

CRAY WANDERERS IN 1913

By Jerry Dowlen, 17 March 2010

For Cray, the early weeks of 1913 were dominated by the aftermath of an extraordinary incident during the Kent League match at Chatham on Boxing Day 1912, when the Cray team walked off halfway through the second half.

The local paper unfortunately tells us very little about what happened, remarking only: "The nine Cray Wanderers players who left the field at Chatham were suspended for seven days. It will be remembered that the conditions were so bad that the Cray team, who were two short, left the field 20 minutes after the restart without, it is stated, the referee's permission."

The news came after Cray had started January with a 3-1 home win against Maidstone. Cray played in red, and there was a noteworthy incident of Reeve hitting the bar with a shot from the halfway line. Did it really happen? Who knows!

The Chatham dispute rumbled on. Today, we have to read between the lines, to try to understand what happened. How bad was the weather or the playing conditions? Although the score was 0-0, were the nine man Wands unfairly seeking an abandonment of the game and a replay on another day? Was tiredness or even over-indulgence a factor? Cray had played against Bromley the day before – Christmas Day – and had won 2-0. They had also played at home to Millwall Reserves the Saturday before, losing 2-0.

Cray managed to get one of the suspensions overturned, on the grounds that one of their players had actually obtained the referee's permission to leave the field. Otherwise, it was a much changed team that played Royal Marine Light Infantry in a Kent Amateur Cup tie, drawing 2-2 in continuous rain. The good news was: one of the new players signed, the veteran Jack Saunders on the right wing, was later to show he still had all his old ball skills and trickery, delighting the Wands crowd during the next two seasons. The bad news was: RMLI protested that 'Pedlar' Palmer, the goalkeeper hastily signed by Cray from the Orpington club, was ineligible. RMLI were awarded the tie. Either this incident, or the Chatham incident, or both, may explain why Cray did not take part in the Kent Senior Cup or the Kent Amateur Cup the following season.

Cray were to finish the 1912-13 season rock bottom of the Kent League, meaning they were relegated for the only time in the Club's history. You will not be surprised, therefore, to hear that their results during early 1913 were mostly defeats, the worst ones being 6-1 away to Crystal Palace Reserves and 8-0 in the

return encounter at Fordcroft. Some relief came from a 3-1 win at Sheppey, even with only ten men, after Willett missed the train! Also, there was a 1-0 home win against South Woolwich, in a friendly. But by the time Cray went to The Den to play Millwall Reserves in their last away fixture of the season, it was evident that the home side were going to finish as Kent League champions for the third season running.

Despite the home team losing Frost with an injury a few minutes after the start, with Quinn also departing injured after 75 minutes, Millwall beat Cray 5-0 before a crowd of 4,000. Liddell (penalty), Conn 2, Taylor and Porter scored the goals. Just before this, at Easter, Cray had lost 3-1 at Dartford in a game that had a five minute interruption for a violent storm, and then on Easter Monday the notorious Chatham game was replayed, a 1-1 draw. Cray followed these results with a 2-2 home draw against Chatham and then a 2-2 draw at Northfleet, something of a mini-revival before the crushing defeat at Millwall.

Cray fielded quite a different eleven for their midweek 3-2 win against Bromley at Fordcroft on 30 April, which brought their season to a close. The team was: Sid Reed, Smith, Sep Reeve, G. Wright, S. Bristow, F. Simnett, J. Saunders, H. Eke, J. Jameson, Banks, Hewitt.

Ian Fordyce has kindly provided the list of all Cray's 1912-13 results he has traced:

KENT LEAGUE DIVISION ONE (Season 1912-13. Final position 15th – relegated):

		Home	Away	
1st	Millwall Reserves	0 – 2	0 – 5	
2nd	Crystal Palace Reserves	0 – 8	1 – 6	
3rd	RN Depot Chatham	2 – 4	2 – 4	
4th	Northfleet United		2 – 2	
5th	Dartford	3 – 4	1 – 3	
6th	Chatham Town	2 – 2	1 – 1	Also Away 0-0 (abandoned)
7th	Metrogas	0 – 3	0 – 2	
8th	Sittingbourne	1 – 4	1 – 3	Also Away 0-2 (abandoned)
9th	Gillingham Reserves	4 – 1	0 – 0	
10th	Maidstone United	3 – 1	2 – 3	
11th	Sheppey United	0 – 1	3 – 1	
12th	Gravesend United	1 – 2	0 – 4	
13th	Bromley	3 – 2	2 – 0	
14th	Rochester	3 – 1		

WEST KENT LEAGUE PREMIER DIVISION (Not completed):

	Home	Away
Gravesend United		
Metrogas	2 – 5	
Northfleet United		

KENT SENIOR CUP:

Gravesend United	0 – 8
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KENT AMATEUR CUP:

Cray Athletic	3 – 0		
Army Ordnance Corps	3 – 2	3 – 3	
Royal Marines	2 – 2		Disqualified

FRIENDLY:

South Woolwich	1 – 0
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Another interesting incident appeared that no doubt caused shock waves to run through the corridors of the Amateur Football Association, was a cartoon printed in the press which had the caption: "Does the AFA play under Association or Rugby rules? The Casuals winning goal was well placed between the uprights by one of their forwards." The cartoon depicted a player making a rugby-lie 'try'. It seems that the referee did not notice a handling incident but, perhaps worse still, the Casuals did not confess to it. The AFA was formed in 1905 to break away and preserve the true ideals of sportsmanship in soccer. New Crusaders, based in Sidcup, were very strong members of the AFA. In 1913-14 they left, and played in the Isthmian League. They did not reappear after the war.

So, in 1913-14, Cray became demoted to the Kent League Division One Western Section. They decided also to compete again in the Southern Suburban League, which altogether gave them 38 League fixtures to fulfil that season. This was quite a stretch, bearing in mind the season didn't start until the first week of September, and was expected to finish by the end of April. Apart from Christmas and Easter, Saturdays were the only matchday available in those days. Players could not easily get time off work for midweek games, which had to be in the afternoons as no clubs had floodlights (these did not come into vogue until the 1950s).

The local press reported that Cray had lost most of their old team and had particularly raided Cray Athletic to form a new playing squad. George Harland, one of the best local players who had started his career with Cray in 1909, was with a team called Bronze Athletic. Based in the Deptford or Rotherhithe district of London, they played in the Southern Suburban League in 1912-13 and then appear to have competed in the Middlesex League the year after. They belonged to the Managnese Bronze and Brass Company, and George Harland would have been a prize capture for them, as he also played for Bromley before the war.

Noting that Kent had just won the county cricket championship for the fourth time in eight years, the 1913-14 football season got under way with the Wands losing their opening Kent League fixture 4-0 at home to Royal West Kents. Hutchins and Lionel Jordan were injured during the game. At the Manor Field in Plumstead, Cray lost their next match 2-1 to Woolwich Reserves. A new signing, Shaw from Croydon Common, could not prevent yet a third defeat by 3-2 at Snodland. A pattern had been set where the Wands' results were very disappointing in the Kent League, and it was not until the week before Christmas that the first win was gained, 2-1 at home to Woolwich Reserves.

It was a completely different story in the Southern Suburban League. Cray's first two fixtures were home and away against Bromley; won 4-2 and lost 5-1. Then came a visit to Herne Hill and a 3-1 loss to West Norwood, nicknamed 'The Bantams'. This was avenged in fine style a few weeks later at Fordcroft when Cray won the return fixture 10-2! The goalscorers were A A Prior (3), A Wiles (2), Jack Saunders (2), A Seymour, F Everist (2), and the half time score was only 2-2! Other good wins prior to the halfway stage of the season were 5-2 at home to Metrogas, 2-1 at home to Dulwich Hamlet, 2-1 away to Catford Southend (having lost at home to them by the same score) and 2-1 away to Nunhead Reserves.

At the close of the year 1913, Cray and Dulwich Hamlet were joint leaders of the Southern Suburban League, Cray having a game in hand. However, Charlton Athletic were to overtake them both and stride away with the championship. But Cray began 1914 in good heart when the following team beat Army Ordnance Corps 4-1 at Woolwich, to maintain the run of good results in the Southern Suburban League: Tommy Greenslade (captain) in goal, D. Fuller, Tommy Willett, F. Hutchins, A Seymour, F Everist, Jack Saunders, C Appleton, J W 'Johnny' Smith (noted for his 'forceful methods'), A Wiles and A Newman.