

Club History

A Brief History of Swanage Football Club...

By Mark Chadderton

THE MODERN GAME of football in England had its origins in the mass, local rivalries of 'mob matches'. These traditional contests saw any means employed (i.e. fair or foul!) by the two opposing sides to attain the much sought after victory. With the goals often miles apart, fair play and foul play were permitted in what proved to be hugely popular events. In Dorset, The Purbeck Marblers would congregate at nearby Corfe Castle on Shrove Tuesday to participate in the ceremony of 'kicking the ball'.

With the popularity of the game ever-increasing and sets of rules put in place, various Dorset football teams were in existence by the mid 1870's. However, association football in Swanage has so far only been traced back to 1898 when Swanage Albion Football Club came into existence. They played their home games on the ground that is now Swanage Middle School. As you enter Swanage you pass the school on the left.

And what a successful start for Swanage football! Swanage Albion won the Dorset Junior Cup in their first season, after beating Lyme in a replay.

With Dorset County football originally being divided into senior, junior and minor leagues, Swanage entered the junior competitions for the south and east and at various times won all possible titles.

Building on this momentum, the club subsequently gained senior status and went from strength to strength, an example of this being in 1930 when Swanage won the Dorset Divisions, a total of four cups.

It was around 1925 that the club re-located to its present home at Day's Park, by this time the club were now called Swanage Town. Day's Park is named after James Day, the mayor of that time. He actually left the ground to the town of Swanage for the sole use as a football club.

There used to be a slope, which ran down to the north end of the ground, but this was eventually removed in 1951 when the pitch was levelled.

The banks, which still surround the pitch, will give you an idea of just how much work was involved.

In 1957 the Dorset Premier Football League was formed, this was initially called the Dorset Football Combination League. The formation of this new league came about because a number of senior clubs within the County had become disillusioned at being dictated to by junior and minor clubs.

It was long serving club member Stan Fordham who became the club's first chairman and in that inaugural season, with twelve clubs in membership of the newly formed league, it was Swanage Town who won the Championship. Runners-up were the 15th Training Battalion R.A.S.C. However, the following season the top two places were reversed as Swanage finished in second place.

This proved to be the start of a golden era for the club because in those first five seasons, Swanage Town won the Championship four times with that second season runners-up spot being the only 'blip' to the clubs' dominance. To date, Swanage are the leagues most successful club having lifted the league title on an impressive twelve occasions. As well as all those league titles the club has also finished in second place nine times.

It was for the 1966/67 season that Swanage Town FC merged with Herston Rovers FC, taking its present day name of Swanage Town & Herston Football Club.

Herston Rovers had actually joined the Dorset Combination League for the 1961/62 season, competing for five seasons alongside Swanage Town up to 1965/66.

In 1976 the Swans joined the Western League (Division 1) and in 1986/87 the club gained promotion to the Western League Premier League as Division 1 champions. At this higher-level Swanage made steady progress finishing 11th, 10th and 9th in 1989/90.

The following season saw the club join the Wessex League, which had been founded in 1986. That first season (1990/91) in the Wessex saw the Runners-up spot gained, with the Swans also lifting the Dorset Senior Cup with a 1-0 victory over Weymouth.

Despite this notable success, the club's fortunes were to take a downturn, as the club finished the following seasons in

5th, 14th, 20th, 19th and finally bottom in 1995/96, conceding 138 goals and losing 30 out of the 40 league games: relegation back to the Dorset Combination resulted.

Back in the Dorset Combination, 1996/97 proved equally hard going as the club continued to struggle and finished fifth from bottom. Two more seasons of mediocrity ensued before they won promotion back to the Wessex League in 1999/2000, finishing third winning 23 games out of 36.

There followed two unhappy seasons back in the Wessex League. 2000/01 saw 123 goals conceded in 44 games, but with 11 wins the Swans finished fourth from bottom. This however only proved to be a stay of execution as the following season Swanage could only manage 3 wins, 6 draws and a mammoth 35 defeats out of 44. A painful 174 league goals hit the back of the Swanage net that season and bottom place ensured relegation to the old Dorset Combination, which had just been newly named the Dorset Premier League.

The clubs illustrious history in the Dorset Premier League (DPL) counted for nothing the following season as once again Swanage finished rock bottom 2002/03. 27 defeats from a league programme of 34 matches, and another 110 goals conceded meant that Swanage were once again relegated and they started the 2003/04 season competing in the Dorset Senior League.

This proved a blessing in disguise as the club could now re-group and with a league programme of only 26 matches, Swanage won 16 of these, finished third and gained promotion back to the DPL.

Two steady seasons then followed with creditable positions of 10th and 14th being attained. 2006/07 saw the club looking to improve on the previous two seasons back in the DPL, but once again they finished 10th. This was mainly due to many injuries throughout the season as well as a heavy fixture schedule in the final month where 10 league games in 32 days took its toll.

Expectations had been for a top five finish, and despite the dip in form in those final 10 games, Swans can point to the 2006/07 season as being a success due to the team producing two excellent runs to the semi-final stage, in both the DPL Cup and the Dorset Senior Cup.

Sources so far consulted:

- Dorset Premier League Website
- Poole Borough Matchday Programme
- Swanage Town & Herston Matchday Programmes
- Wikipedia