

The History of Wanborough Junior Football Club by Jon Raymond

Incredible though it might seem, Wanborough Junior Football Club has now been going for more than 15 years. It therefore feels like a good time to revisit the club's formation and initial years, before memories fade, so that the next generation of players and parents is aware of how different things were at the start of the new millennium.

Back in 2003, the village had two thriving adult teams: Wanborough United FC, who played on Saturdays, and Wanborough FC, who played on Sundays. Although there had been a number of very good young footballers in the village over the years, they had always had to go outside of the village in order to play junior football; to clubs such as Old Town, Highworth and Stratton Juniors. Towards the end of 2003, both Andy Bryant and Jon Raymond had started to hold some informal kick-about sessions for their sons and friends at the Lower Rec. By January 2004 it was clear that there were enough children wanting to play football regularly that the possibility of playing some friendly matches was mentioned. Jon therefore arranged a meeting, hosted by Roy Sansum at The Black Horse, to propose the formation of a new junior football club in the village.

The meeting was well-attended and the initial structure was put in place for the first committee meeting to be held in March 2004, with a view to having at least three teams competing in the recently-formed North Wilts & District League for the 2004/05 season. Ray Pethick stepped forward as the first Chairman, a position which he held for the next eight years. Under Ray's chairmanship, the club grew during his tenure to become one of the largest within the league, a position maintained subsequently by Adrian Hannay and then Gary Sumner from 2014. Lee Herring generously volunteered to become the first Secretary, which was an onerous role, requiring the drafting of a constitution for the new club, as well as the other administrative tasks involved in getting the new teams entered into the league in time. Julian Maull took on the position of Treasurer, a role that he probably didn't imagine he would continue in until 2014!

The first committee meeting was where the nickname of "The Wasps" was coined, reflecting the chosen colours of yellow and black shirts, with the iconic logo being designed shortly afterwards by Greg Rendall's art students.

The first-ever friendly match was an under-8 game away to Cricklade on 14 March 2004, involving Bradley Mitchell, Gareth Hook, Ben Peapell, John Reeves, Harry Cheesley, Edward Lever, Avinesh John, Tom Pethick, Liam Hobbs and Cameron Gill. This was followed by an under-9 game away to Marlborough Town on 27 March 2004 (the first win!), involving Dan Thomas, Bradley Mitchell, Matt Raymond, Harry Webb, Jack Pethick, Ben Peapell, Gareth Hook, Oli Herring and Luke Witts. The players had no matching shirts and had to wear bibs, until a successful application was made to The Football Foundation for a new kit.



Come September 2004 everyone was very proud to have four teams competing in the North Wilts & District League, with the managers having undertaken their FA Level 1 training over the summer: Andy Bryant's under-7s, Shaun Hobbs' under-8s, Rob Reeves' under-9s and Jon Raymond's under-10s.



The club was helped to get established by support from Wanborough Parish Council, particularly the late Bill Suter, and Chris Davis, the headteacher at Wanborough Primary School at the time. Pitches were initially used at the School and the Lower Rec, but in subsequent seasons Liddington Parish Council allowed the use of their playing field and Hooper's Field was hired for 11-a-side matches. Annual donations were provided to the School, together with Liddington PCC and Parish Council for the use of their facilities.

An early decision was made that the policy of the club would be fully inclusive, to encourage as many children as possible from the villages in the Benefice to play football. Fair play was also important, which has been well-evidenced over the years: The under-7s were invited to The County Ground at the end of their first season to celebrate their fair-play success and Rob Reeves' teams repeatedly won the league's sportsmanship trophies, often with record point scores voted by the opposing sides. One of Rob's players who might not have had the chance to play at another club was Ollie Hooton, who sadly died from cancer in 2014, and had an annual trophy named in his honour.



Back in the early '00s the internet was not as pervasive as now and e-mail was only verging on being the preferred medium of communication. The club produced regular newsletters to keep players and parents in touch and to update them with news of the teams' performances. A handbook of fixtures was also produced at the start of the first season.

Thanks to the efforts of the committee and all the other volunteers (managers, coaches, supporters and sponsors), alas too numerous to mention individually, the club grew rapidly with a new team being added almost every year. Until recently, there was little opportunity for mixed teams continuing after primary school age and the club therefore also introduced a girls' team in 2010. This was run by Lorna Goodwin until 2014 and gave the opportunity for many girls to play socially and develop their skills in a fun environment.

Part of the club's development was the attainment of Charter Standard status in 2009. This involved a massive effort from Phil Lester, the Secretary, at that time. Charter Standard Development Club status was achieved in 2012, through the efforts of Phil's successor, Jon Raymond, and Chris Chilcott. This required the club to have ten teams and sufficient qualified coaches (including at least one Level 2 coach, Chris) and managers. At this time there were 15 FA qualified coaches and a further ten individuals who were CRB-checked. By the 2012/13 season there were league teams from under-7 to under-18 for the first time, as well as under-6 and girls' training teams.

The growth of the club meant that the school hall was rapidly outgrown as a venue for getting everyone together at the season-ending AGM. The Zurich training centre then became the AGM venue, before the facility was taken over by PGL and some great days were spent on the newly-installed equipment. Eventually the AGMs returned to the Village Hall and the Lower Rec under the guidance of Gary Cannon in 2014. The AGMs also included the end-of-season presentations and a Roll of Honour was maintained listing all the players who won awards, a great historical record of their achievements.



In 2016, the original under-7 team became the first to go all the way through to the under-18 age group, including a number of players who took part in every season. As the children got older, the club also gave them the opportunity to give something back. Some of them trained to be referees and officiated the younger age groups, whilst others took their own coaching qualifications (often as part of the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme) and helped train other teams.

Whilst not every team has achieved success on the playing field, it is hoped that the opportunities that have been given to all the players to mix with their friends, play sport competitively and learn other life skills is just as valuable. That was certainly the main objective when the club was set up 15 years ago and makes all that hard work worthwhile.