

Looking Back In Amber

1889-90 Season



In 2010, the Wands will be celebrating their 150th anniversary. To mark this milestone, we intend to publish a thorough history of the club. In the meantime a lot of research is being undertaken. In a special series of articles, [Pete Goringe](#) shares some of our findings from a season that saw a number of significant events for Cray Wanderers F.C.

Back in 1889, the local football scene was rather different to what we now take for granted. Whilst the Football League had commenced operations 12 months earlier, it would still be another five years before the Kent League got underway and the only competitive football was provided by the Kent County Cups.

It was only in the second half of the 1880s that the local press started to cover Association Football in any like a systematic way, although Cray Wanderers had, of course, started playing some form of the game back in 1860. We suspect that for many years the Wanderers played versions of both what we now know as “football” and “rugby,” but certainly by 1887, the club committed itself entirely to the Association version.

Other clubs in the area were still making their minds up. In September 1889, *The Sidcup and District Times* reported that Bromley Rovers F.C. had decided to change from playing Rugby to Association Football. Their first ever soccer match happened to be against the Cray Wanderers “B” team (reserves) and the Rovers lost 8-2. They clearly improved at their new pastime, as later in the season, in March, a much closer game between the sides ended 2-1 to the Wanderers.

Of course it’s inconceivable that nowadays any of our area’s local clubs could suddenly opting to change the sport they play. Imagine rugby clubs like Blackheath, Sidcup or Westcombe Park deciding to play soccer instead and expecting to join the Ryman League (or, indeed, Cray Wanderers or Bromley F.C. becoming rugby clubs)! Back in the 1880s, though, both sports were still in their infancy and the “clubs” were, I imagine, simply groups of athletic young men (entirely amateur, of course) looking for the most enjoyable way to spend their Saturday afternoons.

Anyway, the 1889-90 season saw Cray Wanderers operate with two football teams, both of which had a full programme of friendly games covering the winter months from mid-September to April. The “A” team also entered the Kent Junior Cup for the first time. The teams played their home games at the St Mary Cray Recreation Ground, which is still there, of course, in the area known as Derry Downs.

The first matches of the season were played on 21st September (presumably tying in with the end of the cricket season). Both the “A” and “B” sides were at home. I’m not

sure whether two pitches were used, or whether the games were played one after the other. The “A” team met “E.T. Budgen’s XI” and won 5-2. I have no idea who Mr Budgen was. Meanwhile, the “B” team lost 8-0 to Westminster. This suggests to me that the fixture secretary may have got things wrong and the “A” team should have been playing the Old Boys side!

The following week a team from Dulwich visited St Mary Cray. This wouldn’t have been Dulwich Hamlet, who were founded in 1893, but they were too strong for the Wanderers, winning 4-2. Dulwich brought what was described as “a cup side.” I think this means that they entered the F.A. Cup on a regular basis and could therefore be considered amongst the top rank of local clubs. It would be another ten years or so before Cray made their first appearance in the national cup.

Indeed, a glance at the record books shows that Dulwich twice reached the third round of the F.A. Cup in the mid-1880s, so these were eminent visitors to the Rec. Unfortunately, their visit to St Mary Cray did not prepare Dulwich too well for their F.A. Cup tie the following Saturday. They lost 9-0 at home to Old St Paul’s, who went on to beat Reading and Luton Town. Dulwich never entered the cup again. I expect they folded and, a little later, the Hamlet became the leading club in that area.

19th October 1889 is a significant date in the history of Cray Wanderers. It was then that the club played its first competitive match. Until that point, every game had been what we would now call a “friendly”, although, as we shall see in later articles, some of them were fiercely contested brutal affairs.

No leagues were yet established, but the 1880s did see the Kent F.A. start to organise cup competitions. Cray decided to enter the Kent Junior Cup in 1889. This gives us some indication of their status at time, as they were not considered suitable for the Kent Senior Cup. Despite its lowly sounding name, I think the Kent Junior Cup would have been the Victorian equivalent of the Kent Senior Trophy.

The Wanderers were drawn away to Westerham in the first round and, on a windy October day, made their way out into the country by train. *The Sidcup Times* even printed the train times, for supporters who wished to accompany the team!

On arrival in Westerham, Cray were surprised that no-one from the home club was at the station to greet them, which was seen as the height of rudeness. To make things worse, Westerham had overlooked organising any dressing rooms for the Wanderers. At this time, very few grounds (“pitches” would be a better word) had dressing rooms on-site. Often teams would use a pub or hall some way distant and walk to the playing area.

It’s impossible to say now whether this was a case of skulduggery on Westerham’s part. The two sides had met twice the previous season, with a win apiece, so a close game was on the cards. Maybe the home side were trying to ensure that they had every possible advantage.

It seemed to have worked for, although Cray managed to get to the ground changed and ready to play in time for the kick-off, they soon went a goal behind. But justice was done (as far as the Wanderers were concerned) when the visitors scored four

second-half goals in quick succession to secure victory in their first cup-tie. For the record, Cray's scorers were Hutchings, Dashwood, Sharp and Hawes.

A fortnight later, it was time for the second round of the Junior Cup and the Northumberland Fusiliers were drawn to visit St Mary Cray. Again, there were problems. At the appointed kick-off time, there was no sign of the army team. They finally arrived about three quarters of an hour late, which does not sound like the outcome of a particularly successful military operation!

Apparently, according to the rules of the competition, Cray could have claimed a walkover. However, as there were several hundred spectators present, who had been charged to watch the game (this, in itself, may have been a first for Cray), it was decided to proceed. This was a good decision as an excellent match took place, which the Wanderers won 4-3, with Hutchins scoring a hat-trick.

Strangely, having won two rounds, Cray got a bye in the third round and it was not until the Saturday before Christmas that they played Royal Arsenal Reserves, in what we think was the quarter-final. At that time, the Arsenal were nominally an amateur side, still based in Woolwich, of course. But they were already established as one of the strongest clubs in the south of England; their first team won both the Kent Senior and London Charity Cups.

It was a shame that only a small crowd of about 100 witnessed Cray's first really "big" match. I imagine this was due to the weather. There would have been no cover for spectators at the Rec., so wind and rain would have put off all but the hardiest supporters. Nonetheless, it was a fine game and the Wanderers gave a good account of themselves as they lost 0-2. Cray's first cup run was over, but they had proved they were more than able to give a good account of themselves.

In his match report of the goalless draw between Dartford and Cray Wanderers, played at Princes Park earlier this year, Jerry Dowlen wrote this, "The Wands looked at their best when they tried to build some patient passing moves on the ground. But the final ball rarely found a telling gap, especially with Darts big defender and sponsors' man-of-the-match John Guest setting an example of safety first and putting the ball into touch every time Cray got near to goal."

You may well be wondering why, in an article about the 1889-90 season, I'm starting with something about a game that was played 117 years later. The reason is that, almost to the day, back in 1890 Dartford and Cray Wanderers met in a match at Dartford. And, by a remarkable coincidence that I'm sure even Jerry was unaware of, the match report contained a great deal about Dartford players kicking the ball into touch! In fact, it was such a big issue that the match was abandoned as a result.

This has to be one of the weirdest episodes in the history of Cray Wanderers and, in order to understand it, we'll have to try to put ourselves into the position of the Victorian chaps playing "the beautiful game" all those years ago. Once Cray had been

knocked out of the Kent Junior Cup in December, all the remaining games were 'friendlies', in the sense that there was nothing specific at stake. All of the players would have been completely amateur and the entertainment provided by the Saturday game of football would have been the highlight of the week, both for them and the spectators.

What appears to have happened in the game at Dartford in 1890 was that after the home side had taken a 1-0 lead, they persisted throughout the second-half (when they were playing against the wind) in kicking the ball off the pitch. Nowadays, we might think of this as good no-nonsense defending; certainly the sponsors thought John Guest was doing a good job at Princes Park! But in "the olden days", this sort of tactic was severely frowned upon. It even had a name: "fluking."

Dartford were clearly using the strategy of fluking to preserve their narrow lead. It was the equivalent of the modern tactic of taking the ball into the corners in the closing stages of a match, in order to preserve a narrow lead. It's annoying for the fans, but most people accept it as part-and-parcel of the game.

Cray and their supporters certainly did not find fluking acceptable in 1890. The previous week to the Dartford game, the Wanderers had entertained Horton Kirby. Apparently, the visitors deliberately kicking the ball off the pitch had marred an otherwise enjoyable match. But it was against Dartford that things came to a head.

I suppose we need to bear in mind that kicking the ball off the pitch in 1890 could have caused a long delay. Rather like the games we all played as kids in the park, there would have been no ball boys, no stands and probably only one football available. If someone kicked the ball a long way 'off', valuable time would be wasted whilst it was retrieved. And there may have been little option for adding additional minutes. With no floodlights, a game in January would have to end as dusk fell.

It seems the Cray captain, Harry Hutchins, asked his Dartford counterpart to tell his players to stop the fluking, but to no avail. Hutchins then felt he had no alternative than to take his players off the pitch and the match was prematurely brought to an end; in modern parlance it was abandoned. I imagine that Cray felt they had to take a stand against something that was against the spirit of the game and ruining the enjoyment of both players and spectators.

Hutchins stuck to his principles, but the incident caused bad feeling to persist between the Cray and Dartford clubs for several years. In subsequent seasons there were some very rough games and a bitter dispute over a player alleged to be ineligible for a cup-tie.

2006-07 saw Cray Wanderers involved in no fewer than three abandoned matches: there was the fog at Boreham Wood and heavy rain at Molesey and at home to Ashford. We thought this may have been a record, but have since discovered that there were also three games in the 1889-90 season that failed to reach a conclusion. In the previous article, I told how the Cray team left the pitch in protest at Dartford's tactics of kicking the ball into touch. There was also a game at Beckenham abandoned due to fog. The third abandonment was an altogether nastier business.

On 22nd March 1890, the Wanderers travelled to Grove Park to take on a team called Star F.C. The home side took an early lead and then scored a second "goal" which Cray felt was clearly offside. That was when the trouble started.

I must confess at this point that I am not entirely certain about the arrangements for officiating matches during this period in Cray's history. By 1890, more senior matches would have had a neutral referee and two "umpires", one from each club (we would now refer to umpires as linesmen or assistant referees). At Cray's level, though, I suspect that it was the home side's responsibility to provide the ref. However, confusingly, the report of the Star v Cray game in *The Sidcup Times* refers to two umpires but no referee. It will come as no surprise that it was the umpire provided by the Star club that caused all the bother, as far as Cray were concerned.

Anyway, when the second goal was awarded, Cray protested long and hard that an injustice had been done. The game was held up for a full ten minutes, presumably whilst they remonstrated with the home umpire. The Wanderers eventually agreed to continue playing. Harry Hutchins scored and then a second Cray goal was disallowed for offside, by the home umpire!

At this point, Cray's umpire approached his counterpart to speak to him about the decision. The home man's reaction was to take off his jacket and to challenge the Wanderers official to settle the matter with their fists!! Reading between the lines of the match report, it seems there followed a mass brawl, which may well have involved many of the 80 or so spectators, most of whom had travelled from Cray. Not surprisingly, this brought an end to the football for the day!

The following week, Star's second team were due to play Cray's "B" side at the St Mary Cray Rec. Perhaps wisely, they didn't turn up ("fearing reprisals," as the paper put it) and a hastily arranged game was played against H. Hutton's XI, which the Wanderers won 4-1.

A few weeks earlier a first team game against Gravesend had been cancelled when the opposition cried off at the last minute. Many spectators were already at the Rec and made their feelings about Gravesend well known. It was this sort of uncertainty about friendly matches that led to leagues being established all over the country during the 1890s.

It was a shame that a couple of unpleasant incidents tarnished the second half of the season for it was probably Cray's best in their history to that point. Frustratingly, *The Sidcup Times* did not include reports of every game but it is clear that both the "A" and "B" teams performed well.

Amongst the “A” team’s victories were a 7-0 success against Southall Athletic and a game at Gravesend versus Hotspur F.C., which the paper said Cray won “with ease”, though the final score was 7-6! A return match with Royal Arsenal Reserves ended in a narrow 3-5 defeat.

Mainstay of the side was Harry Hutchins, who scored most of the goals. Herbert Berens, of the local gentry, turned out regularly for the Wanderers, whilst Harry Dashwood and Bob Sharp were other prominent forwards. All have an honoured place in the proud history of our club.

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