

# Attila the Stockbroker

There's more to a football club than 90 minutes of action. Mike Ward unearths the individuals who have one thing in common... a love of the Albion



**Rather like you always know the Queen is in residence if the Royal Standard is fluttering from its flagpole, it's not hard to spot when Attila The Stockbroker has made it to a match at Withdean.**

Crackling over our comedy PA system you'll hear him, in his matchday announcer's role, playing a blast of The Clash, perhaps. Or maybe The Jam. Even occasionally this column's vote for Greatest Band of all Time, the marvellous Half Man Half Biscuit (personally, I'd recommend *Mathematically Safe or Dead Men Don't Need Season Tickets*).

It's not to everyone's taste, of course, as plenty have made abundantly clear, but Attila's excellent (in my opinion) pre-match musical selections are as much a part of the Withdean experience as getting regularly soaked to the bones – or, for away fans, heading home with raw red rings around your eyes from excessive use of your binoculars.

As I say, though, he can't always make it to Withdean, try as he might. A fan since the mid-60s, when his dad first took him to the Goldstone, the Albion's official Poet In Residence, aka "old-fashioned punk rocker" John Baine, has recently been celebrating 30 years as a performer – music and poetry-wise – with an extensive tour of Britain, Holland and Germany.



"I've missed quite a few games," John tells me, "but I don't intend to miss many more until March. That's when I'm off on my fourth tour of Australia and New Zealand.

"I haven't been able to go for a decade because my mum, Muriel, had

Alzheimer's for six years and my touring abroad was curtailed very much by the fact my wife Robina and I had to look after her."

Muriel passed away in June, a day before her 87th birthday, and although this affected John very deeply – as did her difficult final years, as expressed in his deeply moving poem *The Long Goodbye* (which you can read on his website) – he's at least looking forward to venturing further afield again.

"I love travelling," he says. "I love visiting different places. I have huge connections with Germany, for example, and I speak the language.

"I do lots of gigs in lots of places. In most cities in Western Europe, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, somewhere between 50 and 100 people will turn up to see me. That's how it is. I'm a cult figure, a tiny fish in a huge great pool, and I love that.

**“Paul and I will be sitting together at the new stadium, proud that we've played our part in making it happen”**



"It's a phenomenally wonderful way to earn a living, doing what I love, and I do it on my own terms."

This, John explains, also includes arranging his own tour dates around Albion matches. But it's not always that easy.

"The day the fixtures come out I'm on the internet to people all over the country, sometimes further afield, saying: 'Right, can I do this date or that?' It combines earning my living with watching the Albion.

"I try to organise as many gigs as possible to fit around away fixtures. For home games I try to arrange ones that are relatively easy to get to afterwards.

"It doesn't always work, and obviously it can't if I'm abroad, but I normally manage about 30 games out of the 46 in a season.

"When I'm not there I'm glued to whatever piece of equipment is

available for me to follow the game.

"To be honest, though, if I'm somewhere else I'd rather go to watch another match. I just love football, full-stop."

John admits he'd still prefer to watch it the old-fashioned way, as he can when he goes to see his favourite German side, St Pauli.

"I want a terrace," he says, "I want a beer, I want people to have the opportunity to smoke in parts of the ground. But you can't do that here anymore."

Even so, having been a key figure in the fight for Falmer, he's not complaining about what the Amex holds in store. Not even the luxury of the 1901 Club. "People have a perfect right if they can afford it," he says, "but I do still believe that football fans also have the right to stand on a terrace with a pint if that's what we want."

The new stadium, he says, "thrills me totally. I'll be so proud at that first match to think I've played a tiny part in bringing it about."

For John, the legacy of that struggle includes one particularly powerful if unlikely bond – with chartered accountant Paul Samrah, his fellow matchday announcer, who chaired the *Falmer For All* campaign. "We come from two totally different worlds," says John, "in terms of our lifestyles and our aspirations – although less so these days, perhaps, because he's actually becoming a bit of a lefty (he'll love it if you put that in!) – but we're really good friends, and it's the Albion that's brought us together.

"Whatever happens to our current PA roles, that friendship is going to continue. Paul and I will be sitting together at the new stadium, proud that we've played our part in making it happen."