

Sir Bob Scott

Our friend in the North



If the Millennium was about Sydney, then this year has been about Manchester. Its hosting of the Commonwealth Games, the most successful in Britain in living memory, has demonstrated what a major event can do for the image and infrastructure of a city. Manchester's bid for the Games was led by Sir Bob Scott. So what led to his great success? And where does he plan to go from here? Locum chairman Richard Tibbott and Locum Destination Review editor, Owen Burdekin, went to find out.

'The truth is I'm quite difficult to label, because I keep being interested in things that don't follow a simple path.' One of the first things that strikes you upon meeting Sir Bob Scott is that he is someone for whom a simple path through life really wouldn't hold much appeal. This is a rare animal. A man of scale and colour. A true impressario. As a result, Sir Bob is one of Britain's most accomplished destination makers, whose distinguished career is probably best described as a cultural odyssey. He is probably best known for his Olympic bids and Commonwealth Games exploits in Manchester, but now he is the Government-appointed Chairman of the Greenwich Peninsula Partnership in London, driving forward the future of the Dome and its surrounding lands. His 'bidding' life has come from his consuming passion for sport, and yet his background is the arts and theatre in particular. Is he Manchester man, Greenwich man

Sir Bob Scott

Sir Bob is 58. He was born in Minehead, Somerset and educated at Haileybury and Merton College, Oxford and is the son of a former British Ambassador, Sir David Scott. He divides his time between London and the North West.

Current roles

- Chief Executive of Liverpool's bid to be named European Capital of Culture in 2008
- Chairman of the Government-sponsored Greenwich Peninsula Partnership
- Chairman of the Greenwich Theatre and the Bexley Heritage Trust
- Chairman of the Granada Foundation

Former positions

- Chief Executive of the Greenwich Millennium Trust, which was created to ensure that Greenwich was chosen to be the centrepiece of the British Millennium celebrations
- Chairman of Manchester's Olympic Bids for the Games of 1996 and 2000, and Commonwealth Games of 2002
- First Administrator of the Royal Exchange Theatre, Manchester
- Managing Director of the Palace Theatre and the Opera House, Manchester
- Founder of Cornerhouse, Manchester's film and visual arts centre
- Chairman of Piccadilly Radio
- Member of the Central Manchester Development Corporation
- Director of the Halle Orchestra, the Whitworth Art Gallery and the Buxton Festival

Awards

- Honorary Degrees from all four of Manchester's Universities
- Honorary Member of the Royal Northern College of Music
- Individual ETB England for Excellence Award for Tourism in 1993
- BAIE Communicator of the Year in 1994
- Appointed an 'Officier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres' by the French Government in 1991
- Knighted in the 1994 New Year's Honours List

or even now Liverpool man, where he spends several days every week?

The first of the many paths on which Sir Bob has found himself began at Oxford University, where, as president of the Dramatic Society, he spent time with Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton in their famous production with the students of *Dr Faustus*. 'They were at the height of their fame and I looked after them a bit.' So what happened to the acting and singing career that beckoned? 'I thought to myself, "Even Richard Burton has to wait until somebody employs him, and I think I'd really rather do the employing." So I made that nervous move from actor to manager.'

He teamed up with an old friend from Oxford and became administrator of the 69 Theatre Company, based in the University Theatre in Manchester. It would be the beginning of a love affair with the city and the North West region as a whole, which remains passionate to this day. 'It very quickly became obvious that this group of people wanted to form a permanent company and I was the kind of glue that to some extent held it together.' The result was the Royal Exchange Theatre, for which he raised the money. 'I knew that if we were to make a success of it, it had to be funded on a revenue basis. I've always taken the view that the capital is easy, and revenue is the problem. Therefore, if you have a project that has a capital hole but a revenue certainty, you can always fill that hole. The other way round and you're dead.' Having convinced the Arts Council to fund the project on the basis that it would effectively become Manchester's Rep, the Royal Exchange was born.

In 1977, Sir Bob moved across town to the Palace Theatre. Here, he put into practice his belief that the right theatrical product would attract the right audiences, in sufficient numbers to sustain the business. Whilst admitting to 'some fabulous mistakes', Sir Bob convinced the likes of Harold Fielding, Bill Kenwright and Cameron Mackintosh to bring West End productions to Manchester. 'In the first season after reopening in 1981, we put on *Annie* and it ran for eight weeks, and there literally wasn't a seat to be had.' Wondering to himself just how big the regional audience was, he encouraged the producers to push back the boundaries of accepted provincial theatre. 'We really tested it in 1984 when Fielding brought Michael Crawford in for 18 weeks of *Barnum* at the full whack to reopen the Opera House, which we had just bought as our second venue.' An experience during that run brought home just how popular large-scale theatre in Manchester was becoming. 'I had to go and see Michael Crawford at the end of a Wednesday matinee in January. It was the most revolting day, and there, lining up in the vile weather and pitch blackness, were five coaches, identically liveried, from East Kilbride. Up and down for the show in a day. I thought to myself, bloody hell, if that's our catchment area we are actually serving half the nation - or more than half the nation.'

Not only were shows playing to packed houses travelling from all over Britain, but the audiences were paying premium prices: 'We charged the same seat prices in Manchester as they were in London, and that had never been done before. Seat prices up until then were always cheaper on the assumption that the show was inferior. *Jesus Christ Superstar* opened in Manchester immediately after it closed in London. They brought the whole shooting match up and we charged 50p per ticket more than the top price in London when it had closed there. People thought we were mad. Happily we were completely sold out.' And it wasn't just musicals on the menu for North West audiences. In its first 18 months, the Palace played host to 21 weeks of opera, including two seasons of the Royal Opera and one of the



The Royal Opera House, Manchester

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Both pictures courtesy of Marketing Manchester



The Palace Theatre, Manchester



Above and opposite: scenes from Manchester's closing ceremony

English National Opera. Again, audiences were asked to pay London prices, and again they responded positively. 'I've always said that a Marks & Spencer suit in Manchester costs the same price as a Marks & Spencer suit in London. Therefore, all you've got to do is to persuade the public that it's the same product.'

'The great thing for me about the Palace and the Opera House double operation was that I actually proved that I could run something. Before then all I'd proved was that I was quite good at making things happen.' By his own admission, everything he has done since has led from those experiences: starting theatres, starting shows, running shows. 'I've always been close to the audience.'

Manchester: silver medal, golden rewards

In 1985, Sir Bob Scott began engaging with a much wider audience, when he invented the idea of Manchester bidding to host the Olympic Games and became chairman of the Manchester Olympic Bid Committee, the body which campaigned twice to host the Olympic Games, in the years 1996 and 2000. The first thing he did was to investigate Manchester's potential to cope with such a global event. 'Whenever you're bidding, the first thing you've got to do is an audit. You've got to really go into these things with a genuine sense of what your strength and weaknesses are.' As a man well known for his flamboyant personal style, isn't Sir Bob running the risk of sounding worryingly like a consultant? 'Maybe I am! But for all the crazy notions I'm accused of, I'm actually extremely cautious. I remember writing an article in the *Guardian*, comparing Manchester demographically with Los Angeles, to justify Manchester bidding for the Olympics, and the more I wrote the more I realised it was true. You are in the middle of a population of 20 million.' Once again, his core belief in the quality of the event and the host

destination comes to the fore: 'If your product is right, people will travel. When the Open is held at Birkdale, for example, it's a national and international event!'

Neither of Manchester's Olympic bids succeeded. But along the way, enough lessons were learned and enough political momentum achieved to enable the city to bid successfully for the 2002 Commonwealth Games, which have just been staged to international acclaim. The sold-out attendances in Manchester came as no surprise to Sir Bob: 'People were worried about poor attendances, but I've always said that Manchester has the best crowds in Britain. Which is the best supported football team? Manchester United. Which is the best supported orchestra? The Halle. Which is the best supported cricket club? Lancashire.'

In his view, however, the most important achievement of the Commonwealth Games has not been the brief but intense media coverage but their longer term contribution to the revival of Manchester and the North West region. And this, in turn, has been driven by the key strategic decision at the time of the Olympic bidding to pursue not one but two agendas: 'I do passionately believe in success and ensuring success. But the strategy must be realistic and not let public expectations be too high. I believe very powerfully in the concept of second agendas. The second agenda in Manchester was that win or lose the Olympics we would get new facilities, a new image and a sense of can-do. And as a direct result of the Olympic bidding we got the Commonwealth Games.' And nobody in retrospect now is saying that the second agenda was in any way secondary. 'No, that's right. You don't want to put all your eggs in one basket. You need a strategy in place for if you don't get the result you're going for. You must still get other results.'

Of course, it has not simply been new sporting facilities with which Manchester has been endowed as a direct result of the Games. The event has been used as a focal point for numerous large-scale regeneration initiatives targeting public spaces, housing,



leisure and public transport. Meaning that economic benefits have been distributed throughout the city region. 'Everybody dates Manchester's revival back to the time of the Olympic bid. And the great thing about that bid was that even though it was a failure, it got people going and gave them a lift. If you go to Manchester now you can't believe it, what's been done. And the great thing now is that you feel the city's under a new leadership which is determined to go on and do more.' Sir Bob is quick to recognise the contribution of the city's leaders, praising their determination to use the bidding process as an opportunity to bring about real change. 'The provincial attitude is to be satisfied with little. And although Howard Bernstein [chief executive of Manchester City Council] is a real provincial man to his bootstraps, born and brought up in Manchester, he has a vision and a drive, which is *not* to be satisfied.'

Event bidding: lessons for UK contenders

Thanks to the persistence of Manchester's bidding efforts, the city has staged the most successful Commonwealth Games ever and used it as a springboard for economic development. Two years ago, meanwhile, England's bid to host the Football World Cup in 2006 ended in humiliation, polling a meagre three votes from the FIFA judging panel. On the evidence of this result, little or nothing was learned from the Manchester experience. Had Sir Bob himself been approached to share some of the knowledge he gained over the course of leading Manchester's three bids? 'All that happened was that I went out for lunch with somebody at the beginning of the process and never heard from them again.' What a missed opportunity. And what a predictable outcome.

Despite his absence from proceedings in the English camp, however, Sir Bob is philosophical about FIFA's decision, suggesting

that the World Cup was always going to be a tough one for England to win. 'The fact is that we're not popular. One of the problems is that the Home Unions effectively control the rules of football worldwide. And because the FA is so strong, and has maintained and kept to itself some of that strength, there is an ambivalence towards us within FIFA. And anyway why do we have four home unions? Now why can't we behave like the Germans and put our unions together to produce a Great Britain side?' And it seems these weren't the only political issues that the FA were up against. 'I got to know Havelange, the Brazilian who used to run FIFA. He was an anglophile of a sort, but he would do anything to prevent the English getting their way. He both admired us and loathed us for our arrogance.'

FIFA politics aside, was the British failure to win the World Cup bid symptomatic of a deeper problem with the process of bidding in general? 'When you bid, you must accept the rules of the game that you're entering. And the British often spend their lives entering into bids and then trying to reinvent the rules of the game. So people get annoyed with us and tell us we can't do that.' What else contributes to a successful bid that we maybe still haven't got to grips with in the UK? Sir Bob identifies three key issues, discussing them in the context of the biggest of all competitions open to bids by cities around the globe: the Olympic Games.

The first is that bidders in any competition must be aware of the prevailing philosophy of the judging organisation. 'If you want the gift of the International Olympic Committee, you've got to know how the IOC works.' He goes on: 'You must ask yourself, "How can we most competently and most attractively serve the Olympic ideal?" If you say you're going to make yourself into a new city as a result of the Games, that's your choice. But it won't move the Olympic voters.' In the case of the IOC, what is the guiding philosophy? 'The thing that all members of the Olympic Committee share, whether they're crooks or saints, is a personal instinct to aim for what is best for the Olympic movement. They are all genuinely



David Beckham lit up the opening of Manchester's Games

Pickett's Lock was a catastrophe for us.
Suddenly we were a country whose
word could not be trusted



While Picketts Lock has been scrapped, the City of Manchester Stadium will be the new home of Manchester City FC

attached to the sentiment of the Olympic movement.' Expanding on this theme, Sir Bob suggests that successful bidding cities tend to belong to one of two types: 'World famous cities like Paris, Moscow, Athens, Munich, and aspiring cities, such as Tokyo, Seoul, Beijing. These last cities are all huge and indeed ancient but their place in the modern world at the time of their bidding was uncertain. When the IOC announce their decision, they must feel that it will bring the host city into the family of nations. The IOC want to be a force for world peace and to be good for the world economy.'

His second point is that desire and competence are crucial to successful bids. 'One of the reasons that Sydney was such a formidable bidder was that John Coates of Sydney, who was effectively chairman of the Bid and chief executive of the Australian Olympic Federation, really wanted the Games for his city.' Discussing the importance of matching this positive attitude with a focused professional team, he points to the body behind Atlanta's successful bid to host the Olympic Games in 1992, 'They weren't the best Games ever but they had the best bid committee ever and the best bid team wins the competition. Atlanta had outstanding individuals backed up by a first-class corporate presence.'

The third of Sir Bob's observations concerns local opposition to bids. It may seem odd to think of anyone objecting to their city hosting prestigious and lucrative international events. But instances of individual and group opposition are quite common. In recent times, protest movements have been organised against Olympic bids by Amsterdam for the 1992 Games, Toronto for 1996 and Berlin for 2000. And the result? Failure on each occasion. 'Protest movements against bidding cities kill the bids absolutely stone dead.' Surely this phenomenon of public protest is all part and parcel of debate in a civilised society. So why does it have such a damning effect on the bidding process? He offers us a scenario: 'Let's say 12 cities bid to host the Olympics. That is then reduced by the IOC's Executive Committee to five, and they go forward. Almost by definition, the full Committee will decide that all five are capable of hosting the Games. So when they have to start deciding which one to vote for, the first question they ask themselves is: "Who do I *not* have to vote for?" The first thing they then look for is evidence that there are people in that city and country who actually don't want it, and they use that to say, well, I needn't vote for them.'

London: Olympic ambitions?

There is talk of London bidding for the 2012 Olympics. Britain has hosted the Games twice before, but on neither occasion was it the result of a bid. In 1908, Rome's hosting of the Games folded and London was asked at two years' notice to step in. Again in 1948, Britain was asked to keep the torch alive after the ravages of world war. Now that a British bid looks likely, it seems a tailor-made opportunity to benefit from the unrivalled insight of the country's most experienced event bidder. But once again, as with the World Cup, the opportunity seems to have been missed. 'I've never been consulted on that, which is kind of strange. I suppose one of the things they say is, "Well, the man failed, so what does he know?" My answer to that is the American view that you learn more from failure than success.' His obvious surprise about being left out in the cold is matched by his genuine concern about the focus of the bid and the process itself. 'While nobody's ever consulted me about the London bid, I have occasionally seen documents about it, and

nowhere ever do I read a serious and painful assessment of the bidding process. It's always to do with facilities, the village, transport, hotel rooms and this kind of thing. All vital, of course. But what about the bidding?

And it seems that a host of other issues are combining to jeopardise any bid that might be materialising, most of which concern the capital's sporting facilities and physical infrastructure. Earlier this year, the British government decided not to proceed with the Pickett's Lock stadium in east London. 'Pickett's Lock was a catastrophe for us, because that communicated itself in a major way to the rest of the world. Suddenly we were a country whose word could not be trusted.' Incidentally, in Sir Bob's view, a demountable stadium would provide a better solution for a city such as London. He does not believe in Wembley for athletics. It is a football stadium and will be needed as such for the Olympics. For many years I have thought a really fantastic way to hold the Olympic Games in London would be in a temporary stadium in Hyde Park, for the opening and closing ceremonies and the track and field events. There would be 360-degree access by Tube, there would be no trace of it six months later and we would not need such a stadium in the long term. The great lesson of the Manchester Commonwealth Games is that every facility has a sustainable, long-term after use.'

Regardless of the eventual sporting facilities, Sir Bob wonders whether London itself would be able to cope with the volume of visitors on a technical level: 'The characteristic of Olympic cities today is that they close down for a month. Could London?' He is also keen to caution against the idea that Manchester's recent success can automatically be used to London's advantage: 'If we think can just throw our hat in the ring and transfer it from Manchester to London, we've got another think coming. It's a very complicated assumption. There are all kinds of nuances about Olympic bidding, and I don't have great confidence that London know about these sort of things. 2012 may possibly suit London from an infrastructural standpoint, but 2012 will not be Europe's turn. Continental turn-taking is an important new philosophy at the IOC.'

And if a bid were to materialise? 'I have to tell you that once people really get down to the detail of what an Olympic Games in London would mean, I do think there is a real possibility that it would spawn considerable opposition, that voices would be raised, saying, "Hang on, we've got problems enough without taking on that. It's the one thing we don't need. London's full!" If I'm right about that, it will absolutely undermine the London bid.' If a previous encounter with a senior member of Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government in 1986 is anything to go by, Sir Bob's suspicions look well-founded: 'I remember going to see Willie Whitelaw and he said, "Anyone who can keep the Olympic Games out of London has got my vote." He thought they stank.' All in all, it seems there is a great mountain to climb before London will be hosting the Olympics in the near future.

A new dimension in the Olympic debate is emerging as we go to press. *The Sunday Times* reported on 18 August that the British prime minister, Tony Blair, is indeed preparing to give formal backing to a British Olympic bid, but one that does not necessarily involve only London: 'While Crystal Palace could form the main arena, it is likely that other events would be held around Britain rather than concentrated in London.' Despite Sir Bob's conviction that the 2012 Games are highly unlikely to be awarded to any European country, it is encouraging to note that some in corridors of power finally seem to be taking on board some of the lessons of Manchester, for which



Londoners enjoyed the Jubilee celebrations, but how would they react to the Olympics?



Liverpool's Three Graces, seen from the Albert Dock



St George's Hall, Liverpool

Sir Bob must take considerable credit. Namely that there are places in Britain beyond London that can stage such events with great distinction, generating massive regional benefits, whilst easing the burden on London.

Liverpool: cultural bidding, regional transformation

While speculation surrounding London's Olympic bid grows, Sir Bob Scott has been leading Liverpool's bid for a very different kind of prize: the title of European Capital of Culture 2008. The judging panel puts forward their shortlist of cities in October/November of this year, from the original list of 12 competing for the title. He is clearly thrilled at the opportunity of working with the city he once regarded as a rival rather than a partner: 'I love Liverpool. I hate to say this, but I used to sit in Manchester in the old days and watch Liverpool committing suicide, and actually I was quite cheerful about it in a funny sort of way. I thought it just made Manchester stronger, because accountancy firms were closing in Liverpool and expanding their offices in Manchester. I have to say that I have absolutely reversed my thinking on that, which is that a strong Liverpool is important and good news for Manchester. There is a new spirit abroad about the English regions.'

It comes as no surprise to learn that the current bidding process began with an audit. The city's existing cultural assets are considerable and impressive. 'One of the things that I didn't used to understand is that Liverpool is a *truly* elegant city, it is a beautiful city. Great regency areas. The cathedrals. St George's Hall. The waterfront. The Walker Art Gallery. More listed buildings than any other British city outside London. The third oldest orchestra in the world. The Beatles. The list goes on.'

Liverpool's bid, however, is not about official recognition of its undeniable cultural endowment. It is about enabling transformation through culture. 'This is not a city that has got everything, which is competing for a cup for achievement and a pat on the head. What we're saying is, "Here is the plan, climaxing in 2008. Give it to us and you will transform our city." For me, the template of Glasgow sits very accurately on Liverpool. What Glasgow wanted when it launched its 1990 bid is exactly what Liverpool wants now. I just think that there is a hunger that Liverpool has today that matches what Glasgow had. Our bid is about winning a scholarship rather than being awarded a cup.'

Where Manchester's legacy has encompassed a wide range of new sporting facilities and physical infrastructure, what can Liverpool expect to gain from its bid? 'It is really important that we have identified that the future of Liverpool, at least partly, is in cultural tourism. This city is one of the birthplaces of modern world culture. The whole thing about the Beatles, new writing, creativity and innovation is really important. And we know that it has considerable national and international significance.' Looking forward, he identifies a number of priorities for the newly focused Liverpool. 'We have to do The Beatles properly. We have to honour them as the Americans honour their great. We have to do sport properly, build new homes for Liverpool and Everton Football Clubs and other new facilities, attract new crowds. We desperately need to revive the river and the waterfront, and we need to get the big ships back. We must build a world-class cruise liner terminal.'

Liverpool's transformation along these lines, he argues, would benefit not just the city itself but the North West region as a whole: 'The regional dimension of the Liverpool bid is extremely important. Liverpool and Manchester have got to sort out a relationship that is based on Liverpool being the tourism and cultural capital and Manchester being the regional capital, the business capital.' To help the flow of domestic and international visitors, the region has now got complementary airports - a genuine international hub airport in Manchester and a low cost, budget, short haul airport in Liverpool. On a practical level at least, things are certainly moving in the right direction. 'If they can finish the motorways off between the two cities, even better.'

As our conversation draws to a close, Sir Bob returns to a familiar theme: connecting with the audience. 'Liverpool used to have a vivid consciousness about what was going on in New York. Stewards on the Cunard liners visited New York and would bring records back. Kids at the Liverpool Institute were playing American music long before the records were sold in this country.' And if Liverpool could begin to convert some of its historic international resonance into renewed visitor appeal, who knows how big its audience might be this time around?

Sir Bob Scott is a rare and colourful animal. While he may not come out of the same pigeonhole as a civil servant, he certainly knows how to get things done. And that really is something that is worth treasuring. We should make the most of him.