Without doubt, many of us will happily wave goodbye to the year 2016.

It’s fair to say that the last 12 months have brought more than their fair share of shocks.

We’ve seen so many deaths of famous musicians, actors, sports people, comedians and more, plus a looming ‘Brexit’ and victory in the US election for Donald Trump.

Meanwhile, the troubles in places such as Syria seem to be the gifts that just keep on giving.

In Brussels, of course, we were bombed - in the metro and at the airport - but at least we’re ending the year with a traditional Christmas tree in Grand’Place and, gosh!, a gazillion-euro ‘space egg’ in Schuman.

Next year will certainly bring about its own challenges - for a start, Brexit hasn’t even really begun and Mr Trump doesn’t actually move into the White House until late January.

But it will also bring with it plenty of fun as life rolls on. Brussels in View will be here to add to that, and we wish you a happy end to this year and a great 2017!
What’s Happening Belgium?

Need to keep up with local news and events on Facebook? Founder of a local event page, Mike Chambers, explains What’s Happening Belgium?

“It’s an open group on Facebook - multilingual - and now has more than 8,000 members and reflects not only Belgians but those who come to the country as expats from all over the world.

“It’s become successful because it listens to what members want.”

You can ask to join the group here

It’s that time of year again when the winter festivities come to Brussels and around the rest of the country. There’s so much going on for all the family to enjoy whatever their ages. In Belgium the festive attractions come out onto the streets and into the cafés and bars.

As Brussels is the capital city, the main attractions are in the centre focussed around Grand’Place and the city streets. However, every city and town around the country is hosting its own celebrations. Christmas markets in town centres are very popular and are often lit up with an array of lights and serving a variety of family treats. It’s always worth taking your time to travel outside of Brussels and experience a real Belgian Christmas in some of the other towns and areas.

Brussels Winter Wonders
Central Brussels
(Now until the new year)

This year there are some 240 wooden chalets around the city centre offering a wide variety of winter treats to help celebrate the holidays. It is not only Grand’Place that offers a magical winter experience, Place St. Catherine is also offering a variety of different foods and delicacies including a definite Japanese flavour to some of the food on offer.

Grand’Place is always the centre of the winter festivities. This year the tree has been donated by the people of Slovakia. Throughout the holiday period there will be a series of sound and light shows which will light up the beautiful historic buildings during the long dark nights.

On New Year’s Eve the Belgian people will celebrate the end of year with a variety of events. New Year’s Eve in Brussels is a pivotal moment when everyone gets the chance to start the new year in good spirits and in a festive fashion. For party-goers there will be a number of special evening events in almost every bar and restaurant around the city centre.

New Year’s Eve is always very popular with everyone from locals to visiting tourists and expats, so contacting the manager of your venue is a must. You may have to book in advance and pay a deposit. Whatever your choice you will have a fantastic evening and celebrate the end of the year in style.

www.visitbrussels.be

Winter in Bruges
Central Bruges
(Now until the new year)

There are few places in Belgium as great for experiencing a magical winter than the beautiful and historic city of Bruges. There you can wander along the canals and narrow streets or take a tour guide visiting the special places around the town. The shops are also now open on Sundays, so you can find that special gift even at the weekend.

The Mid-Winter Festival is a family event enjoyed by both local residents and visitors alike. Here you will find many craft-made Christmas presents together with the usual festive food and drink. Mulled wine and freshly-baked waffles together with the sound of traditional music will put you in the mood for the Christmas holidays.

Together with the rest of the country the city of Bruges will be celebrating New Year’s Eve with a series of events and fireworks at midnight. There will also be a songfest in the town to help you celebrate the end of 2016.

www.visitbruges.be

Winter in Antwerp
Central Antwerp
(Now until 8 January 2017)

As with all cities and towns around Belgium, Antwerp will be celebrating the Christmas holidays in style. The festivities began recently and there are a number of events to visit, including a China Light display after dark in the famous Antwerp Zoo. There’s an ice-rink on Groenplaats where you can have a warming drink at the terrace winter bar to keep away the winter chills.

The Christmas Market is not all about buying presents but also tasting the food on offer. This year the market is not only offering the traditional mulled-wine and waffles but also a variety of foods from around the world. There are some 100 different stalls and cabins around the city centre, together with the local bars, cafés and restaurants. You will not go hungry or thirsty as you search for that special Christmas present.

The new year will start with a bang in the city centre with the fireworks from 23.00. It’s a good idea to get there early as this will be a popular event for both visitors and locals alike. Also security will be tight this year so try not to take many bags or packages.

www.visitantwerpen.be
Mini-Europe is above all an “invitation to travel”. The chimes of Big Ben, the gondolas in front of the Doge’s Palace, the Grand-Place in Brussels, the Acropolis... an animated tour with visual and sound effects of 350 miniatures and attractions that you won’t find anywhere else.

The best miniature park in Europe. All the monuments have been recreated down to the smallest detail. Big Ben is 4 m high. With its height of 13 m, the Eiffel tower projects above a 3-storey building! And yet all the buildings are on a scale 1 to 25.

All kinds of working models. Be surprised by the eruption of Vesuvius or the fall of the Berlin wall, watch the launch of Ariane V and marvel at many other working models, for both young and old.

Europe in a few hours…

Open every day from mid March till beginning of January from 9:30 am till 05:00 pm. Open By Night with musical fireworks the 3 first Saturdays in August. Catalogue available in 11 languages (D, E, F, NL, HB, RU, PL, PT, CN). Restaurant - cafetaria.
More events over the holiday period in Brussels and beyond

Ypres (above) is well-known for its links to the WWI, but it’s a lively Belgian town which celebrates Christmas in a traditional way. The market is small but, together with its links to the soldier’s cemetery, provides a poignant alternative to the usual festivities. The Ypres Christmas village offers a warm welcome.

www.toerisme-ieper.be

Meanwhile, the Ghent Christmas Market (Gentse Winterfeesten) is large and varied and draws on its history as a major Belgian town. As in all historical towns with their medieval streets the winter festivities add a magical dimension. This year there is a Nordic theme with a scent of pine drifting through the city centre.

www.gentsewinterfeesten.be

Durbuy (page 5) is a small town in the Wallonian region that provides a seasonal flavour of the French-speaking part of Belgium. For the children there’s an ice-skating ring to keep them amused. You’ll also find an artisan market with regional food and drink.

www.belgium-tourism.be

Tervuren is only a short ride from the centre of Brussels and provides a breath of fresh air away from city traffic. This year sees a new, modern community centre offering a variety of events for all the family. As well as the usual Christmas markets there’s also the Africa Museum and the beautiful Tervuren Park.

www.visittervuren.be

The Gourmet Tram Experience is ideal for those who love gourmet food and like to combine it with sightseeing. This is a restaurant in a tram riding through the streets of Brussels and offers the chance of a unique experience tasting some of the best food in Belgium, while being transported in style.

www.tramexperience.be

The results are in for 2017 and Belgian restaurants are well represented in the famous Michelin Guide. There are five in the Flemish region, three in Brussels and one in Wallonia. Enjoy the experience of the best of the world’s cuisine, right here in Belgium.

www.resto.be

Sabena, travel in style
Square de l’Atomium
(From 24 November)

This exhibition offers visitors a journey into the comfortable, elegant world of the now-defunct Sabena Belgian airline. A new exhibition - ‘Sabena, Travel in Style’, can be visited from 24 November and well into 2017.

Despite the fact that many Belgians will tell you that ‘Sabena‘ stands for ‘Such A Bad Experience, Never Again’, this expo is well worth a look.

There was a time, before the advent of low-cost air travel, when flying was seen as the epitome of glamour. For several decades, Sabena was one of the leading airline companies to capture the public imagination in this way.

The exhibition presents visitors with an unsentimental, unbiased review of Sabena’s history, from its beginnings at Haren Airport to its abrupt end in 2001, exploring its development on the international scene over four continents.

The exhibition features original objects, such as scale models of aircraft, uniforms, posters, photographs and archive videos,
as well as gadgets and other examples of memorabilia, from both private and public collections (notably from the Royal Museums of Art and History).

These all illustrate the 78 years during which this jewel among commercial airlines was in service.

Created by the Pièce Montée firm, the exhibition scenography reproduces the experiences of passing through check-in, boarding the aeroplane and the flight itself.

There is also a particular focus on those men and women who played a leading role in Sabena's remarkable adventure. They called themselves the 'Sabéniens', as an expression of their attachment to the company.

**A Feverish Era in Japanese Art**
*Bozar (Now until 22 January)*

This year Belgium and Japan celebrate a century-and-a-half of diplomatic friendship with state ceremonies and cultural events across the country.

One of the programme's centrepieces is *A Feverish Era in Japanese Art*, which surveys the thriving underground arts scene in post-war Japan.

The years following the Japanese surrender were full of cultural ferment as the nation's artists re-evaluated traditional forms. The end of WWII inaugurated a truly global avant-garde movement fuelled by exchanges between East and West.

**Tintin Gallery**
*Grand Sablon, Brussels (Now open)*

The Belgian capital has welcomed the opening of a new gallery entirely dedicated to everyone's favourite reporter, Tintin.

Located at Grand Sablon, the gallery is firstly a tribute to the legacy of Hergé, the Belgian creator of the famous comic series.

But the new gallery is also a specialty store for collectors and a promotional tool for the Hergé Museum in Louvain-la-Neuve.

**History of Ice Cream**
*Rue du Moulin à Vent 1140 Evere (Now until August 2017)*

Held at the MBMA (le Musée bruxellois du Moulin et de l’Alimentation), this exhibition traces the complex history of ice cream as well as the modern product, plus the methods used to make it.
Theatrical entertainment a-plenty!

If you find yourself looking for a cheerful pick-me-up antidote to the post-Christmas blues, then look no further than the latest offering from Green Parrot Productions.

The company is putting on ‘Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat’ at Théâtre Saint-Michel in Brussels and it promises to be a real treat for young and old alike.

The Biblical story of Joseph and his coat of many colours may be familiar to many readers as a legacy from their school days. The story is told by the Narrator, played by Laura Ford, who is a professional soprano based in the Belgian capital.

But this particular version of the musical treat by Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Webber goes a step further as it features a recently-penned song, called King of My Heart, which has only been performed in public since 2007.

Described as a type of parody of hits made famous by Elvis Presley – and sung by the Pharaoh of Egypt (played by Andrew Pimm) – this new song’s debut in Brussels will be eagerly anticipated, but it is just one of several highlights.

There will also be an eruption of colourful special effects, all set to music by a 16-piece orchestra, conducted by David Miller, the former director of music at La Monnaie.

The show is an engaging cornucopia of musical styles, from country-western, 1920s Charleston and calypso to bubble-gum pop and rock ’n’ roll.

The musical sees the involvement of many young people – at least 50 per cent of the 111-strong cast are children, some as young as five. The actor playing the lead role of Joseph, Benedict Noon, will be just days past his 18th birthday at curtain up.

The participation and engagement of children and teenagers is Green Parrot’s speciality (its production of Peter Pan, the musical earlier this year even featured kids flying on wires across the stage!).
A Green Parrot spokesman said: “We specialise in musicals that include both children and adults. It’s what adds that extra magic to a performance – and the kids always turn out to be fabulous.”

The whole cast is (as might be expected in a multi-national city like Brussels) a mix of nationalities, with both expats and local people.

Show times are 19.30 on 27 January, 14.00 and 19.30 on 28 January, plus more performances at 13.00 and 17.00 on 29 January. Tickets are priced from €14 to €26. Purchases of ten-or-more tickets get a discount.

Green Parrot Productions was set up in 2007 by experienced players on the Brussels theatre scene to bring adults and children of all ages to the world of theatre and in particular, the magic of musicals.”

www.greenparrot.eu

Meanwhile, lovers of pantomime can also see Cinderella, including Steve Challens as Buttons and Sara Hammerton as wicked stepmother Baroness Hardup, from 13-15 January.

The show will feature an original script written for a Brussels audience.

As we know, Cinderella always makes the best of everything, but her horrible stepmother and hideous stepsisters try to make sure she is as miserable as possible.

And while 'Cinders' sweeps the floors of Hardup Hall, at the Royal Palace a certain Prince Charming dreams of finding someone who will love him for who he is.

Bringing the Prince and Cinderella into each other’s lives will take some real magic – so it’s lucky that Cinderella has a fairy godmother. But with two inept trainee fairies looking after things, get set for a whole lot of topsy-turvy silliness on the way to Cinderella’s happy ever after.

With enchanted pumpkins, sparkling slippers, toe-tapping songs and loads of fun, this brand-new production is sure to delight young and old alike. Oh yes it is!

Tickets are €16 and €12, and you can catch it at Auderghem Cultural Centre, Boulevard du Souverain.

www.thelittleboxoffice.com/ecc

Heading to UK, perhaps? Well, one of the best pantos this season promises to be at Nottingham Playhouse which has been one of the UK’s leading producing theatres since its foundation in 1948. It welcomes more than 130,000 ticket buyers annually through its doors.

It creates productions large and small from timeless classics and enthralling family shows to adventurous new commissions, often touring work nationally and internationally.

This year, you can join Widow Twankey and Aladdin on their magic carpet for a ride full of family fun and frolics.

Aladdin promises to be a sensational show, dazzling with wit, shimmering with glitter and sparkling with song, dance and magical costumes.

Prepare to boo, cheer and sing, as their much loved panto dame John Elkington, of Coronation Street fame, returns in the role of Widow Twankey.

Aladdin is directed and written by Kenneth Alan Taylor and runs at Nottingham Playhouse until 21 January.

www.nottinghamplayhouse.co.uk

Back in Belgium, Martin’s Brussels EU Hotel, on Boulevard Charlemagne, will run ‘Champagne Days’ during the weekend of 13-15 January. It makes for a great way to start the year in style.

Looking a bit further ahead, the Brussels Chocolate Fair will take place at Tour & Taxis from 10-12 February.

This fourth edition of the fair promises to be delicious, with animations that will delight the eye and a spectacular chocolate fashion show with dresses made by duets of choc couturiers.
Martin Banks gets stuck in to more tasty food in two Brussels eateries

‘t Misverstand
916 Chaussee d’Alsemberg
Uccle

The name of this delightful restaurant translates as ‘misunderstand’ but, be sure, there’s no mistaking the quality of cuisine (and service) on offer here.

From the outside, you could actually be forgiven for thinking you’re in the middle of rolling countryside.

The lovely, rustic façade belies the fact that ‘t Misverstand is at the heart of a particularly bustling area with trams rumbling by.

Once inside, that is completely forgotten as diners are overwhelmed by the delicious food lovingly created by the long-serving head chef Robert Dejean.

There’s a terrific choice, ranging from the sort of traditional dishes your grandma would’ve been proud of, such as meat loaf, sweetbread and Flemish stew, to what could be described as more contemporary creations, such as avocado with shrimp.

The emphasis is on great seasonal products and home cooking, which is one of the restaurant’s biggest assets - but not the only one.

Another is the delightful décor (look out for the well-stocked wine cellar, visible via a glass floor) and a marvellous garden, plus the very friendly ambience, partly generated by staff - some of whom have worked there for 20 years, an eternity in the horeca trade.

The welcoming Brussels-born owner, Jean-Marc Schellens, has been in the restaurant business for 32 years, the last 17 here, and insists on the highest standards, one reason why customers return year after year.

The very affordable prices (mains start from just €12 and there’s a good-value lunch option) are another fine reason for its perennial appeal, together with the availability of a car valet service, particularly useful in this built-up area.

The latest ‘fashionable’ restaurants come and go, but it’s good to know there’s an old faithful you can rely on for top-class food and ‘t Misverstand is undoubtedly one such place.
If one sign of a first class business is the length of service of its staff, then this fabulous fish restaurant must be right there at the top of the tree.

Its head waiter started as a 15-year-old in 1977, his female colleague has run its adjacent traiteur service for 38 years and the head chef started in 1993!

Each put down their longevity to having a “good boss” and “job satisfaction”.

It’s not just the staff who are loyal – so too are its army of dedicated customers who have been feasting on the wonderful cuisine here for nearly 100 years.

It’s no wonder they keep coming back – while Brussels is a long way from the sea, the food (almost exclusively fish) is equal to the very best that could be found at the coast.

Choose from a ‘Discovery Menu’ that changes monthly, the fixed ‘Francois Menu’ - a daily suggestions board - or the a la carte option, which offers quite fantastic fish dishes.

Everything is carefully selected so it’s seasonal and fresh. Currently, that includes a mouth-watering scallops cooked in butter but, at other times of the year, it might be asparagus or oysters and mussels.

Much of the fish is locally sourced, such as North Sea cod and the shrimps and eel, both Belgian traditions. If you really want to push the boat out try the Siberian caviar or seafood platter.

This beautifully decorated and atmospheric restaurant, which dates from 1922, is situated in a prominent position on the site of Brussels’ traditional fish market, near St Catherine.

Its owner has come up with a great idea for those wanting to celebrate Christmas and New Year in style: dishes will be delivered to your door via a stretch limo with the driver bedecked in full regalia.

Clearly, it’s that kind of attention to customer satisfaction, and consistent high standards, that’s the secret to retaining staff for so long – and which keeps this Brussels institution right up there with the best.
Martin Banks takes a cold, hard look at the homeless situation in Brussels

A cursory look at the streets, traffic lights and intersections in Brussels reveals a disturbing phenomenon - a huge rise in the population of beggars.

Amid the ever-changing appearances of the city, one feature of commune life remains the same – the daily presence of beggars on the streets.

These include youngsters aged between 16 and 18 who are pinning their few hopes on the generosity of caring shoppers and passers-by.

As its response to the perennial problem, Brussels-Capital Region is once again providing winter accommodation for its homeless population.

Some 1,283 shelters will remain open until the end of April, and extra places can be made available where needed.

Brussels Minister of Family Affairs Pascal Smet said: “We are ready to accommodate the people who need it. Since the beginning of this legislature, some 300 additional shelters have been created, so that no homeless people should have to spend the cold winter months on the street.”

Marie-Anne Robberecht, spokesman of Samusocial, the organisation in charge of the coordination of the shelters, promises to provide shelter to all who need it.

“We not only provide a roof over their heads, but also hot meals, shower facilities and medical assistance. We also offer psychosocial support to help them find a way off the streets,” she said.

Freek Spinnewijn, director of the Brussels-based European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA), said: “Crisis is an overused term at the EU level and yet what we are currently witnessing is nothing short of a social emergency.

“Four million people experience homelessness every year and yet there still seems to be a frankly staggering lack of awareness of this fact at the EU level.”

He added: “Homelessness is an extreme form of poverty and is a violation of human rights. It does not just have a potentially irreversible effect on the individual concerned; it also has an enormous negative impact on cities and society as a whole, acting as a barrier to employment and social rights.”

But what is it really like for people, living below the breadline, to resort to begging?

I took to the streets of Brussels to try to find out.

Dressed in cheap clothing, holding a piece of tatty cardboard bearing the plea “J’Aï Faim Et Sans Abri. Aïdiz Moi” (“Hungry and homeless. Please Help”) and brandishing a plastic bowl I braved the bitter cold.

It wasn’t long after I had settled down at my chosen ‘pitch’ – near Place du Luxembourg (page 11) - that the first coins started falling into the container - cash from kind-hearted people I did not know for doing absolutely nothing.

For all they knew I could have been a professional scrounger and Brussels Police say that, unlike other cities such as London, these are a minority.

But, recently, a Moldovan was found to be making €100,000 per year from his panhandling, posing as being mentally and physically handicapped.

For the warm-hearted souls offering me money none of this seemed to matter.

As I sat, slightly shame-faced, on the cold pavement, a woman stopped, dropped a few cents into my cup and declared, “il fait froid.”

Homelessness in Brussels still on the rise and ‘EU should take note’
But as the cash trickled in, I encountered my first aggressive response - a burly man pointed to my pathetic little sign and ordered me in no uncertain terms what to do with it, telling me to find a job.

A short time later my faith in the public’s kindness was restored when an elderly lady bent down, wished me, “Joyeux Noel” and dropped a one-euro coin in my cup.

I was too embarrassed to make eye contact. It was touching that an elderly woman, whose threadbare clothes suggested she had little herself, was prepared to come to my aid.

Were people giving their hard-earned cash because they felt “guilty” or did they really care? A woman, pushing a young child in a pushchair, stopped and asked if I wanted a baguette she’d just bought. When I declined she dropped a 50-cent coin in the cup.

Another passerby urged me to visit one of the homeless shelters recently opened in the city, advising that that was where I could get something to eat and drink. For all the kindness shown to me by some, the majority of people barely turned their heads when they passed.

After more four hours in the chill, I counted out the money from my tub. I’d been given the princely sum of €14 euro and 30 cents.

It is estimated that at any given time there are at least 150 people, or ‘rough sleepers’, bedding down on Brussels’ streets.

Belgium has not escaped the impact of the well-documented migration crisis that has engulfed the EU in the last year-or-so.

It is feared that some of the migrants and refugees displaced by the recently closed ‘Jungle’ refugee camp at Calais may have headed to Brussels and are among those begging on the city’s streets.

But the problem is closer to home than some might like to admit, as is evidenced by the Flemish parliament’s decision to explore solutions to homelessness among children and young people.

This comes after a report from the children’s rights commissioner revealed that one-in-three homeless people in Flanders is a minor. For one-in-three of those, the situation ends up lasting for more than a year.

According to the report, 12,958 eviction procedures were started in Flanders in 2014, with children involved in one-in-four cases, most of which concerned rent arrears.

The team of children’s rights commissioner Bruno Vanobbergen spoke to 43 families about their situation.

Vanobbergen described homeless children as “refugees in their own land”. Homelessness leads to lack of privacy, and it often requires one-or-more changes of school, meaning they must leave their friends and give up out-of-school pastimes, he said.

The children become uprooted and at the mercy of the adults around them. Vanobbergen’s recommendations include a more preventive approach when it comes to evictions of families with children, a more ambitious approach to the provision of social housing, and the provision of emergency and transitional housing by local authorities.

Despite the apparently desperate outlook for the homeless in Belgium this winter, even in these hard-pressed times, there is clearly some goodwill left, as I discovered.

After my short stint as a beggar, I was able to change my clothes and regain a semblance of dignity.

Sadly, it’s a privilege not enjoyed by the genuine homeless.

With an estimated half a million people sleeping rough or in emergency or temporary accommodation every night, the EU can’t afford not to act.

NB. Martin donated the money he made that day to charity.
After the opening of the Bozar Café Victor at the end of the summer, followed by a brand-new box office, now it’s the turn of the Bozar Bookshop, an art bookshop, in partnership with Walther König, to open its doors.

It’s an elegant and contemporary design, true to the spirit of Victor Horta’s original project.

The bookshop has exhibition catalogues, art, architectural, photographic and design publications, postcards and a range of objects relating to the exhibitions. Located in the Horta Hall, it’s easily accessible, too.

Bozar spokespeople say it is delighted to be associated ith Walther König, a guarantee of quality and choice within the sector.

Walther König is one of the biggest art editors in the world. With around 40 sales points in cities such as Cologne, Amsterdam, Berlin, Düsseldorf, London, Munich, Vienna, Paris and Milan, he is behind the leading museum shops and art boutiques in Europe. After the Whitechapel Gallery in London, the Palais de Tokyo in Paris, the Nationalgalerie in Berlin, the Haus der Kunst in Munich and the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, this is his first shop in Belgium.

Aside from an exhibition space, a venue for concerts and conferences, Bozar also sees itself as somewhere where people are welcome to come and go as they please. Give it a try.

www.bozar.be

Although you won’t find this one at Bozar, you could be looking for a great Christmas stocking filler and, if so, look no further than the following cracking little football book.

It tells the tale of overpaid players, Sunday lunchtime kick-offs, absurd ticket prices and non-black boots.

Sound familiar?

Football’s menu of ills is long. Where has the joy gone? Why do we bother?

If you miss the ‘good old days’, the recently published Saturday, 3pm offers a glorious antidote and reminds us that football can still make our hearts sing.

In 50 short essays of prose poetry, author Daniel Gray celebrates the “unchanging delights” of the game. This, he insists, is not wallowing in nostalgia.

“They are things that remain sweet and right. Seeing a ground from the train, brackets on vidiprinters, ball hitting bar, Jimmy Armfield’s voice, listening to the results in a traffic jam, football towns and autograph-hunters.”

They are words to transport you somewhere else - a clarion call to reconnect with the beautiful game.

Take, for example, the chapter recalling the charms of raucous chanting on football terraces where “to enrol in the choir can be spine-tingling."

He writes: “There you are, caught in the game, when a chant rises up. Your heart tells your mouth to join in, and because you do it feels like the whole world is singing. It can be a rushed call to arms or an anthem, a ‘Come on, City’ or a ‘Blue Moon’.”

A Middlesbrough supporter, Gray began attending football matches in 1988 and “has never recovered.”

He has also worked in a psychiatric hospital which, as football fans everywhere will tell you, seems to make him entirely appropriate to write about the game.

Saturday, 3pm is published by Bloomsbury and priced at £9.99 for the hardback and £8.99 for the eBook.
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