

It sounds like a question in a Pub Quiz:

“Who made his one and only England international appearance in May 1982?”

The answer, of course, and one that all Old Wilsonians will know, is Richard ‘Mac’ McAlister, who lined up with the likes of Bobby Moore, Geoff Hurst and the Charlton brothers at Selhurst Park on Wednesday May 19th 1982 in a side decreed as ‘England’s 1966 World Cup Heroes’

He was, and ‘Mac’ would be the first to admit this, a tad fortunate for, of the original England side who won the Jules Rimet trophy in July 1966, Nobby Styles was in Canada and Alan Ball was still playing for Southampton – the OW’s conversation with Laurie McMenemy, the Saints manager at the time, went something along the lines of:

“Southampton pay Alan Ball’s wages, not the Old Wilsonians’ football club”, when we inquired if his player could play in this charity game.

So ‘Mac’ was asked to fill one of the vacancies, and Jimmy Greaves the other - not bad replacements for the originals, no-one will deny.

‘Mac’ may have played only one game for England – what do you mean, **only one!**, but he played no fewer than 703 times in the black and gold of Old Wilsonians, a career which spanned all of our sides and many years

He died on February 28th last year, which was the Football Club’s Vice Presidents Day, and as a tribute to a man who did so much for the Association as well as the OWFC, the latter have agreed that VP’s day will henceforth be named after him.

As I walked from Hayes station to attend this event the light rain, which was to remain for the rest of the afternoon, had begun to fall, and my saunter along Hayes Hill Rd saw me passed by a more energetic young man carrying a kit bag – was he on the way to our ground, I wondered.

When he was about 30 yards ahead of me – it did not take long – a car stopped and picked him up and then zoomed up Hayes Hill, thereby almost certainly confirming my suspicions that he was going to the Club

There were already a lot of people in the bar when I arrived and not long after I noticed a young man on a pair of crutches.

Could this be James Eglon, I surmised, and introduced myself to him and discovered that he was, indeed, ‘Eggy’. He was watching the Arsenal v Hull cup tie and was not impressed by the quality of the football

I thanked him for all the work he does for the football club – I speak to him every Sunday evening having sent the newsletter to him and he then puts it on the website – well, when the website is working that is, wished him a speedy recovery and my belief that what a fine young man he is was further confirmed when he revealed he is a Palace supporter.

It was good to put a face to his name, although the experience was probably not as fulfilling for him.

James’s injury reminded me of the day I broke my leg in the name of the Club, and there were a number of my team mates on that day in attendance on this occasion, namely Rod Hall, Tony Brighton, Mike George and Les Wilks, and ‘Mac’ himself was also in that side, whilst John Drabwell and Mike Kendrick were watching from the side-lines.

(Mike complained that the noise of my leg breaking was not loud enough “I’ve heard louder” he exclaimed, and was probably not playing himself on that day because he was serving one of his many suspensions)

A number of that side came to visit me in hospital to..... remind me that I left without paying my match fee and not putting in the beer whip!

The inclement weather, already referred to, delayed the unveiling of the plaque in Mac's honour and scuppered Les Wilks's plans to say a few words about our hero, his contemporary and good friend, at the memorial garden, so he made his oration in the Clubhouse instead, some of which was in rhyme

"I could not think of anything to rhyme with McAlister", he confided

How about

"The ladies all swooned at the sight of Richard McAlister
With his perfect features, as smooth as alabaster"

Perhaps not and Les, you made the correct decision, for his words fitted the bill perfectly, after which we braved the elements and Pat McAlister unveiled the plaque which declares:

"He was always there for us, whatever the circumstances, loyal, dependable, our rock"

Eventually a bush will be planted on the memorial garden and the entire McAlister family, who were there in force, will always find a warm welcome at the end of Hayes Hill at any time they wish

Many stories of 'Mac' and his past endeavours were then exchanged by those in attendance, Stan Quantrill even claiming that one of the few injuries he had sustained when playing was 'Mac's' fault although, and on closer examination, it was Stan's inability to head a football correctly that caused the problem and, as ever, a massive thanks to Ian Forbes for organising the event and providing the food

Those playing on this particular afternoon had pizzas because the oven's problems have been declared terminal, and it is perhaps apposite that, on the day that the oven finally gave up, the McAlister sisters, who had all prepared us with pie and beans in days gone by, graced the occasion as only they can, all of whom were in fine form – even had a conversation about a forthcoming Iggy Pop concert and reminisced about Kate Bush's appearance at the Hammersmith Appolo, and for a full review of this event please see Pikey's Progress No 51.

There were also games being played, of course – hence the pizzas - with the 1st XI sharing a 2-2 draw with Nottsborough and the 2nd XI defeating Parkonians 4-1, whilst, over at Hawes Down, the 4th XI beat Ibis Eagles and, in the 'match of the day', the 8th XI beat the 9th XI 7-1, with the OWFC Chairman scoring four times.

Our four 1,000 games players – Terry Adams, Geoff Robinson, Lou Barry and Bruce Graham were all part of the occasion, and as well as the 703 games 'Mac' played for us, he was also a participant in our fixture to celebrate the millennium, when the combined age of the squad had to be over 1,000

And so the first Richard McAlister Memorial Day came to a close and will be repeated next season and forever more. In the meantime we look forward to celebrating and remembering one of the other OWFC greats - at the George Croucher Memorial Dinner on April 23rd