

NEW BOOK LOOKS AT TIES BETWEEN CHURCH AND GAME

We must thank God for footy!



WHEN Peter Lupson's book 'Thank God For Football!' was published in 2006, it caused a stir in the world of the beautiful game.

A culmination of seven years of research, the book told the story of how 12 of England's most famous clubs were formed by either churches or individual Christians. However, the seeds for the project were initially sown back in 1994.

"I started a church league for youngsters in Liverpool and Wirral churches, but it wasn't long before they were being badly ridiculed at school for only being in a church league," explained Peter. "They were told, 'Church leagues don't count. You're all soft. Bet you use Bibles for shin pads,' and it put a lot of them off.

"But I then made the connection that Everton Football Club is of church origin and that Liverpool is an offshoot of Everton, and so I was able to say to the boys, 'Next time you get ridiculed at school, just mention that you're following in the footsteps of these two great clubs who owe their birth to a Sunday school.'

"And it got me thinking whether there were any other clubs of a similar background, and I made the amazing discovery that a third of all the clubs that have played in the Premier League are in fact of church origin."

DELVED

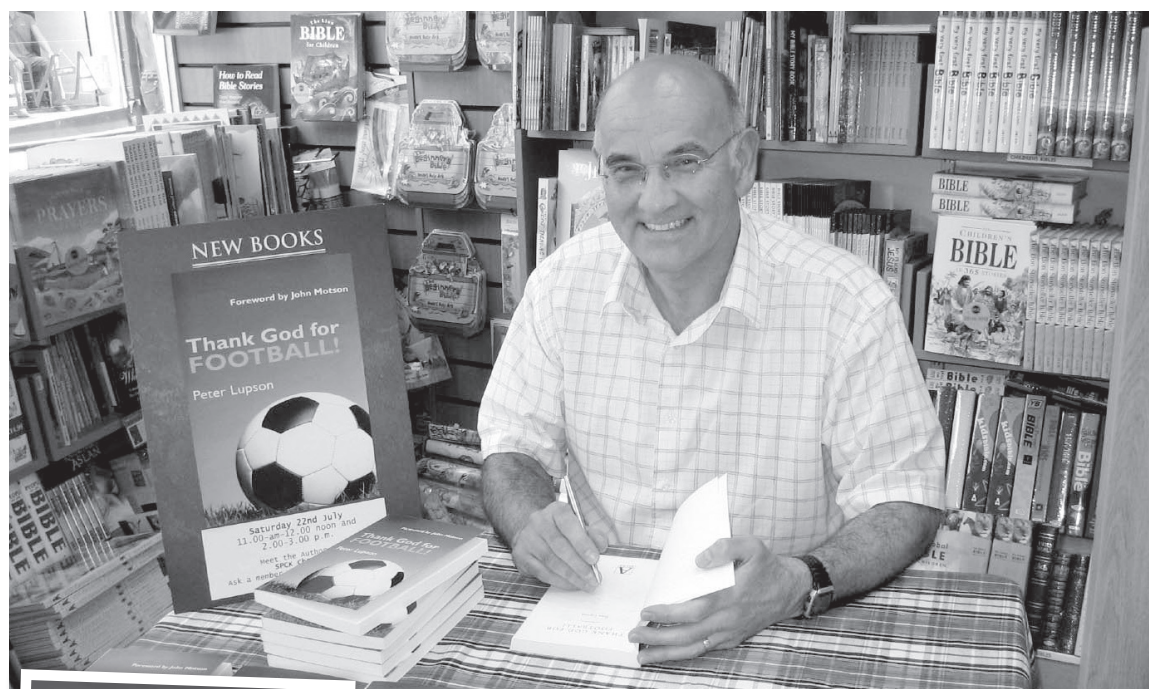
As Peter delved further into his research, he realised that he was discovering facts that even the clubs themselves were unaware of, and the idea to write a book on his findings was born.

"Traditionally, when people research football history, they look through old match programmes or the sports pages of newspapers. I went down a totally different route. I read reports in parish magazines, went through church reports in newspapers and went to places like Lambeth Palace - to the archives there.

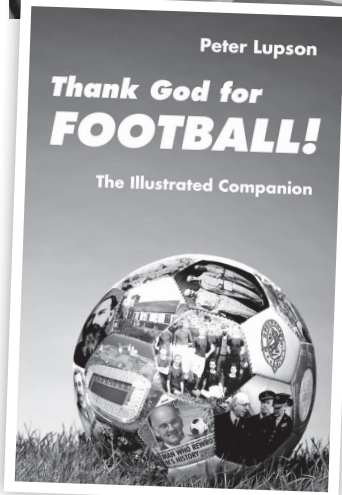
"It was quite obvious that I'd tapped into something that was uncharted territory, and so I wrote 'Thank God for Football!' to tell the story of how churches were the birthplace of some of our most famous clubs.

"The clubs never ignored their Christian heritage - they just

Few would link football and the Church, but the beautiful game and the house of the Lord have surprising ties, as author Peter Lupson found out. *Andy Evans* spoke to him about his discoveries



Peter Lupson signs copies of his book, 'Thank God for Football!'. Left, The Illustrated Companion to his original book



weren't fully aware of it. So that's what I wanted to do. I wanted to make people aware of the debt football owes to Christian pioneers."

Peter's wishes were duly fulfilled as the impact of 'Thank God for Football!' spread far and wide - largely due to the fact that the book uncovered so much new material that the clubs themselves took an active interest in its contents.

"I found, to my amazement, that most of the clubs had very little

knowledge about their origins, and in fact three were honouring the wrong founder! Another one - Swindon Town - had got its foundation date wrong, so they changed their club badge as a result. Also, following on from the book, six clubs restored their Christian founders' graves - Swindon, Aston Villa, Bolton Wanderers, Everton and Liverpool together - because they share the same man - and Tottenham Hotspur.

"Their founder, John Ripsher, was actually so poor at the end of his life that he died in the workhouse in Dover and was buried in an unmarked pauper's grave.

HEADSTONE

"When I brought that to light to Tottenham, they immediately responded by saying, 'We must have a headstone for this man,' so I worked with the club, plus the Mayor of Dover and others, and we had a headstone publicly unveiled on the centenary of Ripsher's death."

'Thank God for Football!' also enabled Peter to meet a vast array

of people. The foreword for the book was written by legendary commentator John Motson, while the launch event took place at the headquarters of the Football Association.

Peter was even invited to speak about his research to the All-Party Parliamentary Football Group in the House of Commons. And the success of 'Thank God for Football!' also led to Peter writing two more books that combined football and faith.

It's certainly been an extraordinary journey for Peter since 2006, but it isn't over yet. The National Football Museum are planning to do a touring exhibition based on Peter's research, which they regard as 'the lost history of football', while a documentary based on the book will be shown on TV around the world later this year before being released on DVD.

Peter added: "It's had a big impact. Some fascinating things have opened up that I never expected. None of these things I engineered - they just sort of happened. I call them God-incidences!"



Ridley Jacobs

My Bible's helped get me through

WEST Indian cricketer Ridley Jacobs has revealed how the Bible helps him through life.

The left-handed wicket-keeper and batsman, who is now retired, played in 65 test matches for his country and was in the same team that included Brian Lara.

Jacobs, now 45, is a committed Christian who draws on the Bible for inspiration.

He said: "The Bible plays a very important part in my life. I don't go to sleep without the Bible. I read it everyday; it is an inspiration. Everything you need is in there.

BLESSED

"The things that you see which are happening now in the world have been prophesied and if you read the Bible you don't have to worry because you know that it is going to come to pass. God has a plan and a purpose for each one of our lives and I am grateful that he has given me the opportunity to play cricket at the highest level. I look at it as God's grace and God's mercy.

"He has blessed me and I am truly thankful. With God's help I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."



Wally Armstrong

Faith putts my life into perspective!

TOP golfer Wally Armstrong has told how God got him in the swing of things.

The American, who turned pro in 1970 and played on the PGA tour through the 70s and 80s, became a Christian when he was at university.

His faith has remained with him throughout his life. He is now 67.

Wally said: "I learned that Christianity is not a 'religion', like we think of other religions. It is a close friendship with Jesus Christ, who is God. And Jesus is not like any other famous person of history. Napoleon was a great person, but he is dead. Buddha was a famous religious leader, but he, too, is dead. Jesus Christ is God, and he is alive today."