



St James' Park in 2000. The new L-shaped roof is cantilevered to a dizzying depth of 65.5m, while at 60m tall at its highest point it is 1m taller than the Tyne Bridge.



▲ To employ a football cliché, the modern day **St James' Park** is 'a stadium of two halves' – to some an unbalanced and awkward mismatch, to others a remarkable feat of engineering that makes the best of a challenging site.

Once **Newcastle United** gave up on the Castle Leazes proposal, work on extending the north and west sides of the ground with an additional tier and new roofs started in June 1998, being completed in August 2000.

Remarkably, the contractors and engineers responsible for this



second phase, Ballast Wiltshier and WSP respectively, managed to keep the rest of the stadium operative throughout the building programme, even if at times fans had to sit out in the rain.

As a result of the extensions, the capacity rose from 36,834 to 52,339 (making St James' the third largest club stadium in England).

To achieve this cost United a further £46 million, although included within that sum was the provision of 1,100 spaces in a multi-storey car park integrated within the Sir John Hall Stand,

vast areas of hospitality and conference facilities in the newly extended Milburn Stand (including the largest banqueting room north of Birmingham), a restaurant, 90 executive boxes, and a media centre. In that sense, this is now a building that serves as a stadium only part of the time, and is otherwise used for a wide range of other activities 365 days a year.

St James' Park divides opinions as much today as it did a century ago. But there can be no denying that compared with most other large scale stadiums, thanks to

the measured approach of the architects Taylor Tulip & Hunter, St James' stands out for having its appreciable bulk tempered by the subtle use of materials, finishes and understated colour schemes; predominantly grey cladding, white steelwork and sand-toned blockwork. It is, furthermore, refreshingly free of the garish branding that scars and cheapens so many of our other stadiums.

To understand why the stadium is what it is today, one must understand its unique context, and therefore its unique developmental

history. It is a history peppered with 'what ifs'. What if the club had been able to buy the freehold? What if they had moved to Gosforth Park, or to Castle Leazes? What if the Leazes Terrace had not been such a crucial factor? What if the club had not been rescued by Sir John Hall?

Of course if United were not such a hugely popular club, none of this might matter. But they are, and therefore St James' Park is a building that virtually everyone in Newcastle knows, and on which they all have an opinion.