

LOOKING BACK IN AMBER

1983-84



For this season's "*Looking Back in Amber*" we turn the clock back to the 1983-84 season. Cray's manager at the time was Alan Payne. A star of the Wands' Kent League title winning side of 1981, he was still playing regularly, usually in the back four. Incidentally, Cray started the season with a new Chairman, Brian Faulkner, whilst Jerry Dowlen continued as programme editor.

It was Payne's third season in charge. The previous two had seen mid-table finishes, but with a strong and experienced squad available, the feeling was that this time around, the Wands could put in a strong challenge for honours. Payne had been able to re-sign striker Kevin Walsh and midfielder Don Butterfill from the championship team. Another good signing was Peter Cappuccio from Crockenhill who made a big impact in the final pre-season game at home to Canvey Island when he scored a stunning goal in a 3-2 victory. But the greatest expectation was of striker Phil Williams.

Phil had arrived at Oxford Road at the tail-end of the previous season, having moved to the area from "up north." He had once played in the Football League for Chester and had an excellent goal-scoring record at non-league level. He scored in eight of his first nine games for Cray and was immediately placed on a contract.

So it was in confident mood that the Wands travelled to the Bull Ground, Sittingbourne, on the opening day of the season. And within six minutes, they were a goal to the good, as Walsh celebrated his return with an excellent solo goal. Sadly, some abject defending soon allowed the Bourne back into the game as Cray went 2-1 down. Terry French equalised with a superb solo goal before half-time, but Carl Laraman restored the home side's advantage with a goal that seemed well offside. Back again came Cray, Williams converting a Butterfill cross, before another defensive howler, this time by 'keeper Gary O'Neill allowed Sittingbourne to claim all three points.

A seven-goal thriller may have provided great entertainment for the neutral, but the defeat was a big disappointment for the Wands.

Four days later at Tunbridge Wells, Cray again made a good start, Williams netting after just three minutes. The Wands missed some other good chances, but were again let down by their defence, as the Wells went in 2-1 up at the interval. A battling second-half showing from Cray brought its reward when Williams made an enormous far post leap to nod home a Walsh cross, but the winner would not come.

The first home game brought the first victory of the season as Herne Bay visited Oxford Road, boasting a 100% record. Phil Williams took his tally to four with the opening goal, with Walsh and Payne adding further strikes in a comfortable 3-1 victory.

Payne drafted in Martin Taylor, reigning player of the season, to replace Cappuccio for the midweek home game with pointless Slade Green. Whatever this was meant to achieve, it failed to do, as Cray slumped to a depressing 0-1 defeat. Steve Jeacock scored an early goal for the Green and then it was a case of the Wands battering away for a goal that never came. As the evening gloom descended, the Cray faithful were feeling thoroughly depressed and frustrated.

Four points from four games represented a below par start to the season. The Wands were under-achieving and this did not augur well for the usual run of cup games in September, all of which would be away from home.

After their disappointing start to the season, Cray's supporters didn't make the short trip to East London for the preliminary round of the F.A. Cup with any great expectations. It was a return visit to the Old Spotted Dog Ground to play Clapton, newly promoted to the Isthmian League Division One. Three years earlier we had visited the same ground in the London Senior Cup, and played well, with a strong team, before losing 3-1.

This time around, the Wands acquitted themselves quite well against their higher-ranked opponents, but fell behind to two goals on the 37th and 45th minutes. That seemed to be that, as far as an F.A. Cup run was concerned. But far from throwing in the towel, Cray played with great heart in the second period and, amazingly scored three goals!

All three were rather odd. Firstly, Terry French hammered home a penalty after Phil Williams was adjudged to have been felled in the area, but it looked like a harsh decision. Then Williams sent in a fierce shot, which hit a defender and looped crazily over the 'keeper and into the net. Finally, with 8 minutes remaining, Paul Edgar waltzed into the box and shot rather weakly. Almost in slow motion, the ball crept into the net, with Williams getting a crucial touch on the way.

It was hard to know who was the more stunned – the home fans or the small band of Cray supporters! For the Wands Christmas had certainly come early, although their determination throughout the game could not be faulted.

It was back to reality seven days later with a visit to Green Court Road to take on Alma Swanley, always a hard-fought local derby. In tricky conditions, a point apiece was about right, Williams scoring for the Wands, and Dave Bourne for Alma.

To be honest, Cray's minds were on the next round of the F.A. Cup, which brought a visit to Addlestone & Weybridge Town of the Southern League. Manager Alan Payne was full of confidence, believing the home side's wide, flat pitch would suit the Wands' style better than the confines of Oxford Road. But his team had something of a re-shuffled look, with Edgar on holiday and Glen Cooper laid low with suspected meningitis.

This meant that the inexperienced Dave Murtagh had to continue to fill a central defensive slot and he and his fellow defenders were soon horribly exposed as Addlestone virtually settled the tie within ten minutes.

Addlestone's centre-forward was the experienced Steve Finnieston who had scored goals at the highest level for Chelsea, but had to retire early from the professional game through injury. He was still far too good for Cray, though, netting a fourth minute penalty, after French handled, and then he slammed home a second shortly afterwards. There was little excitement to follow, as the home side strolled to victory, well-marshalled by former Wimbledon favourite Dave Donaldson. They added a third near the end, before sub Micky Wills dribbled neatly through the box to notch a consolation for the Wands.

So another brief encounter with the F.A. Cup came to a swift end for Cray and their attentions turned to a Cup they stood more chance of winning – the Kent League Cup. The first round brought the relatively easy task of a visit to Ramsgate, who were facing another season of struggle, which was the norm for them in the early 80s.

In fact, Ramsgate were quite cheerful about having lost only 5-0 at Dulwich Hamlet in the F.A. Cup, where their goalkeeper Peter Hook was given a standing ovation at the end! He let in three more against Cray. French opened the scoring from the spot just before half-time after Kevin Walsh had been fouled. Neil Adams and a tremendous long-range effort from Walsh in the second-half completed the scoring. Cray's

defence, which included new signing Dave Quirke, who played over 200 league games for Gillingham, had a very quiet afternoon.

A run of cup-ties in September had resulted in Cray falling down the Kent League table. At the beginning of October, 20 years ago, they found themselves in the bottom four. Ramsgate were bottom, with no points from six games, so their visit to Oxford Road, seven days after Cray's 3-0 League Cup success at Southwood, seemed to offer the chance for the Wands to kick-start a rise up the table.

The Rams arrived without six regular players. Those regular players had struggled badly. Without them, the Ramsgate side that took to the field on 1st October 1983 was probably the weakest first-team ever to play at Oxford Road. And with a striker with the voracious appetite of Phil Williams bearing down on them, they were in for a torrid time!

Phil opened the scoring after 14 minutes, before Neil Adams added two, the second a spectacular volley from a corner. Then came three goals in 11 minutes from "The Goal Machine", as Williams was becoming known.

6-0 at half time became 9-0 as Williams, Adams (completing his hat-trick) and Don Butterfill found the net. Remarkably, Ramsgate then pulled one back, but Williams notched his sixth on 73 minutes to make the score 10-1. Somewhat surprisingly, there were no more goals, as some of the Cray players became rather self-indulgent in the final quarter of an hour.

The game created several records, including the biggest team and individual goalscoring at Oxford Road. In fact, it was Cray's biggest win since beating Chingford by the same score in 1958, when Ken Collishaw scored the club record – seven.

A trip to a stronger than usual Kent Police side provided a much sterner test seven days later. Cray only managed a single goal victory, but again it was Williams who stole the headlines, finishing off a four-man move just before the interval.

So three wins in a row seemed to suggest things were looking up for the Wanderers, but the second half of October saw a run of disappointing performances away from home.

The committee had decided to re-enter the London Senior Cup, after a gap of three years. With the Kent League down to a bare 16 members (Chatham had been promoted to the Southern League) the idea was that some extra fixtures and prestige would be good for the club. A first round trip to lowly Chingford looked straightforward enough, but in wild and wet conditions, the Wands were appalling.

Perhaps they didn't have the rub of the green, as a couple of the home side's goals had an element of good fortune, whilst Williams had a goal disallowed for the unusual reason of not using his name when calling for the ball. Even bearing all this in mind, though, to lose 4-1 against a team they would have expected to beat comfortably was a real shock for Cray.

They attempted to take out their frustrations against Whitstable, in a league match at The Belmont. A goal straight from a corner by Peter Cappuccio, followed by strikes from Williams and Adams put the Wands 3-up just after half-time. Then followed another collapse and the Oystermen were allowed to grab three goals of their own in a disastrous 15 minute spell.

And if that wasn't bad enough, a further set of disasters befell the Cray team at Wested in the first round of the Kent Senior Trophy. Despite having their fair share of the play, the Wands succumbed 3-0 to Crockenhill, and Williams suffered a leg injury.

So having scored 10 against Ramsgate at the beginning of the month, Cray had managed to concede 10 in three games at the end, making early exits from cup competitions in the process. Manager Alan Payne needed to put things right, quickly.

After a disappointing end to October, which saw them eliminated from two cup competitions, few Cray supporters would have predicted that November 1983 would be a highly successful month for the club.

Returning to Oxford Road for the first time in five weeks, the team could not have faced high-flying Sheppey United with a great deal of confidence. There was much concern over leading scorer Phil Williams, whose knee injury was proving troublesome and restricted him to a place on the bench.

It was a dour game of few chances – one of those games that had “goalless draw” written all over it. With 15 minutes to go, Alan Payne gambled on Williams’ fitness, throwing him on in place of Peter Cappuccio.

The gamble paid off handsomely! On 85 minutes, Williams received a pass from Kevin Walsh, burst through the otherwise impenetrable Sheppey defence and rounded the ‘keeper before slotting home. It was a classic striker’s goal and showed how valuable even a half-fit Williams was to the Wands.

Cray were back at Oxford Road the following week as Tunbridge Wells visited for a quarter-final Kent League Cup tie. Williams was now well on the road to recovery and he added two more to his tally in a commanding Wands performance. Neil Adams and Martin Taylor also made it onto the scoresheet as Cray cruised into the semi-final by a 4-0 margin.

It was a similar story seven days later as Faversham Town came to Oxford Road. Again the Cray defence kept a clean sheet, their third in a row. The solid rearguard was built around the experienced centre-backs Dave Quirke and Glen Cooper, with George Henning and Terry French performing more than capably at full-back. Behind the back four Gary O’Neill fully deserved his reputation as one of the best goalkeepers in the league. Another Williams double and a further goal from Walsh made it definitely a case of “home sweet home” for the Wands.

The final match of the month was at Beckenham. Town were in their second season in the Kent League and Cray were yet to win at Eden Park Avenue, having lost there in both the League and the Kent Senior Trophy the previous season. They put the record straight in no uncertain fashion with a stunning 6-3 win.

Beckenham’s defence had been somewhat leaky all season and it took just five minutes for Cray to take the lead, Cooper bulleting a header home from a Walsh corner. Steve Acott equalised for Beckenham on 35 minutes, but Williams restored the Wands’ advantage just before half-time as he took the ball from the halfway line before chipping exquisitely from a very narrow angle.

It transpired that Williams had pulled his hamstring in the act of scoring but he stayed on the pitch, perhaps unwisely, for the rest of the game. Indeed, after Beckenham had again equalised through Acott, Williams won a penalty. He was tripped by the Town ‘keeper and French put away the spot-kick.

Beckenham thought they had equalised again on 65 minutes, but the “goal” was disallowed for offside, and Cray then sealed the points with two quick strikes. First Don Butterfill rose unchallenged to nod home a corner and Walsh added a fifth.

Acott made it 3-5, completing his hat-trick on 88 minutes, but the hobbling Williams had the last word, latching onto a poor back pass to notch his sixth goal in three games.

So, four wins in a row for Cray brought them a hat-trick of rewards. Firstly, they moved up to second in the table behind Sittingbourne. Secondly, Payne received the manager of the month award (this was the first season of the award, I believe). And thirdly, Cray were now top scorers in the league. This put them in line for an invitation to the end of season Thorn-EMI Six-a-side competition, where the winners would receive a full floodlighting system.

Cock-a-hoop after their tremendously successful run in November, Cray went into their F.A. Vase game at Crockenhill with high hopes. The Wands were still benefiting from exemption from the early rounds of the Vase, based on their performances a few years ago.

The Crocks had the psychological advantage of their 3-0 victory in the Kent Senior Trophy five weeks earlier, and there remained a doubt over Cray's leading scorer Phil Williams. His hamstring injury picked up in the previous game ought to have meant that he had no chance of making the team, but both Cray boss Alan Payne and Williams himself were desperate that "The Goal Machine" should play.

The game brought together the free-scoring Cray attack, who were averaging three goals a game, and the mean Crockenhill defence, who had conceded only six goals all season. In the event, Cray maintained their three goals record, but sadly two of these were own goals!

After just twenty minutes, Crocks' Graham Haskins put a teasing cross into the Cray box and Glen Cooper got into a tangle, nudging the ball past Gary O'Neill. On 35 minutes, the Wands equalised. Williams, playing with his usual strength and pace despite the injury, surged to the bye-line and crossed for Neil Adams to find the net. A couple of minutes later, Williams himself hit the post with a header, a miss Cray were to rue later on.

Both sides had chances in the second-half, with O'Neill the busier 'keeper. He pulled off a string of fine saves, including twice foiling Paul Clarke when he was clean through.

The winning goal came in the second-minute of extra-time, and again it was agony for the Wands defence. Clarke crossed from the left and the ball struck Dave Quirke's outstretched boot for another tragic "o.g." Try as they might, Cray could not find a way back and their Wembley dreams were over for another year. After the game Payne expressed his disagreement with the Vase rules, feeling that there should be a replay if the scores were level after 90 minutes. He argued that playing extra-time gave the home side an unfair additional advantage.

At least the Wands bounced back well after this disappointment. They travelled to the Charles Sports Ground, never an easy place to pick up points, and defeated Deal, who were going well in the top half of the table, 3-1. Williams took his tally to 23 for the season with Peter Cappuccio, who tended to find himself on the bench, adding a third.

This win took Cray to third in the table, behind Sittingbourne and Sheppey. As these two sides were their next opponents, either side of Christmas, the strength of Cray's title challenge was about to be put to the test.

Payne had made few team changes in recent weeks, but he brought Cappuccio in from the start for the trip to Sheppey, relegating Terry Elphick to the bench. This made little difference in the first half as the Wands were completely overrun. "One way traffic" hardly does justice to the Islanders' total domination. Suffice to say, they led 3-0 at the interval, and it could have been a lot more without the heroics of Gary O'Neill.

Payne may well have inflicted the hairdryer treatment at half-time, as Cray came out a transformed team. Williams soon reduced the arrears and, after a lot of pressure, Cappuccio pulled it back to 3-2, converting a Kevin Walsh corner. Then Williams was pulled down by the home 'keeper, but the Wands' penalty claims were waved away. Soon after, Sheppey scored a fourth goal, which meant that Williams' last minute strike, from a great Walsh pass, was merely a consolation.

And Cray fell further off the championship pace when the strong Sittingbourne side took all the points from their visit to Oxford Road. Carl Laraman scored a first-half goal and the Bourne's big defenders then soaked up everything Williams and co. threw at them.

After a disappointing December, which saw them dumped out of the F.A. Vase and lose to their main league rivals, Sheppey and Sittingbourne, the Wands needed to make a good start to the New Year if they were to avoid the season petering out.

Fortunately, their first opponents were Ramsgate, still rock bottom of the league, with the memory of their ten-goal drubbing at Oxford Road still fresh in their minds. But on a very cold and blustery day at the coast, Cray were thoroughly frustrated for long periods. After 75 minutes, the game was still goalless and an embarrassing result seemed on the cards.

It was Paul Edgar who saved the Wands' blushes. He was never a regular first-teamer and on this occasion was playing at full-back in place of Alan Payne, but he popped up to break the deadlock. It was his only goal for the club. After that, the home side's determined defence disintegrated somewhat and Peter Cappuccio and Neil Adams added further goals to complete a rather flattering 3-0 scoreline.

The three goals kept Cray at the top of their qualifying group in the Thorn EMI Floodlighting Competition. All the teams in the first round of the F.A. Vase had been drawn into eight groups of 30 or so with the top scorers in each group over a set period of 12 league games qualifying for the finals in Birmingham. With three games to go, Cray needed to maintain a good goalscoring record in order to stand a chance of winning the prize of a set of floodlights.

They made a good start in the home game with Whitstable Town. The Oystermen were next-to-bottom in the table and a comfortable three points seemed assured when Cappuccio struck twice in the first-half. But in an abject second-half display, the Wands allowed the visitors back into the game. The final scoreline of 2-2 was a massive disappointment, especially as it repeated the events of the previous encounter at Whitstable when Cray had thrown away a three-goal lead.

The league title was now out of the question for Cray, although they did have the League Cup to play for, with a home semi-final against Darenth Heathside in March to look forward to.

Darenth were their next opponents and as they were in the bottom four, the Wands should have been confident of getting maximum points from their trip to Horton Road. But, Phil Williams apart, it was another disappointing performance from Cray.

Williams hadn't scored for three games, but he made up for it with a brilliant hat-trick. He was a constant threat in the air and his goals took his tally to 28, and it was still only mid-January! Sadly, Cray's defence was not in good form and a final score of 3-3 meant another two points had been thrown away.

Williams' goals did, though, keep the Wands at the top of their Thorn EMI group. Sadly though, the last game of January was a 2-0 defeat at Herne Bay and, as this was the last qualifying game, it seemed to have severely damaged the chances of playing at Birmingham. But after an agonising wait of several weeks as the other clubs across the country completed their games, the news came through that Cray had remained top and would take their place in the six-a-side finals at the Alexander Stadium.

With no chance of taking the League title and their next cup-tie (the League Cup semi-final) still several weeks away, February 1984 proved to be a very quiet month for Cray.

Indeed the home game with Tunbridge Wells on the first Saturday of the month was called off, so there was a seven day wait until third-placed Hythe Town came to Oxford Road.

Hythe were a big, physical side and they gave Phil Williams little chance to add to his 28 goals although, on one occasion, a great solo run ended with the ball being cleared off the line by a defender.

Agonisingly for the Wands, Hythe managed two further goal-line clearances to deny Peter Cappuccio and Neil Adams. Cray actually played some attractive football but it was one of those days when the ball wasn't

going to go in for them. After 63 minutes, Hythe's Hunter smashed in what proved to be the winning goal and left the Wanderers with nothing from a good, competitive game.

There was further disappointment from the visit to Faversham's Salters Lane ground. Cray again went down to the only goal, which made it five games without a win and only four points from the last eight games. The goals had dried up too, with the Wands firing blanks for three games in a row.

Another mid-table side, Deal Town were the next visitors to Oxford Road, a fixture which gave Cray the chance to seal their second league double of the season, following their 3-1 win at the Charles Sports Ground in December.

This was the game when the Wands finally overcame the frustrations of the past month. Deal were ideal opponents. Their defenders were, to be polite, "heavily-built," and attempted to play the offside trap almost up to the halfway line. This was meat and drink for Williams, who several times used his electric pace to burst past the statuesque visiting rearguard.

The first goal came in this fashion as, in the 30th minute, the "Goal Machine" latched onto an excellent Kevin Walsh lob over the Deal back-line and powered a shot which hit the back stanchion of the goal and rebounded back onto the pitch. It all happened so quickly that some supporters assumed the ball had hit the crossbar, but a goal was rightly given.

Cappuccio added the second soon after, again after a long pass. He tapped in a rebound after his first shot hit the post.

Then came a worrying incident. There was a sickening clash of heads as Terry French attempted to break up a rare Deal attack. The Cray captain lay unconscious and received a lot of treatment before being stretchered off. Fortunately, X-rays at Queen Mary's hospital revealed no fractures, but concussion and a large lump on the face were bad enough!

Just before half-time, Glen Cooper, who had almost scored an own goal earlier on, headed home a Walsh corner to make it 3-0.

In the second period, Williams and Cappuccio continued to torment Deal with their pace and control but Cray's finishing was poor and it was Deal who scored the next goal.

Williams, though, sealed the points with his second goal 20 minutes from time, having been set up by Don Butterfill. He was clean through again seven minutes later but was brought down by Deal 'keeper Farbrace, who I think was a wicket-keeper for Kent. He was denied his hat-trick as it was Adams who stepped up to slot the penalty home. Vic Medus scored a late consolation for Deal to make the final score 5-2 to Cray.

How often does it happen that clubs who have been drawn together in a cup competition find themselves playing a league match immediately before or afterwards? This seems to occur with remarkable regularity, and it was the situation Cray and Darenth Heathside found themselves in at the beginning of March, 20 years ago.

Both sides had been looking forward to their League Cup semi-final clash for some time. It was the last chance of honours for either club. But first there was a league fixture, seven days earlier, which was also to be played at Oxford Road.

If there was any psychological advantage to be gained, it was in Cray's favour as they ran out 2-0 winners. Phil Williams scored both of the goals, taking his tally for the season to 32. But, on the down side, the Wands faced potential injury problems in defence as both player-manager Alan Payne and Dave Quirke picked up knocks and Glen Cooper was suffering from 'flu. They would also be without their regular

'keeper, Gary O'Neill, who was a fervent Manchester United fan, and would be supporting the Reds in a big game. Fortunately, Kevin Nield was a more than adequate replacement.

Darenth, who had been very lack-lustre in the league game, were boosted by the return of three key players for the cup-tie and they were much the stronger side for the first 45 minutes. But they were rocked by a Cray goal just 30 seconds after the restart, Neil Adams converting a Kevin Walsh cross.

It took just seven minutes for Heathside to get back on level terms. Cray's makeshift defence failed to deal with a corner and Jobling scored with ease. Cray were back in front on 65 minutes, Peter Cappuccio scoring a fine individual goal. It seemed that the Wands were on their way to the cup-final, but there was more drama to come.

With 15 minutes remaining, Williams, who was helping out his defence, jumped for a high ball with Yandle and a penalty was awarded, apparently for illegal use of the elbow. It seemed a harsh decision and Williams felt he was simply protecting himself from his opponent's lunge, but Darenth equalised and extra-time was needed.

Ironically, it was another controversial penalty decision that settled the match in Cray's favour. Adams was adjudged to have been fouled in what looked like a 50-50 challenge in the box. Maybe there was some "evening up" by the referee. Certainly the Wands camp felt justice had been done, as Terry French tucked away the spot-kick.

Cray held on comfortably to reach their first Kent League Cup final. Indeed, Williams nearly made it 4-2 at the end, but was pulled down cynically by the last Darenth defender. Second-placed Sheppey beat league leaders Sittingbourne in the other semi-final.

Unfortunately the trip to third-placed Hythe Town did not prolong the celebrations. After just four minutes the Wands fell behind. Another Williams goal, heading in a Walsh cross, got them back on terms, but Hythe completed a league double with a second-half winner. Cray's disappointment was complete five minutes from time when strong penalty claims were rejected after Williams appeared to have been brought down by the home side's 'keeper.

Williams finished the game far from fully fit. With so many injuries to regular first-teamers, Payne was probably relieved that the Cray had no fixture on either of the next two Saturdays, although quite how the league's fixture computer came up with such a blip is another matter!

After a two week lay-off, the Wands returned to league action with a series of home games. They had now fallen back to sixth place in the league and, whilst they were keen to finish as high in the table as possible, the real incentive was for players to stake their claim for a place in the team for the Kent League Cup final and the Thorn-EMI Floodlight Competition finals in Birmingham.

Alma Swanley came to Oxford Road under the charge of caretaker-manager Bobby Sustins, a former Cray manager. His side included two other popular ex-Wands players, Dave Waight and Dermot Trainor, who had been part of championship winning sides in the 1970s. But Sustins had been frustrated in his attempt to bring in three on-loan players, by league red tape.

The Alma, who were in the bottom three, had more of the possession and Waight had an excellent game, forcing one brilliant save from Gary O'Neill, but the Wands got the goals that mattered. After 48 minutes, Neil Adams converted a Kevin Walsh cross. Eight minutes from time Walsh's delivery was again perfect, as Phil Williams headed home his free-kick.

After another blank Saturday, fourth-placed Tunbridge Wells were the visitors for a midweek match. In a lively game, Cray were 2-1 ahead entering the closing stages. Williams and Peter Cappuccio scored the goals, but the Wands had missed a penalty. They came to regret this as the Wells equalised late on with a

looping effort that seemed to have been intended as a cross. Glen Cooper had left the field with an ankle injury and Cray fans wondered if the goal would have been prevented by his commanding presence in defence.

Having blamed the league fixture secretary for a threadbare period before Easter, the Wands must have been delighted with their Easter programme – local derbies at home on both the Saturday and the Monday. The games with Beckenham and Crockenhill drew nearly 350 paying spectators in total, and Cray banked a full six points.

On a very warm day, Cray's experienced midfield, which included Alan Payne and Don Butterfill, coped far better with a bumpy pitch than Beckenham's young side. They set up goals for Terry French and substitute Mick Wills, a replacement for Williams, who had sustained yet another hamstring injury.

Two days later, Wills was on the scoresheet again as Cray finally overcame Crockenhill, also 2-0. This was a sweet result, having lost to the Crocks earlier in the season in both the F.A. Vase and the Kent Senior Trophy. The game started dramatically as former Wands reserve player Danny White was injured within the first twenty seconds. His centre-back partner, Peter Wellman, who later joined the Wands, opened the scoring with an own goal. Williams made a brief appearance as substitute, but was clearly not fit.

A third local derby in four days proved too much for Cray, as they visited Slade Green on the Wednesday night. Neil Adams scored their goal in a 3-1 defeat.

Kent Police were the visitors for the last home league game of the season. Williams was missing again and O'Neill was making another trip to watch Manchester United, but Cooper returned after injury. Cray won fairly comfortably in a dull game, their fourth 2-0 home win in April. Cappuccio got the first midway through the first-half, heading in a free-kick. And the Wands winger doubled the tally a quarter of an hour from the end, when a good run from Adams culminated in a near post cross that he shot home.

A good end of season run had secured fourth place in the Kent League for the Wands twenty years ago, but they were set for an exciting climax with two finals over the May Bank Holiday weekend.

First, though, there was the final league game on the Wednesday night at Crockenhill. Alan Payne resisted the temptation to play the reserves, but there was a definite "end of season, nothing at stake" feel to the game which, predictably, ended goalless.

Payne had stated that the Kent League Cup was his main priority and he was sweating on the fitness of 35-goal Phil Williams, who was suffering from yet another injury niggle, this time a hamstring problem. Williams himself was, as usual, desperate to play, and he took to the field at Sittingbourne's Bull Ground far from fully fit.

The final with Sheppey United was one of the most exciting games in the Wanderers' long history. Payne chose to play himself in midfield, rather than Paul Edgar, with Alan White preferred to Mick Wills on the bench.

Cray took the lead after just six minutes when Kevin Walsh's free-kick came back off the crossbar and Don Butterfill put away the rebound. Sheppey got back into the game after 19 minutes when poor defending allowed Roger Steed to play a one-two with Neville Smith and chip the ball over Gary O'Neill.

The Wands re-took the lead in the 34th minute with a strange goal. Having made a save, Sheppey 'keeper Andy Hough wanted to punt the ball from the edge of his area. In those days, the "four-step" rule meant he couldn't run forward. The common practice was to roll the ball to a defender on the edge of the area, who would then tap it back into the 'keeper's hands (there was no "back pass" rule then). Unfortunately for Hough, he and defender Tommy Armstrong hesitated as they attempted this manoeuvre and Williams nipped between them and poked the ball into the net.

It was a goal that would not happen under the current rules. It was also about the only thing Williams was able to contribute to the entire match, but it showed his value to the Wands, even on one leg!

The second-half saw winger Peter Cappuccio finding gaps in the Sheppey rearguard and on 54 minutes, he appeared to have clinched the cup for Cray. Hough completely mis-kicked Glen Cooper's long ball and Peter simply walked the ball into the net.

But Sheppey were not finished. They mounted a superb comeback. Two minutes later Smith made it 3-2 and on 63 minutes Steve Hermitage headed the equaliser. The Islanders were rampant now. O'Neill made a couple of great saves, but Cray's cause looked lost when Cooper brought down Stock - a clear penalty. Graham Mitchell struck the spot-kick firmly, but O'Neill saved brilliantly with his legs.

This seemed to spur the Wands into a last effort as, on 78 minutes, Hough again misjudged a through ball. Cappuccio, later voted man-of-the-match, beat him to it and crossed for Walsh to rifle home the winner. Cray held on to take the Kent League Cup for the first time in their history.

Two days later, Cray travelled to Birmingham for the Thorn-EMI Competition finals. The eight top scorers nationally converged on the Alexander Stadium for a six-a-side tournament, played on an almost full-size pitch. The winners would receive a set of floodlights.

Sadly, fatigue got the better of the Wands. They were well beaten by Littlehampton Town in the first group match (0-4) before making a better fist of the game with Yorkshire side Denaby United, Terry French scoring in a 2-1 defeat. The final game was against one of Williams' former clubs from Leicestershire, Shepshed Charterhouse. Cray lost that one 4-0 as well, a result that didn't look so bad when Shepshed beat Three Bridges 9-0 in the final!

Nevertheless, at least Cray ended an interesting season with some silverware. There was no surprise that the supporters voted Williams their player of the season.

PETE GORINGE