

Pegasus

A high-contrast, black and white photograph of a large crowd of people, likely at a football match, with a large flag visible in the background. The image has a grainy, historical quality.

*The Famous Oxford and Cambridge
Soccer Side of the Nineteen Fifties*

SECOND EDITION

Ken Shearwood, D.S.C.

*with an Introduction by Geoffrey Green
and an Afterword by David Miller*

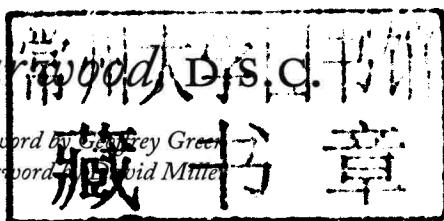
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Pegasus

Not in growing old...
The body's sure decline towards decay...
Is tragedy.
But in the ageless heart that will not stay
Quiet in the sinking ship.
Dredging the silt of memory, the grey
Adventurer still flies his flag of dreams.

PHOEBE HESKETH

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I am indebted to Martin Moriarty, my old friend and Oxford colleague, who read the book in typescript. To Ted Maidment who perused the book at regular intervals and offered sound advice. To Mrs. Yvonne Griffiths who too read and sifted through the typescript. To David Miller, who offered the Afterword and some additional material. And finally, to my dear daughter, Vanessa, who typed it all and was such a help and encouragement to me.

Foreword to the First Edition

Scarcely forty-eight hours have elapsed since I finished reading the first and last words of Ken Shearwood's absorbing book about Pegasus, the Flying Horse of combined Oxford and Cambridge University football whose flowing tail so many romantics caught for a brief but magic trip over the rainbow of the early 1950s.

But in spite of all the joy, and high hopes of an inspiring concept at the start it is with a sense of impaled sadness that one reaches the end. For here, like some Greek tragedy, is the story of what might have been a powerful marriage that was doomed; the rise and fall of a family rich in promise but finally torn by dissension; twin religions with a common stem which, in spite of it—or perhaps because of it—became irreconcilable.

It is time for the story to be told. The departed years have lent perspective and Ken, I believe, has told it fairly—objectively and with an understanding that neither shirks the facts nor blinks the many-sided truth as it was seen at the time.

Though the central theme is Pegasus, this is more than the mere history of an original football venture, offspring of Centaur and Falcon, which soared like a brilliant comet and died within a crowded decade and a half, victim of its own early success.

Across these pages are woven a wider human pattern: esoteric days at Oxford, the trials of parenthood, of cricket in high summer, the growing pains of a schoolmaster at Lancing. And through it all moves a cavalcade of people who in the end provide the real currency of life.

For me in a strange way it all has something of the elusive quality of a 'Brideshead Revisited'. Not an Evelyn Waugh novel in shape or form, of course, but a raking of dormant senses, of footsteps retraced, of events recreated and relived by one who was at the eye of the storm.

Curiously, too—though separated in time by the wastage of the 1930s when many of us failed to heed the fateful march of time—I find several points of contact with the author.

Generations apart, we both played centre-half for Shrewsbury and for our universities, he dark blue, myself a lighter shade of

Preface

For a long time I have wanted to write something about an amateur soccer club called Pegasus, but have been daunted by the fact that we live in an age of professionalism, particularly in soccer where there is now no distinction, rightly so I hasten to add, between amateur and professional. And once persuaded that there could be some justification for a book, I had to ask myself whether anyone would be interested in reading the history of a club which only existed for a decade and a half. And even should an interest exist, could it possibly be sustained by a factual account of a series of matches? I thought not.

Eventually, and at the risk of appearing egotistical, I came to the conclusion that the only way to tackle the thing was to tell the story autobiographically, linking the events of Pegasus with my own personal experiences, first as a married post-war undergraduate at Oxford studying history, then as a schoolmaster at Lancing. In this way I hope the reader will see the club in perspective, share its humour, growing pains, disappointments and successes.

Today its members have all grown older, perhaps a little wiser, certainly a little thicker round the middle. Occasionally we meet with our wives for dinner. I don't think any of us dwell unrealistically on the past. We do not consider that we were better than comparable sides of today. In any case such comparisons are invidious and quite impossible to gauge. I am an optimist and my own view is that all things go forward, no matter what, and soccer today has improved at every level. Had we been competing now, our skills and techniques would have been found wanting, as in similar circumstances would our contemporaries of the professional world.

I mention this just to lay a certain bogey that critics might seize upon, for it is never my intention to make out that we were a particularly great side then, or in the light of today. All is relative, and if we are to be judged at all, it must be in the context of the fifties.

We did hit some highlights, and we did derive a great deal of pleasure from the soccer we played and our company. Often we

were absurdly casual and light-hearted in our approach, but we could also be serious. There were personal clashes and internal problems, and we tasted the sweetness of success and the bitterness of defeat, all part and parcel of the story. My credentials for writing it? 172 games for a club whose brief history I believe is worth telling.

KEN SHEARWOOD.

1975

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1 A First Tutorial

Whenever I spot a pheasant in the countryside, I mentally doff my cap, inwardly give thanks and recall yet again how much I am indebted to these handsome creatures. For had Rob Tillard, Wykhamist and regular army captain in the 60th Rifles, not elected to go shooting one particular Saturday in November 1947, I would probably not have had the opportunity to play soccer against Cambridge three weeks later, nor perhaps have enjoyed all those subsequent years with Pegasus.

I was twenty-six and married when I came to Oxford after four and a half years in the Navy, followed by a financially unprofitable, though far from unrewarding, eighteen months of inshore-fishing down at Mevagissey in Cornwall.

In June of that lovely summer I had come up from Cornwall and sat three entrance examinations and made a 'pig's-ear' of them all. At the interview Dr. Stallybrass had given me a kindly introduction to the assembly of Brasenose dons seated round the table, and finished by remarking that I had recently been fishing for a living. A brief silence greeted this piece of information and then I heard someone asking me politely what flies I had been using. It was my cue and I began to tell them about dog-lining and how we had worked a thousand hooks a man and that fishing was hard graft and long hours in all weathers, often for scant reward. I spoke of the nights of pilchard-driving and the excitement of looking down and seeing those first silver pilchards glittering in the water beneath the fishing lights. I told them about the superstitions of the fishermen and what it was like to unhook fifty score of dogfish and how, when lining, the tide was the killer.

It seemed to do the trick, for several days later, returning in the late afternoon from a day's spillering out on those great sandy stretches of sea bed that lie some twelve miles south-east of Point Head where the whiting come in the summer months, I found a letter from Dr. Stallybrass informing me that I had been accepted at Brasenose College to read for an honours degree in history.

Years later – 1963 to be precise – Eric Collieu, writing about that interview in the college magazine, *The Brazen Nose*, in an article entitled 'Admission Procedures of the Past', wrote:

The marks gained by the successful candidate on this occasion are still preserved in a tutorial file, but they constitute one of those journalistic confidences, rather than violate which the Editor of this magazine would prefer to suffer a long term of imprisonment.

In fact he did give the game away when he wrote and asked my permission to quote the account of that interview which I had recorded in *Whistle the Wind**. In his letter he said:

I may disclose, incidentally, that after I read your book, I looked up my examination records and found I gave you delta for history, with the comment that you appeared to know none. But you did a respectable General Paper, and that, combined with your close resemblance to a former pupil of ours, whom we greatly liked and who was killed in the war, got you in!—I may add that we never had any regrets at our decision.

It was very kind of them all and we were delighted.

And so my wife, Biddie and I, went there. Our immediate task, by no means an easy one, was to find accommodation. Eventually we found a bed-sitting room above a fishmonger's shop out at Botley, and there with our Labrador, Kim, we began our times at Oxford.

Very well do I remember that first tutorial with Kevin O'Hanlon, a tall highly intelligent Irishman, for it proved a most disquieting affair. Attired in our short commoners' gowns, we sat upon an enormous settee that was covered in a loose fabric of gold hopsack and listened as Edgar Stanley Cohn outlined the course of study for the term, gave us a bibliography and advised us what lectures to attend.

'Of course we expect that you know all the facts and events of history,' he remarked casually, standing before his elegant fireplace in a room lined with books, its mellow old walls and ceiling panelled in oak.

I hastily nodded my assurance, but I found his words neither comforting nor particularly easy to hear. For Stanley Cohn had a habit of speaking in low musing tones, almost as though we weren't there. And then without warning he would break off, glance down as if suddenly aware of our presence once more and smile benignly.

He was a small man, dark and slightly Jewish-looking, and when he smiled his eyes narrowed, his mouth curled upwards and his whole face creased in puckish humour. He wore a hound's-tooth brown jacket, dark flannels and neat suede shoes and he

* This is recounted in *Whistle The Wind: A Mevagissey Venture*, the account of the author's fishing career, reprinted in 2009

rocked gently to and fro, his heels on the hearth, while he stared thoughtfully over our heads at the long windows overlooking the quad.

'Well,' he said at length, addressing O'Hanlon, 'I think you'd better write an essay this week on the ..' and I watched Kevin's aquiline features as he scribbled something down on paper.

And then it was my turn and although I could hear his voice, for the life of me I could only distinguish one word, Northumbria. I pretended to be writing it all down, for I had not the courage to ask him to repeat himself.

'Right,' he said softly, dismissing us with the slightest of nods and another brief smile, and we got up to go.

Outside the door I followed Kevin down the narrow spiral steps.

'Did you manage by any chance to catch the title of my essay?' I asked him as we went out into the sunlit quad.

He shook his head. 'Something to do with Northumbria, I think.'

'Yes,' I said, 'I got that bit too.'

'Well, we've a whole week to do it in,' he remarked cheerfully as we parted.

But I found it difficult to see what difference a week or even a year would make to the predicament I now found myself in.

Most of that following week I spent at Iffley Road striving for recognition in the soccer trials held for freshmen. Those interested had written a short account of their previous performances to Colin Weir, the Oxford captain and goalkeeper, who stood all of six foot six.

My own experience had been two years in the Shrewsbury eleven and a year captaining Mevagissey football club in one of the junior leagues of Cornwall, apart from a game in Greece against the crew of the *Ajax* and an officers' match against the ratings in Messina, in which the officers lost not only the game but a good deal of their prestige as well. My very earliest football experience had consisted of being shown at the age of six how to lace my boots at Miss Maltby's establishment in Derby, by Sammy Crooks, the tiny England and Derby County right-winger, and sitting with my father in the directors' box watching the *Rams* perform in the latter half of the Thirties.