

Know any good dugouts?

If you do, you could dig out David Bauckham

It could be argued that the dugout is one of the most important areas of any football ground. Within its confines discussions take place and decisions are made that might change the course of a game. Before even the most basic shelter or seated stand is constructed, or even a perimeter rail is erected, there has to be provision for a 'dugout' of some description. Yet the humble dugout is something of a Cinderella structure, often unnoticed or overlooked by even the most zealous stadium enthusiast or groundhopper. Even Simon Inglis' seminal *Football Grounds of Great Britain* devotes barely a paragraph to the evolution of the dugout.

It is generally accepted that the first dugout in British football appeared at Pittodrie around 1921, at the instigation of Aberdeen's trainer at the time, Donald Colman, and was followed around a decade later by a similar structure at Goodison Park after a visit by Everton. Less certain is what provided Colman with his inspiration for a covered shelter, the rationale for which was evidently to keep his notes dry. The dugout is an integral part of any baseball park, and it has been suggested a transatlantic link may exist given the attempt to introduce the sport into this country during the late 19th century. More likely however, is that the idea came from one of Colman's coaching trips to Norway, where shelters were the norm due to the cold climate.

I first began photographing dugouts when preparing an online directory of Sussex Non-League clubs, for the simple reason that at some grounds at intermediate level, there wasn't much other than a dugout to photograph. It wasn't until they were viewed en-masse that I really began to appreciate the diversity of what were largely home-made structures. And that's what makes them so interesting; not only that in many cases the existence of dugouts at the lower levels of the pyramid is solely due to the hard work of volunteers, but also the range of materials used for their construction, not to mention degrees of success; and variety of design..

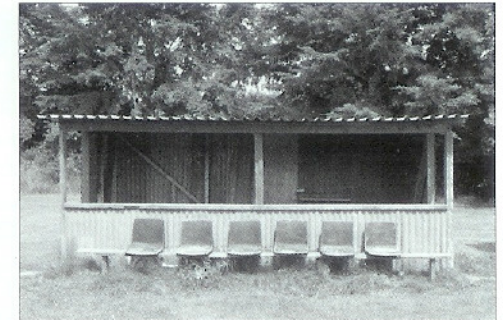


Brixham Utd: Holidaymakers are no doubt unaware of this unique double-decker at Wall Park

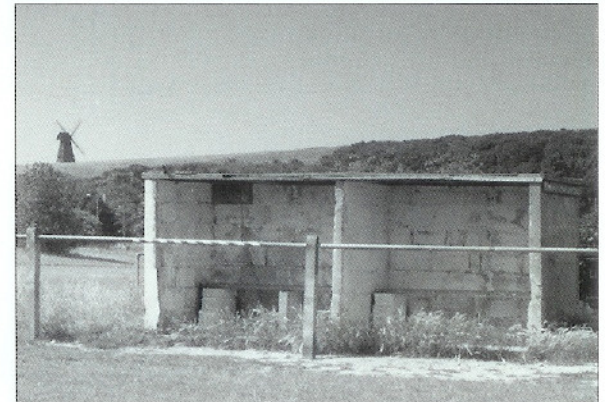
Another key factor is that the FA National Ground Grading document dictates that although 'trainers' boxes' may be portable, they should be an equal distance either side of the halfway line and at least three metres apart. Crucially, the regulations state that each should accommodate eight persons on fixed seats or benches. The saving grace here is the word 'should'. Nevertheless, it is not difficult to see how many existing dugouts will fail to meet these requirements, and may ultimately be replaced by homogenous Perspex clones. The hunt is on, therefore, to document this diversity that underlines the beauty of the Non-League game. Whilst top flight clubs install ergonomically-designed seats in increasingly capacious plastic caverns, players at the lower levels may be found squeezed into a tiny concrete box at a recreation ground, complete with evidence of the local youths' latest sexual conquests.



Top left: Grazing sheep are an obstacle in getting pictures of these unusual angled-roofed dugouts at Earlswood Town



Top right: Outside seating gives subs an al fresco option at Tipton St. John



Right: These disused originals are overlooked by the famous windmill at Rottingdean Village

All photos: David Bauckham

I am currently researching and travelling the country photographing dugouts for inclusion in a new book to be published in October 2006. There are in fact relatively few proper sunken dugouts, but there is still plenty to get excited about. Some dugouts are distinctive by nature of their shape, roof, paint-job, or lettering. Others merely by the fact that they are standing at all, such is the flimsy nature of their construction. Some are tiny, some are ridiculously tall, and some are derelict. Some otherwise ordinary dugouts are made interesting by what is behind them: a stunning piece of geology in the case of Roche in Cornwall; or the constant low flying aircraft at Bedfont, whose ground lies beneath the Heathrow flight path. Both make for an interesting photograph. Shropshire appears to have a preponderance of dugouts that double as storage sheds, hence the provision of doors. Shed culture is prevalent at some grounds, although I have yet to find old wooden bush shelters commandeered for a new purpose, or dugouts bedecked with hanging baskets and potted plants. Is there anyone, anywhere who has re-erected a dugout from a demolished ground in his garden? If there is, I want to know.

Many worthy examples will be found at the intermediate levels of the pyramid, and this where I need your help in drawing these to my attention. In particular, I am in search of dugouts in the North of England for inclusion in the book, though not exclusively so. If you can help me in any way please send an email to db@bauckham.plus.com or telephone me on 01323 410854. Please don't assume that I already have it on my hit-list. I may be more 'dugout aware' than the average person but am equally sure there are some more gems out there I don't know about.

Check out some of the dugouts already in David's 'collection' at: www.pyramidpassion.co.uk