

PROGRESS OF THE PAST

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An interesting article which was written with benefit of information available at the time and probably with some reliance on memory. Fortunately, in the modern-day there is more detailed information readily available and various notes have been added to provide more detail or provide accurate information.

It is 35 years since football began in Macclesfield, and those of the old brigade of the local sportsmen who can throw back the screen of memory to 1875 **[Note 1]** will remember that the game had its birth in Macclesfield as an offshoot from the Volunteers. Captain, now Colonel, J. W. H. Thorp was the first president of the club.

The team used to play on the Old Drill Field in Victoria-road, where the Asylum now stands, and among the club's earliest and most enthusiastic members were Messrs. Robert Comberbach, John Dunkerley, and J. Bates, the last of the trio being a notable cricketer who made big scores for Stockport.

That was the beginning of a sport which was destined to pass through various vicissitudes, but happily it never really died out. The game continued to be played, but any reliable records are scarce until the year 1886 comes along **[Note 2]**.

By then the sport had gained the support of other men of status and influence. Captain Thorp was the president, the vice-presidents being Mr. W. Bromley-Davenport, then member of Parliament for East Cheshire (Macclesfield) Division, Mr. Wm. Coare-Brocklehurst, Sir W. C. Close-Brooks, M.P., Lieutenant-Colonel Stancliffe; Messrs. S. Adshead, J. Kershaw, R. S. Comberbach, Wm. Mair, J. G. Cotterill, and Captain Birchenough. The members of the committee were: Messrs. J. Hall, Stephen A. Pearson, F. Millet, A. Bancroft, R. Ward, Peter Wright, J. Hindley, R. C. Mellor, J. Bradburn, and the treasurer was Mr. T. W. Sheldon and the secretary Mr. A. R. Sadler. The captain was Mr. W. Goodfellow, and the vice-captain Mr. J. Haworth. The matches were still played on the Old Drill Field, and consisted of such fixtures as Chester College, Blackburn Olympic, Birmingham Excelsior, Northwich Victoria, Stoke Swifts, Sheffield Park Grange, and Buxton, just to mention a few. That season was a very successful one - that is of course when one remembers what was then considered good, but in measuring success then and now it is advisable to admit there are degrees of comparison.

Mr. W. Greaves, the late manager of Lower Hayes Cotton Mill, became president of the club in 1888-1889, and this was another successful season. On November 3rd of that year Macclesfield played Northwich Victoria and beat them by three goals to one, and on November 21st, in a contest for the Cheshire Senior Cup, Northwich beat Macclesfield by four goals to nothing,

With the advent of the season 1889-1890, Mr. W. Bromley-Davenport, M.P., again became president, and the sporting event of the season was the meeting with Nantwich, at Northwich, for the Cheshire Senior Cup, the silk lads winning by four goals to one. To add to their laurels they played Chester, at Macclesfield, on the following Saturday, and also defeated them.

The season 1890-1891 marked the opening of an interesting epoch in the history of Macclesfield football; the club joined The Combination. It will be remembered that Everton were the prime movers in getting The Combination together. **[Note 3]** This season was the last at Victoria-road. The club was being very poorly supported, and Mr. Schofield, then the landlord of the Moss Rose, being a genuine lover of football, subscribed liberally to bring the club to its present arena. But not only did he pay out in hard cash; he also had the ground fenced around and a level surface created in the place of hillocks. The rent of the ground was then £1 per season, and the committee were paid back £1 1s. in a subscription from the landlord. The present rent of the ground is £20 per season.

The first match on Moss Rose was played in 1891, on September 19th and Macclesfield beat Hyde by five goals to one. **[Note 4]**

The late Mr. James Kershaw was President of the club in the season 1892-93, and the fixtures consisted of matches with Chester, Wrexham, Stockport County, Leek – in the days when they were really something to be reckoned with – and also Everton Reserve. Mr. George Hall became assistant secretary. Mr. Peter Wright was financial secretary, and Mr. F. Lees was the secretary. Mr. Stephen Pearson was the treasurer, and the committee was composed of seven instead of 14, as at present constituted.

The following year, 1893-94, Mr. George Hall, the present treasurer, became secretary, and it was a strange and disagreeable fact Macclesfield did not win a match until October 24th. **[Note 5]** Yet, on the whole, the season turned out to be one of the best that had been known in the history of the club up to then, and there is no doubt the turning point in the fortunes of the club came with the defeat of Wrexham **[Note 6]** by five to one on October 21st. In those days the committee were fond of putting into practice the idea of trying new men, and the love of fresh men prevails to-day, just as strongly as it did in those far-distant ones. Among the notable fixtures of that season were encounters with Stockport County, Buxton, Chester, Wrexham, Leek, Bury, and Middlesbrough and, last but probably greatest, was Macclesfield's defeat of Blackburn Rovers by two goals to one, on April 21st. **[Note 7]** That season a strong set of rules were drawn up and adopted, and although they have been altered to meet present-day requirements the gist of them with the same principles are yet in force.

The season 1894-1895 saw the late Mr. Kershaw again in office as president; Mr. Jack Smith becoming secretary. But Mr. Smith resigned at the end of November, and Mr. George Hall was re-elected, and he finished the season out.

At the end of this season, the club was formed into a company, and with the beginning of the season 1896-1897 the team was controlled by "The Macclesfield Football and Athletic Company, Limited." The directors were Messrs. Peter Wright (chairman), J. Brown, P. D. Bratby, D. R. Bloor, Frank Kershaw, F. Lees, George Hall, William Heath, W. Greaves, Harry James, P. Crowder, and H. Walthall. The secretary was Mr. J. E. Smith, and the registered office was 19, King Edward-street. Mr. William Bolton was captain of the team. The season opened on September 5th with a home encounter, Everton **[Reserves]** being the visitors. That season the team met Crewe, Wrexham, Northwich, and Chester in the Combination. The company had, however, a comparatively short reign, for at the end of two years it was no more. The admission money was raised from 3d. to 4d., and, for reasons which are contentious and varied, the support dwindled and the local sport suffered badly.

In fact, it threatened to die out. Then the old Hallefield Club occupied the ground for about three seasons. **[Note 8]**

In 1901 Mr. Walter Addy, whose name will be associated with local football as long as the game lasts, came on the scene and, through his instrumentality, the club was admitted to the Manchester League under the name of Macclesfield. That season **[1900-01]** Macclesfield finished in the ninth position, and football would have gone out only for Mr. Walter Addy. The club was hard up; it was, literally, on its beam ends. Mr. Addy, however, called together old officials, and, after a lot of meetings, the following gentlemen formed themselves into a committee, under the new regime: -- Messrs. Tom Sheldon, Peter Wright, A. Sadler, S. Binks, Dick Ray, Wm. H. Bolton, J. Smith, and H. Walthall, Geo. Hall (secretary), J. McVicker (assistant secretary), and Walter Addy (treasurer). J. Fitchett, the present trainer of the Macclesfield first team, was, it is interesting to note, the trainer of the old Hallefield team.

The first match **[of 1901-02]** was with Northwich, on September 7th and the gate receipts were £11 13s. 2d., which was a veritable godsend. That season, however, was one of many financial troubles, but, thanks to the realisable value of a diamond ring of one of the officials, football was kept on its feet, and a small - very small - balance was shown at the end of the season. On Wakes Monday of that year, thanks to the energies of the old player, Dick Ray, the full back, [of] Macclesfield, Manchester City, and Port Vale, a fixture was arranged with Manchester City at Moss Rose, and Macclesfield were beaten - although no one seems inclined to remember the score. There is no doubt they were beaten. But the "gate" was a grand success. It brought in £11. At the end of the season, the club finished thirteenth on the Manchester League table, and had to apply for readmission. When the difficulties were explained to the Manchester League officials, the Macclesfield Committee were praised for their sportsmanlike struggle, and unanimously re-elected.

The worst was over. In the following season Mr. G. H. Heath became president and Mr. George Millward became secretary. The club finished eleventh on the league table, and since then the doings of Macclesfield are so fresh as to be hardly worth recalling. Mr. George Hall, who has been connected with Macclesfield football for the last 22 years, was elected treasurer in 1905-6 the same season as Mr. Ben Hurst became assistant secretary.

Glancing back over this little sketch, the names of old players flash across the memory, and among these immediately within recall are:- Dick Ward, Dick Mellor, Bute Hall, Billy Bolton, Joe Heapy, Joe Birchenall, Jack Kent, Tommy Potter, Billy Heath, Tommy Bullock, Albert Burton, Bob Moss, Billy Oldham, Dicky Rogers, Joe Rogers (Grimsby, Newcastle, Southampton, and Preston), Tom Lunt, Joe Murray, Dick Ray, and Wheeldon.

Note 1 – In Macclesfield the first ever football match was played by the 8th Cheshire Rifle Volunteers in 1873. By October 1874 a number of teams had been formed in Macclesfield to enable football to be played on a regular basis with the 8th Cheshire Rifle Volunteers the major team. In October 1976 Macclesfield FC were officially formed (see timeline in another article).

Note 2 – In more modern times research of newspapers published in the 1870s and early 1880's have provided a wealth of information but these are now readily available at libraries and on line.

Note 3 – It is an interesting statement that Everton were the prime movers in getting the Combination together. They may well have been the prime movers in keeping the league together after issues arose, eg non-fulfilment of fixtures but they did not join the Combination until the second season 1891-92 and then it was their reserve team.

Note 4 – This match was played on 12 September 1891 and the score was 6-1 to Macclesfield.

Note 5 – The first win came in what was only the fourth match of the season and was played on 21 October.

Note 6 – This was the match referred to in Note 4 but the opponents were Newtown and not Wrexham.

Note 7 – Modern-day research indicates that Macclesfield were victorious in the final of the Cheshire Senior Cup on that day.

Note 8 – Macclesfield FC did 'die out' when the first ever Limited company was wound up (see another article) and they ceased to function as Macclesfield FC for three seasons. Hallefield was a local amateur team who moved their fixtures to the Moss Rose.