

By Albert Sewell

BETWEEN OURSELVES

Programme Editor

THE blurb for their 1972 guide tells you that for a real humdinger of a holiday Blackpool is the place to go, with its safe, seven-mile beach, three piers, luxury ballrooms, swimming-pools, huge pleasure beach, three-tier promenade and big-star stage shows. "Head for the greatest pleasure range in Britain," the come-on continues . . . "the golden resort that's as lively after sundown as it is at high noon."

But Chelsea are no sand-castle kids heading for a holiday when they go to Blackpool a week hence. For them it's the start of an F.A. Cup tournament that is going to be larger than life by the time the two Finalists emerge from the tunnel at Wembley on May 6. It's an extra-special F.A. Cup this, because it marks the competition's centenary—a fact of which we shall be reminded with increasing emphasis as the rounds go by.

If the Chelsea lads need to find any extra resolve for next Saturday's tie (and I doubt it), they should know that in this same third round Bloomfield Road has been the burial ground of London Cup hopes in each of the past two seasons. In 1970 Arsenal went down 3-2 in a replay there after Blackpool (taking a breather in their promotion effort) had drawn 1-1 at Highbury, and twelve months ago—when Blackpool were on their way down again to the Second Division—West Ham crashed 4-0.

That was a defeat with repercussions. Overnight, with the Blackpool pitch frozen, the tie seemed sure to be postponed, and, taking a chance on it, some of the visiting players stayed out until the early hours. If the match had been called off possibly nothing would ever have been heard of the curfew-break, but after a four-nil thrashing it had to come out, and it hit the headlines in the same way that a similar "Blackpool night out" by some Chelsea players had done when they were in training there in April 1965.

With these and other things in mind, I reckon that on balance Blackpool has not been good for London football clubs. Johnny Haynes smashed a leg in a car-crash there . . . Peter Osgood, at the beginning of his career, broke his right leg away to Blackpool in the League Cup in October 1966. But it hasn't all been bad news from Bloomfield Road.

Look at Chelsea's League trip to Blackpool last season—and forget the half-time score, because Chelsea trooped off losing three-nil. That was still the score with 20 minutes left. Then Charlie Cooke went on as substitute and in a general reshuffle Peter Houseman moved to left-back, Ron Harris to the right, Paddy Mulligan to centre-half and David Webb went hunting upfield . . . with tallyho effect. Goals by Keith Weller, Webb and Weller again brought Chelsea astonishingly level, but that wasn't all. In the last minute Weller centred and Blackpool defender Hatton shot the ball into his own net to give Chelsea one of the most remarkable victories in their history; a match to remember for everyone, especially John Phillips, who was having his first taste of goalkeeping in the First Division.

But it wasn't such a happy second half for the Chelsea team that went to Blackpool on October 29, 1932. Maybe no one here this afternoon will have been there that day, so I'll quote from what I wrote of the game in "Chelsea Champions", published in 1955: "During the second half it was Chelsea's ill-fortune to face sheets of rain and snow driven by a pitiless north-westerly gale. One after another the visiting players fell exhausted by the elements, and when the game mercifully reached its ninetieth minute only six Chelsea men were on the field. The rest were being revived in the warmth of the dressing-room." The result: Blackpool 4, Chelsea 0.

That was in October. I should add that the "pitiless north-westerly" can blow up there in January, too. So, if you're planning to cheer the Blues next Saturday at the start of what we hope will be another Cup run with a Wembley destination-board, don't leave your winter woollies in the airing cupboard at home. It's Blackpool Tower to a stick of peppermint rock that you'll need them with you.