

# LOOKING BACK IN AMBER

## 1979-80 SEASON



August 1979 saw Cray embark on one of the greatest seasons in their history, and ultimately one of the most frustrating. It's hard to believe it's so long ago!

It was Cray's second year in a new spell in the Kent League, after winning the London Spartan League twice. The first season (1978-79) had been disastrous, with a poor league position and a dreadful disciplinary record, including nine players sent off.

The committee appointed a new manager, Harry Richardson, who had been running a Sunday side called Thanet FC. Harry had made two appearances for Cray some seven years earlier but his assistants were very experienced men. Wally Hill had been coach of the very successful Alma Swanley team and Johnny Stevens was a Cray favourite of the 1950s who then had a long spell with Dartford.

Cray supporters were astonished by the quality of the players that were signed on. Keeper Steve Biggs had been 'Player of the Year' at both Romford and Tonbridge in the Southern League. Alan Payne and Kevin Walsh were also highly experienced men who joined from the Angels.

For many of us, the star names were Eddie Jones and Mick Kelly from Dartford. They had both been playing in the Football League with Millwall and Charlton respectively just a few years earlier.

In addition to the top signings, Richardson & Co somewhat ruthlessly rounded up the best players from the local Kent and London Spartan League sides. They included the Erith trio of Kenny Edwards, Andy Bushell and Alan Whitehead, young defender Tony Pamphlett from Dartford Glentworth, winger Terry Elphick (Crockenhill), Don Butterfill from Alma Swanley and Steve Barry from Greenwich.

These signings gave Cray an immensely powerful squad (and probably didn't make them too popular with their local rivals!). There was a tremendous air of anticipation at the club during the pre-season as the Wands breezed through their friendly matches, winning four out of five.

The first Kent League game was a tough one, at Whitstable and, without the holidaying Biggs, Jones and Elphick, we had to be content with a 3-3 draw, coming from behind.

Three days later at home, Slade Green were swept aside 5-0, with Mick Kelly grabbing a hat-trick, sweet revenge for a 1-5 defeat at Oxford Road the

previous season. This was the first of several scores that were settled by the new-look Cray team.

And the Wands finished the month by making it five points out of six (two points for a win in those days!) with a 2-1 win over Dartford Glentworth, Steve Barry netting both.

An encouraging start to the season had created a lot of interest in Cray's new-look team and a good crowd (233) turned up for the visit of reigning Kent League champions Sheppey United.

The Islanders had lost only one game in 1978-79 and, inevitably, had done the double over the Wands. They had been weakened, though, by the loss of some of their better players to Chatham Town, of whom more (much more!) later.

In a rousing game, Cray fell behind, Alan Whitehead equalised with a stunning volley, but the points were shared when Steve Biggs saved a penalty.

Two Mick Kelly goals earned a 2-0 win at Herne Bay in the next game, which the Wands dominated from start to finish. So five league games unbeaten set up nicely for the first cup-tie, a visit to Farnborough Town in the F A Cup.

Cray and Farnborough had met before, in the first season of the London Spartan League (1975-76), six times in fact! Cray had managed two drawn League Cup ties and one drawn league game, but had played second fiddle to Farnborough who won the League and Cup double, sealing the League title with a 6-0 win over the Wands.

Since then, Farnborough had roared through the Athenian League and Isthmian Second Division. They had also reached the F A Vase semi-final and won the first leg 2-0 before heartbreakingly capitulating 0-6 to Billericay in the return. Later in the season Cray would know just how they felt!

As it happened, Farnborough had not made a good start to their first season in the Isthmian League Division One, but they were several rungs up the ladder and certainly expected to beat Cray. But the Wands brushed them aside. Steve Barry headed the only goal of the game in the second half and Steve Biggs saved another penalty. It was a fantastic result that signalled that this was a Cray side whose claims should be taken seriously.

In the long run, of course, this proved to be a minor irritation in Farnborough's relentless rise to the top. They soon reached the Conference and have played in the First Round Proper of the F A Cup. The Wands, on the other hand, managed to get to the Fourth Round Qualifying, and that was some 30 years later.

The next game was a trip to Faversham Town, Kent League champions in 1978-79 and third the following season. Second half goals from Whitehead

and Kevin Walsh enabled Cray to come from behind to move into third place in the table behind Hythe and Chatham.

The final game of September was a preliminary round F A Vase tie at home to BAC (Weybridge). The visitors were quite a tough opposition on paper having won the Home (now Combined) Counties League the previous year. They were, like Cray, unbeaten and made a bright start. But in a half hour spell either side of half-time, the Wands brushed them aside, winning 4-0 with Walsh scoring twice.

As Harry Richardson's Cray team entered the month of October, optimism at the Club was almost boundless. Unbeaten and with giant-killing in the F A Cup at Farnborough and a great start in the Vase, a sensational start had been made. Even the Reserves hadn't lost a match!

So the Wands travelled to Isthmian League Kingstonian for their F A Cup Second Qualifying Round match full of optimism. After all, the Ks were lower in the table than Farnborough. There was even talk of Cray reaching the First Round Proper for the first time ever.

This all turned out to be a little premature. Cray's first defeat of the campaign came at Richmond Road by a single goal. It was a case of 'what might have been', especially as Tony Pamphlett hit the bar with a header right at the end. Kingstonian's goal, just before half time, was a disputed one too.

First came a trip to Alma Swanley in the London Senior Cup. Alma were then still in the London Spartan League playing at St Mary's Rec. It was a return to his former club for Cray coach Wally Hill. The Wands were probably expecting an easy ride against a side they had beaten 4-1 in pre-season, and Eddie Jones gave them an early lead. But Alma weren't prepared to lie down. Their classy striker Chris Das scored twice and an upset had looked on the cards before Kevin Walsh got his own double in the closing moments.

Final score 3-2 to the Wanderers. The game marked the appearance of Cray's very own 'super-sub'. In those days there was only one substitute and Harry Richardson brought on Eddie Sencherey with ten minutes to go and the Wands were still 2-1 down. Now Eddie hardly touched the ball, but his arrival coincided with the team's great comeback, so who knows what effect he had. This was his one and only appearance for our first team.

Walsh was missing the following week, as Cray took on Crockenhill at Wested in a League match. The popular Phil Lawrence, the only player remaining from the previous season, filled in for Tony Pamphlett at centre-half but the whole side lacked fluency and Steve Barry in particular had a poor game (he was never to play for the Wands again). The Crocks took an early lead and it took two moments of magic to secure the points for the Wands. Alan Whitehead finished off a flowing move and, in the last minute, Micky Kelly chipped a brilliant winner.

Cray had 'got out of jail' in their last two games but they made no mistake when they returned to Oxford Road to meet Three Bridges in the next round of the F A Vase. New signing from Alma, Don Butterfill (whose father Les had played for the Wands), weighed in with two goals as the Sussex side were swept aside 5-1. Their manager, Harry Easton, was full of praise for Cray's performance. *'This is the sort of team I believe can go all the way to Wembley'* he said. As we shall see, he was very nearly right!

Cray entered November 1979 unbeaten in the Kent League and with two F A Vase victories under their belt. The first match of the month was a trip to the Bull Ground to play Sittingbourne. In damp conditions, the game matched the weather and the sides played out a dour goalless draw.

All the cup matches meant that the Wands had slipped down to eighth in the table, although they did have as many as **seven** games in hand on the teams above them. The situation wasn't helped by their next four matches all being cup-ties!

First came a visit to the Old Spotted Dog Ground in East London. This is the home of Clapton FC, a famous old amateur club who played in the first division of the Isthmian League (then two leagues above the Kent League). Cray had already shown in close games against Farnborough and Kingstonian from the same division that such teams held no fear for them, but Clapton clearly had no idea who the little team from Kent were.

Their supporters were amazed as Cray tore into their higher-ranked opponents in the London Senior Cup match. Don Butterfill gave the Wands an early lead and there were several other near misses. Clapton equalised against the run of play and gradually got on top, finally running out 3-1 winners. It was only Cray's second defeat.

The next two games were something of a double-header. The first rounds of the Kent Senior Trophy and the Kent League Cup took place on consecutive Saturdays and in each case the Wands had been drawn against Kent Police, at home in the Trophy and then away in the League Cup.

The result of the Kent Senior Trophy game was a 3-2 win for Cray. The Wands should have beaten bottom-of-the-table Kent Police very easily. In fact, they were behind for much of the second half before goals from Andy Bushell and Terry Elphick saved a serious embarrassment.

The boys in blue put up another fine show in the second match at their sports ground in Maidstone. There were no goals in the first half, but on returning to the dugout, Cray boss Harry Richardson told the small crowd (virtually all of them were Cray supporters) that his half time talk would be 'worth three goals'. He was nearly right, as Elphick and Mick Kelly scored to earn a 2-0 victory.

These cup victories would cause a lot of problems later in the season as the fixtures piled up. At the time it didn't seem to matter too much as there was

the next F A Vase game to look forward to. This was against Eastbourne United, then in the second division of the Isthmian League and quarter-finalists the year before. They took the lead midway through the second half, but if ever a side had character, it was this Cray team. They battled up the Oxford Road slope in front of the largest crowd of the season (259) and goals from Eddie Jones and the Kevin Walsh in the last minute sealed a dramatic victory. It was the fourth time in a few weeks that the Wands had come from behind to win in the last ten minutes.

The Wanderers were now through to the last 64 of the Vase, equalling their best performance as at that time, but they had a lot further to go!

With Tony Pamphlett happily recovered from the broken toe he sustained in the F A Cup defeat at Kingstonian, the Cray team that went into the Kent League match with unbeaten leaders Chatham Town in December 1979 was the one that remained unchanged for virtually the whole season.

It was clearly a great benefit to have such a settled and injury-free side with Steve Biggs in goal, Alan Payne and Kenny Edwards at full back and Pamphlett and Andy Bushell in central defence. Eddie Jones, Mick Kelly and Don Butterfill made a powerful and creative midfield and Terry Elphick created havoc on the wings. Up front Alan Whitehead nipped around as an ace goal poacher, whilst Kevin Walsh was a skilful centre forward, his deft touches setting him apart from more heavily-built target men.

Cray, of course, were still unbeaten in the League and so a draw at Chatham came as no surprise. Elphick scored the Wands' goal. The result left Cray ten points behind the Chats with five games in hand, but Cray's next three games were cup-ties.

The first was a League Cup match with lowly-placed Faversham Town. It was a dreary game and the Wands had to rely on a late Pamphlett header to ensure a replay. The only good thing about the result, bearing in mind the fixture pile up that was already developing, was that Faversham were one of the few Kent League teams at that time who possessed floodlights and a replay was arranged for the following midweek. On this occasion Cray had few problems and breezed into the quarter finals with goals from Jones and Whitehead, setting themselves up nicely for the third round encounter in the Vase with Isthmian League Cheshunt.

Heavy overnight rain and strong wind made conditions very difficult. In fact, these days the game would probably have been postponed and played a few days later.

That was not an option at Oxford Road (indeed, this game had to kick off at 1.45pm to make sure there was enough light left at the end). Cray were no doubt glad the game went ahead as they won 2-1. A Butterfill shot was adjudged to have crossed the line after 21 minutes and Whitehead added the second just before half time. Playing with the elements in the second half, Cheshunt managed to pull only one goal back.

Four victories, all at home, made this the Wands' best ever Vase run to date. Meanwhile, at Park View Road, there was a mighty shock as Welling United – then in the Athenian League – succumbed to an extra-time goal from Alma Swanley who had to defend frantically for almost the full two hours.

The following Saturday, Cray again had a first team match at Oxford Road, the fifth in a row. Tunbridge Wells visited for what turned out to be an entertaining 4-2 win for the Wands. When the final whistle went, a few supporters noticed that the second half had been a couple of minutes short, but we thought nothing of it as we went home to wrap up our Christmas presents.

Only later did it transpire that the referee (Mr Smith of Chatham) had abandoned the game after 88 minutes due to bad light! This must still rank as one of the silliest decisions of all time, and to make things still worse, the League management committee did not use their discretionary power to allow the result to stand, but ordered a replay. With fixture congestion becoming critical for the Wands, seven games behind Chatham, one has to wonder what lay behind this series of events.

Cray took out their frustration on Wells in the return fixture at Culverden in the last match of the 1970s. After going a goal behind, they ran out 5-1 winners and earned rave reviews in the local press.

As Cray Wanderers entered the new decade of the Eighties, things could hardly have been rosier. Going strong in three cups, and still unbeaten in the league, Harry Richardson's team threatened to sweep all before them.

The New Year started with the Wands in a rich vein of form, and the visitors to Oxford Road were Faversham Town. In December, Cray had laboured through two matches to get past Faversham in the League Cup, but this time they were swept aside. Alan Whitehead opened the scoring before two Mick Kelly penalties early in the second half settled the issue. Eddie Jones added a fourth near the end.

With the Reserves also winning 3-0 at Whitstable it was a perfect start to 1980 for the Club.

The following week, Tunbridge Wells made a quick return to Sidcup. It was now common knowledge that the League game between the two sides, played just before Christmas, would have to be replayed, as it was abandoned two minutes early. Both Tunbridge Wells, who had lodged an appeal, and the League officials were not in Cray's good books!

There was some booing as the Wells took the field, but a far more eloquent punishment was dished out over the next 90 minutes as they were swept aside 5-0. Don Butterfill put Cray ahead with a beautifully taken individual goal after seven minutes and four other players got their names on the scoresheet.

In fact, it was a strength of the Cray team that they relied on no one individual to score their goals. By mid-January they had found the net 62 times, but top scorers Whitehead and Kelly had only 11 each to their name.

The third home game in a row brought Gorleston to Oxford Road. The Norfolk side represented a real threat to the Wands' progress in the F A Vase. Like Cray, they were unbeaten in their league (Eastern Counties) and had won 7-0 in the previous round.

A crowd of over 450 (the best for over three years) were present and they witnessed a splendid cup-tie, in my view the best game of a fantastic season. Kevin Walsh's excellent early strike was soon equalised by a penalty awarded against Tony Pamphlett. In the second half the visitors took the lead. But roaring up the slope, with their fans massed on the 'mudbank' behind the goal, Cray pressed forward and two defensive mistakes brought dramatic goals for Pamphlett and Whitehead.

The Gorleston press complained about the state of the pitch. *"It boasted fewer blades of grass than there are hairs on Yul Brynner's head"*, they said. They weren't the first or the last to offer that sort of criticism, but the Wands didn't mind – they were in the last 16 of the Vase and the twin towers were beckoning.

Cray's first away match of the eighties was at Botany Road, home of reigning champions Sheppey United who, because of the Wands' fixture backlog, were actually higher placed in the League table.

The Wands rounded off a superb month with another comfortable win. Goals from Terry Elphick and Kevin Walsh put Cray well in control and a late Mick Kelly penalty made the final score 3-0. The spot kick took the former Charlton and Millwall man's tally to five out of five for the season. When a team is playing well they tend to get a lot of penalties and Cray were fortunate to have such a reliable marksman as Kelly. Despite the win, the Wands were still eighth in the table, eighteen points behind Chatham (who had just lost for the first time) with **ten** games in hand!

After an excellent start to the New Year, Cray entertained Sittingbourne for the first game of February. In a torrential rainstorm, the visitors went ahead, but a Mick Kelly penalty sealed a 3-2 victory that took the Wands, still unbeaten, up to sixth place in the table. It was the 12<sup>th</sup> time during the season that Cray had come from behind to gain a good result.

The following week saw a record gate at Oxford Road, as 856 turned up to watch the fifth round F A Vase clash with Newbury Town. In a hard-fought cup-tie, Cray took the lead through an early Kelly penalty (his third in as many games) and, though both sides had several good chances to score, that settled it.

Cray were through to the quarter-finals, the first Kent League side to reach this stage. And when the news came through that the Club had been awarded

another home tie, their seventh in succession, against Stamford, it seemed that the Wanderers' finest moment in 120 years of history was just around the corner.

Then, suddenly, it started to go wrong. On the pitch, the team seemed to suffer a reaction to the Vase excitement, and failed to score for two games. Admittedly, the League Cup quarter-final, a match at Sheppey, was a fine game and the Wands did everything but score, before losing to the only goal.

Four days later, the trip to Ramsgate was disastrous. The home side were bottom of the table, but Cray, who had been averaging four goals a game in recent matches, never looked like finding the net and had to be satisfied with just one point from a hugely disappointing goalless draw.

Any dropped points were costly, because Chatham were forging ahead in the League. Cray were 18 points behind (two for a win), still with ten games in hand. In order to catch up with some of the backlog, the Wands' committee had arranged a series of 'home' games under the lights at Erith & Belvedere. The first of these was the replayed game against Tunbridge Wells, which saw a return to form with a comfortable 3-0 victory. By the time the game was played, though, there was a bombshell.

Amazingly, the League Management Committee forced the Wands to postpone all future games at Erith. It transpired that Chatham's officials had made representations calling into question the right to play on another club's ground. Quite what could be wrong with such an eminently sensible arrangement, no one ever explained, but rather than dismiss the objection, three weeks were wasted whilst the Committee looked into it.

Later, Cray were given the go-ahead to continue, but precious weeks were wasted and the fixture backlog hardly got any better as, in the end, they were able to play only three matches under lights. What motives could the League have had in obstructing the progress of a club whose Vase exploits were bringing it a good deal of prestige?

At the time, Chatham's intervention caused quite a stir, and a lot of popular support for Cray. There was a feeling that the management of Kent Football was dominated by the so-called 'mid-Kent Giants'. Chatham, Sheppey, Faversham and Sittingbourne had between them won every title for the past ten years. Perhaps they didn't want to see unfashionable little Cray Wanderers gatecrashing their private party! Programme editors spoke up for Cray. Tunbridge Wells commented, *'This will enhance Chatham's chances but whether it will make them popular champions is another question'*. Slade Green, who the Wands visited for a Kent Senior Trophy quarter final were blunter, *'Looks like Chatham have got the wind up!'*

Cray won a poor game 1-0, with an Alan Whitehead goal.

March 1<sup>st</sup> 1980 saw the biggest game Cray Wanderers ever played in their 25 year stay at Oxford Road. Stamford FC were the visitors for the F A Vase

quarter final. The Wands were the first Kent League side ever to reach the last eight of the competition. With a home draw and a two-legged semi-final to follow, 'Wembley Fever' had Sidcup and the Crays in its grip.

The record crowd, which included five coachloads from Lincolnshire, officially numbered 1,523. Sadly, a number of gatecrashers came intent on causing aggravation, which spoiled the atmosphere and led to some ugly scenes, which required police intervention.

The game itself was a blood and thunder cup tie in which Eddie Jones unleashed a terrific shot which cannoned back off the bar but the Wands could not break down a big and effective visiting defence. In fact, Stamford conceded only two goals in ten Vase games that season and, as the afternoon wore on, they looked the likely winners. The goal came in extra time. The scorer, Broadhurst, was sent off soon after.

So, dreams of the Twin Towers of Wembley were over. This was the closest Cray had ever come to reaching a National Cup Final. Stamford cruised through the semi-final 4-0 on aggregate and beat Guisborough 2-0 at Wembley. The Wands were left with thoughts of 'what might have been'.

They also had the Kent League title in their sights and over the next few weeks started to make inroads into the ten games in hand over Chatham. A draw at Erith & Belvedere was a creditable result in a tricky fixture and this was followed by an easy 4-0 demolition of Kent Police, Alan Whitehead and Terry Elphick each scoring twice.

Meanwhile, the Kent League had reversed its decision to ban Cray from using the grounds of clubs with floodlights. This enabled Deal to make the long midweek trip to Erith for a rearranged match. In front of the smallest crowd of the season so far (102), Cray took an early lead through a Jones penalty, but lacked ideas and dropped a valuable point in a 1-1 draw with a side from the lower half of the table.

Almost forgotten was the fact that the Wands had reached the semi-final of the Kent Senior Trophy for the first time. This called for a trip to play Swanley Town, fierce rivals from our days in the Met London and Spartan Leagues. In a tight game, a first minute Jones goal gave Cray a crucial advantage, which the same player doubled just before the end. The Swanley manager was furious with rage that an offside decision wasn't given. It wasn't going to be Wembley but at least the Wands would be in one cup final!

The following week Cray took full revenge for the dropped point against Deal by thrashing the seashiders 5-0 on their own ground. Don Butterfill, with two goals, led the rout. Four days later in another floodlit game, this time at Welling, Herne Bay were brushed aside 3-0.

Unfortunately, throughout this period, Chatham were playing, and winning, almost as many games as the Wands. When bottom of the table Ramsgate

turned up at Oxford Road, Cray were still eight games and fourteen points behind the Chats.

Ramsgate had managed to hold Cray to a goalless draw at Southwood earlier in the season. The return match was just as dire and it needed a second half penalty to salvage a point – and our unbeaten League record!

Easter Saturday 1980 brought second-placed Hythe Town to Oxford Road. Cray, who had now risen to third, were hoping to put the previous week's disappointing performance against bottom club Ramsgate behind them. But, for 45 minutes, it was more of the same as the South Kent team strolled into a two goal lead. The Wands' unbeaten league record looked to be about to disappear, but they roared back in the second half. Inspired by fit-again Mick Kelly, who scored a hat-trick, Cray found the net five times kicking up the Oxford Road slope.

This tremendous display of character was followed by an Easter Monday morning win at Slade Green; Walsh and Whitehead were the scorers.

Cray's 19<sup>th</sup> and last cup-tie of the season came at the Bull Ground, Sittingbourne. Canterbury City, then a reasonable Southern League outfit, were the opponents in the final of the Kent Senior Trophy. It was the Wands' first appearance at this stage of the competition. The 600 spectators, the majority from Cray, saw an even game. Canterbury proved to be a lot better organised than most Kent League sides and, after conceding a first half goal, it took the Wands until the 73<sup>rd</sup> minute to find an equaliser from Eddie Jones. Unfortunately, Canterbury scored again shortly afterwards and another chance of silverware slipped away.

It was now very definitely a case of 'let's concentrate on the league'. With nine games to go, Cray still had high hopes of catching Chatham, but they would have to win all their seven games in hand. A tough midweek game with fourth placed Darenth Heathside gave the Wands a chance to get over their Trophy final disappointment and they scraped home thanks to a first half Alan Whitehead goal.

The following Saturday saw the top four in the League playing each other. Cray travelled to Hythe whilst Darenth entertained Chatham.

Hythe's ground, Reachfields, was in 1980 little more than an open field. Cray's own ground at Oxford Road has come in for criticism over the years but at Hythe the playing surface was absolutely dreadful. Thoroughly uneven with long grass on both flanks, it was impossible to play good football. The physically strong home side took advantage of Cray's inability to play their normal passing game and gained ample revenge for their defeat of a fortnight earlier with a 3-1 win.

This was Cray's first league defeat of the season (in their 25<sup>th</sup> game) and it seemed to have dealt an almost fatal blow to their title challenge. But then the news came through from Horton Road: Darenth 2 Chatham 0. The situation at

the top of the table was unchanged; Chatham were eleven points clear but the Wands had six games in hand.

Chatham now had to sit and wait as Cray played four more games before the showdown between the two sides. The Wands could ill afford to drop any more points but were fortunate that their next three games were against teams in the lower half of the table. And they took full advantage, scoring 15 goals.

Dartford Glentworth were the first victims. Cray scored five second half goals in a 6-0 victory. Eddie Jones didn't find the net, but the game is remembered for a rasping off-target shot which snapped Jerry Dowlen's umbrella!

Back at Oxford Road, Crockenhill were comfortably beaten 3-1. Left-back Kenny Edwards, ever-present for 48 games, scored his first goal for the Club. Four days later Kent Police, who had replaced Ramsgate at the foot of the table, were on the end of another six-goal hammering, Mick Kelly and Terry Elphick scoring two apiece.

That win reduced Chatham's lead to just five points... and the Wands still had three games in hand.

The fixture list for Cray's final assault on the Kent League title looked formidable, with four matches over a nine day period in early May. First they had to visit fourth-placed Darenth Heathside, who had beaten leaders Chatham a couple of weeks earlier. Next came the game with the Chats themselves, followed by two home matches against Erith & Belvedere and Whitstable, both in the top half of the table. In fact, Whitstable beat Chatham 4-3 in the League Cup Final on the first Saturday in May, a result that was heartily cheered at Oxford Road!

After a goalless first half, the game at Darenth sprang into life early in the second period, as Cray scored three times, through Mick Kelly (penalty), Kevin Walsh and Alan Whitehead. All three players had now reached 20 goals for the season.

And, so to Maidstone Road, Chatham. The arithmetic was quite simple. If Chatham beat Cray, the title was theirs. If it was a draw, Cray would need three points from their final two games. If Cray won they would be just one point off securing the title.

A crowd of 1, 002 turned up for the big match. This was the biggest attendance recorded since the reformation of the Kent League in 1968. It has since been exceeded.

As so often happens in these circumstances, the game itself was not a particularly memorable one. Certainly Cray had the balance of play and made the better chances, but with ten minutes left, the scoreline was still blank. This was fine as far as the Wands were concerned, but then Chatham scored from a corner. Cray made every effort to get the equaliser, and even got involved in

a mass brawl in the Chatham penalty area, but it was not to be and the Chats were crowned as Kent League champions.

The final whistle was probably the most depressing moment in all my years of following Cray Wanderers. Clearing an enormous backlog of games in hand, the Wands had come really close to achieving what most considered impossible. The Chatham manager offered the opinion that Cray's 'legs had gone' in the final minutes of the game, due to the number of matches they had played in such a short period of time. This may well have been true, but grated with Cray's supporters. After all, it was Chatham's manoeuvres that had stopped the Wands from reducing the fixture congestion earlier in the season.

Cray's final two games at Oxford Road, which could have been so vital, were a complete anti-climax. At least there was a reasonable atmosphere for the Erith game, when Tony Pamphlett salvaged a point with a late equaliser. But for the final game with Whitstable a meagre 76 people turned up in a season when the Wands' average home gate was an impressive 264. On a desperately sad evening, Cray soon fell 3-0 behind. Eddie Jones pulled one back and then Mick Kelly, who had a 100% record of nine penalty successes, missed a spot kick. The Wands went through the motions in the second half. It was only their eighth defeat in six different competitions, but they ended up with nothing to show for their efforts.

Kenny Edwards was voted Supporters' Player of the Year, but right-back Alan Payne (also ever-present) also deserved credit. Cray certainly had the best full-backs in the Kent League. Alan Whitehead was top scorer with 24 goals out of 123, whilst the defence conceded just 45 in 53 games. One other interesting statistic was that eleven players made more than 40 appearances for the Wands, and no one else reached ten.

Cray's management team of Harry Richardson, Wally Hill and John Stevens were, of course, the key to the Club's success. Together with the players, they brought the Club one of its greatest ever seasons and re-established the good name of Cray Wanderers Football Club across the county.

PETE GORINGE