



Home Thoughts FROM ABROAD

From China by Eric Breadmore

no. 18



You could say I was an exiled supporter even while I was living in the UK, as one reason after another kept me away from the beloved Dell.

In 1966, I got married and went to live in Portsmouth – so close to Fratton Park that I could wait to hear the referee's whistle calling the captains to the toss, then leave home and – so sparse was the crowd (some things never change) – that I could be inside for the kick-off. I soon returned to Southampton and began officiating in the local Southampton Leagues, both Saturdays and Sundays. So I was restricted to mid-week matches at The Dell – although I got to train there, pre-season: one of the privileges of being a local referee. There was always a rush to bag the use of Mick Channon's peg. Not that that helped much, but it was great to get out on the pitch and dream.

My exile proper began in 1977 with a move to Kuwait. Without computers, internet and the like, I had to rely on friends who'd telex the score – and then I'd wait a fortnight for the *Football Echo* to arrive from my mum. Occasionally, a business visitor would produce an invaluable photocopy of a UK daily – although my priority gifts were the bottle of alcohol, then allowed, and maybe some Marmite. It was then that I purchased my first Short Wave radio – great when I could get a signal, but at best it was BBC World Service. Still, this radio travelled with me to some unusual listening spots, often small hotel rooms in Iraq, Lebanon or Syria. Baghdad was fairly good, as the British Club



Eric (left) joins Roger Stace and Dan Macmillan (right) at Dan's club in Putaturu, on New Zealand's North Island, which has become a meeting point for the Echo Saints Forum – as discussed by Dan in the next 'Home Thoughts' on 2 April.

there had a 'friend' who would telex all the results through, usually around 9.30 pm.

Next stop the USA, Ohio in particular. Information was again hard to come by but it helped when I was approached at a Softball Tournament in Dayton by a man who had been a school-teacher in Chandlers Ford, a keen fan with Saints stickers in his car's rear window. I now had a friend I could meet to talk about the old days at The Dell. When I first arrived in Shanghai, I made the obligatory visit to The British Consulate. On being ushered into the office of the then Trade Counsellor, Bob Manning (whose 'Home Thoughts' from China you may recall from last season), I was amazed to see all the Saints photos on the wall and memorabilia on his desk. My appointment went out the

window, as we reminisced over endless coffees.

Keeping up to date is now much easier. The *saintsfc* site is very good and is the Home page on my computer. And I use the Echo Forum a lot, especially on match days – not for the journalism, but for the fans' comments. I have yet to visit St Mary's, but pledge that I will be there for the first home game when we are back where we belong.

I now live in a Ningbo, basically a village of 6.25 million people. I regularly meet four of its small ex-pat community in the local bar: one each from Chester and Birmingham and, strangely, two from Sheffield Wednesday. My mates Andy Garner and Roland Kenyon will both be buying the beer again after today's match. ■

Born in Swaythling in 1944, Eric Breadmore was educated at Taunton's, until the school and he parted company by mutual consent. Since he began travelling in 1977, he has lived in 12 countries. He now has his own cable company in China, but likes to spend time in New Zealand, where he has two adult kids, four grandchildren, an e-mail address (cencomint@extra.co.nz) and a standing invitation to Dan Macmillan's club.