

The (Saturday) boy done good: Steve Rowe bows out at M&S

WHEN [Steve Rowe](#) became [boss](#) of Marks & Spencer in 2016 many in the City, and many former customers, thought it was finished.

The gap between the glamorous adverts and the reality of most stores was getting wider.

And successive CEOs had failed to grasp this, milking what they could before they moved on.

Appointing Rowe, a former Saturday boy and Millwall fan, may not have quite been the last throw of the dice.

But it seemed a pointed change from his predecessor Marc Bolland, a suave Dutchman who had never stacked a shelf in his life and saw [M&S](#)'s future as abroad, in Paris, and other places miles from Millwall.

Rowe's initial job was straight forward, if not easy: putting out fires.

M&S profits were going backwards at a rate of about £100 million a year. The clothes looked dowdy and by trying to appeal to everyone ended up appealing to no-one.

In so far as it had an internet presence, M&S had made a hash of it. The stores were ageing.

The arrival of Archie Norman as chairman in 2017 helped Rowe galvanise a business that people still felt sentimental about, even if they shopped elsewhere.

The pair reversed some of the international flag planting to focus on remembering what M&S is for.

As Rowe steps back, where are we? Well, it is now the second

largest online clothes retailer after Next. The initial scepticism about the food tie-up with Ocado has faded.

The food is excellent, and M&S has given up any pretence that it might compete with the Fast Fashion houses on clothes – that is not what it does.

Rowe hands over to Stuart Machin and co-CEO Katie Bickerstaffe, who have more work to do on the clothes and on the estate.

They are in a dramatically better position than they were.

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