

The Hillsborough Memorial Bench

**By Guy Prowse, News Editor of the Liverpool FC Supporters Club
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Just as a link will forever exist between a hill on the plains of northern Natal and a unique piece of concrete at Anfield, Liverpool, so the link that binds Liverpool Football Club supporters around the globe remains forever, and, whether in joyous celebration of victory, or in the moments of solitude and sadness, the emotions expressed by the club and it's supporters is shared universally.

Many South African supporters have long harboured strong feelings regarding Hillsborough, and it's aftermath, and the intervening years have done little to dampen the pain of the 15th April, 1989, nor the anger that after 19 years, justice is still sought for 96 victims of that awful Sheffield afternoon. A year ago, this long build-up of emotion from the S.A. Supporters Club manifested itself in the inaugural Hillsborough Memorial, held at the summit of Spion Kop.

This year, the 19th anniversary of the disaster, the Supporters Club felt that it was equally as important to create a permanent memorial, as it is to annually hold a pilgrimage to Spion Kop to co-incide with the Hillsborough Memorial held on the Kop, at Anfield. Two simultaneous memorial services, one at the spiritual home of every Liverpool supporter in the world, and the other, atop the mountain that gave that great edifice it's name.

In honour of the 96, the South African branch of the Liverpool supporters club commissioned the construction of a bench, to serve as a permanent memorial to the brothers and sisters we all lost at Hillsborough. The bench sought to signify that resultant from the Taylor Enquiry into the Hillsborough disaster, all stadiums should henceforth be all-seater, and although we had lost, for eternity, our brethren, and their memory would be upheld in every stadium in the Premiership. In addition, the main supports of the bench would be the two eternal flames, with the mainstay of the back-rest inscribed with the words "In Memoriam Hillsborough 15th April 1989", the inscription guarded on either side by a Liver bird. The seat itself is constructed from 96 separate slats, each in memory of those who succumbed.



The memorial service itself started at the Spion Kop Lodge, where the permanent memorial will henceforth be housed. The bench was placed so that when seated, one looked across the valley at the magnificence of the Spion Kop itself. Behind the bench a

plaque is mounted, with the names and ages of the 96 forever remembered. The 'unveiling' of the bench was done by Guy Prowse of the Supporters Club, who highlighted the link and history between Spion Kop, and the Kop at Anfield, as well as highlighting the significance of the bench, and the elements included in it.



The main service started on the summit of Spion Kop at 15:40 CAT, coinciding with the time, in the UK, when the infamous Gate C was opened by the police. Dave Walters led the members through the ordeal of that fateful day, the circumstances and consequences, and failure of those who had the power to have prevented the tragedy. The fluency of Walters' speech, the passion of his words conveyed to all that in spite of the passing of 19 long years, justice is still sought for the 96.



Dean Davis, Supporters Club Secretary, then held an emotion-filled commentary on how the images of that day will haunt him forever, and that we should never be allowed to forget the victims of Hillsborough. Guy Prowse read a poem from a collection of works dedicated to Hillsborough, highlighting the on-going hurt, and the pain of both loss, and of rebuilding lives shattered by events. All those present then read out both the names and ages of the victims, each speaker's different tone, accent and inflection highlighting the diversity of those who perished.

Between 16:00 and 16:06, silence in honour of the 96 was impeccably observed, the period of mourning bookended by the sound of a referee's whistle. Interspersed between speakers, the club's anthems of "The Fields of Anfield Road" and "You'll Never Walk Alone" were sung, not with the frivolity of the terraces, but with the dignity demanded by the memory of the victims of Hillsborough. To conclude events, a wreath of red flowers was laid. A simple, yet fitting conclusion to an emotional day.

8 supporters climbed to summit of Spion Kop to honour the memory of our brethren. 8 made the journey, but 104 were there.



The Supporters Club can be contacted by emailing supportersclub@liverpoolfc.co.za or visiting our website www.liverpoolfc.co.za