

## **Gone and forgotten – the next in the series of clubs who came, saw and did very little – this week Burton Wanderers FC by Stuart Fuller**

As this programme goes to press, Burton Albion are sitting pretty near the top of the fourth tier of English football. The club, who play at the modern Pirelli Stadium can claim a number of honours, including once holding Manchester United to a score-draw in the FA Cup third round under the management of Nigel Clough. Whilst they represent the honour of a town, perhaps better known as the home of Bass Beer and Marmite, the club has a complicated background.

Let me take you back to the 1894-95 season, when Burton Wanderers were elected into the Football League Second Division, after winning the Midlands League title. They weren't however, to be the first team from the Derbyshire town to play in the Football League. Two years previously, Burton Swifts had been part of the Football Alliance Division that had merged with the Football League to form a two-tier structure.

Swifts had finished in sixth place in their first two seasons, but it was Wanderers who seemed to impress the most, recording a 9-0 victory against Newcastle United and a 8-0 win against Manchester United on their way to a fourth place finish in 1896. They missed out on promotion due to goal average, but it seemed that they would push again the following season.

It was not to be. That following season they finished second to bottom in the league and could count themselves very unlucky to be voted out of the Football League at the expense of Luton Town. Rivals Burton Swifts finished one place higher and lived to fight another day.

Three seasons later, after the Swifts finished bottom of the league, they did a deal with the Football League to stop themselves being relegated, merging with rivals Burton Wanderers to form Burton United, and thus becoming the third Burton incarnation to play in the Football League. However, once again their tenure provided short-lived and at the end of the 1906/07 season, after never finishing higher than tenth in the Football League Second Division, they were demoted and soon disappeared off the footballing map.

It wasn't until 1950 that football returned to the town with the formation of Burton Albion. Their promotion to the Football League in the last decade meant that Burton now has the honour of supporting more League clubs than any town in England.

The Peel Croft ground used by the first three Burton teams is still in existence today, and is home to Burton RFC. Back in the day, the ground had a capacity of 58,000, with the record attendance alleged to be over 56,000 – quite some feat for a team at that level.

Whilst Wanderers, Swifts and United's time in the Football League was brief, it did show that provincial towns could support the game at the top level, albeit for only a few seasons.