

SPORT 3

The faces of football hooligan

PETER said he would be looking out for the Sunday Times this morning, he said he'd be buying copies for all his friends too. In fact he had to be persuaded that the publication of his own name would not be advisable.

Peter, 17 years old, lives on a housing estate in the heart of London's East End. It would be very easy to call him a nice lad: clear-eyed, quietly spoken, a manner deferential and obliging. The Cockney vernacular blurred his speech at times, but no swear word passed his lips.

Hospitably, he prepared a pot of tea, and discussed his "weapons". He had only two with him at this time, the spanner and wooden mallet. The others—including the razor and meat-hook—were in the special jacket which he had lent to a mate who was off to Arsenal's match.

The jacket is especially padded, with six weapon-holding pockets which were sewn into the inside lining by his young sister (his mother is dead). His boots are steel-toed, with exposed, classed as an offensive weapon, they got him turned away from a recent match.

He has been "pinched" just once, arrested with the spanner in his hand. He had to pay the £25 fine himself. Since then his father has tried to discourage him from going, but usually returns when his mates come around to pick him up.

He is what they call a "skin-head" or an "Agro boy". His hair is cropped, he wears braces, Levi jeans with a half-inch turn-up, and the boots. "The Tottenham supporters are called 'The Park Lane'. But we're on our own, about 12 of us, the others are from Rotherhithe. We haven't really got a name, we just went to school together."

How do you actually use the weapons?

"Hitting the other lot with them. Hitting them over the head, in the legs, in the back. The supporters of Tottenham never fight on the ground, but when they come out they wait across the road and then when Liverpool, say, comes out, all

the Tottenham just get behind them, and just run into them and start hitting them with whatever they've got. They go to all the stations, when the Northern clubs are down here. Boxing Day they were all down. West Ham and Tottenham usually join up then."

You would use the razor?
"Yes, I would. I have really. In the arm. This was against Manchester City. They'd cut my mate's head open with a bottle."

Have you used the meat-hook?

"Another boy has. Pulled a geezer's leg, ripped all his leg out. That was Manchester United at Old Trafford."

Could it happen that you could kill someone?

"I haven't thought of that really... We put some Everton supporters in hospital, two of them. This train was just pulling out from the platform and the door was open. We kicked them and they went out the door."

You could get a prison sentence couldn't you?

"Yes, well, if there was only one copper I'd have a go at him. This is what they do. You've got your mates with you and they jump on the copper. Up at Charlton on the railway platform a policeman grabbed hold of me and said: 'You're coming with me.' I said, 'No I ain't'. He was fighting, he took his helmet off and hit me across the back with his truncheon, and I hit him and caught him in the chin. My mate says: 'Come on, help him.' They got the copper off and I got away."

"As we were getting on the train this policeman comes up and says to me: 'You were lucky, if you'd been on your own I would have caught you.' And he walked away and this kid threw a bottle at him and he came back to me again and kicked me in the shins. I jumped up and nudged him, and this other kid jumped on his back. Three old boys was there, 30-odd, and they told



everybody to break it up. We left it at that... I got on another train, and they wrecked all that train. Smash all the lights. One of my mates split his head..."

You do quite a bit of train smashing?

"Yes. Coming home from these Northern clubs—we lose they smash the train if we win they do the same. Some supporters say that when Tottenham win they don't fight, but they do."

Don't you get a bit worried that if you keep going on this you're going to end up in prison?

"You mean—frighten me? Not really, 'cos—well I've had

a few beatings from other supporters. When I used to go down to Tottenham first of all I used to, you know, start a trouble. Just go to watch the match. But after the third game, when I got jumped on, after that I realised it's either you or them. And then I wasn't bothered, really, as long as I don't get pinched."

But you could always just go along to football.

"Yes well there's nothing to do Saturday afternoons except go swimming. And my mates come especially, a long way around, for me... An afternoon's entertainment, really."

You've got a good build, do you do a lot of swimming?

"Yes I like swimming, I'm

always down at the baths. I used to belong to a club. But I smoked too much."

How would you like to have a season ticket and a seat of football?

"I wouldn't like it, not really. If someone offered me a season ticket I'd say no, keep it... When I went to see Liverpool I went with my Dad and he said come up in the seats. He'd got me a ticket for that match, and you could feel the atmosphere—all singing and all enjoying theirself, Liverpool singing their song and then Tottenham. They have a race to see who lasts the longest. Liverpool—Tottenham—Liverpool—Tottenham, and all that... And sometimes when you're down there with our lot you feel just like jumping over and getting in with this crowd and joining them... But I'd rather be with all my mates."

He tells a story of a return train journey in which he and his mate were invited into a players' compartment by Jimmy Greaves and offered a piece of chicken each. Greaves said that he didn't like Soccer hooligans, and they said they didn't either.

"We went all the rest of the way. We got all their autographs. I've got the programme upstairs with the autographs in it... When we came back to Ipswich they wouldn't let him in because his boots had the steel showing. Alan Mulvey lent him a pair of pissmolls. He's still got them. Mulvey's quite a nice fellow, and Cyril Knowles. They're all good fellows really."

What if someone like Mulvey said to you he wanted a good club and good supporters and asked you as a personal favour to help some of his hooligans?

"Well, if he asked me that I'd leave all the weapons at home. But I'd still go there and fight because—well, really, in the papers it says Tottenham starts fights. But it isn't really. Because Liverpool come down and start engaging in it. Sound of Distant Drums. And they've got all pennies and bricks in their hands, and they start firing them over. And they beat up the hot-dog stall man... But if Alan Mulvey said that to me, 'On Saturday leave all your weapons and that, cut out all the hooliganism, I would for two weeks. The next two home games. If it controlled down after that I'd only take one weapon with me.'"

And if it all started simmering down, would he be pleased or disappointed?

"It'd be disappointing, really. Because you miss your knuckle of an afternoon."

The interview over, we walked together down to the corner of the road. Peter chatting amiably. He was meeting some friends at the cafe, going off swimming and back to school. He was a window cleaner, but that wasn't working at the moment. To tell the truth, he said, he'd be glad to get back home.

Norman Harris

This article is based on an actual interview but the subject's name and certain locations have been changed.