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Banks of England increases value of Stoke City's footballing heritage

Stoke City's return to the top flight of English football has coincided with the visit of Pele and Archbishop Desmond Tutu to 'The Potteries', to unveil a statue in honour of arguably the world's greatest-ever goalkeeper – local legend and World Cup winner, Gordon Banks.

Promotion into the Barclays Premier League means that, starting this month, almost one billion people, in 200 countries, will now see Stoke City every week. And the unveiling of the Gordon Banks Monument at the Britannia Stadium a few weeks ago helped to raise that profile still further – as football fans world-wide were reminded of a brief moment in time when Banks denied Pele a certain goal with what has simply become known as "That Save".

Stoke City enjoys a fascinating footballing heritage. Much of that is owed to the "first knight of football", Sir Stanley Matthews. One of the Potteries' best-loved sons, the "Wizard of the Dribble" was born in Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent in 1915. When he died in 2000 more than 100,000 people lined the streets of Stoke-on-Trent to pay tribute to the man who – after rejoining Stoke City from Blackpool at the age of 46 – helped the club to win promotion back into the First Division of English football.

He played for Stoke City until the age of 50 (and afterwards always said he had retired too early!). A testimonial game in honour of Sir Stanley at the club's former Victoria Ground involved, amongst others, Lev Yashin, Ferenc Puskas and Alfredo Di Stefano. A statue of Matthews outside The Britannia Stadium notes: "His name is symbolic of the beauty of the game, his fame timeless and international, his sportsmanship and modesty universally acclaimed. A magical player, of the people, for the people."

Now, it is the turn of Gordon Banks – with a monument costing £350,000, comprised of three figures: two of Banks in action (including 'That Save') on a raised book-plinth; and the third life-sized and placed on the ground, depicting Banks holding the World Cup in 1966. (The latter was the one unveiled in July, and the other two will be erected soon).

Banks was joined on the day by Pele who – to this day – still wonders how his header in Mexico failed to hit the back of the net. The unveiling was accompanied by a charity match between a Pele XI and a Gordon Banks XI to help fight poverty in Africa. Pele's "Assistant Manager" was Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

That match also celebrated the lives of Sir Stanley Matthews, who taught children to play football in Soweto; and Josiah Wedgwood, who campaigned against slavery in Africa. For further details, visit <http://www.banksofengland.org/>

A third statue outside the stadium commemorates John Ritchie, Stoke's centre forward in the 1972 League Cup winning side.

Stoke-on-Trent Tourism Division, meanwhile, is now helping to promote Premiership Football packages to its visitors for the 2008/09 season. Details can be found at www.thomascooksport.com. Or, visit www.visitstoke.co.uk.

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