

By Albert Sewell

BETWEEN OURSELVES

Programme Editor

MOST of us have a skeleton of some sort in the cupboard. I become aware of mine every time Chelsea play Arsenal . . . so I might as well confess. You see, although my working association with Chelsea goes back 22 years to the start of the 1949-50 season, it was Arsenal who won the first battle for my boyhood pocket-money. And Tottenham. During war-time, they shared the White Hart Lane ground. You saw Arsenal playing there one week in the League South, Spurs the next, and on days when landlord and tenant clashed out in the middle my shouts were always for Arsenal.

Alf Kirchen was one of the strongest-running, hardest-shooting right-wingers I've ever seen. Denis Compton was another of my heroes on the left—what a left foot, and what battles he and that hard-as-nails Spurs right-back Ralph Ward had whenever they met.

And it was Arsenal who introduced me to Stamford Bridge. I'd never crossed London this far until May 15, 1943, when war-time North and South Cup-winners Blackpool and Arsenal met here. The team-sheet is in front of me as I write, and at least one colleague in today's Press Box will remember that particular game—Bernard Joy. He was programmed as Flt./Lt. B. Joy, Arsenal's centre-half, with Flying Officer Jack Crayston and Cpl. George Male (captain) on either side of him, R.A.F./Sgt. Laurie Scott and L/Cpl. Leslie Compton behind, Flt./Sgt. George Marks in goal and, up front, Flt./Sgt. Kirchen, Pilot Officer Ted Drake, L./Bdr. Reg. Lewis, Cliff Bastin and Sgt. Compton (D.).

Blackpool, too, had a bit of a team, and from two down in seven minutes (Drake and Lewis were Arsenal's scorers), they responded with four goals (Dix, Dodds, Finan and Burbanks) in a wonderful match watched by 55,000. Matthews was the only Blackpool forward who didn't score, but the Maestro did just about everything else.

On the way out I buried my red and white rosette deep in my pocket, but it was not a day of total disaster. After all, I'd been to Stamford Bridge for the first time, and went home with the feeling that it would not be the last.

Between times, Arsenal have played here on many occasions, and just to bring things right up to date with today's game, did you hear the no doubt apocryphal story of the 'phone call Dave Sexton had the other day? It came from the wife of a life-long Chelsea supporter. "He's dying," she said, "and his last wish is to say a few words to you, Mr. Sexton." So Dave, being the decent chap he is, pops round to the house a few streets from Stamford Bridge. Outside, there's a fellow busy painting the place in red and white; indoors, the old 'un is propped up on his deathbed in a room that's garlanded with red and white.

"It's all right, you've come to the right house, Mr. Sexton," murmured the departing one. "I had to speak to you, because after following Chelsea for 65 years, I wanted you to know that I'm changing to Arsenal."

"But why?" asked Dave. "We've won a couple of cups for you these past two seasons, haven't we?" "That's right," came the reply. "But we're playing Arsenal this week, and I reckon if someone's going to die, it's better it's one of their devils than one of us!"