

PAGE FROM THE PAST: SEASON 1948-49

“A SEASON of might-have-beens. . . .” So wrote Manager Billy Birrell in his column in the final Club Programme of 1948-49. In fact, looking back, there were several optimistic signs and, as subsequent events were to show, more fruitful days were not far away.

For one thing, the third post-war campaign saw the rise of Roy Bentley into one of the country's leading centre-forwards. After his hesitant start the previous year, a tally of 22 goals in 40 League appearances was rewarded by selection for the F.A. close season Continental tour. Unhappily, there was no-one to share the goalscoring responsibilities.

Tommy Walker returned to Heart of Midlothian, playing his last game for Chelsea on December 27th after an all-too-short, but distinguished and nostalgically remembered, career in London. Reg Williams, seemingly as always, was plagued by injury, and Len Goulden, made senior coach, no longer commanded a regular first-team place. Defensively much again relied on the admirably resourceful John Harris with Ken Armstrong, Danny Winter, Billy Hughes and Jimmy Macaulay giving solid support.

Thirteenth position was Chelsea's highest final placing since 1937-38 and the goal average, at 69-68, was “in credit” for, incredibly, only the second time in their First Division history (the previous occasion having been as long ago as 1919-20).

Still the crowds rolled in. Again, not far short of a million spectators watched home League games, with 77,696 for the visit of Blackpool—and Stanley Matthews—in October the highest Stamford Bridge “gate” since the war—“Dynamo Day” excepted.

At times the team played with great assurance. Everton were routed 6-0 in September—then our greatest victory

margin since the war; just before Christmas Wolves were beaten 4-1 with equal conviction; and in April the margin over Huddersfield Town was 5-0. Set against this, eleven of sixteen defeats were by the odd goal, and another unwelcome feature of the season was an epidemic of last-minute goals conceded.

The F.A. Cup run came to a halt by three clear goals in the fifth round at West Bromwich. In the third Chelsea had retrieved a deficit against Bristol City, with Roy Bentley scoring twice in a 3-1 win on a triumphant return to his old stamping ground, and Everton were defeated 2-0 at Stamford Bridge in the following round.

Not the least far-reaching event of the season came with the launching of the “Magazine Programme” at home to Portsmouth on Christmas Day. Sixteen pages, including four sides of pictures, for sixpence. In this field at least, Chelsea were well ahead of all other rivals.

HOW THEY FINISHED IN 1948-49

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Portsmouth.. ..	42	25	8	9	84	42	58
Manchester United	42	21	11	10	77	44	53
Derby County	42	22	9	11	74	55	53
Newcastle United	42	20	12	10	70	56	52
Arsenal	42	18	13	11	74	44	49
Wolverhampton W.	42	17	12	13	79	66	46
Manchester City	42	15	15	12	47	51	45
Sunderland	42	13	17	12	49	58	43
Charlton Athletic	42	15	12	15	63	67	42
Aston Villa	42	16	10	16	60	76	42
Stoke City	42	16	9	17	66	68	41
Liverpool	42	13	14	15	53	43	40
Chelsea	42	12	14	16	69	68	38
Bolton Wanderers	42	14	10	18	59	68	38
Burnley	42	12	14	16	43	50	38
Blackpool	42	11	16	15	54	67	38
Birmingham City	42	11	15	16	36	38	37
Everton	42	13	11	18	41	63	37
Middlesbrough	42	11	12	19	46	57	34
Huddersfield	42	12	10	20	40	69	34
Preston N.E.	42	11	11	20	62	75	33
Sheffield United	42	11	11	20	57	78	33