

# From the Tunbridge Wells Museum and Art Gallery

## Making Subbuteo

We collected people's individual memories of being involved in the manufacture of Subbuteo in preparation for our Flick to Kick exhibition, and we would like to continue to collect your stories.

Please take the time to [send us your comments](#) or personal reminiscences to add to our website, for others to see and for us to keep as a historical record.

### Your memories

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My Grandad John Elliot made the angling game you have on your site. We have the first copy ever made at home :) It wasn't the best game in the world but we did play it when I was younger and it was fun back then :)... Oh and I'm pretty sure we didn't have this UFO dice thing... in our one it had specially made green dice. I think the UFO might have been added when it was mass-produced... you probably already know this but thought I would mention

(Anon)

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My friend's mother worked in the factory in the late 1960s. One Christmas, it was a bad year for berries on the holly, so to compensate, she painted some of the footballs red and stuck them on the holly!

(Ruth Chambers)

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### Growing up with Subbuteo

As a child of Primary School age I remember our home was continually filled with boxes, plastic bags and a familiar smell of paint, glue and cardboard. This was because my mum was employed by Subbuteo as one of a large team of people who did what was called outwork for the company, which was to complete items to be packed into the famous Subbuteo games of football and cricket.

### Painting

My Mum would sit at the dining room table for many hours with very small footballers or cricketers and paint. The painting of these figures went was an art form as first you would paint the face, hands and legs if they were showing a flesh colour, and leave them to one side to dry. Next came the hair and boots that were nearly always black, after which the figures were given their team football strip, for example some were quite simple and had the same colour on the shirt as the socks and white shorts, others were much more complicated and the shirt was painted first then the socks and shorts after which when dry either the team badge was painted onto the shirt or stripes added to it and to the top of both socks.

Cricketers were easier as it was only the face and hands were painted a flesh colour and then the hair and cricket bat were sometimes both painted the same colour.

## **The Base**

Another job was the figures were delivered and these had to be fixed to a base. The bases were different colours to match the team. In each base a round metal washer was placed and the base was then fitted with a figure on a white cap which was then glued to the top of each base, these again had to be left to dry before being put into a box and returned to the factory.

## **Advertising Boards**

This was another task that again was delivered in large boxes. These were green in colour as I remember and were a long triangle shape made from plastic, on these my Mum was given many long sticky labels which advertised different products. The labels would have to be peeled off of a backing paper and stuck in a straight line onto the plastic boards. As they were peeled off the backing paper some labels, if you were not careful, would curl up on itself, so again the task could not be hurried.

## **Goal Posts**

These products I remember my Mum did for many years and these goalposts were sometimes different. This was because the football game was produced in several different ways, for example World Cup, International, and League games. When Mum did this outwork our home was very full and we had boxes stacked in the dining room or wherever there was a vacant space.

World Cup and International goalposts were quite complicated as sometimes you had to make up the frame first before a red, blue or white net made from a cotton-like material was placed on the posts. The nets sometimes could also be made from a kind of nylon material these did not have much stretch so my Mum would get very sore fingers. Again there was a certain way to fix the net onto the goalposts. Mum would place the net onto the left upright first, then pull it along the crossbar and then down the right upright, then she would proceed to fix the net to the right then left rear corners and tuck the excess into the corners. (The nets were looped over tiny hooks on the goalposts- this stopped the net from slipping off.)

Some goalposts for these games were what we call today as 'flat-packed' and so the base, two uprights, crossbar and two nets were placed into a plastic bag and stapled at the top. The goalpost for the League game were white plastic and was a solid moulded frame, and Mum had to fix on a white net, which again could be either made from a cotton or nylon type of material but these were packed into rows of 25 and then placed back into the boxes they had arrived in. World Cup and International goalposts were very often packed in pairs and packed in a different box which would also arrive flat-packed, so Mum would have to build the box first before she could pack these goals to be returned to the factory.

I know the Subbuteo factory was in Langton Green and then moved to Wadhurst but I remember when my Mum used to have these tasks to do at home the Subbuteo factory was based in Chiddingstone Causeway and several of the local people from the village and villages nearby worked there. You can still see the factory site in Chiddingstone Causeway although it is now home to a company that produces First Aid products.

(Jane King)

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As a child I spent the school holidays with my best friend and her 3 brothers. Their mother used to paint the Subbuteo players to earn a bit of money. There were always rows and rows of half-painted players lined up on the kitchen table- no one was allowed to get near the table in case the players were knocked over.

(Wendy Miles)

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I joined the Company in 1970 and I left the Company in 1981. My last five years with the Company, I was the Company Buyer. Well it was a unique product in as much that there was only one Subbuteo and for instance, see those nets, which were put on the frames by people working at home. Now those nets were produced by a company in Bridport, Dorset, who make nets for Wimbledon, all sorts of things, great big nets, nets for aircraft carriers, in the old days with aircraft carriers, when planes came down to land on aircraft carriers they used to have nets to stop them going any further. This company made vast nets and they also made our little nets.

We had a lot of dealings with them. At one time I was buying from the Far East because we had a supply problem with this company in Dorset, but mainly because of bad weather. If you didn't have nets you couldn't produce any games and our production came close to laying people off and the Managing Director at the time said to me, 'it's such a critical component Alan, we can't just have one source, we must get another source'. So I was sourcing all the fishing ports, Hull and all that, and they didn't have a clue what I was talking about. I said I want tiny little nets that you put on a tiny little goal and unless they knew Subbuteo, they didn't know what I was talking about. So eventually I sourced it from Taiwan. So I was buying nets from this company in Dorset and abroad, so all that sort of thing. I mean, all these playing surfaces, cloths, were produced up in Manchester, Lancashire of course.

I was sourcing everything, everything that went into a game - it was unique. I mean as you probably know, in these little players is a washer. We bought millions of washers. Every player has a washer inside it and we use millions of players in a course of a week. From an engineering point of view, a washer has to be greased, but we didn't want greased washers, they wouldn't stick in those little bases and that's what I mean by unique. Whoever I dealt with said "well what do you do with that. You can buy the washers but we charge you a penny a thousand for greasing them". I don't want them greased. "Oh you have to have them greased as they will go rusty". No, I don't want them greased. Unless they knew what you were talking about, it was a unique product. So from a buying point of view, it was a very interesting job.

And of course you had the cardboard boxes, we brought from numerous companies because there were a lot of companies. From a buying point of view it is basically packaging, I'm buying packaging. This used to be cardboard and then we went over to this EPS.

I would guess about the mid 1970s we went over to that form of packaging. We still kept the cardboard base and lid, but the inserts were EPS. We could pre-package and then just stand them up, stand them up etc.

Waddingtons bought Subbuteo in the late 60s, just before I joined the company and they left us to our own devices, as we were a successful company. They left us to our own devices down here for quite a number of years and then, because Waddington's were basically a Leeds based company. All their companies were based in Leeds apart from Subbuteo and there was another company called 'Painting by Numbers'. We were the only two Southern based companies within the Waddington group of companies. They left Subbuteo to our own devices really until 1980/81.

Waddington's Directors started coming down. In about the mid 70's they sent one of their chaps down and he became operations director I believe, and then two other Waddington Directors came down. So gradually Waddingtons started putting their people into the board, but the production and the distribution, and the sales force stayed in this area until about 1980, 81. That's when I left the company. I was so happy that it was a successful company, but I didn't want to go up North.

They flew me up there. It was a funny decision because they moved to a big development area called Washington Tyne & Wear, which is a great big industrial estate, and there were incentives to move up there. It was an area of bad unemployment and they were encouraging firms to move up to those sorts of areas and there were all sorts of financial incentives. They wanted me to go up there but my home is in this area. And actually, they didn't stay there that long before moving the company to Leeds. So, it was a strange decision, I couldn't understand it. They were very keen for me to move up there, they flew me up there and I had a look around at the factory they were taking over, and I was slightly suspicious because when I arrived at the factory, there was no fascia board up saying that Subbuteo sports games occupied those premises. Now the

managing director at that time was so marketing orientated it wasn't true. He was a marketing expert and I thought you would have had the fascia board up there, if this was a permanent position, he would have had his name plastered over everything. I went for a lunchtime drink and I said to the Landlord "a lot of empty units on this industrial estate isn't there"? Oh yes, he said, they come and go. So, I wasn't happy about the security of the situation and I wasn't going to move up there anyway.

Maybe a story that you have already heard. I was in the Managing Director's office.... so Subbuteo was at Langton Green and that's where Peter started it and as the company grew he gradually acquired additional premises. They were the White Park, actually that's where I started, they had Rockvilla Road, which is near Tesco's. They dispatched all the teams and all the accessories from there. They had about five, six, seven people working there. They were at Langton Green, they were out at Chiddingstone Causeway, and they were at Wadhurst, and they had production facilities out at Paddock Wood. All this plastic injection moulding was done at Paddock Wood by a company called Larkgrove Engineers. And of course they were in Gibraltar and they were also in Spain.

But we were always worried. We Subbuteo people when Waddington's took us over, we were always worried of the fact that we were such a Southern based company, that ours was the consolation was that there were so many out workers in this area, and it was a unique set-up, that you couldn't set-up over night. So all the while the company was relying on out workers, the company was duty bound to stay in this area. Once you altered it, it could go anywhere.

That's what happened. And I was in the Managing Director's office, an ex Waddington man who they sent him down here. That dozy company down South, shake them up! He was a very aggressive, a very progressive young managing director. And I was in his office talking about budgets for the following year, because I had to work to a budget, and all of a sudden he picked up a phone and he called the company secretary and he said 'get on to our insurance brokers and get me an insurance premium to insure a boy's index finger'. Well I think it was a quarter of a million pounds. The premium was very small, hundreds of pounds whatever it was, and he said "take it" and of course he leaked that to the local press that a boy's index finger was insured for a million pounds and the national press picked up on it and he got all this free publicity for an insurance premium of a couple of hundred quid. And that's what I mean that he was a marketing expert.

Subbuteo used to organise the world cup. The world cup proper is held every four years, so Subbuteo used to hold their world cup tournament the same year, and the winner used to go to the world cup proper. So every four years we used to hold our world cup just before the world cup proper, be it in Italy, I mean we were up in the Ritz in London one year. Anywhere. I mean the amount of free publicity this company gets is unbelievable.

The man's unique and the product's unique. I mean video games started coming in and affecting us. Of course now you have computer games, but there is still seemingly a demand for that game because it's so realistic. I've never played it. I used to muck about it. If you watch two boys playing it, who know what they are doing, it's like watching a real match.

I used to go and watch the world cup. We first had these trade shows and there is a famous one at Harrogate, the Harrogate toy fair, which is usually in January and all the toy and board game manufacturers are at these shows for the next Christmas. So we were obviously there. We were out in Munich, which was the first international toy exhibition we went to and the buyers were queuing up on the stands. They wanted to become a Subbuteo world champion. We appointed an agent per country and Italy was our biggest market. Anywhere where football is popular you will sell that game, and of course Italy is fanatical about football and they were our biggest export company - a man called Parodi.

Soccer was the biggest seller, there was about seven or eight versions. The club edition was the run of the mill. I'm not sure how many thousands we produced a week, but there were thousands of this particular game produced a week and that German lorry was probably three quarters full of it. So there was about seven or eight versions of the football game. There was at least two versions of the cricket game, one

version of the ruby game. There was the angling game, which was a board game, the only Subbuteo game that wasn't a flick type game. And there was football express which was the five-aside game.

Snooker express I can remember but not the motor-cross as I believe that was before or even after my time. Well the Beatles is very old. That was before my time. They are really collectable items. That's something that they just toyed with, Peter Adolph had never heard of it, not realising it of course how big that they would have become, they were just a boy band of that time. But the other things were after my time. The cricket was a very small seller and the rugby was a small seller.

The rugby scrummer - that was a brilliant idea, absolutely brilliant idea. It was invented by George Erik. He was a real character, goatee beard. He used to work at Warwick Park. He lived in a flat there. He was a brilliant designer and he thought of that idea.

This George Erik would think up that idea like the rugby scrummer, he would do an outline drawing of it and he would take it to this company at Paddock Wood and say "do me a mock-up of that in plastic" and they would do it. Then we would test it to see if it worked, then we would commission a tool to be made to produce the item. Most things were in two bits. These are in several bits. There was the figure, the base, the washer inside him. I mean my Mother assembled four thousand Subbuteo bases every week as an out-worker. I mean this was one chaps full-time job. Delivering and picking up.

He had a place at Southborough and he used to put usually four thousand figures out at a time to these ladies who were painting all these different colours. The accessory side of it was once again another reason for the success of the company. We always put a blue team in and red team in, they were our standard colours. They may or may not represent a football team, but Manchester United's strip for instance was say yellow. So Johnny would get that for Christmas but he was a Manchester United supporter, so he would want to buy a Manchester United team, and he would want flood lights and all the extras. You could add to it.

It was a real headache I can tell you, because we have the British cup and invariably you have one of the lower teams in the earlier stages of the competition that does well. You always have a giant killer. Each season there's one of the lower teams that knocks out one of the premier sides. It always happens. The week that happens the demand for the lower team - there's no statistics to support it. All of a sudden everyone wants Watford, because Watford knocked out Manchester United out of the FA Cup. This chap Bridges had to pay an awful lot for the Watford colours until the success stopped.

There was always a certain number of teams who were always a higher demand like Brazil who were always successful. With the English and Scottish teams, Manchester United, Liverpool and teams like that you could always plan that. It was the unknowns that all of a sudden became successful, that was the difficult part.

When we started producing all the different colour strips, all the teams in the British league and all the teams abroad, I mean the demand just fell out the window. It was a job to keep up with it. In the end we started putting out the work to outside contract packers for a while, because it was to a certain extent seasonal. With the football season plus Christmas of course. You could employ enough production people to meet your peaks and also keep them usefully employed during the quiet times. It became so successful that we started putting it out to contract packers. John West salmon for instance is an office in Liverpool, but all the canning and labelling is done by outside people. It wasn't until I got involved with contract packers I realised what a big business it was.

Now then, have you not seen this - Subbuteo Sounds - the record? Well we made this at Wadhurst. The idea of this was to give some background atmosphere for the boys while they were playing the game. We sang the world cup song, which was to the tune of 'She'll be coming round the mountains'.

Subbuteo didn't employ salesman. Their sales force was self-employed agents and we had about ten over the UK. They were manufacturer's agents. As well as working for Subbuteo, they may have worked for Slazenger or Dunlop. Subbuteo in the main didn't sell in toy shops, but mainly in sports shops. One of our

agents was a chap called Frank Burton and he was based in Blackpool and he wrote the lyrics for this song. We didn't employ professional singers.

The words are on one side of the record and on the other side are the crowd sounds. The sound of the football being kicked was someone just flicking the microphone. I don't know how many were sold.

(Alan Ellis)

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I worked for the Wadhurst factory, it was either late '78 or early '79.

I didn't work there for very long. It would have been months because we were living in London and we moved down to Southborough in '78/'79 and I was pregnant with our first child and we were living there so that was why I got a part-time job - packing.

It was quite easy. It was very pleasant and local to me. That's all I remember really

(Katherine Butler)

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I had a young family and that's why I worked for Subbuteo to get some money. So, it's about 40 years ago. So we are going back a long time. I said to my daughter when I did it. She said, 'well, it's before I was born'. It must be 40 years ago.

Well my eldest daughter is 63 so it would be around 1964/65. My son said to me 'you used to paint Subbuteo toys didn't you', then he said, 'well they want people who know about Subbuteo', so that's why I came up. So it's about that time. I worked from home; you collected the boxes, some where by the hospital I think.

As far as I can remember it was in Mount Ephraim. I don't know how I knew they wanted painters and I think it was somewhere opposite the hospital. I remember I went downstairs and you got a box. The first ones I had were the bigger ones, blue ones, and I painted faces and hair. It might have been hands as well. You didn't get much for those and you didn't have so many. I think I did one whole lot, and the second lot I struggled. I think I got half way through and thought 'I can't do anymore', and you only got paid for finishing them, but they record them for stocktaking so I got paid for the ones I had done. The next time I did the little ones. I thought if my husband did some as well, so I said 'I'll paint them until you catch up with me'. It's funny, I remember them as blue, but I don't remember painting strips. I did faces, hands and hair. Whether we did these I don't remember. It's so long ago. I think they came in thousands. How much we got I don't know.

We went downstairs and we got these boxes and obviously you didn't get so much for the bigger ones but I thought they would be easier, but you didn't have so many to paint. They were quite big and they were about that size and they were blue if I remember rightly. We painted the faces and hands and hair. They all had brown hair.

It was more stimulus to do the smaller ones then, because you got more money, and also because my husband got involved. I just remember saying to him 'I'll do it until you catch up with me', so I think he did hair and I did faces and hands. I don't remember what I did with them when they were wet, I don't remember. Memories are so strange. So that's really all I know.

(Ruth Moon)

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Well I was a pattern maker-come-sculptor, freelance, and I used to take on the work from George Erik, well I used to work with George Erik, and we used to be employed by mould makers and pattern makers to do the work for them. Whatever came along, we sort of did. Charlie Stadden was employed by us and we contracted Charlie Stadden to make the first projection moulded figures that they had, and they didn't work. And they are doing the same now and they don't work.

We took over from the celluloid figures to produce a plastic 3D figure. And we devised the bases as well. It just evolved really.

Peter Adolph would just come up with the idea and chat it through. He liked to employ people who knew the job. Another man, Mike Reader / Raider who was organising the despatch and everything down at Langton Green. When I first joined he was in offices behind the Post Office and he used to run his debt collections there as well and he lived opposite. There were some quite interesting people that lived in Langton in those days, like Yardleys. The oil company collectors lived in Langton Green as well, all quietly. The 'Sky at Night' man used to visit Ridgeway School as well.

I really started, because I'm a technician by trade and I started by apprenticeship, and my Mother used to make hats, a milliner, and dresses for George Erik, who was a costume designer for stage. He worked in Park Lane at one time. He was quite a character really, a larger than life man. Holiday on Ice, he designed all the dresses for that. This was going on at the same time and he did the Bournemouth Live shows as well.

The way we got into Subbuteo, we used to have a hand-painting outfit in Walpole Road, and we painted Britain's toys and tin post soldiers and those sort of things. Peter Adolph wanted his figures painted and he got to us through that and from that we made the figures sort of thing. Then Charlie Stadden made some patterns for something, it's such a long time ago. He made small military figures and we had a technique, instead of making them 3 to 1 or 4 to 1, we made them 1 to 1 and had them electro-formed by a firm in Scandinavia who electroplated the moulds.

Well you have a 2 to 1 figure or a 3 to 1 figure made and you make a big resin pattern of it and then you have a machine with a big cutter on the end of the stylus. You move it around and it changes the scale of the figure. It was very detailed and a long process. So is electro-forming, but it's not so detailed.

Electro-forming was a 1 to 1 figure. You had a football figure, the size you wanted it to turn out and you make a mould. I made the mould, this was my job. I used to set the figures up so that they could be got up one, two pieces sort of thing, because most sculptors they make figures with a hand in front of the face, but you can't do it. So I made sure that the figures could work and also set them up, made the resin and then painted onto the resin and then build up and build up and then back it up in copper. That was a Scandinavian speciality. From that you made six or seven of these things. You don't realise what goes into it. I used to make all sorts of things, we made dolls, prams, squeaky toys for prams, the trolls with hair. We made those in wax. It's quite a process, it takes about three months from the pattern to having it manufactured. That long. Making the Beatles never worked, because by the time we made them, the Beatles were back from America and they weren't all that popular then.

We made Adam Faith and someone else, Cliff Richard years ago, and I sculptured those. I got quite good at making likenesses. We made those and I think that gave Peter Adolph the idea to make a set of the Beatles.

But it's like a catch 22 question. People won't buy an idea they want to see it and once they've seen it if they don't like it you've spent thousands. And I don't think that Peter wanted to pay the royalty. I think that's what it was. Peter did things like that. He got things made and then went about finding out how to do it.

You see what I mean because in those days royalties were just coming in. Marketing men again were just sneaking in, and we made racing cars and all of a sudden we had to pay a royalty to the racing cars, then we had to pay a royalty to the drivers, because we used their colours of the hats etc.

Funnily enough they made money out of the football teams though, because he would sell West Ham figures at West Ham and that's how he made his money, he made the shirt for every team that was in the two leagues. He made a team for every football league.

I did tell you though that Peter Adolph sold Subbuteo Ltd, there was two companies

Subbuteo Games Ltd was the senior company. They bought Subbuteo Ltd and it was a moulding shop and a tool room and they had moulding shops and tool rooms all over the country, but they thought they were buying Subbuteo games, but they were only buying the workshop, and me! Then we had quite a big contract going. I was moved in roughly the early sixties I think, somewhere around that. I was employed by Pedigree at Paddock Wood for about a year, and we did Subbuteo moulding figures for Hornby and all the rest of it.

You have heard about the world cup. I sculptured that. That was the one we put up for sale. Keith Buckwell and I. Everybody was looking at this for sale sign, and did a double-take and half an hour later the local police came round. It was only third size!

It was at Commercial Road in Paddock Wood, just down from the station. It's all pulled down now, I think Midland Bank is in the place of it. That was the office of the Medway Tool Company and the moulding shops. I think there is probably an old farmhouse because the moulding shops are in old barns. I'll tell you another funny thing, when Peter Adolph was selling the company, Subbuteo Ltd to Pedigree, he had all the people concerned in his company, the other firm is Rotaplass because they made the electroform dyes. Dave Ellis the Director of the London branch and all the rest of it came down, and I think he picked us up from Sevenoaks in his car, plus the only director of Pedigree. On the way to a pub, all of a sudden Peter Adolph's pulled up and said that there was a robin's nest in the hedge and everybody had to get out of the car, all these directors, because of this robin's nest.

The directors couldn't believe it. The big boss of Pedigree, Murray Lyons, which was Lyons Brothers then, anyway we finished up at this place and we had this terrific meal, and nobody had any money to pay for it. They had a whip round or paid by cheque or something

### **The bases**

Yes, I did have to consider how the bases worked - originally they kept falling over. We invented the 'dive' in football. We had to weigh them with a washer and the flat bit of the base had a curve. We must have turned out about a dozen variations of it. And he (Peter Adolph) was very pedantic. In the end it was a very good combination. We spent a fortune just getting it right. Not that I made a fortune out of it. It was actually designed on the Kelly doll. Do you remember the clown that you knocked over and he came back up again?

I'm trying to find out about the hunting scene that was made. Keith Buckwell remembers it. I think there are about four or five, or six huntsmen on horses, a pack of hounds and a fox. I made the scene for it. This was Subbuteo when they were at Medway Tool Company, but how he made a game of it we can't make out. It never was produced he just had the figures made and that was it.

Peter tried out lots of different ideas, he never stopped, because he realised that every year you had to bring out something different. The size of boards varied considerably. I must have made lots of different boards and then the patterns on the boards.

It became a bit of a nightmare, because every season they changed their shirts, and then the boards changed. After that it was quite nice until it became more international. I suppose it must have been mid 70s. All of a sudden you had the changes in shirts etc.

He had very little painting done here. The main bulk of the painting was done in Gibraltar.

### **The scale of the figures**

Yes there is a scale - 4mm to the foot - I'll bring you a book in on it actually. There is OO gauge. In model railways there is OO gauge, O gauge, 10 gauge, but they're all so many millimetres, 7mm or 4mm. Model soldiers are normally made in 52nd scale, which is similar to 4mm to the foot.

It's a scale to rationalise, like if you make a six-foot figure, you would make him say 12mm and so if you wanted to make a building to it, you would make the building to a scale. It's a scale you like to work to. You make a OO scale, mind you these are slightly under, there again for balance, so we cheated a wee bit, but we call it a OO gauge.

So you could use these figures on a OO railway set. I think a OO gauge started at eighth of an inch per foot. But how it came to OO gauge that's the railway that's done that. I don't think they should really use it on these.

(David Pomeroy)

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Yes, I was an outworker. I'm dreading remembering. Around 1967 when I had my first baby. I used to work from home. They used to call me once a fortnight with four thousand. I stuck them into their bases. You had the base, and the washer that you stuck in, and then you stuck the man on top, which had already been painted. You glued the washer in and then you glued the man on top. Oh no, you had to be neat, you couldn't fill it up with glue and hope for the best. Yes, it was a particular type of glue, I'm trying to think what it was. You probably wouldn't be able to use it now.

Someone came to pick them up. Mr Olly his name was, I know he's died. He used to deliver them and then come and collect them and leave you another four thousand to do.

You had to do something to earn some money and that was the easiest way to do it. I was at home all the time you see. You didn't go out to work in those days did you? I did it mostly in the evenings really. You used to sit at the card table and just do them. The players used to come in plastic bags.

I did that for a long time. I didn't go back to work, not when the children were small. Then I was expecting another one, and I did it all the time I was expecting her and when she was small I think. I think I gave up probably when they sold out to Waddingtons.

I think that nearly every other person in Langton used to do it to be quite honest with you. I know a couple up the road she used to paint them but I didn't get on well with the painting as they were too small for me. I had a go at it (the painting), but it was very tedious and fiddly. And then of course there was making the football goalposts and things like that. My Mother and Father did a few of those. Putting the netting on the goalposts - very fiddly work but they got on alright with it.

Well yes, it was a shock when they (the Subbuteo factory) moved. I can remember it coming here in the first place. I knew the people that worked here. I mean Joy who works here now, her Mother worked here packing and things like that. I did come here (the factory in Langton Green). I worked for the people who came after too. All this bit upstairs has been built in. There were two rooms downstairs, and where you come in the front door there was just the two rooms downstairs.

The figures were made along Frant Road. Up Frant Road, just at the top there by the pub. I worked there for a little while too. Going and taking the figures off the mouldings as they came out. They came out on a sort of long bit and then you had to break them off.

Well it is a different world all together, but I was pleased of the money and we were pleased of something to do to get a little big of extra money.

Yes, I knew Peter Adolph and I know his son too. His son actually lived in our road for quite a while until they moved on. He was a bird watcher, an ornithologist. I know, it (table football and bird watching) doesn't really seem to go together does it. It was just an idea that he set upon and that was it. I mean I knew Peter Adolph's Mother as well and that's going back even further when I was a child.

I knew of them (Peter Adolph and his mother) yes. But then we were more of a village. You knew everybody. I've lived here since 1941. 1947 is when Subbuteo was invented.

These are some of the washers we used. I don't know, I think some of them got into his work box and what have you, and I said to him, 'do you know what happened to all the washers' and he said 'well there might be one in here'. And then I've found one for your exhibition.

(Christine Ellis)

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I worked at home. Peter's wife was one of my greatest friends and we had our kids together and all that sort of thing, but also, I bought this up. My husband was also a great friend of Peter's. He used to go out to the Schoolboys Exhibition with him every year. We have got pictures. So he (my husband Michael) has been looking through his pictures and I thought I'd bring this up. This is one of Mike's pictures, he was a professional photographer and he took all the schoolboys to the exhibitions with Peter and the other two boys, Spud and I can't think of the other one's name. There used to be a schoolboys cup given at the exhibition and we have a picture of Peter shaking the hands of one of the young lads who had won the cup.

I only painted things - that's all, I just painted the figures, but as I say Pam was one of my greatest friends and Mark and my son were together. Gosh! I can't remember when I was painting the figures. The kids were at school, I must have done it for years. Well I suppose they were easy to paint in a way. Well I'm a commercial artist by profession anyway. But these days they all have their different colours, where they change their strips. You were given them and you know, it was awfully difficult. I can't remember how many I did. You could do it whilst sitting there watching the tele during the nighttime, yes there were loads of people that did it. And they had the thing going at First Street for a little while. That was like a factory. Peter's wife Pam used to come down and do some painting together with several other people, it wasn't a very big place. So we'd go in there but Spud was always down there, Spud Murphy, he was always down there.

(June Wheeler)

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I done it (outwork) for about six to nine months. We were working from home, or a friend's house. The boxes used to be delivered straight from the factory and we then used to cut the men off the sprues, and then cut the bases off the sprues, trim up, and then you'd fit the actual person into the bases. We'd paint using the brush, which basically took us ages to put the markings on. We'd use a little bit of pink obviously on the face, and white for the shorts.

There used to be my friend, her two daughters, her husband, my brother and I, and we did that for six to nine months. It was quite an interesting job, but it was hopeless work, I think it was a ridiculous amount we got paid for doing it. We probably earned about £2 or £3 a week. But they didn't get a lot.

We did anything between a thousand and 10 thousand to cut them off, and actually putting them together you were probably lucky if you could get two or three hundred done a night because of the work involved.

It was good, it was enjoyable. I drifted away, my friend carried on doing it two or three years after that. They (my friend) had a room out the back next to the garage and we used to work in there. In 1972, 1973.

I got faster by using a pair of cutters rather than breaking them off and then having to trim up with a sharp knife. Obviously if you trim them up with a sharp knife there is always a chance you are going to cut your hands, which happened a few times. I got involved with electronics and managed to pick up a pair of cutters, which were ideal for doing the sprue cutting. They used to come in big cardboard boxes, and you'd think 'oh no, not another lot'.

It took anything between four and five hours. They were very impressed with us, we were really knocking them out. In the end what happened was, Jean and my friend, we worked out a system whereby I would be cutting off, they would be trimming up and the husband would be whacking them into the bases. You start working out a system to do it, so one of us would be doing one thing and we'd pass them down to the next person. Quite interesting.

I've got an unnamed team in a box, just with white shorts and white tops, ready for painting. I bought that a long time ago. And I've also got a world cup 1984 edition of Subbuteo complete with floodlights, commentators, fencing, and the original cloth piece, which has never been used. It sits in the drawer underneath the bed. It's been in the drawer for a long time. I bought it about 10 / 12 years ago. Originally I sort of thought that I might use it, but it never got used, because we used to play when I went to school in Tonbridge, and we used to have a football league, and we played during the dinner break. There was quite a bit of competition. That would be 1967 / 1968.

I always played with Chelsea. Quite often they used to get broke, especially the goalkeepers, especially if somebody kicked hard enough or flicked and the ball caught the goalie wrong, oops, new goalie! I've seen them snapped off quite a few times. Luckily these days you can use superglue to repair them. But in those days we'd use the glue that we used to make them with, that used to hold them. Some people used to use Evostick, but that made a mess.

(Ron Craft)

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y two twin brothers and I used to play - so it's Robert, Desmond and Derek Hassell. There were five of us who used to play sort of tournaments and things, and we used to write down the results. We probably took it in turns, oh yes, there's a misdemeanour, someone was obviously up to too much cheating or something.

That must have been between 45 and 50 years ago, it's got to be. Nearer to 50 I would have thought. That is a thing that you used to cut those out, they were so fiddly, and stick them on the back of the players to give them their number. And I've bought a selection of players that have survived, they have been in an old tin. When I said to your colleague about heads breaking off and whatnot, we still used to use them and then legs used to break so we had to put them back in the game. Oh here's an example - they are just stuck back in. Originally they had like a two-piece on the bottom that went in that slot. You would stick them with durafix, so there we are, there's a real stumpy man. So all these are about 50 years old and the goalposts as well.

I'm 62 now and I probably started playing the game when I was nine or ten, and my brothers are nearly five years younger than me, so yes, it's difficult to put actual dates on, but you are looking at an era of about 50 years ago. We (myself, Stuart Turner and Nevil Austin) all lived in the Grosvenor Road area.

I did start sticking the stickers back on, but it was such a fiddly job, you can imagine trying to cut that, get a bit of glue and stick it back, no it wasn't successful.

(Robert Hassell)