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University  
Of  
Sheffield.

26 July 2011  
Immediate release

## Study heralds Jimmy Hill as Britain's 50<sup>th</sup> football statue

**\*\*Image available\*\***

A statue of football manager and broadcaster Jimmy Hill, to be unveiled at Coventry City FC on Thursday 28 July 2011, will be Britain's 50th such monument in situ, according to a new study by Dr Chris Stride at the University of Sheffield.

The study, to be published in the August edition of *When Saturday Comes* magazine, classifies and investigates the motivations behind the building of football statues, which have been erected at an increasing rate over the past 20 years, at both stadia and in city centres.

The most common type of statues (43 per cent) are those organised and funded by clubs, but increasing numbers of statues (34 per cent), such as Jimmy Hill's, have been primarily fan-funded projects, with a further 21 per cent erected by local authorities in the subject's home town. Statues typically cost around £65,000. Of those depicted 72 per cent are players, 21 per cent managers and 7 per cent chairmen or owners. Brian Clough is the subject most frequently honoured, with statues in Derby, Nottingham and his home town of Middlesbrough.

Statues are typically thought of as commemorative, and their growth in popularity is in part due to 'inflation' in mourning behaviour within the UK in general and sport in particular. With a minute's silence becoming increasingly frequent, statues offer a new, longer lasting and more celebratory tribute.

However over half of the 50 statues have been unveiled when the subject was alive or had died over a decade earlier. Many of the statues built by clubs reflect a desire to 'brand' themselves and their stadia in a way that will appeal to new and old fans. A statue boasts of a club's success, tradition and wealth, makes the match day environment appear more attractive and welcoming, and provides positive publicity that may distract from lack of success on the pitch.

Fan organised statue projects have been inspired by their club rebuilding or moving to a new ground, which are often bland in appearance and lacking the homely atmosphere of their previous stadium. Supporters have sought to bring some feeling of tradition and ownership to their new 'home'. The growth of fan groups such as Supporters Trusts has made organising and fundraising for a statue project easy to facilitate. There is evidence of contagion, with supporters eager to match statue building by their local rivals.

Home town statues are a reflection of both the rapid increase in public art in the UK since the 1980s and the changing cultural status of football and footballers. Traditional subjects such as politicians, religious figures or military heroes are less likely to appeal to the wider public than in the past; erecting a monument to a local sporting hero is becoming a popular alternative.

Dr Chris Stride, from the University of Sheffield's Institute of Work Psychology, said: "Far from merely memorials to the dead, the UK's football statuary says much about the game itself, its cultural preferences, increasing commercialisation and the changing relationship between clubs and their fans."

**Notes to editors:**

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