



Arthurian Legends

Ralph Hancock

Wish I'd seen you Arthur,
the man on the flying trapeze,
catching the ball as solid as a rock
with laces hard as sand in a sock,
catching footballs between your knees,
wish I'd seen you Arthur.

Wish I'd seen you Arthur,
with yer 'ead tucked under yer arm,
performing acts of legal thuggery
villainy, larceny and skulduggery,
legendary for keeping calm,
wish I'd seen you Arthur.

Wish I'd seen you Arthur,
tackling the man without the ball
pushing, barging, shoulder charging,
less of a game, more of a brawl
less like football more like boxing,
wish I'd seen you Arthur.

Wish I'd seen you Arthur,
days when fisting a leather ball,
meant kung fu fighting with a brick wall,
days when tipping it into the stand
meant a spectator with a broken hand,
wish I'd seen you Arthur.

Wish I'd seen you Arthur,
studs like starters for fluorescent tubes,
diving under horses hooves
emerging without a single bruise,
wish I'd seen you Arthur,
wish I'd seen you Arthur.



Arthur, Arthur What's the Score **Ralph Hancock**

That's Arthur leaning coolly on his new headstone,
nodding to the people without visitors or flowers.
Born in Accra, buried with the home fans,
provocative to the last, brave and eccentric as his saves.

That's Arthur Wharton, the beautiful young man
with the Rotherham tache that grows without light.
Punching, barging, taking crap -'danky'-
giving back, a 'goal-custodian', in the language of the day.

Arthur was a 'pedestrian' an athlete, a hundred
yards in ten seconds. Holder of the World Record,
a working-class hero when he ran and kept goal.
That's Arthur playing for Rotherham Town.

The Higuita of his time; he'd jump, grasp the bar
and catch the ball between his legs. My Dad says
Frank Swift used to save a penalty and roll the ball
back: 'Have another shot'. It's true! Saved, Arthur!

He was a Preston 'Invincible'; but none of us are
without someone to come out and catch us.
Arthur slipped out of his own hands. But look
he has words now to confirm that he lived and died.

And I'll bring a football next time and friends
for a kick-in (though the only kicking will be us: 'Out!').
That's Arthur, practising the scorpion save,
Arthur, Arthur give us a wave!

(Performed at the opening of
In a League of His Own, Doncaster Museum)