Sittingbourne FC - History

The forerunners of Sittingbourne Football club commenced playing on the newly-opened Recreation Ground in 1881, being known as Sittingbourne United.In what must have been one of the first local derbies in the early days of the game, United met Faversham in 1885, winning 3-1. The two clubs met again in 1886, with United again victorious, this time by 3-2. The first match with Sheppey Rovers took place on a field near the Halfway, with United coming out on top 1-0. In 1886 it was decided to lapse the old united and form a new team- Sittingbourne Football Club. Another local club calling themselves "Nil Desperandums" had been formed, and during the following season, (1887/88),the "N.D" were growing in enough strength for many of their players to regularly turn out for the town team; and so an 1888 meeting of local footballers decided that the Sittingbourne and Nil Desperandums clubs should merge as one. By 1890 many junior clubs were springing up in the area and, with the "Rec" becoming crowded each Saturday, Sittingbourne migrated to the Gore Court Cricket Ground which at that time was just behind where Sainsbury's is now in the town. It is not the current Gore Court in London Road. By 1892 the club was experiencing some bother with Mr. Jessup of nearby Trotts Hall Farm, to the extent that a new home for the club had to be found. A field at the rear of the Bull Hotel, Vallences Meadow, could be obtained on good terms if taken on a five year lease. Consequently, the club secured the field, fenced it and made a charge of 3 old pence (1 old penny for children), for admission. That "meadow" was to become the club's ground until 1989! On October 8th, 1990, both teams turned out in Black & red and these have remained the official club colours. The 1893/94 season saw the club gain senior status, entering the English Cup for the first time, while being invited to compete in the Chatham Charity Cup. The Kent League was formed in 1894/95, and the club had a team in each of the two divisions although the first team also played a large number of games against opponents outside of the League, including Arsenal, Millwall and the Orient. Professionalism was adopted during the 1898/99 season. The Kent league was won in season 1902-03. See Kent League tables from 1894-95 season.....CLICK HERE

Sittingbourne won the Kent Senior Cup in 1902, while a year later they were once again Kent League champions. The club left the Kent League in 1905/06 to enter the South Eastern League Division One, but by 1909/10 they had returned to familiar territory. The First World War brought a temporary closure but the club was reformed for the start of the 1919/20 season. The Kent League was restarted on 5th June, 1919 and the Thames and Medway Combination League on August 16th that year, Sittingbourne joining both. Success came in the late twenties when they won the Kent Senior Shield in 1927 and 1928, the Kent League Cup in 1928 and the Kent Senior Cup in 1929 and 1930. They competed in the Southern league (Eastern Section) from 1927/28 to 1929/30 with final league positions of 8th, 17th, and 15th respectively. Their second spell in the Southern League spanned the 1959/60 to 1966/67 season finishing 6th, 5th, 7th, 19th and 24th. There was a financial crisis in 1932/33 and the club went into liquidation. The Supporters Club took over, however, and Sittingbourne survived to the second world war when hostilities once more brought about their enforced closure. In 1946 the club was reformed but three years later it was again in financial difficulties. The hat was passed round at the AGM and this enabled Sittingbourne to start the new season. In January 1954 the Bull ground was purchased with the help of a £3,000 loan from the FA and help from the supporters association. The "Brickies" or the "Bourne" as they are known, won the Kent Senior Shield that year beating Canterbury City 4-2 in the final. They ended the days of the old Kent League as the strongest team, winning the championship by seven points in 1957/58 and by nine points the following season. They won the Kent Senior Cup in 1958, beating Ramsgate

1-0 in the final at Gillingham in front of a crowd of 10,066. In 1959 they won the Kent League Cup and finished Runners Up in the Kent Senior Shield. In 1959, Sittingbourne joined the Southern League along with a number of other Kent clubs. Having missed promotion to the Premier division on goal average in their first two seasons, they might have been excused in thinking that it would never come, however hard they tried. Subsequently, their results deteriorated and after finishing 7th in 1961/62 they ended in the bottom half dozen each season before resigning from the Southern League in 1967. They had won the Kent Senior Shield in 1960 winning 1-0 away to Tonbridge in the final and runners up in the Kent Senior Cup final the following year. Sittingbourne returned to the reformed Kent League in 1967 winning the title in their first season. They repeated this feat in 1975/76 and were runners up in 1972/73, 1973/4 and 1976/77. They won the Kent League Cup in 1974 beating Chatham 2-1 in the final at Sheppeys ground and were beaten finalist in 1973, 1975 and 1976. Since 1977/78 when they finished 13th, they always finished in the top six. They came 6th, 5th and 5th again before finishing runners up to Erith and Belvedere in 1981/82. Fourth in 1983, they won the title by eleven points from Sheppey United in 1984. Thereafter they finished 3rd, 2nd (to Alma Swanley), 6th, 4th and 5th before finishing Runners up to Greenwich Borough in 1987. In 1989/90 they beat Whitstable Town 2-0 at Gravesend to win the Kent Senior Trophy. In February 1990, Sittingbourne made what was probably the most important decision in their history when they opted to sell the Bull ground for development. This venture enabled the Club to move to a 23-acre site quite near to the town centre. A 2000 seater stand complete with executive boxes, executive lounge, boardroom, restaurants, bars and sports hall have been constructed, while greyhound racing was introduced in 1994. In the season 1990/91, the Club's first at Central Park, Sittingbourne became the Winstonlead Kent League Champions, remaining unbeaten throughout their entire League campaign. A fact recorded in the EUROPEAN newspaper as not only a record first for the Kent League, but also a record for the 1990/91 season as the only senior football club in Europe to remain unbeaten within their own respective league. Promotion to the Beazer Homes (Southern) league followed in 1991/92, with the pinnacle of achievement finally being realised in 1992/93, when Sittingbourne won the Beazer Homes League Southern Division championship to gain promotion to the Beazer Homes League Premier Division for the first in the Club's long history. An incredible 1992/93 season, during which Bourne lost only four League games, saw the Central Park ground attendance record broken no less than FIVE times, with 5,951 spectators turning up to watch the friendly with Tottenham Hotspur on Tuesday January 26th 1993- an all-time ground record. A crowd of 3,074 watched the local derby with Gravesend and Northfleet to set a new Beazer Homes League Southern Division attendance record, while BBC television described Sittingbourne as "the Manchester United of Non-league football"during a full-length feature on the Club in their Newsroom South East programme, broadcast to millions in the Home Countries and Northern Ireland. All this seemed to bode well for the future but little did the fans know about the financial problems that were just around the corner. It seems that Sittingbourne not only spent the 4.5 million pounds that they received for the Bull ground but a further one million pounds plus as well! With little money to spare to spend on the team, results suffered and they were relegated back to the Southern Division. Swale Council seemed to be the saviour by spending £750,000 to purchase the ground and leasing it back to the club. Under Steve Lovells management, Sittingbourne bounced back by winning the Southern Division championship again. The next season saw yet another crushing blow, because of a worsening financial situation, (not surprising when it is rumoured that the electricity bill at Central Park was £1000 per week!) Swale Council locked the club out for non payment of rent. Greyhound racing was stopped and all the restaurant and main bar facilities were closed. This was followed by the liquidators pulling the plug. It looked

odds on that Sittingbourne would be no more, however an agreement with the council and the liquidators as well as financial support from the supporters club allowed the club carry on. The situation was obviously extremely serious with them surviving on a match to match basis. Popular manager Steve Lovell resigned in September because of the uncertain future of the club and joined Gravesend and Northfleet. Ironically, after Alan Walker took over, results improved and Sittingbourne were climbing the table.

Sittingbourne fans were not happy with the way that Swale Council had handled the matter, particularly when at that time, Woking Council were sponsoring their local club to the tune of £30,000. What is ironic about this is that Sittingbourne were locked out of Central Park for owing £35,000! Before Caerns took over, the Council had spent over £135,000 of tax payers money on security to keep the football club out of certain areas. All this time, the Stadium was getting into disrepair and Sittingbourne FC appeared to be no nearer getting the 7 year lease they required to secure their future in the Dr Martens League. At the beginning of March, 1997 Chairman Barry Bright (now number 2 at the FA), announced that the football club could no longer promise to pay the players. Most players, however, showed great loyalty. The main loss for Sittingbourne came when Barnet moved in the summer for Stevie Searle and didn't have to pay Sittingbourne a penny for him as all contracts had defaulted because of the non payment issue. The club were finally saved from extinction when Roger Cearns signed a lease with Swale Council to run Greyhound Racing at Central Park and he, in turn, allowed Sittingbourne to sign a seven year lease for the use of the facilities that satisfied the Dr Marten League. Although the immediate future was now secured, with little money coming in and the crowds having dwindled to the 400 to 500 level (750 being a break even figure), Sittingbourne were always going to struggle in season 1997 - 1998 in the Premier Division. It came as little surprise, therefore, that they finished third from bottom of the league and were relegated to the Southern Division. This could have been thought of as being a blessing in disguise as the money savings on shorter journeys could be substantial and should help the "Bourne" inch closer to financial stability. Midway through the 1998/99 season Barry Bright felt that he had taken the club as far as he could and handed over the Chairmanship to Andy Spice. Andy and the new committee took a long hard look at the finances and made a few drastic decisions in the best interests of the club. Out went the full-time secretary, closely followed by the Assistant Manager Paul Haylock, and the Manager Alan Walker. Hughie Stinson took over as (unpaid) Manager and the only paid employees of the club were two players on contracts. Sittingbourne finished this season in 13th position in the Dr Marten Southern League Southern Division. So the new millennium saw Sittingbourne in a healthier financial position than they had been for some time and with a Chairman and committee pledged to making them a successful club with a sound financial footing.

With the playing budget pruned the next two seasons were difficult for the club. 1999/2000 saw them finish just above the relegation positions. Season 2000/2001 was even worse, they finished second from bottom and looked like heading back to the Kent League. With just a few months to go, Hughie Stinson resigned and Reserve team manager John Roles took over. Although results improved for a time, the damage had already been done (one period saw eighteen games pass without a win) . At the eleventh hour they were reprieved because of the sad demise of Baldock Town. Ironically the last team Sittingbourne had played that season.

Season 2002/2003 saw the management committee make the decision to move out of the main Central Park stadium:- Televised greyhound racing made it impossible to guarantee that the club could continue to use the stadium on a Saturday afternoon.

The club signed a 10 year lease with Caernsport for the use of the training pitches and feverish activity during the summer of 2002 by an army of volunteers led to a new ground being developed for the new season. The ground was given the name "Bourne Park" and a temporary stand shipped in from Mount Ephraim Gardens which was used throughout that season. The original stand that stood at the Bull Ground and for a while at Central Park was then refurbished, partly paid for by a football foundation grant, and erected at the new ground in January 2003. Two additional floodlight towers have been installed and a new clubhouse built.

Ex Leeds, Brighton and Maidstone Utd goalkeeper Mark Beeney assisted by Steve Nolan took over in October 2001. Steve Nolan had a brief spell in charge on his own in early March 2005 when Mark could no longer continue owing to full time commitments at Chelsea as a goalkeeper coach. The reins then passed once again to Steve Lovell who had returned for his third spell at the club in April 2005.

The 2005 -2006 season was destined to be the last one Sittingbourne played in the Southern League because of the FA reorganising the leagues on a more geographical basis so the club said goodbye to many old friends and faced a brand new challenge playing a number of "unknown" teams in the Ryman's Isthmian league for season 2006 - 2007. That last Southern league season saw Sittingbourne finish a poor 18th out of 22 clubs however in their first season in the Isthmian league they finished in 10th place in the table despite a terrible run of 15 matches without a win.

In November 2007, Sittingbourne appointed a new manager in non league goal scoring legend Gary Abbott. Steve Lovell had left to join Ashford Town *Kent) who had had a substantial cash injection from investors, Steve took many of Sittingbourne's key players with him. Despite this Gary managed to guide the team to a very respectable 9th position by the end of the 2007 -2008 season.

Gary Abbott was successful in guiding the team to a Kent Senior Cup victory over Folkestone Invicta at the end of season 2009-10. The team struggled somewhat after the playing budget was slashed midway through the 2010-11 season and Gary was replaced by his assistant Richard Brady in 2011-12, Richard was joined by ex Brickie Jamie Coyle as his assistant. Season 2011-12 also witnessed the birth of the Sittingbourne FC football academy, a joint venture with the Sittingbourne Community College. Richard Brady and Jamie Coyle opted to join Leatherhead as Manager and Assistant in October 2011 and ex Brickie Joe Dowley, assisted by players Bryan Glover and Bradley Spice took over the reins till the end of the season. Unfortunately the trio couldn't turn round the clubs fortunes and Sittingbourne finished 19th in the table, just two points off the bottom. Jim and Danny Ward, well known in Kentish footballing circles, joined as joint managers at the beginning of season 2012-13 and immediately the fortunes of the club improved and they finished a very respectable 9th in the league having been candidates for a play off place for much of the season. Jim and Danny Ward departed from the club during September 2013 by mutual consent and coach Matt Wyatt and captain Nick Davis took over as joint managers.

The season (2012-13) marked a new milestone in the clubs history with the club gaining a new chairman in Maurice Dunk and also moving home to Woodstock Park, South of the town, as Bourne Park was proving prohibitively expensive and outdated. The outgoing chairman, Andy Spice, is staying on as Vice chairman. The club and supporters owe Andy and Tania an enormous thank you

for keeping Sittingbourne FC afloat after the disastrous mismanagement of the previous regime that led to the club on the brink of extinction in the early 1990's. Andy and his wife Tania's contribution has been immeasurable not only in the way of finance but also in general management and in building the infrastructure.

Season 2014-15 finished with Sittingbourne exactly half way in the table, finishing 12th out of 24 clubs.

Nick Davis was given his first managerial role and for the next few seasons the Brickies started off well but fell away from mid-season to 18th in 15/16, 15th in 16/17 and 14th in 17/18. Davis left in January 18 citing that he couldn't work within the budget set! Aslan Odev was appointed as the replacement and the team's results picked up, but despite another excellent start to the season the teams results again fell away dramatically from October 2018, and Aslan was replaced in January 2019 by Dover Academy head Chris Lynch. Chris had steadied the ship when relegation looked a real threat and the team was saved from relegation.

After a disappointing end to the now expunged 2019-20 season Chris Lynch resigned to be replaced by his Assistant Darren Blackburn.

After a promising start unfortunately results fell away and Nick Davis came back to the Brickies for his second period as Manage. Nick resigned at the end of 2022 after a winless run of 12 games and Ryan Maxwell took over. Almost immediately the results improved and Sittingbourne finished clear of the relegation places.

The 2023-2024 season, under Maxwell, was a great improvement with The Brickies finishing in third place. However promotion was not to be as Three Bridges defeated them at Woodstock Park in the semi finals of the play offs.

The 2024-25 season was our most successful in recent years. Reaching the Quarter Finals of the ISUZU FA trophy was the highlight. We lost to Aldershot Town who went on to win the Trophy. We beat seven clubs from higher divisions in the two major cup competitions. The highlight was the FA Trophy tie at National League side, Southend United where the Brickies scored a last minute winner.

In the league a second place finish, that saw a points total of 101 and 117 goals scored, was not enough for promotion as Burgess Hill Town defeated the Brickies on penalties in the Play off final.

The 2025-2026 season saw Sittingbourne lose a number of players who had done so well the season before. – all had gone to higher league sides. Ryan Maxwell, though, boosted his existing squad with a number of high quality signings.

Ryan Maxwell accepted an invitation to become manager of Isthmian Premier Division side, Welling United and Reece Prestedge, Maxwell's assistant, took over as manager.
Reece appointed Joe Anderson as his assistant and the two of them continued the great work Ryan started. They finished in the last play off place but went out in the semi final stage when losing 2-0 at AFC Croydon Athletic.

The club became a limited company by guarantee in May 2018 and now has 6 Directors.

Honours and league placings

1894-95 Founder member of Kent League

1900-01 Kent League runner-up

1901-02 Kent League runner-up (lost title after play-off (Cray Wanderers 1 Sittingbourne 0)

1901-02 Kent Senior Cup winners

1902-03 Kent League Champions

1903-04 Missed runner-up spot on goal average

1905 Left Kent League

1927-28 Joined Southern League Eastern Section

1928-29 Kent Senior Cup winners

1929-30 Kent Senior Cup winners

1930 Left Southern League

1957-58 Kent League Champions

1957-58 Kent Senior Cup winners

1958-59 Kent League Champions

1959-60 Re-joined Southern League, in Division One

1960-61 Missed promotion place by goal average

1967-68 Joined Kent Premier League
Kent Premier League runner-up (missed title on goal average)

1968-69 Kent Premier League renamed Kent League

1972-73 Kent League runner-up

1973-74 Kent League runner-up

1975-76 Kent League Champions

1981-82 Kent League runner-up

1983-84 Kent League Champions (2nd time)

1985-86 Kent League runner-up

1989-90 Kent League runner-up

1990-91 Kent League Champions (3rd time)

1991-92 Re-joined Southern League, in Southern Division

Six points deducted for fielding ineligible players

1992-93 Southern League Southern Division Champions

Promoted to Premier Division

1995 Relegated to Southern Division

1995-96 Southern League Southern Division Champions

Promoted to Premier Division

1998 Relegated to Southern Division

1999-00 Southern Division renamed Eastern Division

2006-07 Joined Isthmian League Division One South

2009-10 Kent Senior Cup winners

2018-19 Placed in Division One South East on league re-organisation

2023-24 Losing play off semi-finalists (finished 3rd in League)

2024-25 Losing play off Finalists (2nd in the League)

2025 -26 Losing play off semi-finalists (5th in the League)