

THE VEGPARDEL MYSTERY

By Peter Goringe

In September 1943 it was reported in the *Sidcup and District Times* that 'Vegparden have changed their name to Cray Wanderers'. Despite having spent twenty-plus years researching into the history of the Club, this statement nonplussed me. Ian Fordyce supplied the information that Vegparden was the sports club of the Vegetable Parchment Mills in St Mary Cray, but what was the connection with Cray Wanderers? I have tried to piece together what the chain of events might have been during those war years.

Cray Wanderers

After 38 years playing at a ground called Fordcroft, in 1936 Cray were thrown out when the owner of the land, Mr E H Joynson, decided to sell it for building. The Tip Top Bakers factory was erected on the site soon after. Joynson was a Mill owner, whose mill provided the paper used for the first £1 notes issued by the Bank of England.

Cray obtained the use of a ground called Twysdens in Fooks Cray, roughly where the Schweppes factory later stood. It was a poor alternative to Fordcroft and the club lost a lot of support. After two disastrous years in the Kent League, the club went down to the Kent Amateur (now Kent County) League.

Things didn't improve much and in 1939 the committee made the perhaps bizarre decision to change the club's name to 'Sidcup and Footscray', in order to appeal to a wider area for support. They were due to go back into the Kent League, in Division Two, when, of course, the Second World War started. The Kent League was suspended and Sidcup and Footscray played in a local league, called the 'Sidcup War-time Football Competition', before ceasing operations in the dark days of 1940. Interestingly, after starting at Twysdens, towards the end of the 1939-40 season, Sidcup and Footscray played some of their home games at Grassmeade in St Mary Cray, which was later to become Cray Wanderers' home ground.

Vegparden

In September 1940, when the new season would have started, there was understandably very little football in the area. In fact, Lamorbey Social were about the only local team to start playing, followed in late October by Orpington FC, who included the famous former Cray Wanderers player, Harry Reeves. In the Spring of 1941, Orpington played a couple of games against a side called Vegparden. 'Vegparden Social' also had a cricket club, who were active during the summer of 1940. Named in the reports of the cricket team is one George Harland.

Harland is, I believe, the central figure in the story. 'Shaver', as he was universally known, had played for Cray Wanderers before the First World War and had served the club as trainer, committee member, groundsman and general dogsbody for years after he stopped playing. He acted as secretary for the Vegparden football team, who began playing in a more organised way in October 1941 in a competition called the Cray Football League. Included in the Vegparden team were Reg



George 'Shaver' Harland,
aged 81, in 1969

Morfill, Diggins (probably Haydn, father of Barry), Styles (probably Arthur, father of Howard), Moir, Hibbs, Tye and Dunmall, who were all Cray Wanderers players after the war. Barry Diggins and Howard Styles were members of Cray's successful sides in the mid 1960s.

By 1942-43, wartime football was getting better organised and Vegpardenel joined the South London Alliance and entered the Kent Senior and Kent Junior Cups, reaching the final of the latter. Vegpardenel generally used Grassmeade for home games. Then, at the beginning of the 1943-44 season, came the change from Vegpardenel to Cray Wanderers, the famous name of the second oldest club in the world that had not been used for four years.

What does not emerge from these bare facts is how a club called 'Sidcup and Footscray', playing in Footscray, became Cray Wanderers playing back in St Mary Cray. And what on earth was the Vegpardenel connection? My guess was that it went something like this:

The club's time at Twysdens was a very unhappy one. It may well have been that the ground was requisitioned for the war effort, as many football pitches were. This would explain why Sidcup and Footscray (the new name for Cray Wanderers) started playing at Grassmeade in 1940. When football all but stopped in mid-1940, Sidcup and Footscray FC disappeared from the scene but George Harland organised the Vegpardenel football team, and also played cricket for them. I don't know if Harland worked in the paper industry. If so, Vegpardenel would have been his works side.

The next part of the story is speculation, but I believe it may be close to the truth. George Harland was keen to re-establish Cray Wanderers, the club he loved and served for forty years, with their historic name in the historic home area. Why not use his Vegpardenel outfit as the basis for relaunching Cray Wanderers? There was, perhaps, an existing connection. Mr Joynson, the Wands' landlord at their old Fordcroft ground, had sold his business to Wiggins Teape & Co and a Belgian Company who converted his mill to produce greaseproof paper and vegetable parchment: The Vegetable Parchment Mills.

If this is right (or nearly right), we at Cray nowadays owe a great debt of gratitude to 'Shaver' Harland. The club had dispensed with the Cray Wanderers name in 1939. I very much doubt that the largely unsuccessful and unsupported Sidcup and Footscray FC would have reappeared after the war, so without Shaver's enthusiasm to revive Cray Wanderers, our famous club would probably have disappeared for ever.

Quite how a works side could become Cray Wanderers is not clear. Was it necessary to get permission to change the name and take over the league status of the paper mills side? It probably wouldn't be allowed now but then in 1943, there was a war on, after all! The name of Vegpardenel disappeared from the South London Alliance after 1943 although, as Ian Fordyce points out, another version of Vegpardenel was still playing in the 1950s.

So, it appears that 'Cray Wanderers' were re-born in 1943. Unfortunately, the story did not immediately have a happy ending. Soon after the war, the club ran into difficulties, firstly because their playing strength was not sufficiently good to achieve any success in the Kent Amateur League and secondly, because they lost the use of Grassmeade. Things got so bad in 1949 that Shaver declined to continue as secretary but, when a consortium headed by local businessman Mick Slater stepped in to rescue the club, George agreed to serve on the new committee.

Postscript: History almost repeated itself in 1973. Cray were forced to leave the well-appointed Grassmeade ground, which they had re-acquired in 1954. They again moved to Foots Cray. This time, of course, to Oxford Road. Fortunately, Mick Slater did not see fit to change the club's name!

Vegparden FC – Playing Record

The first reference I could find to Vegparden was in the Spring of 1941, when they played two friendly matches against Orpington FC, losing 4-5 to their Reserves and 0-4 to their first team. At about the same time, it was reported that Cray Wanderers' former trainer, W T (Sonny) Field, had received the George Medal for a gallant rescue when part of the Bromley Rescue Party. I imagine this refers to heroic action during enemy bombing raids.

By the Autumn of 1941, something more resembling a football season was organised and both Vegparden and Orpington Reserves played in the 'Cray Football League'. It soon became clear that Vegparden were far too strong for the opposition, as can be seen from the results I have traced. They beat Orpington Reserves (12-1), Orpington ARP (3-0), O'Sullivan's (9-1), Euston House (14-0), Morphy Richards (16-0, Styles scored seven), Eledamic (4-1), Cray Juniors (9-2), Tip Top Bakers (10-0) and Durex (yes, honestly!), 12-0 and 6-1.

With a 100% record and over 100 goals in ten games, Vegparden would presumably have won the Cray League. Curiously, though, after early January I can find no more mention of this league and Vegparden embarked on a series of friendly matches. These were mainly against forces sides and were a lot closer. Perhaps Vegparden opted out of the Cray League as their results were embarrassing the other teams.

Vegparden's energetic secretary, George 'Shaver' Harland, organised two charity matches against the Royal Artillery, which were apparently well supported. Grassmeade, later to become Cray's ground, was used. Vegparden lost the first of these matches 1-3 and drew the second 4-4. Other games against the military included the Royal Army Pay Corps (2-0), the Scots Guards (4-2) and the Royal Engineers (2-3). Vegparden also beat Erith & Belvedere Reserves 9-3 and Crystal Palace's Junior side 5-0.

At the end of the season, Harland reported a final record of P29 W23 D2 L4 F184 A 47. Leading scorers were Ingram with 35, D Payne (28) and T Payne (22). Shaver thanked all those who had helped the club and put their success down to a fine team spirit.

The following season saw Vegparden enter the South London Alliance as football became far more organised. The club finished in mid-table (see results below). In the Summer of 1943 Vegparden's name was changed to Cray Wanderers.

Vegparden reached the Kent Junior Cup final in 1943, as did the new Cray Wanderers in 1944. This almost exactly matched what happened in 1918-19, when Cray reappeared after the First World War, as 'Cray Old Boys'. Then they reached the Kent Junior Cup final, losing to Bexleyheath Labour after a replay. So Cray have appeared in the KJC final under three different names! We also played in the 1892 Kent Junior Cup final, losing to the Highland Light Infantry. Incidentally, Bexleyheath Labour were the forerunners of Bexleyheath & Welling (later Bexley United) who played at Park View Road, now the home of both Welling United and Erith & Belvedere.

Vegpardel FC – Results 1942-43

Date	Opponents	Comp	F - A	Scorers
12/9/42	H V C D	SLA	2 – 0	Morfill, Ingram
19/9/42	A Erith & B Res	SLA	7 – 1	Morfill (4), Ingram, Coleman, T. Payne
26/9/42	H A A Battery (1)	Fr	6 – 0	D. Payne (4, 1pen), Tye, Coleman
3/10/42	A Stones Athletic	SLA	1 – 9	
10/10/42	H Siemens Sports	SLA	2 – 1	T. Payne, Ingram
17/10/42	A UGB (Charlton)	SLA	14 – 1	Ingram (4), Coleman (3), Reeves (3), Payne, Tye +2 (N/K)
24/10/42	H Manor Corinthians	SLA	4 – 3	Reeves, Walker, Lee, Coleman
31/10/42	A R O F S A	SLA	2 – 5	D. Payne, Ingram
7/11/42	H R A P C	SLA	6 – 2	D. Payne (2), Smith, Reeves (2), T. Payne
14/11/42	H R A S C	Fr	5 – 1	Hibbs (pen), Brown, Reeves, D. Payne, Ingram
21/11/42	A V C D	SLA	8 – 1	D. Payne (30, Hibbs, Smith +3 (N/K)
28/11/42	H Woolwich Poly	SLA	0 – 4	
5/12/42	A R A S C	Fr	4 – 1	
12/12/42	A R A P C	SLA	0 – 2	(2)
25/12/42	H Eledamic	Fr	6 – 1	Manning (2), D. Payne, Reeves, Ingram, Coleman
2/1/43	A Catford Wanderers	SLA	2 – 3	D. Payne (2)
9/1/43	H Orpington	KSC	1 – 3	D. Payne (pen) (3)
16/1/43	H R O F S A	SLA	2 – 2	Walker, Lee
30/1/43	A Woolwich Poly	SLA	1 – 7	
6/2/43	H Metrogas	SLA	2 – 7	Ingram, Hibbs
20/2/43	A Eledamic	KJC	5 – 1	Coleman, Brown (2), Ingram (2)
27/2/43	A Orpington	Fr	3 – 2	
6/3/43	H Erith & B Res	SLA	3 – 0	
13/3/43	A Siemens Sports	SLA	3 – 3	Morfill, Griffiths +1 (N/K)
20/3/43	H Bromley National OB	KJC	2 – 1	Griffiths, T. Payne (4)
27/3/43	A Metrogas	SLA	0 – 8	
3/4/43	A Lamorbey Social (5)	KJC	4 – 4	Coleman, Allchorne (3, 1pen)
17/4/43	H Manor Corinthians	KJC	2 – 0	Morfill, Smith
17/4/43	A Manor Corinthians	SLA	1 – 2	Morfill (pen)
24/4/43	H G E C	KJC	4 – 1	Ennis, Cousins (3)
30/4/43	H J & E Halls (6)	KJCsf	5 – 4	Appleby, Halton, Cousins (2), Coleman
1/5/43	H Catford Wanderers	SLA	1 – 6	
8/5/43	N T T W S M E	KJCf	4 – 5	Lees(2), Coleman, Tye (7)

(1) Harry Reeves, the old Cray Wanderers player, played for Vegpardel and 'was a source of inspiration to the younger players'.

(2) Vegpardel had only ten men and then Hibbs was injured.

(3) Reeves was unavailable for this match due to work commitments. In the next round, Orpington lost 0-9 at Bromley, for whom Reeves scored four!

(4) Vegpardel won this cup-tie with only nine men.

(5) Lamorbey forfeited the replay after their secretary only received the letter confirming the fixture on the evening of the day it should have been played.

(6) Vegpardel's winner was disputed. Referee said Halls' 'keeper dropped Coleman's shot over the line.

(7) Final was played at Shorts Sports Ground, Rochester.