. A stickler for punctuality, he is always well groomed. Where Jack does not

have a shy bone in his body, shyness is the word that is most frequently used about Bobby. This characteristic is sometimes regarded as aloofness, a charge often labelled at him by some hardcore Manchester United fans of today. In the football fraternity, his occasional reluctance to greet others has caused more offence than his brother's expression of his forthright views. Former United manager Ron Atkinson has even described him as a 'grizzlin' old misery, a dour, very distant individual.' The truth is that Bobby, because of his self-conscious, reserved nature, is wary of strangers and dislikes large public gatherings, much preferring the company of a small circle of trusted friends. Hearing the sound of his own voice is a delight to Jack, an anathema to Bobby.

With his fiery temper and rhinoceros hide, Jack can dish it out and take it much more easily than Bobby, who is sensitive to criticism and cannot ignore a slight. John Giles recalls, 'I would have a blazing row with Jack on Saturday. We would even be grabbing each other by the throat, especially because Jack has a short fuse, and over the weekend I would think about it. On Monday I would come in and say, "Sorry Jack," and he would have genuinely forgotten about it. Bobby would be different. He would take a row to heart, and might not speak for a week afterwards.' Because of his willingness to express his opinions, Jack's career has been littered with public controversies, perhaps most notoriously over his claim, made on television in 1970, that he had 'a little black book' in which he kept the names of his

footballing enemies. It turned out to be a joke, for the 'little black book' existed only in Jack's volatile imagination. But the row did him untold damage at the Football Association, perhaps ensuring that he was never appointed to the England management job he wanted so badly. Bobby, on the other hand, became a standard bearer for the English game, serving as a director of Manchester United and an ambassador for England's World Cup bid in 2006.

Yet the same diplomatic streak meant Bobby was doomed to fail in management when he took over at Preston. Unlike his brother, he did not have the outward strength of personality needed to cope with the endless conflicts of the manager's job. Furthermore, because he was such a gifted footballer, playing by natural instinct, he never had to analyse the game too deeply. So when it came to tactics and patterns of play, he struggled. But Jack, with far less ability, had long been fascinated by systems, and was a qualified FA coach before he was 30. Unlike Bobby, he had no reluctance about stamping his methods on every team he organized. He knew exactly what he wanted, whether it be at Middlesbrough or Ireland, and he would brook no arguments. 'It was Jack's way or you didn't play,' says David Kelly, who served under Jack with the Republic of Ireland.

The gap between them runs far beyond football. They also have completely different interests, with Jack liking country pursuits such as shooting and Bobby preferring the more suburban activity of golf. Where Jack cultivates the image of the cloth-capped countryman, with a gun in his hands

and wellingtons on his feet, Bobby is much more at ease in the director's box, wearing a dapper suit or blazer. Despite the Munich crash, Bobby loves to travel all over the world, whereas Jack is always at his happiest in the fields of his native Northumberland. Bobby is essentially conservative in his outlook, while Jack is a staunch socialist.

This sense of difference goes right back to the brothers' childhood in Ashington. Tellingly, Jack went to secondary school, while Bobby went to grammar school. Again, the separation of pupils along grammar and secondary lines was one of the great fault lines of working class life until the arrival of comprehensive education in the 1960s. Yet, while the gap between Bobby and Jack was undoubtedly exacerbated by their schooling, they were always travelling on different paths from their early years, since they were such very different children. Jack was the rebel, Bobby the conformist. Trouble was an alien word to Bobby. It was Jack's middle name.

And so it remained for the rest of their lives. While on the football field their careers flourished, the rift between the brothers grew in private. This mutual antagonism was fuelled not only by the tragedy of the Munich air crash in 1958, which made Bobby even more introspective and distant, but also by a long-term feud between their closest relatives, which tore Jack and Bobby apart and left them barely on speaking terms.

Given the fascinating contours of the Charltons' tale, it is remarkable that there has never been a comprehensive, joint

biography until now. The only previous book on them was written more than thirty years ago, in 1971, by the New Zealander Norman Harris. Though it provides some compelling insights, particularly about their early lives, it is based entirely on their own testimony and uses hardly any other sources. The shelf is equally bare when it comes to separate biographies. Astonishingly, despite the deluge of books on Manchester United stars – even Dennis Viollet, winner of just two England caps, was the subject of a 333-page work in 2001 – no-one has ever attempted to write a life of England's greatest living footballer, Sir Bobby Charlton, while Jack has been rewarded with just a thin 1994 account from journalist Stan Liversedge. Moreover, unlike Jack, who penned a bestselling autobiography in 1996, Sir Bobby has never written his own life story. Since his retirement as a player, all he has produced is one light book of soccer anecdotes.

It is my hope that, with this joint biography, I will go some way towards rectifying this strange gap in British football literature. No-one can dispute the vast contribution the Charltons have made to the soccer of our islands over the last half century. It is now right that the story behind that contribution should be told for the first time.

CHAPTER ONE The Boys

'If ever I'm feeling a bit uppity, whenever I get on my high horse, I go and take another look at my dear mam's mangle that has pride of place in the dining room of my home. The mangle has the greatest significance. It is the symbol of my beginnings. It serves as the reminder of the days when I learned what life was all about.' These are the words with which Brian Clough, another footballer from a north-eastern family, begins his autobiography, emphasizing how much his mother meant to him.

The mother of the Charlton brothers was an equally dominant figure in their upbringing. Born Cissie (a shortening of Elizabeth) Milburn, she was the classic matriarch: strong, passionate, sociable, and outspoken, as protective of her brood as she was ambitious for them. Her husband, Bob, could hardly have been more different. A coalminer who spent his whole working life underground, he was quiet, dry, undemonstrative, but strong-willed. Indeed, it is striking how, in their personalities, Jack seems to have taken after his mother, and Bobby after his father, though, like Jack, old Bob could be quick-tempered if the mood took him. Walter Lavery, who grew up with Bobby and Jack, recalls: 'You would go round to their house after playing in the park, and old Bob would be sitting by the fire, in his braces, just reading the paper. Cissie would be talking away, asking you all about football and school, while Bob made no contribution

at all. It was not that he didn't like his children, but just that he didn't like the fuss.'

What made the influence of Cissie all the more powerful was the fact that football was in her blood. Her great-grandfather and grandfather, both called Jack, had played for top-class local sides in Northumberland, while her own father – yet another Jack but known universally as 'Tanner' Milburn – played in goal for Ashington FC when the club was in the old Third Division North in the 1920s. All four of her brothers played League football as full-backs: Jack, George and Jimmy for Leeds and Stan, the youngest of the quartet, for Chesterfield, then Leicester and Rochdale. Her cousin, 'Wor' Jackie Milburn, the greatest of all the family soccer stars before the arrival of her sons, won 13 England caps and three FA Cup winners' medals as a striker with Newcastle. It is hardly a surprise, then, that Cissie herself should have become a serious football enthusiast, with an understanding of the game that surpassed most male fans. She often said that she wished she had been born a boy. 'For years, I kicked footballs around the parks and back streets of Ashington with a bunch of lads, usually with my skirt tucked into my knickers,' she said in her autobiography. Bobby Whitehead, who played for Newcastle and was another contemporary of Jack and Bobby's, remembers, 'When we played at school or in the park, there would usually be a few dads around. But there was nearly always one woman there, Cissie Charlton, who would be able to shout more loudly than most fathers. And she would travel with the school team on

the bus to away games. She was so wrapped up in the game and was very knowledgeable about it.'

Cissie Charlton's fixation with soccer might have been rare in a woman in that era, but just as odd was her husband's total indifference to the sport, given its grip on masculine working-class culture in the north-east. Bob Charlton had absolutely no interest in football. He never went to games with his wife, never played and, in 1966, did not even watch the World Cup semi-final between England and Portugal – regarded by many as his son Bobby's greatest-ever match – preferring to work his shift down the mine. The two sports he enjoyed were boxing and pigeon fancying. Like many miners used to back-breaking manual labour, he was a good fighter, sometimes holding his own against travelling professionals who earned their living by touring the country and setting up challenges with local men. In fact, Bob won the money to buy Cissie a wedding ring in just such a bout. Later, he would help train boxers in the area, earning the nickname 'Boxer'. Pigeons were his other great interest. 'I remember old Bob sitting, very quiet and still, by his loft on his allotment, where he kept his pigeons. His conversation was always limited. And he had a catapult with him. Suddenly he fired it, straight up the arse of a cat. Pigeon fanciers hate cats,' recalls Ron Routledge, an Ashington local who went on to play League football for Sunderland. But it should not be thought that Bob had any streak of cruelty. He was actually a soft-hearted man, who felt so sorry for the pit ponies that he would regularly

bring them treats. Once he even purchased one of them because he could not bear the thought of her being taken to the knacker's yard. He was so devoted to the animal, going out at all hours of the night to see her, that Cissie thought he was having an affair.

Bob's lack of enthusiasm for football was particularly striking in Ashington, because soccer and coalmining were the twin forces that shaped the town. By 1930, it boasted that it was 'the biggest mining village in the world, with more than a third of its 30,000 population employed in the coal industry. And coal had a direct influence on soccer, the chief recreation of the town. The Ashington Colliery Welfare ground had no less than seven pitches, catering for three separate leagues and more than 20 local sides, many of them playing to a high standard. The upkeep of these excellent facilities was maintained by a penny a week off the miners' pay. In addition, all the working men's clubs had their own sides. No wonder, in view of such enthusiasm, Ashington was able to produce a stream of League football professionals, such as Joe Bell of Middlesbrough, Jim Potts, the Leeds goalkeeper, and George Prior of Sheffield Wednesday. Perhaps the most interesting case is that of the great Jimmy Adamson, captain of the Burnley championship-winning side of 1959/60 who, like both Bobby and Jack, was awarded the title of Footballer of the Year. Coincidentally, Adamson grew up in Beatrice Street, where the Charlton brothers also lived – I doubt there is any other terrace in Britain that has produced three Footballers of the Year. The eagerness for football rubbed off on

the boys of Ashington, who spent most of their free time kicking a ball around in Hirst Park and then, when darkness descended, continued in the streets, their play illuminated by the overhead lamps. Such games were illegal and could result in heavy fines if the participants were caught, so lookouts were posted at each end of the street to warn of the approach of a police officer. 'Everything in our lives was football-orientated. That's all we were interested in,' says Walter Lavery. 'We were so fanatical that even when the football season was over in the summer, and the council was trying to allow the grass to grow long in Hirst Park, we would still take out a ball, flatten down a patch of grass in one corner of the ground and get a game going.'

Despite the attractions of football, pigeons, boxing and a few pints with mates, it was still a very tough life for the miners of Ashington. The pay was poor, the job insecure, the conditions dangerous. Bob Charlton worked through the 1966 World Cup semi-final not just because of his indifference towards football but also because he was worried about losing a day's pay. In the same way, he never missed a day's work even when seriously injured. Mike Kirkup, an Ashington local historian, a contemporary of Bobby's and himself a former miner, gives this glimpse into the precarious existence faced by miners. 'A miner's cottage was tied to work at the pit. So the colliery owners could always use that as a threat. On one notorious occasion, when 13 men were killed at the Woodhorn colliery in 1916, the notices of eviction went out to the widows within just three months of

this disaster. It was a pretty harsh regime.'

The actual work for the miners could hardly have been more unpleasant. Forced to toil in a dirty, dark environment more than 800 feet underground, they were so cramped that they had permanent scabs on their backs from crawling along the tunnels. Little wonder that old Bob Charlton, who started work in the mines the day after he left school at the age of just 14, once took his second son, Bobby, to the colliery and told him, 'I don't want you ever going down there, doing what I've had to do all my life to earn a living.' But Bobby never had any intention of joining his father in the pit. 'I was determined about that, even if I had to travel and seek my fortune elsewhere,' he once said. What had particularly struck Bobby was the physical legacy of the job. 'You can always tell a miner just by looking at his hands. At first glance, you might just think they were dirty, but when you looked more closely, you saw that they were full of scars, the accumulation of hundreds and hundreds of cuts made over the years.' Similarly, Jack Charlton spent just one day underground as a 16-year-old trainee miner before handing in his notice. 'I've seen it, I've done it, I've had enough. I don't know what I'm going to do with the rest of my life, but it won't be that,' he told his colliery manager when he resigned his post.

Nor were there many financial rewards for a miner's family. Bobby recalls his father going out to work every morning and checking the contents of his satchel: 'Bait (sandwiches), bottle (water), lamp, carbide, tabs (cigarettes),' and adding with a grin

and a tap of his pockets, 'but nae money.' In contrast to their wealthy status today, Jack and Bobby grew up in a small house without an inside toilet or running water. The brothers, now so distant, had, as small children, to share the same bed because of the lack of space. Though Cissie provided a warm home, there were precious few luxuries. Food that we take for granted today, such as pork and chicken, was a rarity then, as Bobby once recalled. 'It was a great celebration in the street when a pig was killed. Everyone came from all over the place and got their little share of it. I used to ask, "Why can't we just eat it straight away?" But I was told that it had to be hung and salted, otherwise it would not keep.'

In the hardened circumstances of the time, the values of family solidarity were a vital source of support. But that is not to say that the Charltons or the Milburns were paragons of domestic virtue. One of Cissie's grandfathers was a heavy drinker who suffered from mental instability after taking a blow from a policeman's truncheon. When he was in one of his more savage, drunken moods, his wife was forced to flee the family home. Her own father, Tanner Milburn, was a selfish, mean, scheming rogue who would rather spend his money on gambling and alcohol than on his own family. A fly-by-night bookmaker, he also trained athletes, who were used as a means of enhancing his illegal profits. His disloyalty to his family was graphically exposed by his cynical behaviour over a major 110-yard sprint in which his own son Stan, a fine local runner, was one of the two favourites.

Instead of backing his son, for whom he acted as a trainer, he struck a deal with the manager of the other favourite, whereby they agreed to share equally the £20 prize money – a vast sum in pre-war Ashington – whichever boy won. After the race, in which Stan came second, Tanner refused to give his son a penny and instead attacked him for his failure to win. Stan was so furious with his father that he threw his sprint shoes in the fire, vowing never to run again.

Cissie and Bob had their own problems. They had married just six months after they first met, at a dance in the Princess Ballroom of Ashington, and had four sons, Jack the oldest, followed by Bobby, Gordon and Tommy. There was a time when they came close to splitting up, since Cissie could find her husband intensely aggravating. 'He embarrassed me, he annoyed me, he argued just for the sake of an argument,' she once wrote, while Bob disliked her boasting and all the attention that she encouraged over her sons. Alan Lavelle, who went to school with the Charltons, recalls that when he was secretary of the Newbiggin working men's club, 'Old Bob used to come in, looking a bit down. I would say, "Bob, what's the matter?" And he'd reply, "I just get sick of everyone asking about wor Bobby. Why can't I just have a drink in peace?"' In an interview with local historian Mike Kirkup, Cissie revealed how close she came to separation: 'There was no such thing as divorce for the likes of us. If you made a mistake in your choice of man, you just stuck it out for the sake of the bairns. Me and Bob were going through

a rough patch and I said to him, "I'm leaving you the minute wor Tommy is 15." Come the day of his 15th birthday, Bob says to me, "Well, are you not leaving then?" "No," I told him, "You've mellowed since then." '

Bob and Cissie's first child, Jack, was born on 8 May 1935. Reflecting her obsession with football, one of her first comments to a neighbour about her new son was, 'Eee, the bairn's lovely. And his feet are fine too.' But, as a child, Jack did not just use his feet for football; he also used them to wander endlessly in the countryside around Ashington. The fields, woods and streams of Northumberland became almost a second home to him as he would walk for miles, studying wildlife, trapping small animals with his makeshift snares, and even attempting to catch fish with his bare hands before he bought his first rod. His deep attachment to rural life was formed in those long, childhood journeys. 'I loved that landscape and I love it to this day. I have to go into cities and crowds as part of my job, but I loathe it,' he said in 1994. Bill Merryweather, a childhood friend of Jack's, gave me this memory: 'He always had to be outdoors, picking up anything from mushrooms to fish. Sometimes the two of us would go out poaching at five in the morning. If it went well, we would end up with two or three rabbits. And he's never changed from when he was a little lad. He's still at his happiest when he's out shooting and fishing.'

Jack developed his favourite haunts, such as a local swamp called the Sandy Desert. In winter this was a vast, festering

bog. But in summer, when it had dried out, it became a large, dusty hollow, riven with cracks. Used as a rubbish dump, it always attracted a large number of rats and Jack would spend hours shooting at them with his catapult. When he was older and had acquired the right equipment, Jack would regularly spend his nights fishing off the coast at Newbiggin, a seaside village just three miles from Ashington. Jackie Lothian remembers an incident which illustrates both Jack's bravery and his devotion to fishing. 'When we were about 13, Jack would often cycle over to my home at Newbiggin, have a game of cards and some supper, and then go out fishing. One night Jack cast his line, and somehow the hook went right into his thumb. Another lad and I tried to get it out but couldn't, because the sky was pitch black. Then Jack breezily said, "I'll have to go off to hospital, so look after my things." Off he cycled over to Ashington hospital, with the hook still in his thumb. He got it out, had the wound stitched up, and then, that very night, he cycled back and carried on fishing with us.' Jackie Lothian says that they could be far more reckless as children than would be tolerated today. 'I cannot believe the things we used to get up to. As a dare, for instance, we would get on the swings at Hirst Park, and push as hard as we could until we could complete a full circle, right over the top through 360 degrees. We also used to try and catch minnows in Bothal Woods, where there was a big waterfall. I suppose, looking back, it was very dangerous but we just never used to think about it.'

In such a climate, it was inevitable that accidents did happen. Once Jack and his friends were playing a chasing game at the top of an old disused windmill, when one of the boys fell out of a window on the third floor and broke his arm. Another boy broke his leg in a race through a field with Jack, when he tripped over a wire fence and was thrown through the air before landing heavily on his back. Far more serious, though, was the horrific night when Jack returned home covered in blood. Jack explained to his mother that he and his friends had been playing in a railway cutting, placing coins on the line. Tragically one of them had been hit by a train and killed. The rest of the gang had dragged the body to the nearest roadway, where they had just left it. Nothing more happened and the event gradually faded from Jack's memory. Today, such an incident would almost certainly involve the police and social services.

Jack Charlton has always been known as a rebel, an individualist, no great respecter of either authority or convention. And so it was in his childhood. At the age of just two, he caused some embarrassment to his family by wandering out of the house, dressed only in his nappy, to join a passing funeral procession. The sight of Jack, without any trousers, toddling proudly behind the Salvation Army band, has become part of Ashington legend. 'I was forever getting into scrapes,' Jack admits. Once a baker drove from Ashington to Gosforth and, when he arrived, he was surprised to find young Jack stowed away in the back of his van. On another occasion, he stole a cauliflower from a neighbour's

back garden. Then he had the cheek to walk round to the front and try and sell it back to him. 'As a schoolboy, like most of us, he was a bit of a rascal, stealing from orchards, pinching vegetables. He was a real Jack the lad,' says Bobby Whitehead.

'From the time he could walk, Jack was full of devilment. I would often say to myself, "God give me strength." He was a livewire,' wrote Cissie in her autobiography. The spirit of rebellion applied in the classroom as well as the countryside. Jackie Lothian recalls: 'He was certainly not frightened of anyone at school. The teachers were on top of you all the time and there was no answering back – except from Jack, of course. He was a likeable lad, but he would put you in your place if he didn't like what you said. He could have been more successful at school if he had put his mind to it, and I remember he was interested in history, especially the local history of the area. But he did not really care about bookwork; he wanted to be away in the fields all the time.' One of Jack's school reports stated: 'Jack would do better at school if he kept his mind on his work instead of looking out the window all the time.'

Jack was in trouble for much more than daydreaming one day, after he shot another pupil, Bernadette Reed. With typical impetuosity, Jack had taken it into his mind to bring his father's rifle – used for game shooting – into school. Having fired the gun towards a nearby church, he then watched as the bullet hit a fence and ricocheted into the face of the unfortunate young Bernadette, who suffered a grazed eye. Jack was given a severe reprimand by

his headmaster and was then frogmarched by Cissie to apologize to Bernadette's father. Yet there was a surprising response at the Reed household.

'This is the lad who shot your daughter,' said Cissie when she and Jack turned up on the Reeds' doorstep.

'So you're interested in guns, son?'

'Well, er, yes,' said Jack.

'So am I. Come inside and I'll show you what I've got.'

Predictably, the man who became a tough defender with Leeds was also a good boxer in his youth, winning both official bouts in the school gym and unofficial ones in the schoolyard. In a *Daily Telegraph* interview in 1994, he recalled: 'I was the best fighter in the street for my age and there was a lad from the next street who was the best fighter in his. We called him "Skinny" Harmer. When I went to school at five, he was in the same class as me and I thought a fight was imminent. But we never, ever fought. We avoided each other in case we got beat.' In another echo of the adult Jack Charlton, who made a fortune in his shrewd handling of money, particularly during his spell as Ireland manager, the young Jack had a host of money-making schemes. These included: a paper round organized like a military operation; deliveries for a nearby grocery store; and the collection – from local collieries – of unused timber, which he then chopped up and sold for firewood.

But perhaps the most interesting parallel with today is that, as young brothers, Bobby and Jack did not get on with each other.

Some of their contemporaries claim that this was because of the age difference between them. Bobby Charlton was born on 10 October 1937, two-and-a-half years after Jack's arrival. 'When you're young, the gap in years tends to count much more,' says Walter Lavery, 'so Bobby and Jack did not really mix much. They had different pursuits and different friends.' Bobby also takes this view. 'Though it appears now we are the same age, he's actually a good deal older than me, so we just did not spend a lot of time together when we were growing up,' he said in 1968.

The reality, however, was down more to a clash of temperaments. Jack was the adventurer, ever eager to plough his own furrow, while Bobby was far keener to stay at home reading or playing football. Jack knew that his younger brother never shared his interest in the countryside, so he hated to bring Bobby along on his wanderings – and he only did so at the instruction of his mother. What particularly annoyed him was when the infant Bobby messed himself or demanded to be taken home when he grew bored or tired. As Cissie wrote, 'Jack wanted to be off on his own, not nurse-maiding someone who was regarded as the family's fair-haired favourite. If I still insisted and made Jack take Bobby with him, he often gave Bobby a swift clout before they got very far and that usually sent him running home in tears, while Jack went on his own sweet way himself.'

With his usual diplomacy, Bobby has claimed that he enjoyed these trips, speaking fondly of his bike rides into the woods to go bird-nesting with Jack or the times they went to the 'lovely coast'

of Newbiggin to pick up coal that had been washed ashore from the mines which ran under the sea. But he has also admitted: 'Like most elder brothers, Jack regarded me as a pest when we were kids, especially when I'd plead to go with him to pick potatoes or on fishing trips. "He's not coming," Jack would say defiantly. "You take him," my mother would reply. From then on it would be nothing but moans, and there are people who will suggest that he's never stopped moaning. He never tried to conceal his darker moods and once his mind was made up, nothing would alter it.' Jack's memory is similar: 'Bobby was more of a mother's boy. He was never a bloke to get out into the country and he still isn't. I took him fishing a couple of times but he was no good. I had to keep changing worms for him. He'd wave to me from 100 yards down the river, and I'd have to trudge all the way back and change the bait, because he just hadn't got a clue.' On another occasion, Bobby and Jack were playing in separate matches at the Hirst Miners' Welfare ground. Towards the final whistle of his game, Jack was penalized for committing a foul in his own box. Bobby got to hear of the incident, and when Jack arrived home, Bobby teased him about it. 'Fancy giving away a penalty like that,' said Bobby, sitting on the edge of a chair in the living room. Without breaking his stride, Jack gave Bobby an almighty smack on the back of his head, sending his younger brother crashing to the ground. 'Jack got thumped for that, but it wasn't about to change him,' recalled Bobby.

For all his sense of independence, there is no doubt that Jack

deeply resented the apparent bias of his mother towards Bobby. 'She never said she was proud of me,' admitted Jack in 1996. 'I was driven to try and please her. Sometimes, I would go down to the dog track and spend hours hunting through mountains of rubbish, searching for old glasses they'd thrown out. When I found some that were not too badly chipped, I'd clean them and take them home as presents for her. She would always thank me, but I suspect she then threw them away. I always knew that I was not her favourite.'

Unlike the outgoing, noisy Jack, Bobby was very shy as a child, so shy that when strangers came to the house he would hide behind his mother or run upstairs to the bedroom. Rob Storey, who grew up with them both, told me: 'Jack wouldn't stand for anything. You couldn't put much on him. I don't mean that he had an aggressive nature but if someone confronted him, he could certainly look after himself. On the other hand Bobby was much more serious, more withdrawn than Jack. He would keep himself to himself, whereas Jack would just say what he thought. In that respect, they were total opposites. Jack always seemed to be striving for what he wanted, whereas things seemed to come more easily for Bobby. Jack was a determined lad, much more determined than Bobby seemed to be.' They were also physically very different, even when they were children. In a BBC radio interview in 1989, Cissie Charlton said: 'When Jack was born, his granny would take him around the town to let everyone see how long he was. He was tall even when he was born. Bobby was

stumpy, thickset, different altogether. They were two different people.'

Bobby was more concerned about his appearance than Jack, sometimes even wearing a tie at home, something Jack would never willingly have done. Jackie Lothian recalls: 'Bobby was smart, polite, diplomatic; he knew how to address people properly. He was always very tidy, unlike Jack who was a scruffy bairn.' Bobby hated being in trouble whether at school or with his parents. When he called his brothers for tea, they thought it amusing to run away, which prompted him to anger. 'Why do you always have to be so stubborn?' he would ask of them. He was never in playground fights with other boys, though, like both Jack and his father, he was an excellent boxer, once winning a youth competition staged in his neighbourhood.

Yet Bobby did have his playful side. He could do good impersonations, and sometimes surprised his brothers by covering himself in a sheet and pretending to be a ghost, a spectacle that became known in the Charlton household as 'wor kid's mad half-hour'. Using a pair of his father's rolled up socks, he played football in the sitting room with his brother. With his greater height, Jack would usually win the aerial contest, though Bobby was almost unbeatable on the floor. Once he'd put it on the ground he'd murder me. Murder me! That's why I like to see the ball in the air to this day,' says Jack. Bobby was never bashful at these moments. While he was kicking the socks around, he would take his mother's iron and use the plug as a fake microphone to

provide a running commentary on the match, putting himself in the role of the great soccer stars of the time: 'Mortensen knocks it out to Stanley Matthews. Matthews goes down the line, crosses and it's there by Lawton. A magnificent goal,' would be a typical passage of play in the Charlton home.

Like many reserved boys, Bobby loved to retreat into his own fantasy world of cartoon heroes and exotic fables. He adored films such as *Ali Baba* and *Robin Hood,* while he explained in a radio interview in 2001 that his favourite comic character was 'Morgan the Mighty, a great big, strong, blond Englishman trapped on an island. The real baddies used to send in opponents for him to fight. And the theme of the story was how he ended up being the greatest fighter in the world.' It does not take a great leap of imagination to see how Bobby, a strong, fair-haired young Englishman, might aspire to such a role.

Football was undoubtedly the greatest form of escape for Bobby, not just from the smoky drabness of Ashington, but also from a future life trapped underground. To a much greater extent than his elder brother, he fell in love with the game in his childhood. 'From his earliest age, he was football mad,' said his mother. When his uncles visited Ashington on a Sunday, they took Bobby out in the street or down to the beach at Newbiggin to show off his skills. Then they came home and discussed League football. 'I listened to them talking about the matches they had played on Saturday and I heard with awe names like Frank Swift and Wilf Mannion. Particularly at that age – and I was only six –

there was an unforgettable magic about it. I suppose it was then that the seed was sown in my mind that I would never be anything else but a footballer, if I was good enough,' Bobby wrote in 1967 in his book *Forward for England.*

Bobby loved everything about football. He spent hours reading his soccer books, his favourite being *Stanley Matthews' Football Album.* He pored over results in the back of newspapers, developing such an affection for the sports pages that he decided, if he did not make it as a footballer, he would become a football journalist, 'that would be the next best thing, because journalists got into matches for free,' he said. He always had some sort of ball at his feet. If he went to the cinema, he would bring a ball with him and kick it along the gutter. Similarly, he would take one if his mother sent him on an errand to the shops. Through his fascination with soccer, he formed a powerful bond with his grandfather, old 'Tanner' Milburn. Though Tanner was a hard, stubborn man, distrusted by many within the family, he doted on Bobby, recognizing the boy's exceptional ability. In return, young Bobby idolized Tanner.

On many evenings during the war, the two of them went down to the local park, where Tanner still held training sessions for sprinters. Bobby got a rubdown just like the adults, his grandfather telling him, 'You'll never be fast unless your muscles are loose.' Bobby then raced against the professionals in the 110 yards, having been given a 70-yard start. If Bobby won, his grandfather would be delighted, saying 'Well done, Bobby

lad, you'll be running against a whippet yet.' During his career, Bobby's electric pace was one of his greatest assets – George Best, a lightning-quick player himself, says that Bobby was the only man who could beat him in sprints during training at Manchester United.

Towards the end of his life, Tanner's eyesight was failing, so on Saturday evenings he would send Bobby to buy the local football paper and then get him to read out all the scores. 'Even though he was dying, the most important thing was the football results,' remembers Bobby. It was an attitude that the grandson inherited. 'Football is my life. I eat, sleep and drink the game. When I wake up every day, I think of who we're playing in the next match. I think of nothing else, apart from my family. I wish I could play until I was 70,' said Bobby in an ITV documentary made when he was 30. The death of his grandfather hit him hard, for Bobby was a sensitive man who could be deeply affected by loss – as he was to show over Munich. 'When he died, I felt as though I'd lost my best friend and there was a gap in my life which was not filled for a long time, even though I was young,' wrote Bobby later.

Bobby was also a keen spectator. When he and Jack were babies, Cissie took them along in the pram to Ashington FC, and they would leap up at the roar of the crowd after a goal was scored. Later, they were sometimes allowed to work as ball boys at the club. Historian Mike Kirkup recalls: 'Their uncle Stan was playing for Ashington and he let them visit him in the dressing room or bring out the water magic sponge for

the trainer. During the play, they sat behind the goals, which they thought was absolutely marvellous,' In the Charltons' youth, though Ashington FC had dropped down from the Third Division North into the North-Eastern League, there were still some big matches at the club. Stan Mortensen, the Blackpool and England striker, played at Ashington during the war, while in an FA Cup tie in 1950 against Rochdale, 12,000 people crammed into the ground, with some of them having to sit on the roof.

It has been claimed that Bobby, as a child, was a Sunderland supporter. In her autobiography Cissie said that Bobby's ambition was to play for the club, writing, 'He was a great admirer of Len Shackleton's team and would have jumped at the chance to join it.' But this view is disputed by those who grew up with Bobby. Ron Routledge, the schoolmate who went on to play for Sunderland, told me, 'I don't know where all this business about Bobby and Sunderland comes from. It's just not true. Never once was he involved with Sunderland. We all followed Newcastle and I went with Bobby to most of the home games at St James' Park. I suppose some people might have thought that Bobby modelled himself on Len Shackleton, the Sunderland striker – for they had the same body swerve – but he didn't. Bobby was always just Bobby.'

Jack also remembers going to Newcastle with Bobby. 'Me and our kid would go to Newcastle to see Jackie Milburn. My father put us on the bus, and we'd get off at the Haymarket and go for something to eat at the British Home restaurant. Then we'd

go and queue at St James' Park. We'd always leave it to the last minute so that we could get passed over everybody's heads in the crowd, ending up right at the front.' As usual, the difference surfaced between the brothers, for Jack was far more partisan in his support of Newcastle. He once told Mike Kirkup, 'I've always followed Newcastle United. To this day I'm a Newcastle fan and I was brought up black and white eyed. I don't think you ever change. Even when I was a player, the first results I looked for were those of Newcastle. When you're a Newcastle fan as a boy, you're a fan for life.' Indeed, one writer told me that he was recently in Jack's home during a Newcastle game which was being shown live on Sky TV. Just before the kick-off, Jack went down on his knees in front of the television screen in a mock act of worship to his beloved Magpies. Yet Bobby never felt the same attraction to Newcastle. 'I don't remember him ever being a great Newcastle supporter,' says Bobby's schoolfriend Evan Martin, who went with him a few times to St James'. Bobby himself says that after Manchester United won the FA Cup Final in 1948, they became his favourite team, though he always liked to watch good football wherever it was played.

And no-one played it better than Bobby Charlton. His natural talent was so enormous that anyone who saw him, even as a child, knew that he was destined to become a professional footballer. Ashington locals still speak with awe about the sight of the young Bobby, sailing past opponents twice his age and then producing a deadly shot from outside the box. Walter Lavery remembers: 'He

stood out like a beacon. He was different, far above the rest of the young players, believe me. He was as near a genius as you could get. He was a great dribbler, with a real sense of style, even when he was young. He could run fast with the ball. He had techniques that the rest of us lads did not even realize existed until we went to professional clubs six years later. That gave him this special aura. Now don't get me wrong, he was a good mixer with the other lads. But, for all that he was in your company, you always had a sense that his mind was elsewhere, thinking about football. He knew that, with his talent, he was going to get away. And he was so passionate, competitive. I remember going to watch a school game one Saturday morning, and I caught sight of Bobby arguing with the referee.

"What's the matter over there?" I asked a spectator.

"It's young Chuckie. His team is winning seven-nowt and yet he's been arguing with the ref for the last five minutes that they should have been granted another goal."

That was so like Bobby. He wanted to win all the time.'

Rob Storey agrees. 'Bobby was always small for his age and went by the name of "Little Bobby". Maybe it was because of the low centre of gravity that he could control the ball so well. When we were playing in Hirst Park, everyone always wanted him in their team, because he was so much better than the rest of us, even though he was younger than most.' Evan Martin, who later went to grammar school with Bobby, recalls seeing him in a junior match: 'Bobby was only seven years old then, but already

he was running rings round lads who were 11. He had terrific speed, one-touch skills and lovely balance. My father, who was a football fanatic and was also watching, turned to me and said, "Watch that kid Charlton. He'll make a name for himself.'"

Bobby's talent was in direct contrast to Jack, who failed to shine amongst his contemporaries, as Rob Storey remembers: 'In all honesty, he was little better than me. Physically, he stood out a mile because of his height and long neck, but, when it came to football skills, though he was a solid full-back, he was so inferior to Bobby that it was an embarrassment.' Jackie Lothian says their destinies could not have looked more different. 'We all knew that Bobby would be a footballer, but we never thought Jack would be one. He was no better than anyone else. You see, he had no motivation. The thought of a career in the game had never entered his mind.'

Jack had the same character on the field as he was to show at Leeds, aggressive, uncompromising. But rather than playing centre-half, he was generally a full-back in his early games. And Bobby Whitehead says that this was his biggest problem. 'Being tall, he was good in the air but, at left-back, I think he was out of position. I kept him out of our school team for a few games when I was 14 and he was 15. But when we had a Cup match, our usual centre-half was off sick, so Jack moved in there. My father, who was watching, said afterwards, "That's the lad's position. He had a brilliant game."'

Perhaps the greatest myth about the Charlton upbringing

in football is that Cissie taught Bobby how to play football. Folklore has it that, to quote Bobby, 'Being a Milburn with football coursing deep in her veins, she took me out on the slag heaps of Ashington and showed me everything from selling a dummy to scoring from 50 yards.' But this tale is untrue. For Bobby was a totally instinctive footballer, with a natural sense of how to play. Moreover, though Cissie provided exactly the right environment for her football-crazy son, she only once gave him direct, personal coaching. This happened when he was already 15, was at Manchester United and had played for the England Schoolboys. After one of these schoolboy internationals, Cissie had been talking to the chairman of the selectors, who said that Bobby's slowness on the turn was a serious weakness. When she returned to Ashington with Bobby, she decided to give him some specialized training. Adopting the methods that her own father, Tanner, had used when coaching sprinters, she took Bobby to Hirst Park early in the morning and had him running backwards and forwards until his speed on the turn gradually increased. 'I suppose that to a stranger it may have looked odd to see a 15 year old training like that with his mother, but this was Ashington and everyone knew I was football mad,' she said.

Cissie's own brothers were a bigger influence on Bobby, particularly his Uncle George, who was at Chesterfield. In his summer holidays, Bobby went down to the club and joined in the training with the professionals. The hardened footballers were kind to him, allowing him to run all over the field and even to

take penalties against goalkeeper Ray Middleton. After training, they took him to lunch or to the dog track or the golf club. If they went to the pub, Bobby sat outside with a tonic water. What really struck Bobby was the amount of swearing amongst the players. One incident particularly stood out in his memory, when a player who had been dropped had a ferocious, expletive-filled row with the manager. It brought home to Bobby, sitting quietly in the corner of the dressing room, the realities of life as a professional footballer.

In an interview with the *Sunday Telegraph* in 1973, Bobby spoke about the influence of Cissie's family and his youthful approach as footballer. 'My uncles made a big impression on me. They used to tell me I had a terrific backheel. That probably does not sound much now, but then, there was no-one doing it much, not even in the League. The game just came naturally to me. It surprised me when other boys couldn't kick or fell over. Why hadn't they the same balance? I thought they were unusual, rather than me. From watching as a kid and kicking around in the street, my philosophy of the game was always as an out-and-out forward. I never put my foot in – getting the ball was other players' work.'

It was an outlook that in later years would delight millions of fans – and enrage some of his closest colleagues.

CHAPTER TWO The Migrants

Jack and Bobby had been on divergent paths since their earliest years, and the gap between them became much wider in adolescence, when they went to different secondary schools.

Both of them had attended the Hirst North Primary School, a traditional red-brick building in the heart of Ashington. Like so many others, the sports master of the school, Norman McGuinness, immediately recognized Bobby's outstanding gifts: 'There wasn't much he could be coached in. My first memory is seeing this small lad of nine, playing football with the 14-year-olds and just waltzing through them. It didn't take the wisdom of Solomon to see that he had great natural ability. Even at nine he had a body swerve and natural check that would take the other man the wrong way.' Inevitably, with Bobby as the captain, his school team was triumphant, winning the East Northumberland Junior Schools League Championship in 1949. In one match, Bobby's dominance had ensured that his side was leading 12–0 at half-time, and Norman McGuinness was forced to tell him, 'I want no more goals. You're humiliating the other side and that's bad sport.' It is a reflection of the austerity of post-war Britain that Bobby's team played in shorts fashioned from old blackout curtains by one of the teachers.

Bobby was not just much more successful than Jack on the soccer field. He also outshone him academically, as Jack

later admitted: Tm afraid I was a bit of a non-starter. I just wasn't interested in subjects like English and maths. Robert was different. Not for him the wayward glances to what was happening outside the classroom. He was attentive and bright. And his handwriting was the envy of the whole class.'

In view of this testimony from Jack, he can hardly have been shocked when he failed his 11-plus and had to go to Hirst Park Secondary Modern School, while his younger brother won a scholarship to grammar school. But some of their contemporaries do not remember Bobby being as clever as Jack has claimed. In fact, Bobby, like Jack, initially failed his 11-plus, and only won a grammar school place after taking a second test, known as the 'review'. Alan Lavelle says: 'There were a lot in our class who were brighter than Bobby. To be honest, I was a bit surprised when Bobby got into grammar – I did not think he was that good a scholar.' Bobby himself has said that he was not the academic type. 'I neglected my lessons and found it difficult to do my homework because my mind was always on football. I was so totally convinced I would be a footballer that I could not concentrate on anything else. But I regret not working harder. I wish I had studied my English and maths, so today I would be able to explain myself better.'

Nevertheless, for all such weaknesses, Bobby was proud to have gained his scholarship to Morpeth Grammar School. But then a complication arose. His family discovered Morpeth did not play soccer, preferring the socially superior game of rugby.

Understandably, Bobby was distraught. The headmaster of Hirst Primary, James Hamilton, also thought it would be a 'tragic waste' to send Bobby to 'one of those snooty places that did not like football' – to use his phrase. So Hamilton, backed up by the formidable figure of Cissie Charlton, approached Northumberland County Council and explained the exceptional circumstances of Bobby's case. With a foresight not always shown by municipal bureaucrats, the education committee agreed that Bobby could be transferred to Bedlington Grammar, south of Ashington, a school which played football.

Bobby began at Bedlington in the autumn of 1949. Evan Martin, another Bedlington pupil, recalls that Bobby was eagerly awaited at the school. 'When he arrived we were already expecting him because of his local reputation. Everyone wanted him in their house so he could play for their house team. And then this kid comes in, with small, thin legs, looking anything but a footballer. But he soon showed that he could play. Even when he was 12, he was picked for teams of 18 year olds. He was that good, with wonderful silky skills. Bobby would get the ball with a man on him – he was always very heavily marked – and with his first touch he had beaten him. I never saw him head the ball much. If he got a high ball, he would chest it down. If he hit the ball anywhere around the penalty area, the keeper had no chance. He was even good in goal. Once, in a house match, the regular keeper was injured so Bobby went in and was fabulous. You could see he was gifted at all sports, whether it be snooker

or cricket. As a batsman he would get into line and had all the shots. I once said to him, "Bobby, you could have been a good cricketer." He replied, "Ah, that stuff wasn't for me.'"

Evan Martin, who was close to Bobby, has other memories of him as a grammar school pupil: 'He was very unassuming, a smashing lad really. He never, ever boasted, even when he was picked for England Schoolboys. He was reasonably bright, though, like me, he was not brilliant at mathematics or science. He was quiet, deep, never really let on what he was really thinking, though he was a good mixer and had a lovely sense of humour. There was a group of about five of us, led by a lad called Tucker Robinson, who was a character with greased back hair, like Henry Winkler as the Fonz. Bobby was a colliery lad first and foremost, and if there were any tricks going, he would be there. We used to go to the pictures a lot in Ashington, and I remember one night, after we had been to see *The Jolson Story,* he sang songs from the film all the way from the cinema to the bus stop. Bobby loved the music of people like Frank Sinatra and Nat King Cole.'

Evan Martin says that Bobby was neither especially good looking or popular with girls when he was at Bedlington. 'He was short and he had this problem with his hair, a double crown at the back which would stick up and he was always trying to plaster it down. But when he was 14, he did go out with a lovely girl called Norma Outhwaite. She and Bobby were beautifully suited because they had the same temperaments: nice, straightforward,

easy to get on with.'

Among the boys of Bedlington, according to Martin, 'There was a mystique about Bobby, because of his football. Everyone knew he was going to be a top professional, playing for England.' But this admiration was not shared by elements within the school establishment, which prided itself on academic attainment and frowned on the idea of a young lad thinking only of football as a professional career. Cissie Charlton wrote that this conflict between Bobby's interests and the school's 'meant that those days at Bedlington Grammar were not very happy ones'. The school's attitude was illustrated by two incidents which happened to Bobby. The first occurred during a lesson in the physics laboratory, which looked out on to the playing fields. Sitting on a bench by the window, Bobby was distracted by the sight of some boys having a football practice. Suddenly the teacher, Tommy Simmons, rounded on him: 'Charlton, you'd be wise to pay more attention to the blackboard than to the games outside. This is where your future lies, in your schoolwork. You'll never make a living as a footballer.'

The second arose when Bobby had been picked to play for England Schoolboys. Amazingly, the headmaster, Mr James, refused him permission to travel down to Wembley for the game. 'You're a scholar, first and foremost,' he said. The sports master, George Benson, was more understanding. Without the head's knowledge, he sneaked Bobby out of the school and drove him to Newcastle station for the rail trip to London.

George Benson was not the only Bedlington teacher to admire Bobby. Another was Tom Hedderley, the French master who was also involved with sport. Now in his eighties and living in Newcastle, he gave me his recollection of teaching Bobby: 'I will never forget my first sight of him. It was during a games lesson and, because it had been raining heavily, the football pitch was wet. We used heavy leather balls in those days, which were not waterproof. One of the balls came rolling out to this little kid, who was not the size of two penny-worth of copper. And he just smacked it. I can still see it, rising all the way from the edge of 18-yard area, thudding against the bar and then bouncing back halfway up the pitch,' Tom Hedderley remembers one match, the final of the local Blake Cup, when Bobby's tremendous local reputation worked against him. 'We were playing Blyth and it was a needle match. Blyth had worked out that their only hope of winning was to stifle Bobby – and they succeeded, winning 1–0. In desperation, our lads kept giving the ball to Bobby to see what he could do. But every time he got it, there were about six Blyth boys straight on to him. It was just impossible for him to get through.'

Hedderley continues: 'Bobby was naturally tremendously popular in school, but he never played on it, never became swell-headed. As in his later career, he was very gentlemanly on the football field. Everyone respected him, not only because he was a damn good footballer but also because of his nice nature. He was not an outstanding pupil, but he was in the upper stream for

most of his time with us. In my subject French, for instance, he got by without showing any signs of being a linguist.' Hedderley disputes the view that Bobby was especially withdrawn. 'Yes, he did not like being thrust forward, but he was not reticent. I would have actually called him happy-go-lucky. He worked steadily, though it always seemed that his mind was on football. We talked about him a lot in the staffroom because we knew he was going to be someone special.' Like others, Tom Hedderley saw the graphic contrast in Bobby's parents. 'His dad was a really nice fella. Sometimes, he used to come and watch on Saturday mornings. He was a very quiet man, the opposite of Cissie.'

Bill Hodgkiss, Bobby's form master, told me that 'Bobby was an average academic pupil, a well-behaved, popular lad who was never in any trouble. In fact, he was the sort of boy who would try and quieten down trouble rather than cause it. He was relatively quiet, not outwardly vivacious, but I would not have called him withdrawn.'

Hodgkiss, like everyone else, knew that Bobby's only ambition was to play professional football. And, not long after his arrival at Bedlington, it became clear that he would soon achieve this goal. By the age of 14, Bobby was already the star, not just of his school, but also of East Northumberland District Boys and Northumberland County Juniors. News of his brilliance was now reaching top clubs across the country, and the first to act was the one Bobby eventually joined, Manchester United.

Ironically, it was Jack's secondary modern school, not

Bedlington, that helped to secure the interest of United. For the Hirst Park School's headmaster, Stuart Hemingway, was a friend of the legendary United scout, Joe Armstrong, the man who secured so many of the Babes for Matt Busby. Having been told by Cissie about the lack of encouragement Bobby was receiving at Bedlington, Hemingway wrote to Joe Armstrong, urging him to come to the north-east to see Bobby. On 9 February 1953, Armstrong arrived at Hebburn to watch Bobby playing for East Northumberland Schoolboys. It was a bitterly cold day. A covering of ice lay on the rock-hard pitch. Oh, I can see it all now,' recalled Armstrong nearly 20 years later. It was a thin February morning and I had to peer through the mist. Bobby didn't do so much that day, but it was enough for me. He was like a gazelle and he had a shot as hard as any grown man, yet he was a kid of only 14.'

Armstrong was so impressed that immediately after the game, he approached Bobby and asked him if he would like to join United when he had finished school. Convinced of Bobby's talent, he did not raise the question of a month's trial, the usual condition for young players. To Cissie Charlton, who was also, inevitably, at the game, he said: 'I don't mean to flatter you, Missus, but your son will play for England before he is 21.' Armstrong then informed Matt Busby, the United manager, of his new find. On his scout's recommendation, Busby went to see Bobby play for England Schoolboys in a trial. He was just as impressed, marvelling at Bobby's grace, power and physique. 'I

decided then that I wanted him for my team. He was a must, with his timing of a pass, his jinking run, his shooting. We needed no more qualifications,' recalled Busby.

Within weeks of this trial, Bobby was in the full England Schoolboys team, prompting a flattering profile in the *Newcastle Journal:* 'Bobby Charlton, a 15-year-old Bedlington Grammar School student, is the first member of the famous Ashington family of footballers to have received this honour. The young inside-forward, whose ambition is to become a sports journalist, is the second son of Mr and Mrs R Charlton of 114 Beatrice Street, Ashington and the grandson of the late "Tanner" Milburn. It is interesting to recall that "Tanner" Milburn prophesied some time before his death that, of all the footballers in the family, Bobby would be the finest. This prophecy looks like materializing as Bobby possesses a remarkable record in school football, equally at home in either inside-forward position.' Bobby was part of a powerful young England team which drew with the Scots, beat Wales by four goals in Cardiff, and crushed the Irish by eight at Portsmouth. The most memorable game for Bobby was at Wembley, again against the Welsh, when, in front of 90,000 screaming young fans, he scored twice in a 3–3 draw. 'When I walked out on to the pitch, the stadium engulfed me and I played the game in a sort of trance. It was over before I realized what was happening,' he told the *Daily Express.* His first goal resulted from the kind of long-range shot which was to become his trademark, as he recalled. 'I whacked it and then saw

it moving away from the keeper all the time. I knew it must be a goal as soon as I hit it.' His second goal was a poke through a mass of bodies, while he also made England's third, crossing for Maurice Pratt to head home.

By now an array of clubs was after Charlton, including many of the biggest in the country, like Wolves, Arsenal and Sunderland. Kenneth Wolstenholme, the renowned commentator, told me: 'I saw Bobby play for England Schoolboys and you could hardly get into Wembley for all the scouts who wanted to sign him.' This pressure was kept up at all hours of the day and night in the Charltons' home in Ashington. At one stage, no less than 18 top clubs were trying to take him on. Cissie recalled, 'I'd be cleaning the fireplace in the morning and I'd look round and there would be another one standing behind me. There were times when we had one scout in the living room and another in the kitchen. The Arsenal scout, in particular, always seemed to be on the doorstep.' In fact, Cissie was quite keen for Bobby to join Arsenal, because of the club's reputation for looking after young players, while Bobby himself has said that he was attracted to the fame of a big London club. 'I was very tempted to go to Arsenal. Since I was a northerner born and bred you would have thought that Highbury would be the last place for me. Yet the temptation was a very real one. Arsenal still has tremendous glamour and there's almost a physical attraction in going to a club which boasts such names as Hapgood, Bastin, James, Male and the Comptons.'

But, despite all the advances from Arsenal and the other clubs, Bobby decided to stick with the earlier offer from Manchester United. There were a number of reasons. One was that Joe Armstrong, the scout, had been the first on the scene, showing an interest before Bobby had even been selected for a schoolboy international. 'Whoever was going to be first was going to be in with a real shout. I wanted to be a footballer as quickly as possible and Joe was the first,' he told Tony Gubba in a 1993 BBC interview. Since that initial meeting, Armstrong had maintained regular contact with the Charltons – to such an extent that when the local education authority objected to all the scouts following Bobby from match to match, Armstrong passed himself off as his 'uncle', while his wife became 'Aunt Sally'.

Just as importantly, given the influence of Cissie on the Charlton household, Armstrong made sure he cultivated her. It was the kind of role he relished as much as talent hunting, for the tiny, grey-haired, crinkle-faced Armstrong delighted in his ability to charm the working-class mothers of his young quarries. As Eamon Dunphy, journalist and ex-Manchester United youth player, puts it: 'Joe was a delightful man with a shrewd mind and an instinctive grasp of the human condition. Women liked him. He was kindly yet flirtatious in a comforting way. Mothers were apt to be apprehensive about big city life with all its temptations. Joe understood their fears only too well.'

If Arsenal had glamour, then so did Manchester United in abundance. By the early 1950s, United had become the most

exciting force in British soccer, winning the League in 1951/52 and gaining admirers across the country for their flowing style and brilliant young players like Johnny Berry, Duncan Edwards and Roger Byrne. When Bobby Chariton visited Maine Road for a schools trial match in March 1953 between East Northumberland Boys and Manchester Boys, another future United youth star, Wilf McGuinness, was in the Manchester team. 'I was captain most of the time of everything I played in and I was a bit cocky. I saw this young lad. He came up to me after the game when we had beaten them, and said, "We may both be going to United. My name is Bobby Charlton," and I thought, "Who the hell is Bobby Charlton?" He was very weak-looking in those days and made little impression on me. All I thought was, well, he's not a bad little player.'

By coincidence, this was the day that Tommy Taylor, the centre-forward, signed for United from Barnsley for a British transfer record of £29,999 – Matt Busby had knocked a pound off the fee so Taylor would not be lumbered with the title of the first £30,000 player. After Bobby's game, the local Manchester boys rushed off to see United, while Bobby had to travel home to Northumberland. As the bus took him to the rail station, he passed Old Trafford and glimpsed thousands of fans queuing eagerly to get into the ground. The whole experience only stoked the fires of his enthusiasm for the club.

Throughout his life, Bobby may have been unassuming, but he never lacked confidence in his ability. Certain that he could

compete at the highest level, he therefore wanted a club which would provide him with the best training. Manchester United, he thought, fitted the bill because of its reputation for a strong youth policy. It was a policy born largely of necessity. Immediately after the war, when Matt Busby was appointed manager, the club had been desperately short of cash, largely because Old Trafford had been badly bombed by the Luftwaffe. Though the financial situation had improved by the turn of the decade, Busby was still reluctant to spend heavily in the transfer market. He preferred the acquisition of youthful excellence as the route to success, becoming particularly adept at exploiting the pool of talent available in schools football, a source largely ignored by other clubs. It is a remarkable fact that between 1951 and 1957, the golden years of the Busby Babes, United bought just one player, Tommy Taylor. So many of the other great names of that era, such as Albert Scanlon, David Pegg, Mark Jones, Wilf McGuinness and Eddie Colman, came directly from school, just as Bobby Charlton did. Ron Routledge, Bobby's Ashington contemporary, says that Bobby's desire to join United reflected his self-belief. 'He said to me, just before he signed, "Ronnie, I'm going to be the best." That is where you've really got to admire him. He could have gone to any other club and been quite comfortable. But he didn't because he wanted to be with the top young players – and United had the name then because of the Busby Babes. There was no way he was ever going anywhere else.'

When he signed for United, many in the north-east expressed surprise that he had not joined Newcastle, effectively his local side. In fact, his parents even received angry mail from several Newcastle fans, complaining about the decision to allow Bobby to leave the area. But, as Bobby later explained, it was Cissie's own cousin, 'Wor Jackie' Milburn, who was instrumental in ensuring that Bobby did not sign for Newcastle: 'He came armed with an offer to give me a job on a north-eastern newspaper but he was completely honest with me. He told me it was not such a good club at that time and that, what organization there was, was inefficient. He didn't believe in the way they treated their young players and the training was almost non-existent. They just went to the ground on Tuesday and Thursday evenings, kicked a ball around and there was no coaching.'

The other great club in the north-east, Sunderland, was never really in the running after an incident in which Bobby felt he was rebuffed by them. This happened on that frost-bitten morning in February 1953 when Joe Armstrong from United turned up to see Bobby playing for East Northumberland Boys. A scout from Sunderland was also at the match but at the final whistle, instead of going to see Bobby, he approached Ron Routledge, the East Northumberland goalkeeper, and made him an offer. According to Cissie, 'Bobby was really hurt to have been overlooked by Sunderland that day. Later, when Sunderland joined a long queue of major clubs trying to recruit Bobby, he had his own back. This time it was Bobby who did the turning down.' But Sunderland

did not give up easily. Even when Bobby was travelling down to Manchester to sign formally for United, the Sunderland scout Charlie Ferguson followed him and got on the same train in the hope of persuading Bobby to change his mind.

Ray Wood, the former Manchester United and England goalkeeper who played throughout the 1950s with Bobby, says that Sunderland would have been absolutely the wrong club for him because of its mean spirit and lack of support for youngsters. 'Like Bobby, I'm from the north-east and Sunderland had wanted to sign me after I had played in the County Cup Final at Roker. They were known as the Bank of England team, they were so rich. After a meeting with the manager, Bill Murray, I was offered the forms to become a professional. Before I had looked at them, he asked, "How much were your expenses?" I said about one shilling, and ten-and-a-half pence. He gave me two shillings and asked for change. I could not believe it. I didn't sign after that. I don't think Bobby would have done as well if he had joined Sunderland or Newcastle. Neither wanted good young players to escape but, unlike United, they never give them a proper chance to develop.'

For all the high-minded talk of youth policies, there could also have been a simpler reason why United were able to win the battle for Bobby's signature: money. There were persistent claims that, as at some other top clubs, United offered financial rewards to the parents of talented youngsters – and this may have happened in Bobby's case. As Ron Routledge said to me, 'Bobby was off

to United, yes, because of the youth policy, but also because of the little incentives on offer.' Cissie denied, in her autobiography, that she or husband were ever tempted: 'The high-pressure tactics employed by the more unscrupulous scouts included some pretty lucrative bribes. Yet the plain fact of the matter was that taking bribes was illegal and we just couldn't bring ourselves to do it, even if they were an accepted fact of professional football life in those days. We were honest, working-class people with a very clear idea of right and wrong and no amount of money was going to change that.'

But the distinguished football writer Brian Glanville gave me a different account. 'I was once told by Jackie Milburn, with whom I was very friendly, that Bobby was all set to join Newcastle United. The deal had been done and dusted and Bobby was going to get a newspaper job. But Manchester United ensured it did not happen. According to Jackie's story, Cissie said to him, "I'm terribly sorry, but United offered us £750. What could I do?"' Brian Glanville continues: 'I have put that story to Jack Charlton and he has denied it but it would hardly be a surprise if it were true. At the time there were two clubs which were absolutely notorious for suborning young players and they were Manchester United and Chelsea. Matt Busby, for all his genial, incorruptible image, was actually a very ruthless man.' Glanville points to the example of Duncan Edwards, who was born in Dudley in the heart of the West Midlands. It would have been obvious for him to join Wolves or West Brom, both outstanding clubs in the

1950s, but instead he was enticed to Old Trafford. And, as John Kennedy wrote in his biography of Tommy Taylor, there were "rumours going around at the time of his transfer that Matt had offered all sorts of inducements to persuade Tommy".'

Rumours about such payments were given more credence in 1979, long after Matt Busby had retired, when a Granada *World in Action* programme revealed the web of unscrupulousness at Old Trafford. Most of the programme focused on the actions of United's late chairman, 'Champagne Louis' Edwards – father of the current chairman Martin – who made a fortune in the meat business, partly through the manipulation of local authority catering contracts, and used his wealth to gain control at Old Trafford in the 1960s. Shortly after the programme was screened, he died of a heart attack while having a bath. Granada researchers uncovered a wealth of evidence suggesting that United were in the habit of paying more than just transfer fees. Particularly damning was the testimony of John Aston, one of United's great players of the post-war era and junior team coach since 1954, who, in a sworn affidavit, said, 'Some of these boys were induced to sign because United offered them or their parents backhand payments. In some cases I was personally involved in obtaining cash and handing it to the families of boys.' As Aston explained, money would be secretly raised through fictitious expense accounts, and then used to pay off families. Such was the strength of Aston's evidence that Matt made little real effort to dispute it, while two other books repeated

the claims. One, Michael Crick and David Smith's *Betrayal of a Legend,* states: '£500 or £1,000 might be handed over in banknotes. Alternatively, the father of a promising young player might be employed as a part-time scout, though, of course, he was not expected to do anything for this,' And Eamon Dunphy, in his brilliantly vivid and subtle biography of Sir Matt, *A Strange Kind of Glory,* writes: 'Year by year, Matt Busby had found himself sucked into a moral quagmire. A few quid in an envelope to the father of a talented youngster for scouting, no bribe intended.' This does not, of course, necessarily mean that all young players, like Bobby, were acquired through such methods, or that they would have been aware of such approaches by United. But it does put into perspective some of the sugary guff that is written about United and Busby, as if he was too virtuous ever to be involved in the more mercenary aspects of professional football.

On 16 June 1953 Busby finally got what he wanted, when Bobby officially signed for United, thus beginning an association with the club that lasts to this day. So highly regarded was Bobby that the *Daily Mail* recorded the event. 'This may sound a minor signing but it is of major importance in a soccer world which is acutely aware of the value of developing youngsters. Charlton, the star of the England v Wales match last season, has superb positional sense and ball control.' Before leaving for Manchester he played out his last season for Bedlington. Evan Martin recalls, 'We had a hell of a team in 1952/53, thanks mainly to Bobby's

skills. We used to go to really hard secondary schools, like North Shields, and win easily. In the very last match of the season, we were on the coach and Bobby asked Tucker Robinson, "What's the highest individual score this season?"

"I got three against Alnwick," replied Tucker.

"Well, I'll get four today."

And he did. Two of them were 30-yard piledrivers. The goalkeeper did not even see them.'

Elder brother Jack had played no role in the saga of Bobby's move to United. There was no army of scouts after him, no club representative offering Cissie a fistful of cash for his services. Yet it is one of the strange twists of this story that Jack was actually taken on by a League club before Bobby. For most of his early years, Jack had rarely impressed anyone with his football. He was merely another competent youngster, a decent stopper of the kind that could be found throughout the north-east. He played for his school, district and YMCA side, but did not come near to his county team, never mind the England Schoolboys. In fact, he was dropped for several games from his district because of his habit of standing still, as if wondering what had happened, when he was beaten by a winger. 'You'll have to sharpen your wits up,' he was told. Evan Martin says: 'I remember watching Jack playing for the East Northumberland Juniors. He was at left-back and he was big, gangly and awkward. He did not impress me one bit.'

Indeed, it is a remarkable fact that the man who later gained a World Cup winner's medal could not even get in the Ashington

FC junior team. Ken Prior, who grew up with Jack, explains: 'Jimmy Denmark, the former Newcastle centre-half, came to manage Ashington and the club decided to have a junior side. So the call went out for all the budding youngsters to come to Portland Park. We had a trial and Jack did not even get picked for the final squad. I didn't think he played too badly but he did not stand out, certainly not for his size. Jack went home, a bit upset, and after he'd gone, Jimmy Denmark said, "You know, that lad will never make a player."'

Yet, as he approached his 15th birthday, there was something about Jack – his size, his strength, above all his 'Milburn' heritage – which meant that he could attract the interest of a League club. After playing well for the Ashington YMCA Under-18 side in a match against Barkworth, he was approached by a Leeds scout, who offered him a trial at Elland Road. In his later career, Jack would sometimes maintain that he, like Bobby, was always destined to be a professional footballer. 'Neither of us had ever considered anything but playing the game for a living,' he told the *News of the World* in April 1973.

But this was hardly true. For Jack had never shown any inclination towards professional football, and, in a rare moment of self-doubt, he feared that if he took up the offer from Leeds, he might not make the grade because of his lack of talent. He saw himself as a big, gangly lad who was not really good enough. Going to Leeds risked the pain of rejection. As he once explained to Mike Kirkup, 'The only way you could get away

from Ashington was to play football. But there was always the worry that you might not make it, and would get sent home again. Then you would come back as a failure.' Moreover, Jack loved the teenage life he had created for himself in the Northumberland countryside. If he left home for a big city like Leeds, he would no longer be able to fish and poach and shoot. Nor were his parents enthusiastic. In another illustration of how Jack felt he was excluded by his mother in favour of Bobby, he says that 'She didn't think I was good enough for professional football.' Indeed, Cissie held Jack's skills in such contempt that, when she first heard of the interest from Leeds, she felt that there had been some mistake. The club must have confused him with Bobby. 'I was amazed because although Jack enjoyed his football, he just wasn't the same calibre as Bobby,' she wrote.

Due to his mother's dismissive attitude and his own reluctance, Jack told Leeds that he was not interested. Now, with the end of his time at school approaching, he had to find a job. And the obvious one was coalmining. 'At that time in Ashington there were only the pits; there was very little else, really,' he recalls. So he followed his father into work at the Linton colliery. Initially, because he was serving his apprenticeship, Jack did not have to go underground. Instead, his first job was to stand by a conveyor belt for eight hours, sorting out the coal from debris as it came up from the mine. Never a patient man – except on the river – Jack found the work unbearably dull and kept asking for a move.

His badgering paid off. He was transferred to the weigh-cabin, where his task was to weigh the wagons before and after they were filled with coal, calculate the difference, then write the weight on the trucks before they were shunted into the sidings. Jack enjoyed his work there. 'Sometimes there was a quiet period when no coal was coming down and that was great. You could draw little things with a piece of stone. It was an artist's paradise. There were footballers, goals, nudes, everything. Some men worked there forever.' The other great advantage for Jack was that the sidings ran out on to land full of rabbits. This provided ample scope for his homemade snares, and Jack would regularly catch three or four a day, selling them on to the other miners. 'I usually left the pit at least two shillings richer than when I arrived.'

But it could not last. Jack was told that he had been selected to go on a 16-week training course in preparation for becoming a fully-fledged miner. As part of this induction, he was shown what work was like in the pit. Jack was appalled by the experience of his first trip underground: the cramped conditions, crawling on his hands and knees along a seam only three feet high; the noise from the explosives; the dust which went everywhere, including eyes and lungs; the gale force blasts of air from the ventilation system.

Returning to the surface, Jack handed in his resignation straight away, to the anger of the colliery manager.

'We've just spent a fortune training you. If you walk away now,

I'll see that you never get another job in the pit – anywhere.'

'I don't want another job in the pit.'

Jack already had another option lined up. Two weeks earlier, with a sense of foreboding about the job in the colliery, he had applied to become a police cadet. Now Jack could not be regarded as one of nature's law enforcers, and his motivation was suitably vague. 'I was getting close to six feet in height. That, to my young mind, seemed as good a reason as any why I should try for the police.' Impressed with Jack's application, the Northumberland Constabulary summoned him to an interview.

But then fate, in the form of Leeds United, intervened. Despite the earlier rebuff, the club had not given up hope of attracting Jack and now another invitation arrived for a trial. This time Jack, having seen the misery of life underground, was much more receptive to the idea of becoming a professional footballer. He knew the truth, though, that Leeds' interest was partly motivated by his close family connection with the club, with three of his uncles having been players there and one of them, Jimmy, still in the squad. 'When I got the offer of a trial, I knew it was right nepotism,' Jack once said.

The immediate problem for Jack was a logistical one. His police interview was in Morpeth on Friday afternoon, while his trial at Leeds was early the following Saturday morning. In the days before motorways, there was no physical way he could get to both places within this timescale. So Jack decided to abandon the police interview, instead travelling down on Friday to Leeds

with his parents. The trial was to be the most important match of his young life. If he succeeded, a new future in soccer beckoned. If he failed, there was little chance that any other club would show an interest.

Snow was falling that Saturday morning at Elland Road as Jack ran out to play for Leeds Juniors against the Newcastle youth team. He was in his customary left-back position, and, in the difficult conditions, he was not sure he had done enough to impress. But the club thought otherwise, admiring his height and solid style. After the game he was summoned into the office of the club secretary, Arthur Crowther.

'We'd like you to join the ground staff, Charlton.'

'Do you really think I'm good enough?'

Of course. Why do you think we'd want you if we didn't.'

Jack went home with his parents on Sunday to pick up his belongings, before returning to Leeds to report for duty on the Monday. Any ideas about becoming a policeman had been ditched as quickly as the career in mining. Despite barely giving the matter a thought, he had somehow become a professional footballer. His only anxiety now was whether he would succeed. What he dreaded, above all else, was being forced to return to Ashington, labelled a failure.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.