



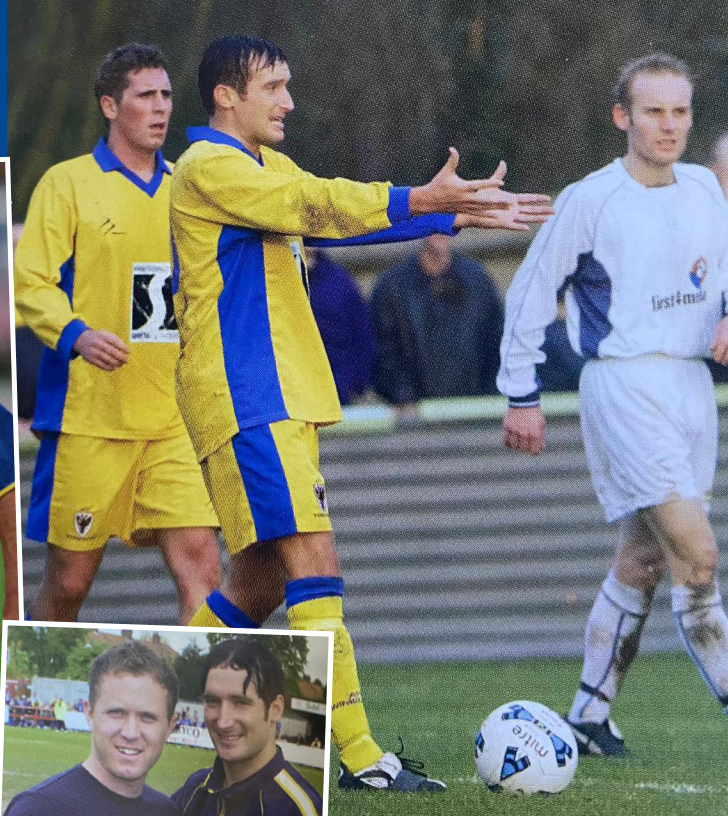
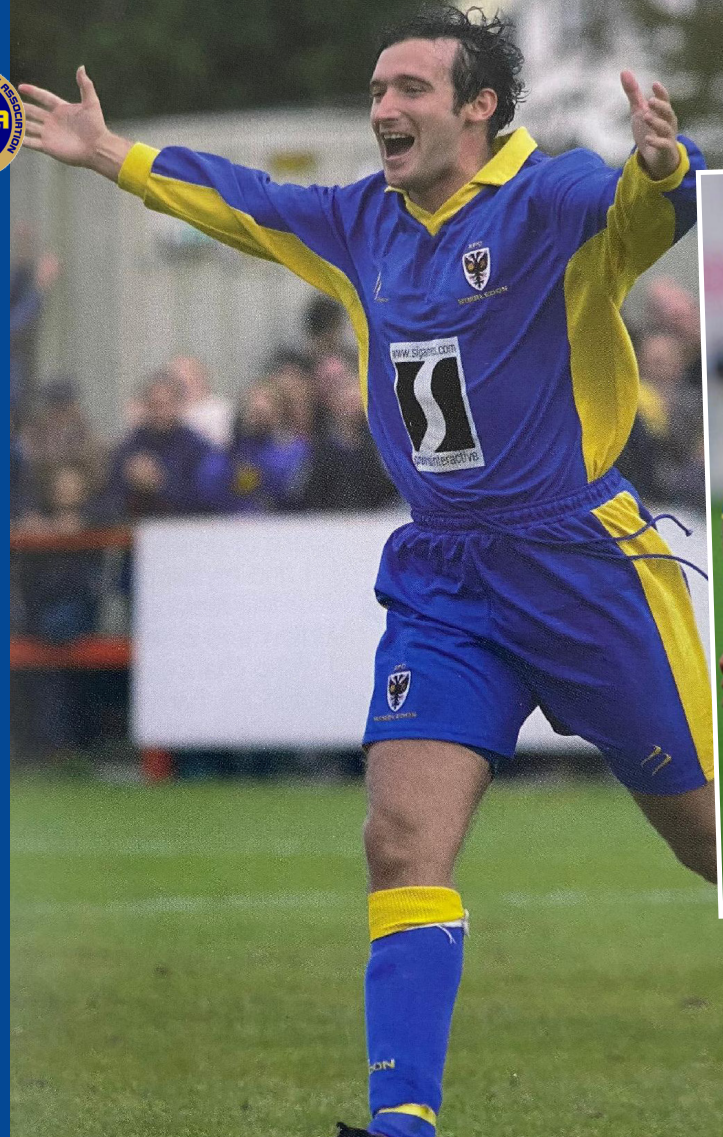
## Kevin Cooper

Kevin Cooper thought 10 July 2002 was going to be just another pre-season friendly for his club Sutton United, despite the growing media attention surrounding the newly-reformed AFC Wimbledon. But it was a day 'Coops' would never forget.

"Personally, I was a bit dismissive. I'd been at a few clubs, including Charlton, Aldershot and Wycombe at reserve level and played against Dennis Wise, Alan Shearer and Tony Cottee in testimonial games, but I could tell something special was happening from the moment I arrived at Gander Green Lane. By the time we kicked off it was full – with people even sitting in the trees. I scored twice in the second-half and thought to myself 'I wouldn't mind playing in front of that sort of crowd every week.' So when Terry Eames spoke to me and asked me to join AFC Wimbledon, I was sold straight away. Who wouldn't be?"

Not the first Kevin Cooper to represent the Dons (his WFC namesake is six days older and both turn 50 later this month), the AFCW version quickly got into his goalscoring stride, with the first goal at Sandhurst in the Dons' Combined Counties League opener and then another at home to Chipstead at Kingsmeadow, where the gates were closed and hundreds turned away.

Wearing the number 10 shirt, Cooper played with a variety of strike partners over the next two seasons – where he wrote his name into the record books. The Dons amassed 111 points from 46 CCL games but incredibly that was only good enough for a third place finish. Kevin scored 41 goals in all competitions, but not a single one was with his head,



which became something of a standing joke to the extent that after the final game a stream of crosses was sent over to help him break his duck – against Ivor Heller in goal with proceeds to the Ground Fund – and it still took half a dozen attempts!

All that changed at Worthing at the start of 2003/04, however. Ten minutes into the game, right-back Steve Gibson was put through by Lee Sidwell and sent over

the perfect cross. Cooper met it sweetly with his head, directing it into the top corner. After a moment's stunned silence, the celebrations were long and loud. T-shirts were printed "I saw Kevin Cooper score with his head!" As the AFC Wimbledon Invincibles posted a record of P46 W42 D4 LO scoring 180 goals in the process to lift the title, Coops broke more records including the most goals in a season held by Eddie Reynolds since 1965 with his 57th

in an 8-0 thrashing of Cove. But he wasn't finished and his 66th of the campaign helped the Dons to the double, beating North Greenford United 4-1 in the League Cup Final at Woking.

"Of everything I achieved at the Club, this topped it all. It is the one game that stands out a mile. The buzz that day was just something else. I just didn't want it to end. I had eight pints given to me within four minutes of getting back to Kingsmeadow – and I'm normally a two pint a night man! It proved to be one of my final games, though. I sat down with the new boss Dave Anderson. I wanted a contract and he promised if I stayed I would play but that wasn't enough for me at the time.

Hindsight is a wonderful thing and I still regret that decision now. I love Wimbledon."

Further moves to the likes of Carshalton, Northwood, Dulwich, Tooting, Dover and Met Police followed plus a spell managing Bedfont in 2011, but in 2012 together with Darren Eadie he launched Sellebrity Soccer – organising celebrity football matches – and has since raised over £1.6 million for various good causes. Welcome to Plough Lane Kevin, enjoy your day here!

