

When City and Town fans shared a sense of solidarity

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The first year I was studying at Cambridge University, long ago, I was the only student from Norwich in my college.

But at the beginning of my second academic year, one night at dinner, I overheard a boy down the table from me talking in a way which seemed very familiar:

He sounded rather like me when he spoke. His accent was by no means identical to mine: he pronounced words like boat, out, and hour, differently from me.

But there was a lot in common, and I felt an immediate affinity with him. I sought him out after dinner and we had a chat – and he told me that he came from Ipswich. So that explained it!

I had never been to Ipswich at the time, and I hadn't actually recognised his accent for what it was.

But I had correctly recognised that there was something distinctively East Anglian about his way of speaking.

Whenever we met each other after that, he would call me "Norwich" and I would call him "Ipswich".

There was a kind of bond between us, surrounded as we were by students from the Home Counties and the North, who



■ Peter Trudgill remembers the days when Norwich supporters would support Ipswich against any team other than the Canaries. Picture: PA

greatly outnumbered us.

As I recall it, in the 1950s and 1960s, there was also a similar kind of affinity operating in the realm of football in East Anglia.

If Norwich City and Ipswich Town were playing each other, that was the biggest match of the season and it was the one which we, the Norwich supporters, wanted to win more than any other.

But, otherwise, we wanted Ipswich to win. If they were playing Arsenal or Manchester United, we wanted Ipswich to slaughter them.

We were pleased when they won the league and the FA Cup.

What we felt was an East Anglian solidarity in the face of opposition from the metropolitan and other big city clubs.

Younger people will doubtless find this hard, even impossible, to believe, because we have since been encouraged over the past many decades to ape the tribal antagonisms of the fans of United vs City, and Liverpool vs Everton, and Spurs vs Arsenal: we are supposed to feel that a football match against a club from a place 45 miles away is a "local derby".

But in those days the feelings of East Anglian solidarity were real enough, and we were none the worse for it.