# Bradford unites in celebration and remembrance 40 years after Valley Parade fire



Bradford, often seen through the lens of division, has recently showcased a powerful sense of unity and pride, especially over the past week. The backdrop to this resurgence is Bradford City's unexpected triumph in securing promotion from League Two, a feat marked by a dramatic 96th-minute winner against Fleetwood Town. This victory, celebrated by over 24,000 fans at the stadium, catalysed a wave of jubilation that spilled over into Central Bradford, with thousands gathering in Centenary Square to honour the players and the collective spirit of a city that has faced its fair share of adversity.

This year, the celebrations coincided with a deeply significant commemoration: the 40th anniversary of the Valley Parade fire. On May 11, 1985, this tragedy had a profound effect on the city, taking the lives of 56 supporters—54 from Bradford and 2 from Lincoln, the day’s opposing team. As the memory of that fateful day looms large in the hearts of the community, the annual memorial service serves as a poignant reminder of both loss and resilience.

The fire, which consumed the main stand during what was supposed to be a festive day celebrating Bradford City's Third Division title, left not only physical destruction but also deep emotional scars. The aftermath of the disaster saw a city rallying together in a way few could have imagined. Local clergy, including Oliver Evans, who will preside over his seventh memorial service this year, vividly recalls the impact on his family and community, describing how they were buoyed by an unparalleled spirit of support. “People came out with cups of tea, blankets, water… anything the victims needed,” he reflects.

Such community solidarity laid the groundwork for significant initiatives—most notably the establishment of the Bradford Burns Unit, born from a disaster relief fund that rapidly amassed over £3.5 million in today’s terms, equating to around £12 million. This unit has become a beacon of hope and recovery not only for those affected by the fire but also for burn victims worldwide. Its founding doctor, Professor David Sharpe, developed the Bradford Sling, now heralded as a game-changing advancement in burn treatment, while its current head, Professor Ajay Mahajan, continues to advocate for the institution's legacy, highlighting how the city's spirit contributes to its ongoing success.

In the years following the tragedy, countless initiatives have sprung up, ranging from charity walks to local fundraising events, tapping into the community's well of compassion and support. One notable act was a long walk by local firefighters from Bradford to Lincoln, commemorating the bond between the affected communities. Additionally, homegrown efforts like those from teenager Georgia Taylor, who has spent several years raising funds through the sale of handmade ribbons, underscore the pervasive determination to remember and honour those lost.

Despite the passage of decades, the memory of the Valley Parade fire penetrates the collective consciousness of Bradford, with younger generations imbued with the stories and significance of that day. Evans articulates this continuity of spirit, stating that the community's response on that fateful day continues to influence how Bradfordians unite today. As thousands prepare to gather once again this Sunday, both to celebrate recent successes and to remember those who tragically lost their lives, the sentiment is palpable: this city does not forget.

Moreover, as part of the 40th-anniversary events, a documentary titled *Unforgotten: The Bradford City Fire* is set to be released, capturing personal testimonies of survivors and families, many of whom are recounting their stories for the first time. This film aims to ensure that the memory of the Valley Parade fire remains etched in the public consciousness, reinforcing the essential narrative of resilience and community.

Bradford City’s recent promotion signifies more than just success on the football pitch; it marks a turning point for many in the city—a moment where joy and grief coexist, reminding all who partake that in unity, even the heaviest burdens can become bearable. The collective remembrance of the Valley Parade fire stands as a testament to the enduring spirit of Bradford, echoing the sentiment that the community will always stand together, a phrase that resonates deeply every time they gather in remembrance.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraphs 1-2: [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/football/2025/may/10/bradford-40-years-valley-parade-fire), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/football/2025/may/10/bradford-40-years-valley-parade-fire)
2. Paragraph 3: [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/football/2025/may/10/bradford-40-years-valley-parade-fire), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/football/2025/may/10/bradford-40-years-valley-parade-fire), [[6]](https://www.thefa.com/news/2023/may/11/fa-remembers-bradford-city-fire-disaster)
3. Paragraph 4: [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/football/2025/may/10/bradford-40-years-valley-parade-fire), [[4]](https://www.bradford.ac.uk/news/archive/2021/burns-unit-marks-anniversary-of-tragedy-that-shocked-a-city-and-a-nation.php)
4. Paragraph 5: [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/football/2025/may/10/bradford-40-years-valley-parade-fire), [[4]](https://www.bradford.ac.uk/news/archive/2021/burns-unit-marks-anniversary-of-tragedy-that-shocked-a-city-and-a-nation.php)
5. Paragraph 6: [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/football/2025/may/10/bradford-40-years-valley-parade-fire), [[3]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/crezr3ydpwjo)
6. Paragraph 7: [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/football/2025/may/10/bradford-40-years-valley-parade-fire), [[5]](https://www.thetelegraphandargus.co.uk/news/11717257.new-t-shirt-and-hoodie-will-remember-56-killed-in-valley-parade-fire-and-support-charity-in-anniversary-year/)
7. Paragraph 8: [[4]](https://www.bradford.ac.uk/news/archive/2021/burns-unit-marks-anniversary-of-tragedy-that-shocked-a-city-and-a-nation.php), [[5]](https://www.thetelegraphandargus.co.uk/news/11717257.new-t-shirt-and-hoodie-will-remember-56-killed-in-valley-parade-fire-and-support-charity-in-anniversary-year/)
8. Paragraph 9: [[3]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/crezr3ydpwjo)
9. Paragraph 10: [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/football/2025/may/10/bradford-40-years-valley-parade-fire), [[5]](https://www.thetelegraphandargus.co.uk/news/11717257.new-t-shirt-and-hoodie-will-remember-56-killed-in-valley-parade-fire-and-support-charity-in-anniversary-year/)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2025/may/10/bradford-40-years-valley-parade-fire> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2025/may/10/bradford-40-years-valley-parade-fire> - This article commemorates the 40th anniversary of the Valley Parade fire, which occurred on May 11, 1985, at Bradford City's stadium, resulting in the deaths of 56 supporters. It highlights the city's unity in remembering the tragedy, the memorial services held, and the ongoing community spirit that emerged from the disaster. The piece also touches upon the recent promotion of Bradford City and the significance of the anniversary in bringing the community together.
3. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/crezr3ydpwjo> - The BBC reports on a new documentary titled 'Unforgotten: The Bradford City Fire,' set to be released in 2025, marking the 40th anniversary of the Valley Parade fire. The film aims to feature personal testimonies from survivors and family members, many of whom will be speaking for the first time, to ensure the tragedy is not forgotten and to honor the victims and the community's resilience.
4. <https://www.bradford.ac.uk/news/archive/2021/burns-unit-marks-anniversary-of-tragedy-that-shocked-a-city-and-a-nation.php> - This article from the University of Bradford discusses the 36th anniversary of the Valley Parade fire and the establishment of the Bradford Burns Unit. The unit, founded by Professor David Sharpe OBE, was created to treat the numerous burn victims from the disaster and has since become internationally renowned for its advancements in burn treatment and research.
5. <https://www.thetelegraphandargus.co.uk/news/11717257.new-t-shirt-and-hoodie-will-remember-56-killed-in-valley-parade-fire-and-support-charity-in-anniversary-year/> - The Bradford Telegraph and Argus reports on commemorative t-shirts and hoodies designed to honor the 56 victims of the Valley Parade fire. The initiative, led by a local volunteer, aims to raise funds for the University of Bradford Plastic Surgery and Burns Research Unit, supporting ongoing research and treatment for burn victims.
6. <https://www.thefa.com/news/2023/may/11/fa-remembers-bradford-city-fire-disaster> - The Football Association (FA) reflects on the 1985 Bradford City fire disaster, which resulted in the deaths of 56 spectators. The FA acknowledges the tragedy's impact on the football community and the importance of remembering those affected, emphasizing the need for continued remembrance and learning from such events.
7. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cx7dl682q71o> - BBC News covers the 39th anniversary memorial service for the Valley Parade fire victims, held in Centenary Square, Bradford. The service was attended by civic leaders, representatives from both football clubs, and the families of the victims, highlighting the ongoing community support and remembrance of the tragedy.