**Innovation in football**

In 1899, Charles H. Duell, the Commissioner of the U.S. Office of Patents, said rather grandly, "Everything that can be invented has been invented." It reminds me of the comment in 1977 from a DEC head Ken Olsen "There is no reason anyone would want a computer in their home."

This rather change resistant outlook reflects most of us at heart I think. Generally we are quite conservative and resistant to innovation. Nowhere more so than football: consider the contrast between Formula One and football. Bernie Ecclestone must lie in his bath on a Sunday evening dreaming up new ways to tinker with the rules, the points, the technology, all in an effort to make things more exciting, more competitive and more lucrative (and yes safety comes in there somewhere as well). Meanwhile we spend years deciding on goal line technology with no decision either way, and the biggest innovation of the last decade has been shaving foam for free kicks.

And I must say in my heart of hearts I’m relieved. But my head tells me that just a little more boldness in the area of innovation wouldn’t go amiss. I know that football is very different to Formula One, but I can remember the angst I felt when cricket went over to Channel 5 and they brought in all the gizmos, yet now I think it all makes perfect sense – it just took a bit of getting used to. We’re a conservative bunch aren’t we?

In matter religious I’m very different. If you’ve followed this column at all you will have realised that church-wise I’m not very traditional: my church doesn’t meet in an old religious building but a lovely newly built school – All Saints Academy, the dress code is informal (as is the style of worship), and I’m more interested in people’s lives being changed than following centuries-old forms of prayer and singing. Fresh coffee is on tap throughout the service and we serve doughnuts at the end. Not that the old stuff is necessarily bad, but we feel that there are many people out there who have a belief in God but don’t fit into traditional churches with their unwritten rules and codes of behaviour. Like me for instance. So we are doing church for them, one that is more about people than programmes, more about relationship than rules. It’s fun, and we enjoy the freedom we have to try new ideas and rethink how things are done.

There is a story of a vicar who wanted to move the font in his parish church but knew the PCC would never agree to such a change, so he had a novel solution. Each week he would move it 10 centimetres, and by the end of the year the job was done and no-one had complained.

We have had no such problems organising the Argyle Carol Service, as long as we don’t upset the groundsman by messing up his pitch. It’s being held on Wednesday December 17th here at Home Park, and I’m very pleased to announce that as well as the players and coaching staff doing their bit we have Hyde Park Junior School coming to take part. It’s always lovely having the youngsters taking part – they seem to focus our hearts on what it’s all about and bring a bit of Christmas magic to the occasion. We will also be commemorating the Christmas Truce of 100 years ago – the series of unofficial ceasefires that took place across the trenches of France in 1914 – with a specially written version of Silent Night. Put it in your diaries – it’s going to be a Carol Service to remember.