

in the Shankly in the bottom Liverpool are

ian was interviewing Jamie Carragher at training ground, Benítez breezed past and said, "English lessons?" - a joke aimed at the Irish accent.

in shorter supply on Merseyside this winter than Manchester United bedspreads. Liverpool have won the league this season (10) as they have won and the prospect of a title will intensify the spotlight on the club as Ian St John, an idol of the 60s, says of the home defeat to Arsenal: "Don't ask me how we have made of it. I dread to think, and it makes me feel even more sad." Graeme Souness, a former Liverpool aristocrat, had claimed his alma mater was "let down".

will doubtless soothe the congregation of family members and 15 players from his grave on the pitch at half-time and a moment when the man from the mines of Glenbuckley becomes the Liverpool identity. Socialism, his political endeavour were the principles Shankly arrived to find Melwood "a wilderness" of hills, there were hollows, there were trees, and where a passive acceptance of men until a change in culture provided the catalysts and St John.

recall a day mentioned by Kevin Keegan: "I'll never forget the game soon after he came when he turned up at Anfield and stood in the Kop. The first we players knew we heard the swelling chant from the supporters: 'Shankly, here he is, here he is!'"

through with the league winning sides of the next wave won the 1973 title and the FA Cup with Tommy Smith, Emyln Hughes, Keegan and Souness. Since he walked into his own wilderness of Melwood 35 years ago, when pathos splashed on the pitch have been led by three Boot Room graduates (Fagan and Roy Evans), two Anfield supporters (Souness and Souness) and two A-list European imports (Gérard Houllier) and then

ed inevitably as an inheritor of the Shankly legacy. The club is kept alive, too, by political resistance. Against the US owner-speculators, Tom Hicks has been banished under the "Spirit of Shankly" banner. Other landmarks at the stadium, after the

Hillsborough memorial, are the Shankly Gates and the statue, which bears the epitaph: "He made the people happy."

This is the challenge all Liverpool managers are landed with: to

be a brilliant comedian, statesman, team-builder and moral patriarch. Tommy Smith remembers Shankly rejecting a player after he had tested positive for a sexually transmitted disease during his medical. "I'm not having a philanderer here," he erupted. "This is a family club. Send him back."

The ultimate accolade is to be compared favourably to Shankly. The stamp of doom is to be dismissed as a vandal to his legacy. The cult is explained by Brian Reade in *43 Years With the Same Bird - A Liverpool Love Affair*. Reade writes of Shankly: "In the lean years we stood by him, refusing to doubt that he would turn things around. In the early Seventies, when the trophies came flooding back, we ditched mere adoration and worshipped him like a pagan god. He started something unique in football: the manager as idol. A tradition Liverpool fans respect to this day under Benítez [the book was published in 2008]."

"Look at the huge liver bird flag that spreads across the Kop shortly before every kick-off and you'll see, down either side of it, not drawings of the greatest strikers over the years, but

the managers. Listen to the songs sung about Benítez, as they were about Houllier, and you will hear a crowd reaching out to its leader, demanding a communion between the dug-out and the stands. It's a cry to be loved, a request for the man who holds the club's destiny in his hands to recognise his flock. And it dates directly back to Shankly. Imagine how that must have felt for Houllier and Benítez." St John wrote: "Shankly once said that his power over the fans made him feel like Chairman Mao."

Loyalty ingrained 50 years ago has bought Benítez and Houllier precious time, but today's Liverpool side have already endured as many Premier League defeats (six in 16 outings) as they did in the previous two campaigns combined. Shankly built the club from the bottom up. Under Benítez, Liverpool are cracking from the top down. Shankly's shadow falls across him, as it will the next man in.