



BEES ARE OUR FIRST POST-WAR VISITORS.

By Gavin Buckland

'We enter this new season with high hopes and with so much to look forward to,' a *Times* editorial proclaimed at the start of the 1946/47 season, the first league campaign of the post-war era.

Everton supporters shared that optimism as seven years earlier they were champions with one of the Club's finest teams. The outbreak of the Second World War destroyed that squad, though, and prevented Everton from surely adding to our tally of League titles.

The return to normality was welcomed as the war had a dramatic impact on football, with games played as part of regional leagues within a 50-mile radius. Although Goodison Park miraculously survived significant damage, the squad was not so lucky. The great Tommy Lawton – a scorer of a remarkable 152 goals in 114 wartime games – had been unsettled by off-the-pitch issues and was surprisingly sold to Chelsea in November 1945 for a record £11,500.

Apart from Lawton's absence, the other difference to the pre-war years is that Theo Kelly had been appointed the Club's First-Team manager. However, not only did Kelly have to integrate new players, he had to deal with an ageing squad, with Club greats like Ted Sagar, Alec Stevenson and TG Jones now at the veteran stage. Joe Mercer also had a serious knee injury.

However, following a crowd of 18,000 for a public practice match the week before, there was enormous interest for Everton's first league game in seven years, with 55,338 spectators packing Goodison for the visit of Brentford – the



Everton's first post-war squad

fixture list replicating that of the abandoned 1939/40 season.

There were only four survivors from the great title-winning side as the away team comfortably won 2-0, with the first post-war league goal at Goodison scored by George Wilkins from the penalty spot. (George's son, Ray, would later play against Everton himself many times during an illustrious career of his own that saw him win 84 caps for England). Scotsman Gerry McAloon scored the second Bees goal and the 2-0 setback set the scene for a disappointing campaign for Everton which ultimately heralded a difficult period in the Club's history.

Yet, significantly, the man who eventually brought silverware back to Goodison was making his league debut for Everton against Brentford that day... Harry Catterick. The future Blues boss

had joined the Toffees eight years earlier but didn't make his bow until he was 26 years of age – one of many whose professional career was ravaged by the war.

Two decades later, as one of Kelly's predecessors in the managerial hot-seat, the Goodison giant produced two title-winning teams who could be mentioned in the same breath at the class of 1939.

