



GRAY HOOPER HOLT LLP

MID SUSSEX FOOTBALL LEAGUE

(affiliated to the S.C.F.A.Ltd. Formed 1900)

Mid Sussex Football League

A Short History of the Gray Hooper Holt Mid Sussex Football League 1900 – 2019

The Mid Sussex Football League was formed in the railway town of Haywards Heath in Sussex in 1900 and the League is proud that the seven founding clubs – Crawley, Burgess Hill, Haywards Heath, Three Bridges, Ardingly, Cuckfield and, Hurstpierpoint – still exist today by way of Crawley Town in EFL Division 2; Burgess Hill Town, Haywards Heath Town and Three Bridges competing in Step 4 BetVictor Isthmian League South East Division and Ardingly, Cuckfield Town and Hurstpierpoint still in the Mid Sussex League. Handwritten details of the inaugural meeting were discovered a few years ago, when the League's first Minutes Book came to light, along with every Minute Book thereafter until electronic minutes replaced them, and this resulted in a complete record of the League's first 100 years being deposited in East Sussex County Council's archives. The Mid Sussex Football League was formed when most market towns in Sussex had a local league and it is understood that for this reason the League initially only accept teams within a radius of 12 miles of Haywards Heath. However, the restriction did not last for long as by 1903, when a Division 2 was introduced, clubs from towns in the neighbouring South Coast - including Newhaven, Brighton, Hove and Portslade – were granted entry and performed with distinction. A Division 3 was formed in 1921 but by the mid-1930s the South Coast clubs had moved away but the League maintained its number up to and beyond World War II with new teams in the main from the Mid Sussex area filling vacancies.

In the late 1940s there was a massive surge in teams playing in the League as a result of the completion of a new town at Crawley when a large number of newly set up clubs, including some organised by the factories that had recently moved to the town, were looking for competitive football. Eventually a new Crawley & District League, that had up to five divisions at its height, was formed and quite naturally those teams left the League to play more locally but the thread was not entirely severed because clubs from the two leagues continued to meet each other in the Mid Sussex FA Senior and Junior Charity Cups even after 2002 when the Mid Sussex & District FA on disbanding asked the Mid Sussex Football League to organise the running of their competitions for posterity. As a result of these trophies a considerable sum has been donated to charities over the years, principally to the Sussex County FA Benevolent Fund. There is a twist, however, in the membership of clubs in the Crawley area as mentioned later.

An influx of teams in the mid-1950s to reach a total strength of around 60 teams resulted in Divisions 4 and 5 being introduced but the divisions were not increased further, apart from a Premier Division installed in 1974 to replace Division 1 from that date, for almost 30 years when in the space of a few years in the late 1980s and early 1990s no fewer than four more divisions were added to provide football for approximately 100 teams every Saturday. This total was built from mainly local teams although the League had no laid down boundaries until they were included in the first FA Standard Code of Rules of 2002.

The first twenty years of the new millennium has seen the Mid Sussex Football League continuing to go from strength to strength. Initially when a few strong clubs from neighbouring like leagues were accepted into membership and they together with some home grown emerging teams enhanced a well-established Premier Division, which due to no fault of the League had lost its Step 7 status at that time but was grateful to see it restored at the start of the 2017 – 2018 season. Another factor was the winding up of the Crawley and District League in 2010 when 19 teams from that league moved over to the Mid Sussex League. Today, the League's member clubs appreciate the good housekeeping and governance of the League through a Management Committee and the League Officers, all of which offers and encourages them to engage in a two-way dialogue. The Management Committee has a willingness to innovate and in recent seasons has provided its member clubs with designated footballs, assistant referee flags and league branded bibs for the substitutes in every fixture as well as providing free training for club assistant referees in its Premier and Championship divisions and first aiders throughout all divisions. Some 15 years ago the League even went to the expense of training 50 new referees, a number of whom are still officiating in the League today, when there was a severe shortage of qualified officials locally. Last, but by no means least, a lot of credit goes to Gray Hooper Holt LLP, our sponsors for the past 22 years, which the League believes may be one of or the longest consecutive sponsorships in English football and this generosity allows the League to continue to present teams with merit awards that recognise their playing records, team administration and, as a negative, team misconduct. Numerically, at this moment of time, the League has 127 open age over 16 teams playing in 11 divisions and runs 13 challenge cup competitions, including two for its three veterans' divisions, currently comprising 26 teams that in the early stages play fixtures on a round robin basis before the more successful teams progress to contest one or other of the two trophies to be won at the competition's conclusion.