



THE TAYLOR TREK POINTS OF INTEREST

We are grateful that you have chosen to join us for our charity walk around Watford and the surrounding area, visiting the key sites of Graham Taylor OBE's Hornets' history, while raising vital funds for a charity close to his heart.

The following will highlight what you can expect to see on the Taylor Trek. We'll point out interesting things to look out for during your journey, and most importantly, we'll delve into the significance of the Taylor Trek's points of interest in honouring the memory of Graham Taylor OBE, ensuring our adventure is meaningful and memorable.

VICARAGE ROAD STADIUM



All three of our Taylor Trek challenges will begin and end at Vicarage Road Stadium – home to Watford Football Club since 1922. The great Graham Taylor OBE arrived at Watford FC in 1977, and his first spell of ten years in charge laid the foundations for the Club and Trust we know today.

The Watford FC Community Sports & Education Trust began life in the early 1990s, as a 'Football in the Community' scheme. It formalised the developments pioneered by Graham, who was passionate about building links between the Club and the local community, and making Watford FC a 'family' club. One of his most significant undertakings was to run the London Marathon to raise sponsorship for the building of the Family Terrace. Over the years the Trust grew, expanding its community engagement offerings through initiatives such as the Junior Hornets, player appearances, and school programmes, to name but a few.

Geographically, the Stadium neighbours Watford General Hospital. Fostering a community relationship between Watford FC and the hospital was important to Graham, who put a lot of effort into building a link between the two. The Club-Hospital connection was more recently demonstrated during the Covid-19 pandemic, where the Club volunteered both their time and facilities to support the hospital staff.

You can find a statue in memory of Graham, which was unveiled in 2018, outside the Hornets Shop. Opposite the Stadium, on the grounds of Cornerstone Church along Vicarage Road, you can also see a mural of Graham, which was created in 2021 by the talented artists at Murwalls.





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WATFORD FC UNDERPASS



Just down the road from Vicarage Road, you'll find the recently renovated Watford FC underpass. The underpass, which connects the Stadium to the town centre, is used by thousands of fans every home game, to get from the town to the Stadium.

In 2022, the underpass was given a much-needed makeover by Murwalls, who adorned the walls with yellow and black, and imagery of Watford legends past and present.

As you wander through the underpass, look out for the large mural of Graham Taylor OBE alongside music legend, ex-Watford FC owner and Honorary Life-President Sir Elton John.

WATFORD MUSEUM

Our journey will also take us to Watford Museum, originally the base for the well-known Benskins Brewery, whose long association with the Club included the purchase of the Vicarage Road site in 1921, after which the Club became known as 'The Brewers.' Today, the museum is a thriving hub filled with everything Watford. The Club and Trust have worked closely with the museum for many years, sharing, collecting, and preserving Watford FC history from throughout the decades. Graham himself was an enthusiastic supporter of the museum, with the relationship spanning over twenty years.

ST MARY'S CHURCH

We will also be passing by St Mary's Church. The Grade 1 listed building is the oldest building in Watford and dates back to Norman times. This was where Graham's funeral took place; a sad day in which the community came together to pay their respects. The church was full and there were also thousands outside providing a fitting send-off for Watford's greatest manager and the heart of the Watford community.



The museum has held two exhibitions about Graham's work at Watford FC – creatively titled the 'Goal-den Years,' and has most recently hosted the wonderful Watford FC Centenary Exhibition, which was a celebration of Watford's 100 years since the Club's first game at Vicarage Road.





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WATFORD HIGH STREET

Along from the church is the high street, which was the setting for 1984's open-top bus tour, to celebrate Watford reaching the FA Cup Final. To commemorate the event, shops and businesses along the high street were adorned with Watford FC decorations, infusing the atmosphere with a sense of celebration and unity. It's also worth noting the pond at the top of the high street, which has consistently served as a focal point for various celebrations, particularly when the Club has been promoted. It's not uncommon for over-enthusiastic individuals to continue the tradition of taking a refreshing plunge into the pond!

Another staple of the High Street is the large nightclub opposite the pond. Over the years, it has undergone various name changes, leading to different associations depending on one's generation: Top Rank Suite, Bailey's, Paradise Lost, Kudos, Destiny, Oceana, and currently Pryzm. Which one do you remember?

In its incarnation as Bailey's, it hosted the Club's Player of the Year nights for several years in the late 70s and early 80s. Sir Elton John also played here at least once for Johnny Williams' player testimonial benefit.

Before we leave the high street, we must acknowledge Graham's profound impact on the Watford community. His unwavering support for

numerous groups and businesses, including the renowned Palace Theatre, played a pivotal role in nurturing the deep-seated community spirit that defines Watford FC. There's even a rumour about one memorable pantomime performance at the theatre which starred some special Watford FC faces!

TOWN HALL

Next up is the Grade 2 listed Town Hall. Completed in 1939, this Art Deco architectural gem has not only been a symbol of the town's rich heritage but has also played a pivotal role in some of Watford FC's most cherished moments.

In 1999, when Watford secured promotion through a momentous victory at Wembley Stadium, a reception was held at the Town Hall, attended by key figures such as Graham, players and staff. The fans gathered outside in vast crowds began calling out for their beloved team. In response, Watford FC legend Luther Blissett OBE DL appeared on the balcony of the building. His appearance prompted an outpouring of support, with Graham himself following suit to greet and revel in the joy of the ecstatic crowds.

As testament to his enduring influence and dedication to the community, Graham was honoured with the title of Freeman of the Borough by Watford Borough Council, a distinction that further solidified his legacy and his deep connection with the town.





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COLOSSEUM

A stone's throw away from the Town Hall is the Colosseum. One of the notable features of the Colosseum is its exceptional acoustics, widely recognised as among the best in the country. This unique quality has made it a sought-after venue for musical performances and recording sessions. The BBC Concert Orchestra has often chosen the Colosseum as a favoured location for its recordings; Maria Callas and Luciano Pavarotti also recorded here. It was also here that the soundtrack for "The Lord of the Rings" was recorded, adding to the venue's legacy in the world of music and film.

Additionally, the Colosseum served as the setting for Graham Taylor OBE's Freeman of the Borough ceremony. This event was organised to celebrate Graham's many years of unwavering support for Watford, highlighting the deep connection between the community and the individual who had made such a lasting impact.

Not highlighted as a point of interest but worth noting as you wander from the Colosseum towards our next location, is the **Peace Hospice**. Over the years, Graham dedicated himself to fundraising for and actively supporting the hospice, a testament to his caring and compassionate nature. His philanthropic efforts extended beyond the hospice to encompass numerous other Watford charities, further solidifying his legacy as an committed advocate for the well-being of the community he held dear.

CASSIOBURY PARK

From the Colosseum, we will next visit Cassiobury Park – a park whose history is rich and intertwined with the community of Watford. Originally owned by the Earl of Essex, it was once considered a part of St Alban's Abbey's vast estate. However, as time passed and the family began selling off the land, in 1908, the Council posed a question to Watford residents: did they wish to purchase the land? Surprisingly, the residents declined the offer. Nonetheless, the Council went against this decision and acquired the land, which has since expanded to cover 144 acres.

The connection between Graham and Cassiobury Park spans a considerable length of time. In his early days with Watford FC, the park served as a training ground for the players, and Graham himself would often be seen walking his dogs there. During cross-country training runs for the players, Graham and the training staff occasionally hid in the bushes to ensure the players didn't take shortcuts! Cassiobury Park also holds historical Watford FC significance as it was the first home of the Club back in 1881 when they were known as Watford Rovers.

Graham's dedication to preserving the park's history was highlighted when he was interviewed for a book about Cassiobury Park's past. He not only contributed to the book but also became its first purchaser, underscoring his commitment to preserving the town's heritage.

In a touching tribute, music legend Sir Elton John dedicated a park bench in Cassiobury Park to Graham in 2017, immortalising his deep-rooted connection with the park and the community he had served for so long.





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KINGS LANGLEY CRICKET CLUB

For those on the Challenge route, our next stop will be Kings Langley Cricket Club. While he had worked for various clubs and lived in different places throughout his career, it was in Kings Langley where he ultimately chose to retire.

ABBOTS LANGLEY

Next, onto the neighbouring village of Abbots Langley. Graham's connection with Abbots Langley was at its foremost in his involvement with the Tough Ten charity run. This event was established in 1982 with the primary goal of raising funds for the charity MENCOP. Over time, its mission expanded to include support for local clubs, charities, school projects, and initiatives aimed at enhancing the quality of life for beneficiaries within the community. Graham played a central role in the Tough Ten, presenting medals and awards to participants at the finish line, even when he relocated to the Midlands. In recognition of Graham's immense contributions and the impact he had, the Tough Ten was renamed the "Graham Taylor Tough Ten" for a few years following his passing.



MERIDEN COMMUNITY CENTRE

Both the Medium and Challenge routes will pass through our Meriden Community Centre. Established by the Council, the Trust took on the lease in 2012 with the aim of re-establishing its role as a hub for community engagement. Graham Taylor OBE 'cut the tape' at the opening ceremony in 2016. You can watch a video of that moment by clicking [here](#) or scanning the QR code.



At the Centre, you can't fail to notice the large Graham Taylor OBE mural in the reception area. This was again painted by Murwalls to honour Graham's community legacy.

Graham's connection to Meriden was evident even before the Trust took on the Centre. When Graham trained for the London Marathon, an endeavour undertaken to raise funds for the Family Enclosure, his running route would take him right past the Meriden Centre and through the surrounding areas.

And so we return to where it all began - Vicarage Road Stadium. We do hope you have enjoyed our whistlestop tour of Watford and the surrounding areas - pinpointing the places with an enduring connection to Graham Taylor OBE.

With thanks to our volunteers and contributors Ed Coan, Geoff Wicken, and Mike Raggett.