

LONDON TO PARIS CHARITY CYCLE RIDE.

As the twenty-fifth anniversary approaches, Adam Bentley - a survivor of the Bradford fire - is preparing to cycle the 328 miles between London and Paris to raise money for the city's Burns Unit.

On Saturday 11 May 1985, fire engulfed the back of Valley Parade's G-block killing 56 people, injuring hundreds and bringing a dramatic end to what was due to be a day of celebration for the Bantams.

The team – lead by Captain, Peter Jackson – paraded the old Division Three Championship Trophy before kick-off against Lincoln City to mark their promotion to the second tier of English football for the first time since before the Second World War.

But minutes from half-time, a dropped cigarette ignited rubbish underneath the main stand and, as flames swallowed up the wooden structure, generations of families were left trapped between the blaze and the locked gates at the rear of the stand.

“Following the fire, the club produced a fund raising book,” begins Bentley who now works as deputy safety officer at Valley Parade. “On the front cover they had a publicity shot of the team with the trophy before the Lincoln game and you can see me sat in the stand.

“I feel I have a connection with the club. I have been a matchday employee for 18 seasons and it felt about time that I gave something back. I made a conscious decision to raise as much as possible.”

Due to the absence of a dedicated burns unit in Bradford at the time, victims were transported 15 miles down the road to Pinderfields hospital in Wakefield – including the father of young Bradford midfielder, Stuart McCall.

But, thanks to funding from the city's University and local hospital, the groundbreaking Bradford Burns Unit rose out from the ashes of the fire, specialising in plastic surgery and rehabilitation.

And in July, Adam Bentley will undertake the four day ride from London to the French capital hoping to raise £2,500 for the centre as well as Action Medical Research, a charity dedicated to helping ill children.

Although escaping physically unhurt, Bentley, 19 at the time, still suffers the long-lasting effects of that day – the severity of which, he explains, took hours to register and days to fully grasp.

“I tend to shut it out. I don't remember an awful lot except for being away from the ground, getting home and my mum saying I was never going to a football match again.

“We were walking en masse away from the ground, struggling to find phone boxes and listening to people’s transistor radios – at six o’clock that evening we were still under the impression that everyone had got out.

“I used to read two or three newspapers a day to get it into my head what had happened – it was hard to comprehend that people didn’t get out. It took me eight or nine years to get to the stage where I could talk about it.

“People don’t understand what it was like – it reduced me to tears for years afterwards. No 20-year-old should have to go through that.”

Bentley’s 100-mile-a-day ride from 22 to 25 July, winds down to Paris via Portsmouth, St Malo, Mayenne and Chartres arriving in style on the Champs Elysées a day before the climax of this summer’s Tour de France.

Determined to keep the memories alive, Bentley will be cycling in a Claret and Amber jersey carrying the Bradford City crest which he then plans to have signed by members of the 1985 Championship winning team to be auctioned-off, generating more funds for the Burns Unit dedicated.

