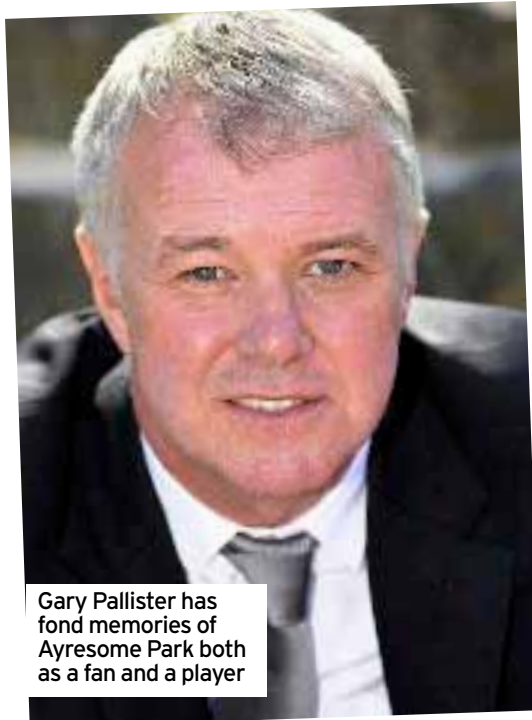


Boro



Gary Pallister has fond memories of Ayresome Park both as a fan and a player

Pally's Ayresome memories... and why Hendrie has not forgiven him!

By TOSH WARWICK

IT'S now 25 years since Boro played their final season at Ayresome Park.

Former Middlesbrough, Manchester United and England defender Gary Pallister played at the much-missed venue at the start of his hugely successful career and he spoke about his memories of Ayresome Park, Old Trafford and how new stadiums compare with historic old grounds.

Tosh Warwick: What are your early memories of Ayresome Park?

Gary Pallister: "I have plenty of memories.

"I went there as a six-year-old kid for the first time, I think I got a 'squeeze' through the turnstiles with my uncle as you would do back in them days. You paid for one turn of the turnstile so if you could squeeze through you managed to get two people in for the price of one.

"Those are my early memories, watching Stuey Boam, Willie Madren, Graeme Souness, Bobby Murdoch, John Hickton, Alan Foggon - it's these names that come back to mind. Most kids at that age were transfixed by the atmosphere



Gary Pallister scores the equaliser in the 1-1 draw against Birmingham at Ayresome Park in March 1988

and what professional football was all about so, many happy memories."

TW: Who was your childhood Boro hero?

GP: "It is difficult to really say because I was a centre forward when I was a youngster so I was looking at John Hickton and Alan Foggon. They were the sort of two

that sprang to mind and David Mills came along.

"I think everybody remembers, 'Six foot two, eyes of blue, Stuey Boam is after you'. He was a larger than life character.

"I used to be in the Chicken Run, although I did end up in many places at Ayresome Park. I remember in the early days being in the

Chicken Run watching John Craggs and Terry Cochrane work in tandem down the right hand side.

"So, I didn't really have one particular hero or whatever, I just loved football and I was kind of transfixed by the whole occasion of a football match."

TW: How did Ayresome Park compare to Old Trafford when you joined Manchester United in 1989?

GP: "You have got to remember that both stadiums were probably a bit dilapidated. Both stadiums were rundown.

"I remember the Boys' End and the side where the away fans stood was falling to pieces and when I went to Old Trafford they had the old Stretford End which was just a bit of a shed. They were both the same, they both were maybe starting to feel the effects of time really, but they had character.

"The old stadiums were great to play in because you felt the atmosphere and tradition and you felt as though you were a part of that. You lose a little bit of that when you go to new stadiums but obviously football has got to move on. After what happened at Hillsborough you have got to make football sta-



Alan Foggon was one of the players Gary Pallister loved to watch



Gary Pallister in action for Manchester United at Ayresome Park as he takes on Boro's Paul Wilkinson

diums much more safe places for people to be. Some of the ones that we see now that are suitable for this day and age."

TW: You played for United in a two-legged League Cup semi-final tie against Boro in 1992. In the second leg at Old Trafford you cleared a shot from John Hendrie off the line to prevent a goal that might have sent the Boro to Wembley. Any regrets?

GP: "Only when I'm chatting to John Hendrie and he keeps pulling me about that! A few of the lads always talk about that."

"Listen, I was so happy when Middlesbrough started to get to cup finals with Robbo and what have you, you kind of hoped it would eventually come and it did."

"I was playing for Manchester United and I was desperate to win trophies. We'd only won the FA Cup in 1990 and that was my first trophy and I got a taste for it and wanted to win more. Obviously my family are Boro fans and they were hurting in that respect but they were delighted for their son, nephew or cousin or whatever to go on and play in another cup final."

"I always remember the build-up to that and I remember being out with Bernie (Slaven) and Curtis (Fleming). We were out in The Kirk and I was winding the two of them up about it, Bernie knew I was trying to wind the two of them up but Curtis bit a little bit! It was always difficult playing against Middlesbrough."

TW: You also scored against Middlesbrough at Old Trafford in 1995, what do you remember about that day?

GP: "I saw it the other day and I didn't realise we went down to 10 men in that game. I'm not one of them guys going, 'Oh, it's disrespectful! You score a goal, you celebrate the goal."

Ayresome Park erupts after Boro gain promotion to the second division after their 0-0 draw with Wigan



"Probably at that time I was probably still getting a little bit of stick off the Boro faithful for leaving in 1989. It was always difficult for me, it did play on my mind when I played against Middlesbrough and I don't know whether other players had that kind of feeling but it was never a comfortable experience for me that's for sure."

TW: If you had to pick one abiding memory of Ayresome Park what would it be?

GP: "It would probably be the Wigan game (May '87). After surviving the liquidation of '86 - I remember it was Swindon playing in the other game and if they'd won we would have needed a result against Doncaster in the last game."

"We were getting mixed messages off the fans and off the sidelines that we didn't have to go and win it so just settle for the draw. We battered Wigan but we couldn't put the ball in the back of the net. You're thinking, 'Oh my God! The fans invaded the pitch, they

thought the final whistle had gone but the referee got them all back off."

"He got the ball and he said, 'Right lads, I've got the ball now, as soon as I blow the whistle run for the dressing rooms'. We all pelted off and we found out Swindon hadn't got the result."

"For a team that was probably favourites to get relegated then with an average age of 21 lacking experience, to go and do what we did will live long in the memory, standing up in the directors' box and that picture of Hammy (Gary Hamilton) stood on the fencing. It was just crazy, it was an unbelievable night and unbelievable experience. That's probably my favourite Ayresome Park memory."

■ Dr Tosh Warwick is keen to hear Ayresome Park memories of former players, managers and supporters as part of a project marking 25 years since the last season at the ground. He can be contacted on t.warwick@mmu.ac.uk