

The summer of 1913 saw the birth of what is now Tiverton Town Football Club from the ashes of the recently demised rugby club. Honorary Secretary Sid Skinner proposed the change of code and the newly formed Tiverton Athletic played host to Exeter City at the Athletic Ground at the start of September for the inaugural match. City won 7-0 but the first Tiverton President Mr. Ford was already prepared to make the bold claim that the new team could become champions of the county. Those days were many years off, and the first season had barely been completed when war broke out and Tiverton Athletic were forced to adjourn their journey.

Play resumed following the Great War and after the 1921-22 season it was decided that a merger between Athletic and Uffculme St. Peters would take place, having been rejected the previous year. The newly formed club, known as Tiverton AFC, moved from the Tiverton & District League to the East Devon League and finally grabbed their first piece of major silverware by pipping Exminster to the league title. It was a championship they would retain for the following three years and the foundations of a successful local football team were well and truly in place.

A string of championships and near misses followed as the club moved into the Exeter & District League before war once again stopped the majority of competitive sport. By this time there were already a number of names that would go down in Tiverton folklore, not least Frank Butler, a prolific striker who would hold the all-time goalscoring record until almost the turn of the century.

When action got underway again in 1946 the club, now with the familiar Tiverton Town moniker, relocated from a war battered Elms Ground to their current home at Ladysmead, although they used a pub ten minutes walk from the ground for changing purposes. The early post-war years didn't give rise to the success of the 1920s and 1930s and by the turn of the decade they were fighting off relegation with some particularly poor seasons; only the ridiculously poor St. Marks and Okehampton finishing below Town in the table in the 1949-50 season.

It took in excess of ten years to regain some form, with much of the fifties spent languishing in mid-table but by the time Alf Ramsay was preparing for world domination the likes of Alec Collard and Terry Lee were firing Tiverton back to the top, the club winning consecutive league championships in 1965 and 1966, and the trophy cabinet was filled out with a host of local knock-out victories. But the high road was a short one and it was only a matter of a few years before Tiverton was back in the pack and struggling both on and off the pitch.

In the early 1970s the brave decision to join the Western League was taken, and while the induction was tough the club were able to hang on through the bleak winters. The 1980-81 season was the bleakest of them all with a paltry 23 goals being scored in the league, and relegation to the Western League First Division confirmed a little more than half way through the season.

Having hit the lowest point possible by finishing bottom of the table in 1984 the only way was up and slowly the fortunes changed, thanks in no small part to the newly appointed John Owen, brought to Tiverton as a coach, but soon to take over the reins as manager. Mark Seatherton and Clive Jones provided the goals as the climb began, and the addition to the squad of Peter Rogers and Hedley Steele culminated in Town clinching promotion back to the Western League Premier Division at the end of the 1988-89 season.

Tiverton were to embark on an unprecedented twenty years of success and never found themselves outside of the top four in the Western League following promotion. Kevin Smith arrived at Ladysmead and started scoring for fun, ably assisted by John Durham and later Phil Everett, and Tivvy finally made Mr. Ford's prediction of 78 years earlier a reality by winning the Devon Cup on penalties against cross-town rivals Elmore. Martyn Rogers took over from John Owen in mid-1992 and that season the club were runners-up to an invincible Clevedon Town and reached the FA Vase final at Wembley on the back of some staggering results against higher opposition. Forest Green Rovers were hit for six while Barton Rovers and Buckingham Town both went for four in what was by far Tivvy's best season to date. The day out at Wembley lost a little of its silver lining as Town were defeated 1-0 by Bridlington, but by now everything was in place and the remarkable rise of a club that was in danger of extinction ten years prior was about to be completed.

The Western League championship finally arrived at Ladysmead in 1994 and stayed in Tiverton the following year. By this time Tivvy had made three appearances in the first round proper of the FA Cup, playing host to Leyton Orient and having the cheek to take an early lead on the most recent occasion. But it was the FA Vase that was most coveted, and having carefully assembled a squad with the belief and talent, the dream was finally realised when Tow Law Town were defeated by a single Peter Varley goal at Wembley Stadium in May 1998. Not satisfied with just one trip up the 39 steps to lift the cup Tiverton went and did it again the following year, this time getting the better of a very highly fancied Bedlington Terriers side thanks to Scott Rogers late, late strike.

The only thing left was to take on the challenge of the Southern League, and after an impressive first season Tiverton won promotion to the Premier Division at only the second attempt. In keeping with an unwritten Tivvy tradition the promotion came after finishing as runners-up but little did that matter on a warm and sunny day at Blakenall. The step up in class did little to temper the Yellow's appetite for success and the next two seasons saw them finish respectably in sixth and then fourth, only being denied a shot at the Conference after failing to win any of the last five games of the 2002-03 campaign.

It is fair to say that the club has since struggled to maintain the air of invincibility that carried them to such great success, and the latter half of the following season saw Tiverton slump from second to fifteenth and miss out on a place in the newly structured regional sections of the Conference. The last five years has seen Tivvy back in mid-table, and a particularly frustrating 2006-07 had them fighting at the wrong end of the table for much of the season, often hampered by postponed games, injuries and suspensions. The only high point was winning Southern League Cup with a fine 3-2 aggregate victory over Hemel Hempstead Town, but even that failed to disguise the fact that there needs to be a period of rebuilding if Tiverton are to take the next step up the ladder.

The culmination of half a decade of struggle came last season when the club finished in the relegation zone. Tivvy were lucky to escape the drop due to off-field matters concerning other clubs across the non-league system, and in May 2010 Martyn Rogers stepped down as manager, bringing to an end a 19-season tenure. Former England Under-21 captain Chris Vinnicombe was appointed in his stead but results were poor and he left the club after just four months at the helm, replaced by former Plymouth Argyle and Gillingham midfielder Mark Saunders.

Tiverton Town Football Club has a history of which to be proud, and particularly in recent times some players that have graced the Ladysmead turf have been etched into Tivvy legend. Kevin Smith broke Frank Butler's goalscoring record and went on to net 303 goals for the club, and Phil Everett eclipsed this total, eventually finishing his Tivvy career with 376 strikes. Smith and Neil Saunders captained the club to victories beneath Wembley's twin towers, while Steve Daly, Kevin Nancekivell and Jason Smith are amongst the best players ever to appear in Tiverton colours. But without their forefathers none of the success of the past twenty years would be possible, and Tivvy are proud to remember all those involved with the club over the last 96 years.

Alan Reidy

28th December 2010

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Club Honours

FA Vase

1998, 1999

Southern League Cup

2007

Southern League

Challenge Cup

2007

Western League

1994, 1995, 1997, 1998

Western League Cup

1993, 1994, 1996, 1997, 1998

Devon St. Luke's Bowl

1991, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995,

1997, 2000, 2003, 2006

Exeter & District League

1934, 1965, 1966

North Devon League

1932

East Devon League

1925, 1926, 1927, 1928

Devon Senior Cup

1956, 1966

East Devon Senior Cup

1929, 1936, 1938, 1953,

1961, 1963, 1967

North Devon Charity Cup

1973

Sellick Memorial Cup

1966

Coronation Cup

1953

Hunt Cup

1959

Geary Cup

1938, 1958

Mills Hospital Cup

1935, 1939, 1947, 1950, 1952,

1963, 1979, 1982, 2007, 2008

Tiverton Charity Cup

1923

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