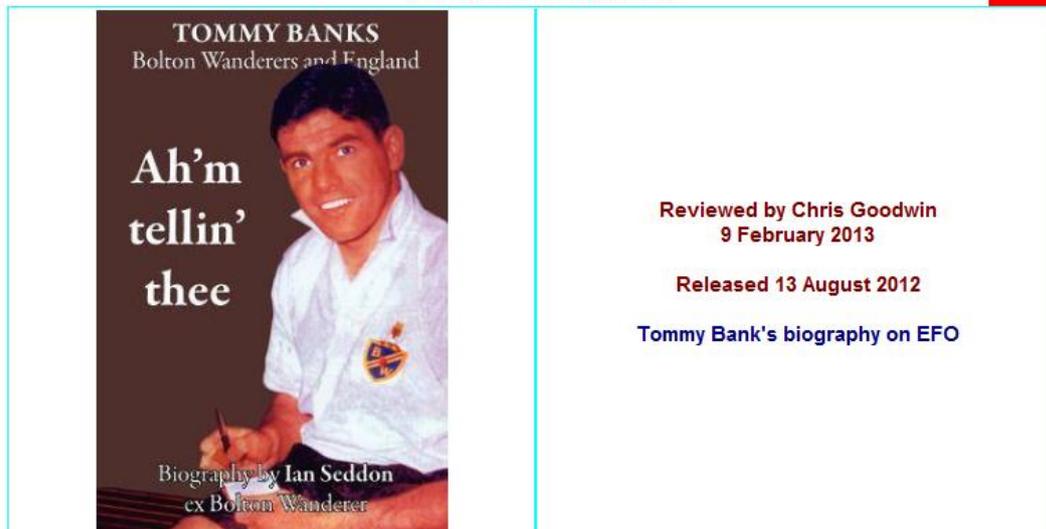


Ian Seddon
Ah'm Tellin' Thee: Tommy Banks
(Paragon Publishing, 2012)

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I've read this book and I have loved it!

The first thing that strikes you about this book is the fact that footballers can write, and some of them can do so very well. The author here, Ian Seddon, also used to tread the same turf as Tommy Banks on the Burnden Park theatre in the early seventies, as well as playing under 'Big Ron' Atkinson at Cambridge United in the latter part of that decade. So already that qualifies him as a genuine writer, someone who know's his stuff. The 'traditional' autobiography uses journalists as ghost writers, and at best, these are the screamers. That is to say, the one's complaining at the television screen and the ridiculous foul that has been committed that to be fair, they only knew about because of the slo-mo replay! Seddon has walked the same path as Banks, and is therefore justified to retell his story.

Now I am in danger of retelling this story, and I really do not want to do that, because I want you to read it. I want you to make Tommy your new best friend. Because that is what this book does...imagine yourself listening to the ramblings of an old man over a pint in the corner of the local pub. And with a smile, you rise from your seat, and with a quick, curt 'hang on, Tommy. What ya drinking?'. You sit yourself back down, straddling the stool, pints back down on the table, ready to resume position and await the next enthralling chapter. Thats what this book makes you feel like.

This is a history book. It is a history of Britain and Lancashire recovering from the war. It's a history that only your grandparents tell you about, not the history that textbooks want you to believe. I am only forty years of age, I know nothing of the perils of war. Yes I know about the Gulf Wars, and I even remember the Falklands War, but they were 'over there', not in my back garden, affecting me. They were just a story on the Six O'Clock News, the last bit of television I watched for the day before making my supper and reacquainting myself with Roy of the Rovers or my Match Weekly. My life was cotton wool in comparison to Tommy Banks. Banks didn't cower through the second world war, he worked his arse off, amongst other things, and when he came of age, he escaped the war by working in the coalpits. Now, I had no idea that there was another way to avoid National Conscription in peacetime Britain. My ignorance led to the belief that objection and failing a medical were the only ways that you missed out on this service. But no, if you worked in three other areas, you were exempt from National Service. One of these was coal mining. Now I didn't know that!! Tsk, tsk to my school years.

Banks did not remain exempt however, and I am itching to tell you why, but you really must find out for yourself. That is what makes this book appealing. This generation of people, not just Tommy Banks, but his

peers also. They had so much to battle for, to battle with. They had nothing. They could gain nothing. Tommy had every chance to go to a Grammar School, but could not because his parents simply had no money to spend on his uniform. A case of 'what if's' at its cruelest.

But lets make it clear, Tommy Banks is not Stanley Matthews. He did not get up at the crack of dawn and ran around the block with a football taped to his army boots and committed himself to do a hundred sit-ups before his first cup of tea in the day... Banks did get up at the crack of dawn to complete his paper-round before getting to school, often late, and with chastisement. Banks did not arrive on a gravel pit of a football pitch every weekend and play back-to-back games from dusk to dawn, cracking in goals from every direction and topped league charts all over the county. He did though, arrive at the farm, and after fulfilling his duties, he delivered the milk in and around Farnworth.... then handed every penny he earned through the week to his widowed mother.

Times have changed. The story of Tommy Banks, from his childhood to becoming a family man and beyond, shows us just how much. It is a tale worth telling because it is a tale worth reading. Its from a different era. When people left doors unlocked and children played out on the road, but they shared bathrooms and outside toilets. Clothes were hand-me-downs and unbranded, and generally lasted. Health & Safety was just a fantasy. Its an era long-lost and it will never be returned. It's as historical as the Vikings and Saxons were. People of Banks' generation were out of this world. Kids today are just off this planet. From a time when the difference in necessity is the difference between shoes and a playstation.

This boy from Farnworth did good. From the turf of the farmyard to the Burnden Park turf, taking in Wembley and the 1958 World Cup Finals. And if that never gave him nationwide recognition, his modelling career soon would. But every step, every path he strode down, he remained pinned to his northern roots, his family-instilled values. Values that spilled into the professional world of football and its 'lump of coal' wages, and his 'Brother' Matthews speech that sits comfortably in many a old professional's memory. Nonemoreso because it could have single-handedly abolished the Maximum Wage in 1961. And what he did with his 1958 FA Cup Final winning shirt will make you gasp with astonishment.

You can list the accomplishments of many a magnificent footballer, but I swear to you....not one of them, except Tommy Banks, will have a musical production in their honour.

Seddon's subtitles throughout this book bring the tales to life. Tommy always has an input, we just need to know what he's saying. And increasingly, the astuteness, the cleverness of Banks' shines through in this terrific book of a genuine footballer that was good enough, and proud enough, to wear the shirt of England.

Well done Tommy, my new best friend , and well done Ian.