



Don Palmer OBE

It was with great sadness that the Middlesex Schools' Football Association learned of the passing of our former President, Don Palmer OBE. Don passed away on 28th December 2020 after a period of ill-health.

Don was a maths teacher who graduated in Mathematics from London University and qualified as a teacher at Borough Road College, the successor to which became part of Brunel University. Having been born in Devon and educated at St Austell Grammar School in Cornwall, he played for St Austell FC as a young man and after moving to London, represented Corinthian-Casuals. He was often made the captain of the teams in which he played.

Don taught for decades at St Clement Danes School, which he joined in 1955. He became acting Headmaster of the Grammar School in Hammersmith while the school - which traces its history back to 1862 - was transitioning into an all-ability, co-educational school in Chorleywood, Hertfordshire.

Prior to becoming Headmaster, Don had been Deputy Headmaster and before that, the Head of Mathematics and Computing. In this role, Don established the first school-based Computing Department in London. He also found the time to write several maths textbooks. The Hammersmith site became the Burlington Danes Church of England School and Don continued to teach there.

Don had a lifelong passion for football and was a qualified coach, a referee and a diligent administrator whose contributions and local, county and national level saw him receive virtually every honour that could be bestowed upon a volunteer within schools' football.

Taking charge of football at St Clement Danes, Don not only organised the boys' teams, but also played for the Staff XI. He was fondly remembered by some of his former pupils for having organised training sessions taken by the then Chelsea manager, Tommy Docherty during 1962-63. These sessions were apparently compulsory and extremely hard work. On 28th March 1962, as part of the school's Centenary celebrations, the St Clement Danes First XI defeated a Queens Park Rangers XI in front of more than 1,000 pupils at Loftus Road while later in the day an Old Danes International XI defeated a Representative Team from The Football Association. The Old Danes team consisted entirely of players who had represented their countries at Youth, Grammar School, University and amateur international level, notably Hugh Lindsay of England, Ron Broom of Wales and Jimmy Quail of Ireland. The FA News covered the event and noted that "it must surely be a record for any school to be able to field an active international team in one afternoon".

Don managed the London Senior Schools Representative Team in addition to leading football at St Clement Danes. Don's time as a coach also saw him manage a young David Beckham, who represented the Middlesex Youth FA at Under-16 level, qualifying for the County through playing for Brimsdown Rovers. Don represented MSFA on the Middlesex Youth FA Council from 1994 until 2010, when the Youth Association merged with the adult body to form the modern Middlesex County FA. He continued to be a passionate advocate for schools' and youth football in his later years and was made an Honorary Member of the Middlesex County FA.

Having been Secretary of the London Grammar Schools' FA, Don Palmer was a member of the English Schools' Football Association (ESFA) Council or its Grammar School equivalent for 30 years. He was ESFA Chairman in 1977-78 and ESFA Treasurer between 1987 and 1991, being made a Life Member of ESFA upon his retirement from Council.

The 1972 amalgamation of the ESFA with the Conference of Grammar School FAs led to significant changes to the boundaries of County Schools Football Associations, not least in Inner London and Middlesex, the two Counties in which Don worked and lived. In their 1977-78 Handbook, which included a biography of Don to celebrate his election to the Chair, ESFA noted that when these boundary alterations came to be implemented, "Don Palmer's wide experience was of considerable help in the South East".

One of the Under-19 Representative competitions organised by the South East England Schools' FA is the St Clement Danes Trophy - donated by the school thanks, in part, to Don's efforts.

His service to schools' football while at St Clement Danes was recognised by the Inner London Schools' FA, who bestowed Life Membership upon him. In addition, Inner London's Under-19 inter-schools competition is named after Don, as was an Inter-District competition for boroughs within Middlesex, which ran from 1975 to 1987. MSFA's inter-school tournament for U16 girls' teams is named after his wife, Janet. He carried out a number of administrative roles within the Middlesex Schools' FA - Middlesex being Don's home county, given that he lived in Norwood Green - and he was MSFA's President for more than a decade, having previously chaired the Association.

He was awarded an OBE for his services to Schools' Association Football in the Birthday Honours List published in June 1992.

A dedicated and knowledgeable teacher, who enjoyed a distinguished career, Don was sometimes called "Toffee" by boys at St Clement Danes and remains fondly remembered and respected by former pupils to this day.

Having also given a lifetime of service to schools football, Don Palmer's contribution to the game in London, Middlesex and beyond was enormous and he will be missed by all who knew him.