



With his prematurely receding hairline and 'Pancho Villa' moustache, Rod Fern was one of the most easily-recognised players of the late 1970s. He had something of a national profile, having appeared in an FA Cup final for Leicester City, to whom Luton Town paid £45,000 for his services in June 1972. He started well enough for The Hatters but played little part in their 1974 promotion to division one, and

played only three times in their unsuccessful attempt to stay up a year later.

His acquisition for only £8,000 represented a fine piece of work on the part of Joe Shaw, who was alive to the fact that Rod was having a miserable time at Kenilworth Road and was desperate to get away. Rodney turned down a move to Brighton, choosing Chesterfield to be nearer to his Leicester home. He took time to settle in and became the 'forgotten man' of Saltergate in his first season - playing out of position wide on the right when he did play, and taking a long time to recover from a back injury that had dogged his final year at Luton.

When Joe Shaw finally moved him into the middle his Chesterfield career took off. He lost a stone in weight and the crowd's attitude changed as they saw a fitter and better Fern leading the line after the departure of the want-away Terry Shanahan.

Shaw left during the next season to be succeeded by Arthur Cox, but he and Rodney never really hit it off. Peculiarly, for one whose career was ended by injury at the age of eighteen, Cox made Fern play through injuries that included a torn thigh muscle and a chipped bone in his ankle.

For all this, Fern was professional enough to be Cox's top scorer for three seasons. Despite receiving the unconditional adulation of the crowd, Fern felt undervalued by the manager and club, and was not reluctant to leave when his contract came up for renewal in the summer of 1979. Rotherham came in with an offer which more or less doubled his wages and, under Jim McGuigan and, later, Ian Porterfield and Emlyn Hughes, Fern became an important member of a Millers side that came within an ace of promotion to Division One, having won the Third Division championship in 1981.

During his last year at Millmoor he entered the licensed trade and remained a publican in the Rotherham area for three years before returning to run pubs and a fuel business in his native Leicestershire. Like so many footballers of his time, it seems, Like so many headers of the ball, Rod's later years were affected by dementia before his death in January 2018, aged 69.

For Chesterfield: 150 + 2 Football League appearances, 54 goals.

Career: 415 + 33 Football League appearances, 125 goals.