

## **Emotional Grounds: stories of football, memories, and emotions**

**Alan Bairner (Loughborough University, UK)**

### **Abstract**

Central to the emotional experience of watching sport is memory – the capacity to recall great achievements, triumphs and defeats. For most sports fans, these memories are collective.

However, this essay seeks to shed light on the ways in which sporting spaces – in this case football grounds – are also sites of acts of intimate emotional remembering that can exert a powerful hold over individuals even after (or, in some instances, because) many years have elapsed and a certain distance travelled. The essay briefly discusses the sociological significance of emotion, memory and place before adopting a narrative approach to describe and interrogate the author's own memories of particular moments in time and in sporting space. The stories that are told represent an invocation of emotions that are now indelibly associated with specific football grounds at particular times and also, in some cases, with the people with whom the author experienced these places. The essay seeks to demonstrate that the emotions that can be prompted by memories of football grounds often exceed the immediate excitement created by the event and, at least as importantly, necessarily vary from one spectator to another.

### **Keywords**

Memory

Masculinity

Football grounds

Intimacy

Storytelling

## 1. Introduction

Memories bind us to particular places. As de Certeau (1984: 108) comments, ‘there is no place that is not haunted by many different spirits hidden there in silence, spirits one can “invoke” or not’. The following stories represent an invocation of emotions that are now indelibly associated with specific sporting spaces at particular times. That said, defining emotions in relation to passions and appetites has long proved problematic (Dixon, 2003). Not every type of feeling highlighted in these stories would fit into everyone’s categorisation of emotions. The experience of male bonding, the appreciation of maternal love, a personal reaction to the compassion of others, and a sense of belonging, for example, might all seem too vague as emotional registers. On the other hand, empathy, excitement, fear, and anxiety would almost certainly feature in most such lists. In many respects, the empathy experienced towards an injured peer or as expressed by others on the death of a parent was arguably the easiest sensation to narrate here because kindness makes sense in terms of the social character of emotion. Empathy, according to Hoffman (2008: 440) is ‘an emotional state triggered by another’s emotional state situation, in which one feels what the other feels or would normally be expected to feel in his situation’. The presence of others is crucial to the recollection of this particular emotion.

The excitement of being at one’s first big football match or experiencing initial, and then more recent, feelings of male bonding, have many similar characteristics as does an awareness of maternal love. Much the same could be said about feelings of anxiety and fear although recalling these emotions is rendered more problematic because of the traditional ways in which boys and men are expected to respond to them in certain societies. That said, whilst it is possible (in some circumstances almost compulsory) to hide feelings of anxiety, essentialist readings of masculinity count for far less when there emerge undeniable and inescapable reasons to be afraid. Perhaps in only one of the situations described below was

the presence of others largely insignificant. Although the feeling of loneliness that was experienced on one memorable occasion was almost certainly accentuated by a sense that everyone else belonged.

There is no doubt that playing sport can produce emotions, such as intimacy, that go well beyond the immediate excitement of scoring a goal or sinking a putt (Evers, 2010). This essay seeks to demonstrate, however, that the emotions that can also be prompted by and in sporting spaces, in this case football grounds, can actually exceed the immediate and, at least as importantly, can vary from one spectator to another. Many years ago, when I was telling a university class about the sociological insight to be derived from watching football, one female student commented, 'Maybe you just think too much'. Maybe I do. But so, I am happy to say, do most of us. As a man, however, with a certain type of background, the temptation to bottle up whatever it is I am thinking remains strong unless I am talking about subjects such as sport and specifically about memories linked to sport.

Central to the enjoyment of watching sport is memory – the capacity to recall great achievements, triumphs and defeats. For most sports fans, these memories are collective. We did not watch alone – hence, questions such as 'Do you remember when...?' and inclusive comments such as 'We were there when...?' which are commonplace in many discussions about sport. In the past, indeed, the only way in which one could refresh one's memory of great sporting moments was by engaging in acts of communal story-telling.

Today, YouTube and similar tools allow us to revisit moments that we previously only witnessed once, if at all, and persuade us to believe that our ability to remember is even greater than that of our forebears. But what is it that we are remembering? It is the event itself but surely not the emotions that we felt at the time, many of which were almost certainly unconnected to the drama that was unfolding before us and formed the basis of the collective

experience? That is why storytelling remains a valuable means of communicating those personal emotions that are always present even in collective experiences.

This essay seeks to illuminate ways in which sporting spaces – in this case football grounds – are sites of acts of emotional remembering that can exert a powerful hold over the individual even after many years have elapsed. Using storytelling whereby the researcher ‘is both researcher and participant in her/his study of a particular phenomenon or phenomena’ (Allen-Collinson, 2011: 53), the essay relies heavily on my own memories of particular moments in time and in sporting space.

The essay does not seek to add new insights to the existing body of literature on either space or emotion. Rather the intention here is to argue that research into the social significance of sport, and specifically of fandom, should be more aware of that literature and demonstrate a willingness to think in terms of individual emotional experiences in addition to collective emotions. The contention is that sports stadia, and specifically football grounds, provide spaces in which people gather, ostensibly and in large part, with a shared set of feelings but which are such that it is also possible for the individual to experience emotions that are purely personal. This is facilitated by the fact that our interaction in such settings is not only with other people but with the physical environment in which we find ourselves and it is commonly recollection of that space which reminds us most vividly of the emotions felt on particular occasions. To explain this further, it is important to consider the sociological importance of emotion memory, and space and, more importantly, of the interplay between the three.

## **2. On emotion, memory, and space**

Collins (1990: 27) argues that ‘emotion potentially occupies a crucial position in general sociological theory’. But how are we to demonstrate this potential? According to Denzin (1990: 86), ‘emotion must be studied as lived experience’. For the overwhelming majority of the world’s population, lived experiences are situated in social space. ‘Space and place’, according to Tuan (1977: 3), ‘are basic components of the lived world; we take them for granted’. Yet, space is only natural in part for, as Lefebvre (1991: 77) observes, ‘social space contains a great diversity of objects, both natural and social, including the networks and pathways which facilitate the exchange of material things and information’. Furthermore, ‘vis-à-vis lived experience, space is neither a mere “frame”, after the fashion of the frame of a painting, nor a form or container of a virtually neutral kind, designed simply to receive whatever is poured into it’. It is in this sense, for example, that ‘the city is a place, a center of meaning, par excellence’ (Tuan, 1977: 173) – a symbol in itself and also the location of numerous highly visible symbols. Not surprisingly, therefore, social spaces such as cities and, I would argue, football grounds, are hugely important in the construction and reproduction of memories and identities (Bale and Vertinsky, 2004).

The analysis of social space, Lefebvre (1991: 226) argues, ‘involves levels, layers and sedimentations of perception, representation, and spatial practice which presuppose one another, which proffer themselves to one another, and which are superimposed upon one another’. As for public spaces (a description that applies, at least in part to British football grounds), ‘from the greatest public square to the smallest public park these places are a product of, and internally dislocated by, heterogeneous and sometimes conflicting social identities/relations’ (Massey, 2005: 152).

Urry (2007: 89) notes that public paths and pavements may provide ‘moments of joy and surprise’. Yet, how often do what we see and the emotions that are conjured up by our physical surroundings, become a matter for sociological analysis? Writing in 1995, Jenks

(1995: 145) noted that ‘sociology has long since evacuated methodological sites that claimed any correspondential relation with the “seen” phenomenon’. In response, Jenks (1995: 145) sought ‘to reconstitute the analytic force of the *flâneur*’. One recognises, however, that there remains considerable suspicion in conventional social scientific circles about the role of the *flâneur* and the validity of his activities. The *flâneur*’s ‘discoveries’ are undeniably impressionistic rather than realistic but that is arguably their greatest strength (White, 2001). Impressionistic as they are, they represent place in sociologically interesting ways (Bairner, 2011). They offer an alternative vision, one which is, according to Jenks (1995: 149), ‘more optimistic than that founded on “power-knowledge”’.

As Bale and Vertinsky (2004: 1) observe, ‘the significance of space and place as central dimensions of sport is well recognized by scholars who have addressed questions of sport from philosophical, sociological, geographical and historical perspectives’. More specifically, sports grounds are always emotive places. This is often because of the ebb and flow of the sporting event itself. However, there may also be evidence of emotional responses to particular landscapes (Bale, 2003; Bairner, 2009). The first of these explanations is more likely than not to result in collective feeling, the second in emotions inspired by the surrounding environment that are almost certainly more personal and confined to the individual. Furthermore, it can even be argued that sporting spaces, even heavily populated ones, can be sites for individual emotional experiences which have only marginal links to the occasion and/or the place.

Emotional experiences associated with specific places can be immediate – of the moment so to speak. However, at least as often, if not more so, they are produced and reproduced within individual memory. The sociological significance of this should not be underestimated.

Huyssen (2003: 11) claims that ‘one of the most surprising cultural and political phenomena of recent years has been the emergence of memory as a key cultural and political concern in

Western societies, a turning toward the past that stands in stark contrast to the privileging of the future so characteristic of earlier decades of twentieth-century modernity'. Memory itself can best be understood as a social activity inasmuch as 'the mind reconstructs its memories under the pressure of society' (Halbwachs, 1992: 51). Indeed, it is for this reason that emotional experience is often to be found at the interface between memory and space. As Johnson (2002: 294) argues, 'the concept of social memory has been linked to the development of emotional and ideological ties with particular histories and geographies'. As a consequence, Hoelscher and Alderman (2004: 348) suggest, 'social memory and social space conjoin to produce much of the context for modern identities – and the often – rigorous contestation of those identities'. The question is how best to capture the dynamic relationship between emotion, memory, and space.

#### **4. On storytelling**

Narrative qualitative research involves a focus on stories (Smith and Caddick, 2012). The researcher is interested in a variety of narrative resources selected from the cultural menu of storytelling. Berger and Quinney (2005: 5) note that 'narrative scholars of various stripes seem to concur with the proposition that lived experience can be understood through the stories people tell about it'. Furthermore, for some narrative researchers, the personal sense of self and of emotion can be constituted through auto-ethnographic stories. In 2000, Jim Denison and Robert Rinehart co-edited a special edition of the *Sociology of Sport Journal* on 'Imagining Sociological Narratives'. In their introduction, the guest editors underlined their commitment 'to making fictional and other types of storied representations an accepted form of scholarship' (Denison and Rinehart, 2000: 2). In so doing, they recognised that 'the shift into personal experience narratives, storied accounts, or ethnographic fiction requires a highly complex and complicated conceptual shift in the way one approaches subjects and topics' (p. 3).

Another consideration is the extent to which these personal stories need to be true in a positivistic sense (Bairner, 2012). Whilst most academic writers may be cautious about the excessive use of invention even in personal narratives, others are less diffident. According to Jean-Claude Izzo (2013: 38), the chronicler of Marseilles' criminal underbelly, 'imagination is a reality, sometimes more real than reality itself'. In similar vein, Joe Queenan (2010: 151) writes, 'Just because something isn't true doesn't mean you shouldn't believe in it'. Indeed the former Bishop of Edinburgh Richard Holloway (2012) argues that great fiction explores the truth better than anything. But this requires some qualification. We are not talking here about the difference between truth and lies but about 'different sorts of truth' (Maitland, 2012: 14) or of verisimilitude as a way of presenting truth(s). In storytelling sociology, 'the measure of the truth is judged not by conventional scientific standards of validity and reliability but by the power of stories to evoke the vividness of lived experience' (Berger and Quinney, 2005: 9). In this way, storytelling is undeniably research (Koch, 1998).

What follows, therefore, is a sort of truth about my own interaction with particular sporting spaces and the emotions that are triggered by memories of those places at specific times. This does not involve what might be described as collective sporting memories (of results, goals scored, players ordered from the field of play) which can of course be faulty but which can also to a certain extent be verifiable. Instead, the stories that follow are attempts to demonstrate how far, and in what ways, place, memory and emotion come together. The memory can be an unreliable tool. However, as Kensinger and Schacter (2008: 603) note, 'emotion can affect not only the likelihood of remembering an event, but also the subjective vividness with which it is remembered'. The thing to stress is the importance of 'being willing to tell as a researcher as well as listen' (Cross, 2009: 102).



My telling of these stories situates me in many respects as a *flâneur* of my own past. When the events described unfolded, I was intimately (and emotionally) involved in the action, a member of the crowd. Now I write as an idle wanderer through my own uncertain bank of memories. The standpoint is male, as is true of so much *flânerie*. In addition, it is the perspective of someone who grew up in the 1950s and 1960s in a working-class family in a coal-mining area of Scotland. West Fife in those days was a place which was strong on solidarity but far less at ease with sociability, especially amongst its male population. Miners stood apart from each other in pubs, lost in their own thoughts. Conversation was limited and silences were long. When asked how he was keeping, the local miner's stock answer was, 'You see it'. The style of writing that characterises the stories which make up the bulk of this essay no doubt reflect this particular brand of masculinity. Men were uncomfortable with expressing their emotions, football and its spaces providing some of the few available loci for emotional outbursts. Furthermore, these were, and in many cases remain, male preserves.

Whilst some ethnographic storytellers have prioritised the senses – soundscapes, smellscapes – and also, in relation to sport, active participation (Sparkes, 2009), the stories that follow focus on the emotions of a spectator. The venues and occasions have been selected primarily because they hold personal emotional resonance. But they are also intended to provide insights into the interplay between sport, place and emotion over time and space and to demonstrate that this relationship is present regardless of the size of the attendance (ranging from 113,618 at a Scottish Cup Final to 311 at a seventh tier game in England), the importance of the match, or the type of venue, all which varied markedly in relation to the events that are described here. In some instances, the emotions evoked were dependent on the presence of others, on occasion of many others. Yet this was not always the case. What is

common to each story, however, is the extent to which a specific sporting place is pivotal to the act of remembering those emotions that were felt at particular times.

### **5.1 East End Park, Dunfermline, 6 September 1958**

*The game itself was unmemorable such that the date is nothing more than an approximation. The event that took place, however, remains imprinted on my mind. In those days East End Park had an old wooden stand behind which there was a gravel path between the structure itself and the perimeter wall. Children liked nothing better than to run round the back of the stand, particularly if the game was unable to occupy their full attention, not uncommon in those days. I was seven years old and running, as I imagined, like the wind. So too was a boy of roughly the same age who was coming in the opposite direction. He tripped, fell and started to cry. My immediate reaction was to help him to his feet, locate the St Andrew's Ambulance hut and ask for help. It was my first experience of empathy and a desire to help someone without feeling any sense of social pressure to do so. Would I do the same now that I am in my early sixties? Possibly not. I would almost certainly wait for someone else to come to the rescue, held back by the potential embarrassment of taking centre stage in a small-scale human drama.*

De Botton (2012: 70) observes that 'once we are grown up, we are seldom encouraged officially to be nice to one another'. On this particular occasion, however, I was not compelled to act kindly towards a stranger. But was the other boy a stranger or did the fact that he was 'one of us', a fellow fan, influence my behaviour? If so, here was a clear

indication of the extent to which the sense of community that is engendered at football grounds takes hold at a surprisingly early age.

## **5.2 Hampden Park, Glasgow, 22 April 1961**

*Dunfermline Athletic had reached the Scottish Cup Final for the first time in the club's history. I knew that classmates would be going to the game but I had no such expectation. It was only on the morning of the final that my father produced two tickets and told me we would be there. My parents had decided not to tell me any earlier fearing no doubt that the excitement would be too much for me. And excitement there was. As we reached the outskirts of Glasgow, the bus we were travelling on was increasingly accompanied on both sides of the road by crowds of Celtic fans. The stadium itself was a riot of colour, most of it comprised of the green, white and orange of the Celtic supporters' scarves. Even in the stand where my father and I sat, most of those around us were followers of our opponents. They gave my father nips of whisky and me sweets, almost certainly relaxed in the belief that their team would be victorious. But there was Dunfermline's goalkeeper, Eddie Connachan, making save after save to ensure a 0-0 draw and a replay. It was the most exciting day of my life up to that point and with the benefit of fifty two years of hindsight, it may well remain so.*

What was the main source of my excitement? The game itself perhaps but at least as important was the fact that I was with my father at a major event, in a huge ground, with the largest crowd of people I had ever seen gathered in one place and being with my dad meant that I experienced no trepidation. Even the rival fans offered no threat; they simply added to the sense of occasion.

### **5.3 Palmerston Park, Dumfries, 17 November, 1962**

*My father and I set off from Dunfermline early in the morning on a bus organised by the Jubilee Dunfermline Supporters' Club. It was a beautiful early winter's day and the trip was uneventful as, indeed, was the game. Towards full time, however, the sky had begun to signal a change in the weather. Undaunted, we left Palmerston Park for a pub, owned by a former Scottish internationalist and situated near the banks of the River Nith, where a meal would be served before our long journey home. Dinner was followed by drinks in the bar where, as an eleven-year-old boy, I listened with rapt attention to the older supporters' discussions about football. In time, I summoned up the courage to add my contributions which, to my surprise, were taken seriously. I felt proud. I was becoming a man.*

*By the time we left Dumfries, snow had started to fall and we had been warned that it was even worse further north. In fact, it was not long before we were caught up in traffic jams as articulated trucks jack-knifed and cars slithered into the drifts that were gathering at the side of the road. Icy particles of snow clung to the bus window like spittle. Fortunately, our bus did not meet with any accidents, although one supporter who alighted for a toilet stop disappeared into a snow drift from which he was extricated, with difficulty, by three of his friends. Everyone else was laughing. We had started to see the funny side of our predicament. Eventually we arrived home at around 6 am the following morning to find that my mother was distraught. Without the benefit of mobile phones, no one had been able to send messages home. My mother had got all her information from radio reports which had been far from sanguine about the havoc caused by such early blizzards. She shouted at us for a while and then cried for considerably longer. It was curious to see someone react in such a way to what for me had been a great adventure. Over the years, however, whenever my mother related this story, it became increasingly obvious to me that what I had witnessed was unadulterated love. To all intents and purposes, the football ground is incidental to this set of memories. Yet*

*it was central to the entire journey and any time I hear it mentioned or look again at the match programme, memories of adult conversation, snow drifts, and a mother's tears come flooding back across the years. Overall the emotions evoked by memories of this particular sporting space are ones of male bonding, a rite of passage, and a mother's love.*

Although I can still picture in my mind's eye the broad expanse of the playing surface at Palmerston Park and the bright sunshine that shone on us for most of the match, it is the aftermath that makes the trip to that ground so important. According to de Botton (2012: 173), 'in their zeal to attack believers whose frailties have led them to embrace the supernatural, atheists may neglect the frailty that is an inevitable feature of all our lives'. My mother was a believer who recognised my frailty and that of my father. It was only many years later, after her death possibly, that I recognised the extent to which, in that single event, our return from Palmerston, she too was frail.

#### **5.4 East End Park, Dunfermline, 30 April, 1968**

*As one gets older one generally becomes more aware of the potential dangers that lie in wait. A few people never experience this feeling and, having lived lives full of adventure, not infrequently die in unforeseen (at least by them) circumstances. I was certainly anxious as I approached East End Park a month to the day after my seventeenth birthday. The Scottish Cup winners would play the First Division champions amidst what was anticipated would be a carnival atmosphere. I knew, however, as I saw the crowds snaking from the town centre towards the ground that it was likely to be a capacity attendance with many supporters almost certainly locked out. I had decided to watch the game from what we knew as the Cowdenbeath end, the least populated terracing on normal match days. On this occasion though, it was as congested as every other part of the ground. Not long after the game had*

*started, a nearby crush barrier gave way under the weight of bodies. One fan died on the spot. As other supporters climbed on to roofs to secure better vantage points, one of them fell to his death through a garage roof. In circumstances such as these, it is all too easy for learned masculine behaviour to kick in. The imperative is not to reveal one's anxiety, let alone fear. Yet simultaneously, all that I wanted was to hear the final whistle and go home.*

I have often felt anxiety before and during football matches even at 'home' games which are supposed to offer a sense of security. Very seldom have I shared this emotion with others. It would not have been 'the done thing'. On this occasion I was frightened rather than merely anxious but still I told no one. It came as something of a relief, therefore, when I later discovered that my father, having arrived at the ground that night, turned back when he saw the size of the crowd that was gathering.

### **5.5 Solitude. Belfast, 14 August, 1984**

*If some venues create anxiety, often simply because they are overcrowded, others can provoke what can only be described as outright fear. Attending matches at Solitude, home to Irish League club Cliftonville, was assuredly always tinged with anxiety. Walking from Belfast city centre to the ground takes you along part of the Antrim Road colloquially known during the worst days of civil unrest as 'murder mile'. The lower end of the Cliftonville Road itself, once a prosperous and predominantly unionist area, had been transformed over the years with large family dwellings being converted into flats and bedsits and an almost exclusively nationalist population taking up residence. The latter fact alone made anyone walking alone at night a potential target for the loyalist murder gangs which had terrorised large parts of north Belfast for many years.*

*However, when the game to be played on 14 August 1984 was first arranged, it was to be an occasion for celebration. Cliftonville would play host to Celtic Football Club with most people in the ground being supporters of both teams as a consequence of the Glasgow club's Irish roots and traditions. But a few days before the game was scheduled to take place, a young Catholic man, Sean Downes, who had been attending a republican rally in west Belfast, had been killed by a plastic bullet fired by a Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) reservist who was later charged with manslaughter although subsequently acquitted. Tensions were running high and yet there was no immediate cause for alarm about a game to be played in front of a sizeable crowd of like-minded people. Nevertheless, a large RUC contingent was present and when missiles were returned from a section of the crowd in the direction of loyalist youths who had been throwing bricks and bottles over the perimeter walls, RUC officers in full riot gear seized the opportunity to charge, firing plastic bullets as they advanced. No one was killed on this occasion but the sense of fear was palpable. This went well beyond the violence associated with football hooliganism and there was no room now for a performance of manly stoicism. The troubles had entered our sporting space and it was a frightening experience.*

Northern Ireland could be a dangerous place in those days but not normally for incomers with professional occupations like me. I had heard bombs explode, on a couple of occasions quite close to my home. I had taught students whose fathers had been killed in sectarian attacks. But this was different, more immediate. It was also very different from any previous experience I had known at a football ground. Although I had often felt anxious in such settings, that anxiety was usually linked to the nature of the game itself and also to the size of the crowd. Something very different had occurred that night and it came as a relief to be able to share my fears with others instead of trying to hide them.

## 5.6 Central Park, Cowdenbeath, 13 February, 1993

*My father, who had taken me to so many sporting venues when I was growing up, had died not long before this game. I was still 'at home' trying 'to sort out his affairs' as the saying goes. Going to nearby Central Park was to be a pleasant diversion not only from mourning but also from attending to the various small matters that one never really anticipates until it is your turn. I went to the game with friends, people with whom I had gone to school and who had stayed on in our home town after I had left, first to live in England and then in Northern Ireland. I knew their company would be good for me. What I had not expected, however, was the amount of compassion shown to me by others, some of whom I knew well, others who had known my father but were largely unknown to me. As an only child, it was like suddenly having a large extended family around me. The game went by almost unnoticed as people kept coming to talk, to reminisce and to offer their sympathy. Central Park itself and indeed the town of Cowdenbeath are grim places but here in this football ground, I could see meaning in the oft-stated claim that life goes on and realised that it does so much more smoothly when accompanied by the fellow feeling of others.*

The loss of a parent is arguably one of the most traumatic events in most people's lives (second only perhaps to the loss of a child). This is particularly true when it is the loss of a second parent. As one friend said to me at the time, 'You're an orphan now'. True of course, albeit a rather mature one. As an only child, I certainly felt very alone. In such circumstances, where is comfort to be found? For me, it was at a ramshackle football ground on a bitterly cold day for the simple reason that it was the type of place where my father and I had so often been together and I was with 'my ain folk', as the Scottish saying goes (Faley, 2005).



### 5.7 The Dovecot, Shepshed, 4 October, 2003

*A new academic year was about to commence. I had left Northern Ireland after twenty five years, leaving behind numerous close friends and countless memories of watching football at The Oval, home of Glentoran, at Linfield's Windsor Park and at Solitude where in recent years I had watched almost every home game in the company of a close knit group of Reds' fans who had become friends both at the ground and beyond. Now I was alone. I recall nothing of the Shepshed Dynamo match itself – not even the identity of the opposition. Instead I was preoccupied throughout by reflections on how my life had changed. Would I, a fifty-two-year old man, be able to establish a network of friends and acquaintances such as I had enjoyed in Belfast? Would I become a regular at Shepshed Dynamo games – alone in a crowd of little more than three hundred people? In time I grew to like my admittedly, increasingly irregular, visits to the Dovecot. I got to know some people at the club and even sponsored a couple of players' kits for two seasons. But even now, some ten years on, when I return to the ground, I can cast my mind back with total clarity to that first occasion and to the existential dread brought on by the loneliness that I had experienced so strongly there.*

Although not nearly as traumatic as losing a loved one, moving location at any stage in life is difficult and possibly all the more so when one is older. It was not surprising that I sought solace by going to a football ground, the kind of place with which I have long been familiar, notwithstanding occasional past feelings of anxiety. To an extent the remedy worked. The material surroundings, the sounds and smells were comforting. I had also always prided myself on being happy with my own company. But suddenly things were different. I was alone again but this time the comfort of strangers was nowhere to be found, even in the type of space which, over the years, had become a virtual home from home.

## **5.8 Pride Park Stadium, Derby, 13 March, 2012**

*Moving to a different place is difficult especially as one gets older. How do you make new friends particularly in a part of England where strangers are treated with far less curiosity than they are in Northern Ireland? Over time, however, I began to acquire some sense of belonging and it was at a much larger football ground than the Dovecot that this emerged. Until I began to watch Derby County regularly, I had never followed a football team that regularly attracted large crowds. This alone would have ensured that Pride Park would prompt new emotions. In addition, because it was nearly always easy to gain admission to the previous grounds I had gone to, I had never bought a season ticket, the main benefit of which is to secure a seat for virtually every home game. The potentially negative aspect of this is that one is taking a chance as to whom one will sit next to, a risk which of course one's immediate neighbours have also taken. In time, these other fans become your ninety-minute friends. I never see Mark or Jim or John or Chris other than at games and I do not even know the name of the man who sits to my left and with whom I talk throughout most matches. Towards the end of 2011, I broke my right arm and was unable to attend several games. The welcome I received from my 'friends' when I finally returned in March 2012 seemed genuine and heartfelt.*

*The game pitted Derby County against the club's most bitter rivals, Nottingham Forest. It was still 0-0 in the closing stages. The atmosphere was intense. I knew that if Derby scored now, Mark to my right would become particularly excited. I suspected that he would grab my arm and try to shake my hand which was exactly what happened when what turned out to be the winning goal went in with seconds remaining. I did what I could to move my body in such a way as to make my recently healed but still weak right arm less accessible. But Mark was persistent and as he grabbed my hand, I let out a muted scream. He recoiled immediately and was clearly still rather sheepish when I saw at the next home game. Now, with my arm*

*restored to full working order, this incident became part of the bonding folklore with Mark and the others periodically extending their hands towards mine and then pulling them away. Moments like these make me feel that I have found yet another place where I belong. It is a very different experience from being at East End Park with my father or at Solitude with a group of much closer friends. But it fills an emotional need – to belong, to be part of something, to feel at home.*

To all intents and purposes, this is a story about homecoming. At a relatively advanced stage in my life, I have many of the same feelings as I climb the stairs to take my seat at Pride Park as I had as a boy walking along the Halbeath Road to East End Park. There is nowhere I would rather be on a Saturday afternoon. The place has acquired a familiarity. I belong.

## **6 Conclusion**

The stories presented here address three inter-related topics – family and community, rites of passage, danger and fear. It might be argued that the emotions described are in no way peculiar to sport or to the sporting spaces which are identified with these emotions. The fact is, however, that no other places have collectively contributed so much to my emotional development. There are, of course, memories of schools, of workplaces, of holiday destinations and so on. However, these memories of certain football grounds elide into more comprehensive reflections on a multiplicity of emotions. Even in the midst of a cheering crowd, the football ground will always be for me a place for quiet contemplation.

**There is, of course a considerable body of literature concerned with emotional engagement with association football and its places. Much of this, inspired by Nick Hornby (1992), has been relatively populist in character. Examples with a Scottish focus include**

books by Ferguson (1993), Bennie (1995) and Gray (2010). Academic work on football has been rather less inclined to address the subject of emotion other than in relation to collective emotion, as manifested, for example, in crowd violence. One notable exception is Farred's (2009) analysis of Anfield, home to Liverpool Football Club. According to Farred (2009: 172, 'like all cultural spaces, Anfield Road is imbued with topophilia.

For the fans, the player and the club officials, there is a

love for the physical place that is in excess of its materiality.

The space is infused with a history and a symbolic value

that cannot be measured in material terms; which is to say, either

in terms of property value or even in the number of trophies and

honours that the club has accrued.

Farred's account, however, focusses on the sport itself and on a particular club, both of which undeniably arouse strong emotions but may not be central to the feelings experienced by an individual when thinking about a specific football stadium

It has long been recognised, by Bale (1982, 1993, 1994), amongst others, that sports venues are socially significant. There is also a substantial body of work concerned the interaction between the monumentalization of space and emotion. This essay has sought to highlight the importance of both memory and space in relation to individual recollections, and related emotional experiences, of particular sporting places. In order to do so, it has relied heavily on storytelling through which it becomes possible to invoke personal memories associated with particular places at specific times. The emotions that are described in these stories were, for the most part, neither shared by, or with, others even though they were experienced in far from solitary circumstances. Rather they were the consequence of a unique coming together of an individual and a place and have been revisited through the lens of

memory. Although it might be reasonable to assume that fans persist in visiting football's places for their entertainment value and for the feelings associated with being part of the crowd, this paper reveals the possibility that there are other, more personal reasons why someone might reflect on time spent at a match. Hornby (1992: 10) wrote that as far as football is concerned, 'I rarely think'. For some of us the football ground is one of the best places for thinking.

## References

Allen-Collinson, Jacquelyn, 2011. Intention and epochē in tension: autophenomenography, bracketing and a novel approach to researching sporting embodiment, *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 3 (1), 48-62.

Bairner, Alan, 2009. National sports and national landscapes: In defence of primordialism. *National Identities*, 11 (3), 223-239.

Bairner, Alan, 2011. Urban walking and the pedagogies of the street, *Sport, Education and Society*, 16 (3), 371-384.

Bairner, Alan, 2012. Between flânerie and fiction: ways of seeing exclusion and inclusion in the contemporary city. *Leisure Studies*, 31 (1), 3-19.

Bale, John, 1982. *Sport and Place*. Christopher Hurst, London.

Bale, John, 1993. *Sport, Space and the City*. Routledge, London.

Bale, John, 1994. *Landscapes of Modern Sport*. Leicester University Press, Leicester.

Bale, John 2003. *Sports Geography*. Second Edition. Routledge, London.

Bale, John, Vertinsky, Patricia, 2004. Introduction. In: Vertinsky, Patricia, Bale, John (Eds.), *Sites of Sport. Space, Place, Experience*. Routledge, London, pp.1-7.

Bennie, David 1995. *Not Playing for Celtic*. Mainstream Publishing, Edinburgh.

Berger, Ronald J., Quinney, Richard, 2005. The Narrative Turn in Social Inquiry. In: Berger, Ronald J., Quinney, Richard (Eds.), *Storytelling Sociology. Narrative as Social Inquiry*. Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder, Colorado.

Collins, Randall, 1990. Stratification, Emotional Energy, and the Transient Emotions. In: Kemper, Thomas D. (Ed.), *Research Agendas in the Sociology of Emotions*. State University of New York Press, Albany, NY, pp. 27-57.

Cross, Beth, 2009. Feeling my way into story space: Lessons for research, *Emotion, Space and Society*, 2 (2), 98-103.

De Botton, Alain, 2012. *Religion for Atheists*. Hamish Hamilton, London.

De Certeau, Michel, 1984. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. University of California Press, Berkeley, CAL.

Denison, Jim, Rinehart, Robert, 2000. Introduction: Imagining sociological narratives, *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 17 (1), 1-4.

Denzin, Norman K., 1990. On Understanding Emotion: The Interpretive-Cultural Agenda. In: Kemper, Theodore D. (Ed.), *Research Agendas in the Sociology of Emotions*. State University of New York Press, Albany, NY, pp. 85-116.

Dixon, Thomas, 2003. *From Passions to Emotions. The Creation of a Secular Psychological Category*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Evers, Clifton, 2010. Intimacy, sport and young refugee men, *Emotion, Space and Society*, 3 (1), 56-61.

Faley, Jean V.L. Hector, 2005. My Ain Folk: Scottish Oral History and the Sociological Imagination. In: Berger, Ronald J., Quinney, Richard (Eds.), *Storytelling Sociology. Narrative as Social Inquiry*. Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder, Colorado, pp. 49-62.

Farred, Grant, 2009. Socratic solitude. The Scouser two-as-one. In: Carrington, Ben, McDonald (Eds.), *Marxism, Cultural Studies and Sport*. Routledge, London, pp. 154-177.

Ferguson, Ronald, 1993. *Black Diamonds and the Blue Brazil*. Northern Books, Ellon, Aberdeenshire.

Gray, Daniel, 2010. *Stramash. Tackling Scotland's Towns and Teams*. Luath Press, Edinburgh.

Halbwachs, Maurice, 1992. *On Collective Memory* (Ed. Lewis A. Coser). University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

Hoelscher, Steven, Alderman, Derek H., 2004. Memory and place: geographies of a critical relationship. *Social and Cultural Geography*, 5 (3), 347-355.

Hoffman, Martin L., 2008. Empathy and Prosocial Behavior. In: Lewis, Michael, Haviland-Jones, Jeanette M., Barrett, Lisa Feldman (Eds.) Handbook of Emotions. Third Edition. The Guildford Press, New York, pp. 440-455.

Holloway, Richard, 2012. Leaving Alexandria. A Memoir of Faith and Doubt. Canongate Books, Edinburgh.

Hornby, Nick, 1992. Fever Pitch. Victor Gollancz, London.

Huyssen, Andreas, 2003. Present pasts. Urban palimpsests and the politics of memory. Stanford University Press, Stanford, CAL.

Izzo, Jean-Claude, 2013. Garlic, Mint, and Sweet Basil. Essays on Marseilles, Mediterranean Cuisine, and Noir Fiction. Europa Editions, New York.

Jenks, Chris 1995. Watching Your Step. The history and practice of the *flâneur*. In: Jenks, Chris (Ed.) Visual Culture. Routledge, London, pp. 142-160.

Johnson, Nuala C., 2002. Mapping monuments: the shaping of public space and cultural identities. Visual Communication, 1, 293-298.

Kensinger, Elizabeth A., Schacter, Daniel L., 2008. Memory and Emotion. In: Lewis, Michael, Haviland-Jones, Jeanette M., Barrett, Lisa Feldman (Eds.) Handbook of Emotions. Third Edition. The Guildford Press, New York, pp. 601-617.

Koch, Tina, 1998. Story telling; is it really research?, Methodological issues in nursing research, 28 (6), 1182-1190.

Lefebvre, Henri, 1991. The Production of Space. Blackwell Publishing, Oxford.



Maitland, Sara, 2012. The greatest pleasure I know, Saturday Guardian Review, 22 September, 14-15.

Massey, Doreen, 2005. For space. Sage, London.

Queenan, Joe, 2010. Closing Time. A Memoir. Picador, London.

Smith, Brett, Caddick, Nick, 2012. Qualitative methods in sport: a concise overview for guiding social scientific sport research, Asia Pacific Journal of Sport and Social Science, 1 (1), 60-73.

Sparkes, Andrew C., 2009. Ethnography and the senses; challenges and possibilities, Qualitative Research in Sport and Exercise, 1 (1), 21-35.

Tuan, Yi-Fu, 1977. Space and place. The perspective of experience. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis.

Urry, John, 2007. Mobilities. Polity Press, Cambridge

White, Edmund, 2001. The Flâneur. A Stroll through the Paradoxes of Paris. Bloomsbury, London.