



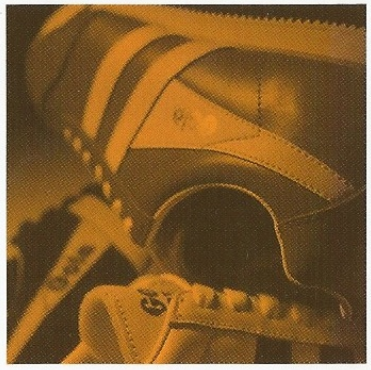


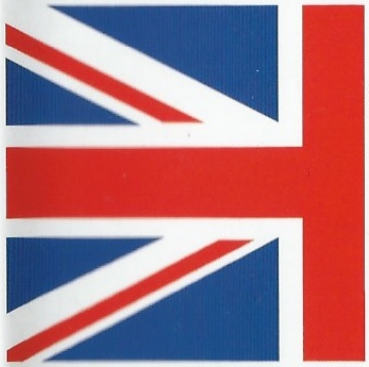






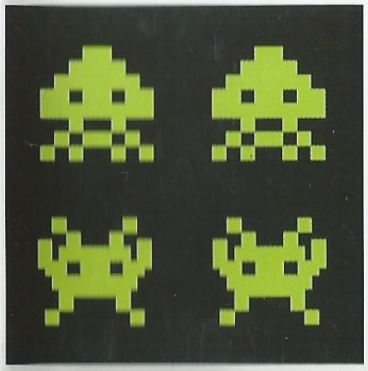




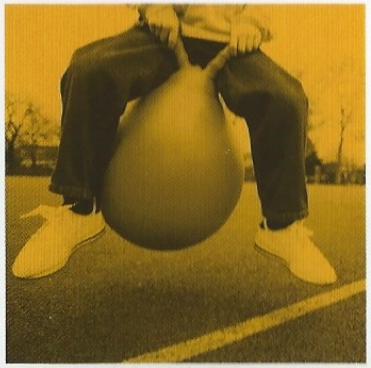


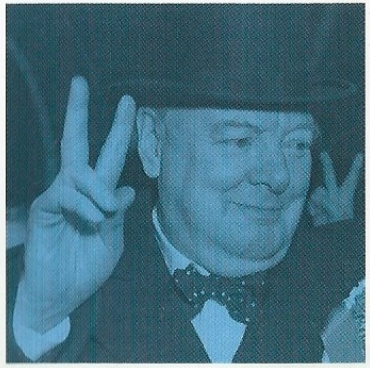
Gola

THE GOLA YEARS 1905-2005

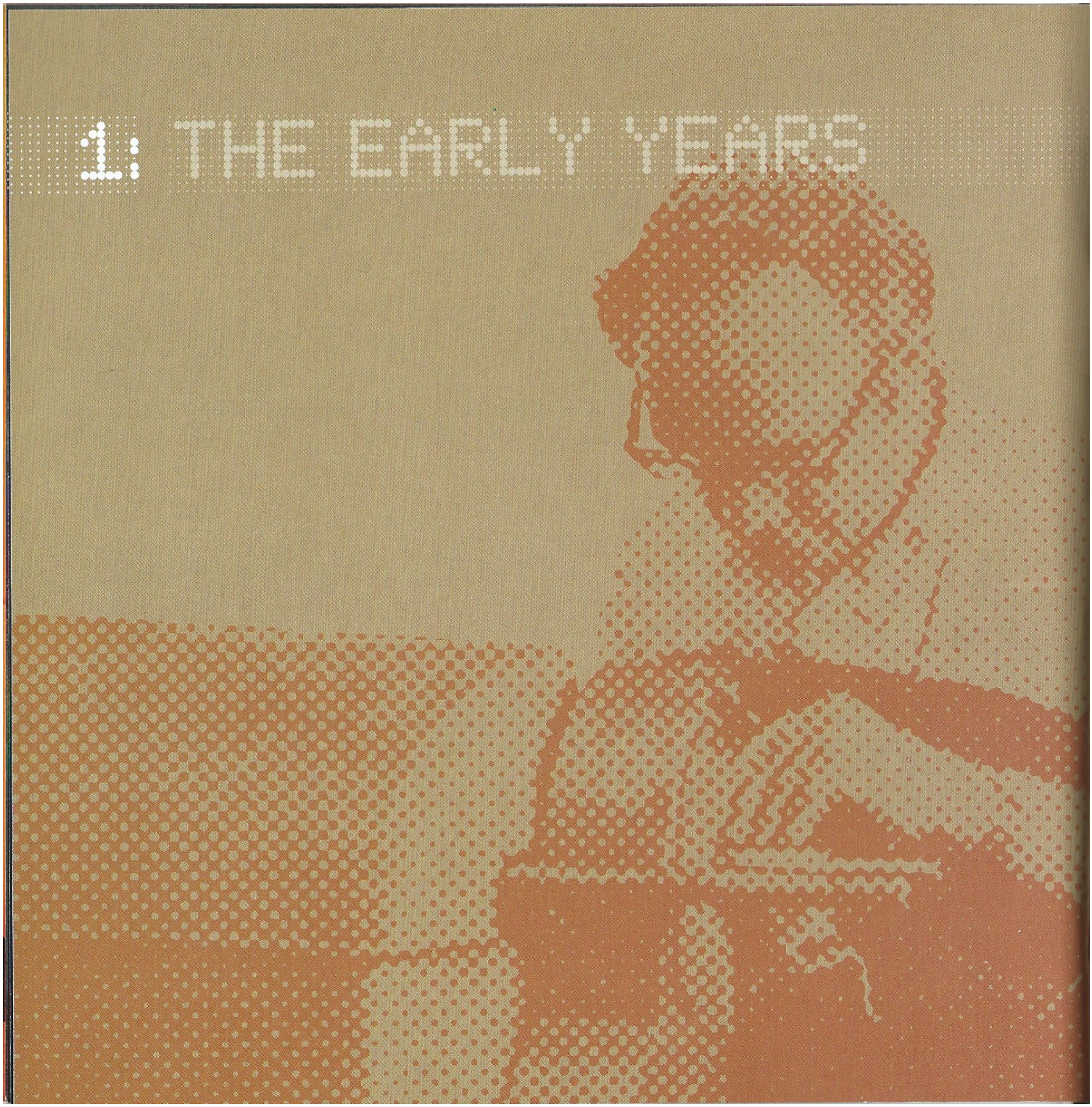








1: THE EARLY YEARS



It may be a name steeped in legend and one well coddled within the sweaty towel of sporting history, but no one is entirely sure how the great name, Gola, came about. True, it's a corruption of the word "goal," but dyslexia hadn't been invented and the subtle art of cunning punning was, as you can probably tell, still in its infancy. What is known, however, is that Britain's oldest sports brand had very humble beginnings indeed...

FACTORY FUN

Originally registered in 1905 by those fine purveyors of "all kinds of athletic goods," Joseph Leeson & Sons, no one then knew that the humble Gola name would go on to become one of the most iconic and long-lived of British sports brands on the market today. But not without a few hiccups along the way.

Initially, Gola was just another brand name for its range of football boot styles, worn by international footballers both at home and abroad, but Leesons also produced another sports brand known as "Fitwell" and, ironically, a football boot range called "Scrum."

Sports footwear production was on the up at this time, as organised sport – leagues and knockout competitions between towns and villages – became a regular escape from the dull drudgery of factory work.

Not that all factories were dull, oh no! Good boys and bad boys alike at King Richard's Road Boy's Intermediate School were, depending on their points of view, either rewarded or punished with a highly educational sojourn to Leesons. As this extract from a report by King Richard's pupil, J. Dunmore, in a 1927 summer edition of the school magazine reveals:

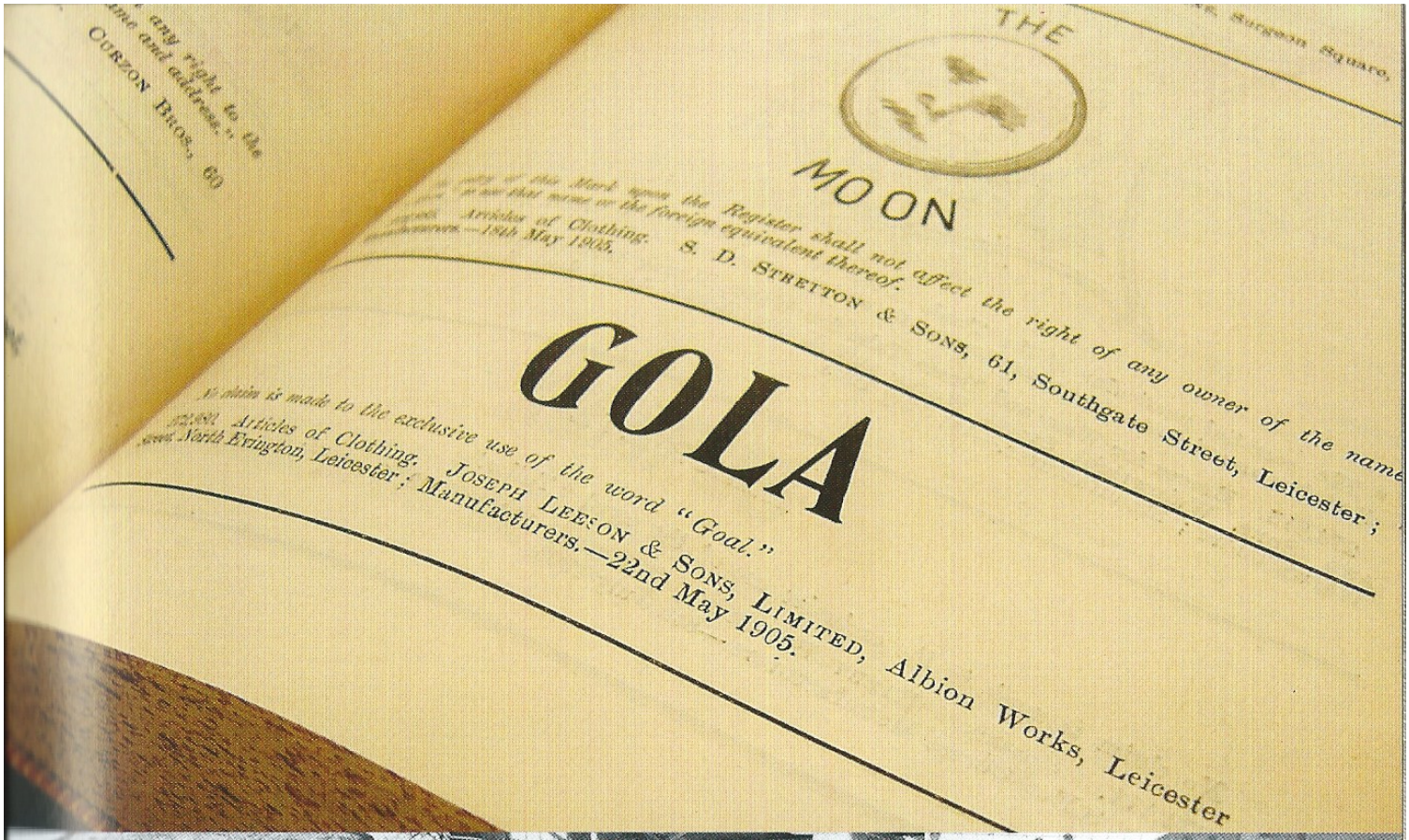
"In the stock room we were shown skins of real Java lizards, and an imitation made from calf skin. They were so much alike that only an experienced eye could tell the difference. We were also shown a python skin valued at 9d per square inch (£0.03)."

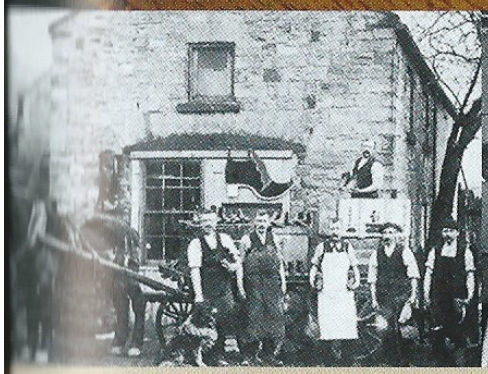
Fancy.

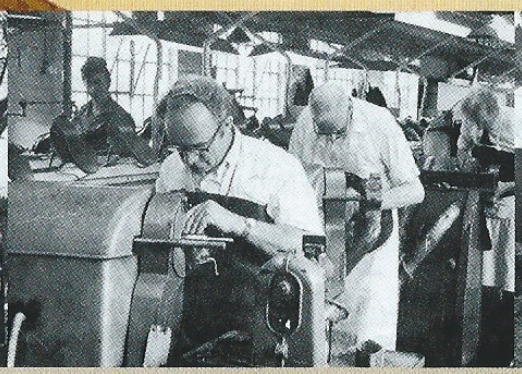
KNICKERBOCKER'S GLORY

Sport also emerged from World War I more popular than ever. Every major sport such as rugby, cricket, boxing, and tennis was embraced as never before, attracting larger and increasingly more patriotic crowds.

Sporting fashions, however, changed very little during Gola's early years. Not quite the sex symbol fashion icons they are today, footballers of the time – including the likes of Bolton Wanderers' Jimmy Fay, and Sunderland's Alf Common, who became the world's first £1,000 player when he was signed by Middlesbrough in 1905 – wore very fetching baggy knickerbockers. Tight-fitting, packet-revealing shorts didn't really take off until the 1960s.









Above: Leeson & Sons: if it weren't for them, there'd be no Gola.

Top: Gola made their mark, literally, in 1905 when the brand was registered.

Above: Bifocals and varifocals were an integral part of the Gola boot-making process.

Above: And not a banana in sight: Wolverhampton Wanderers standing proud, knickerbockers and all, circa 1905.


Gola starts here.

BOTTERILL & SONS

Sadly, post-war production for Leeson & Son was not quite so jolly and fashionable as a footballer's kit. After almost 50 years manufacturing the company was wound down in 1930 and Gola temporarily ceased production for the first, but not the last, time in its stuttering history.

Despite the growing market for sportswear, Leesons, like many other firms, had been crippled by their enforced contribution to the war effort and by the Depression that followed. And so, in the early 1930s, the brand name was bought by another boot maker, W. Botterill & Sons of Bozeat, Northamptonshire. But the brand was left on the shelf for a further six years before being dusted off and slipped on the nation's feet once again.

OF BOTTERILL & BUSES

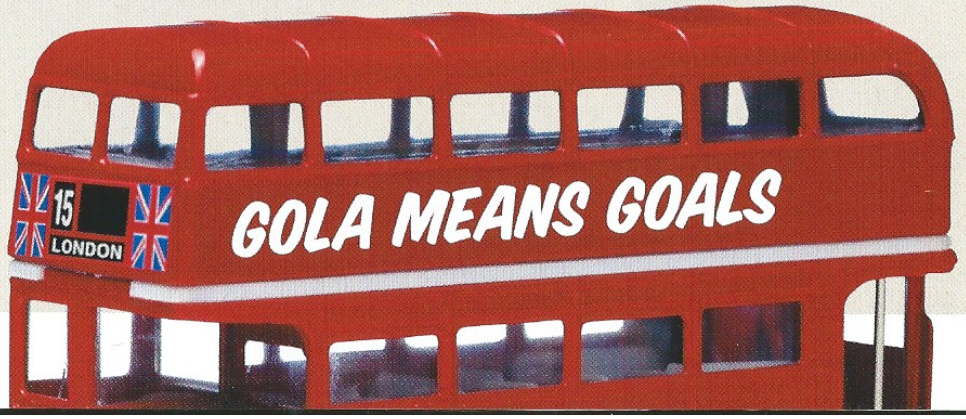
Boot manufacturer, William Botterill, set up Botterill & Sons in the early 1880s. When the company bought the rights to the Gola name, it didn't exercise them straight away. But, in 1936, the company decided that it needed a brand name for its already popular football and rugby boots.

After World War II, William's grandson, Richard, together with his brother, John, joined the team and became responsible for turning Gola into one of the biggest sportswear brands in Europe.

Many of the Gola styles that are still popular now were first made under Richard's guiding hand. All told, the Botterills were responsible for creating what Gola is today. Without them, the name would have vanished in the 1930s. But the Botterills had big ideas, even then.

"Some of my earliest family memories are associated with the brand," says Richard. "I can clearly remember my father telling me in the 1930s, that they were going to start advertising on the sides of buses, with the slogan 'Gola means goals.'"

And that they did.



Opposite: Cool façade: the entrance to the original factory, built by William Botterill. The cottage adjoining it was lived in by a member of the family. Strangely, they were always late.

Right: Gola means goals. Or at least, it would, if it had been spelt correctly.

THE FIRST BOOT

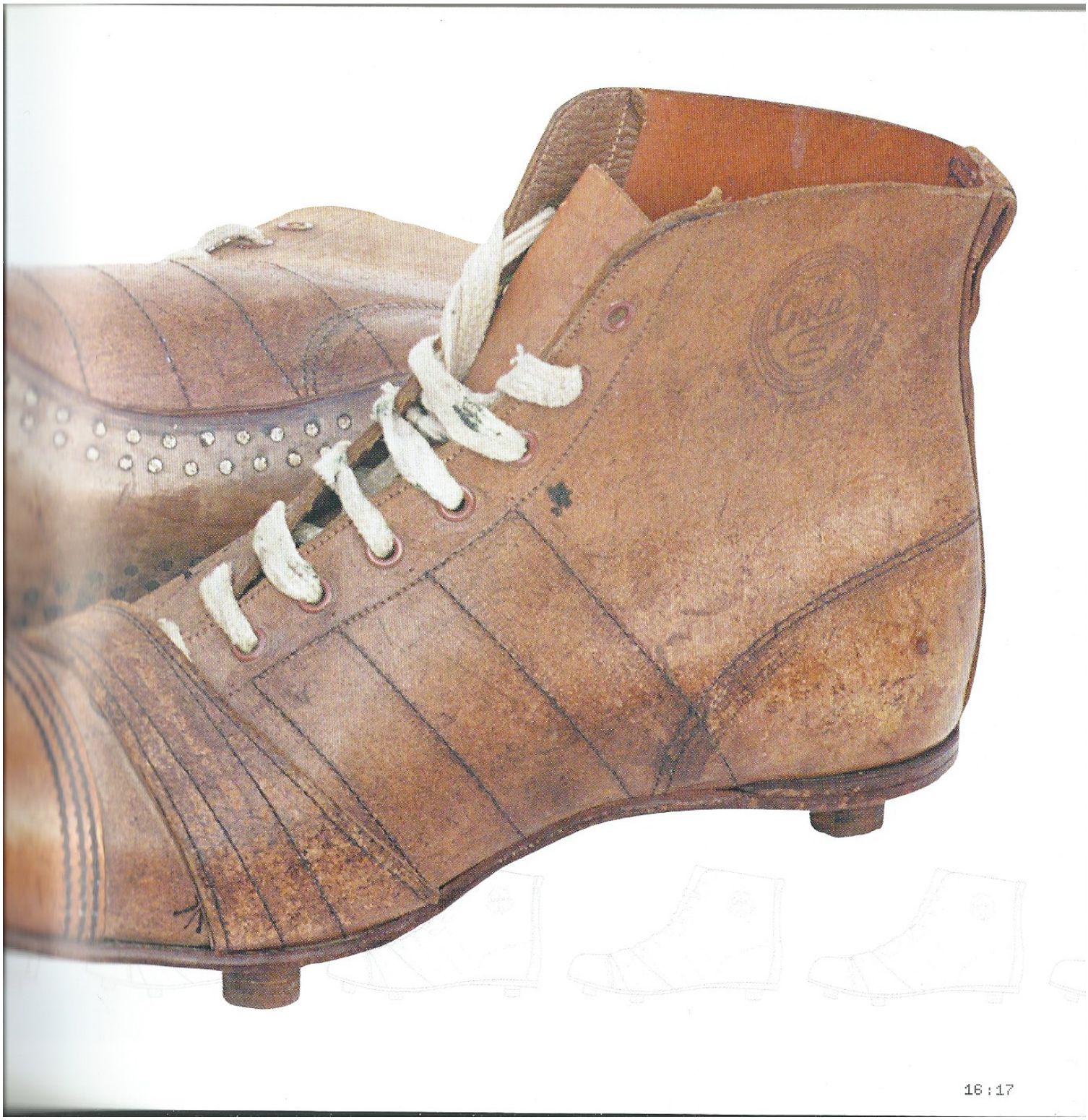
On the 22 May, 1905 – a Monday – the Gola brand was born and the very first pair of handmade football boots were delivered in a small and unassuming workshop on Spalding Street, Leicester, England. The family business, Joseph Leeson & Sons Ltd, had previously only produced army boots and regular men's, women's and children's footwear. Their influence can clearly be seen in this rather sturdy pair of footy boots, with their rugged, handcrafted design, the look of which changed little until well after World War II.

Above ankle height, and heavy – with a reinforced toecap – the boots had all-leather soles and studs which, when worn down (with the metal inside pins protruding), would have ripped a man's leg apart – Vinnie Jones, eat your heart out!

Plus, they would have weighed down even the most agile of the tricky pre-war wingers, when the rain and mud was at its worst. Which is how players in those days developed such firm calves and thighs.



Right: These are the oldest pair of Gola football boots in existence from this period. Squint and you can still see the old-style Gola logo stamped on the side. Made completely of leather, they are on display at Gola HQ, in Rawtenstall, Lancashire. And yes, some people do make the pilgrimage.


16:17

THE GOLA YEARS 1905-2005



Gola

THE GOLA YEARS 1905-2005

As British as the proverbial bulldog, Gola is the UK's most enduring and endearing sportswear and fashion brand. While other better known pretenders have come and gone, in 2005 Gola celebrates its 100th birthday, cementing its reputation as the oldest, wisest and best-loved kid on the block.

Armed with a stunning collection of photographs and a fondly preserved history, this book tells the highs and lows of the brand's story with a sense of humour that only comes from such longevity. During 100 eventful years Gola can truly be said to have been there and bought the T-shirt…or should that be the pair of trainers?

Daniel Fryer is a writer, editor, journalist and author of *The Ultimate Stag Night Kit*. He's written about wizards and witches and Romans and slaves, edits a magazine for a well-known bingo chain and has discovered that bingo players are very sweet, but totally mad. He also wants to write an amusing history of pirates and there's a sci-fi comedy on the backburner if anyone's interested in asking.