

The Bull that turned by Stuart Fuller

When Hereford United were relegated from the Football League back in 2012, confidence was high that they would make a swift return. Whilst the Conference Premier was littered with the husks of former Football League clubs, the Bulls had been here and done it before. A swift return was the number one objective.

Two years later in June 2014 the club were expelled from the Conference League due to financial irregularities with debts of over £1m. They fell two divisions, being accepted into the Southern League Premier Division for the start of the 2014/15 season. However, financial worries continued, including a winding-up petitions started by former manager Martin Foyle and HMRC. Creditors rejected a proposed Creditors Voluntary Agreement (CVA) from the board, and fans boycotted home games in protest at the mismanagement of the club. Whereas the club had been attracting a few thousand fans just two years previously, hosting the likes of Plymouth Argyle and Shrewsbury Town, they were now welcoming the likes of Burnham (where their attack was spearheaded by none other than Leroy Griffiths) and Biggleswade Town, plus local derbies against Cinderford Town and Mangotsfield Town. Despite crowds starting around the 600 mark they soon fell to no more than a few hundred.

On the 29th November they club lost at home to Sutton United in the FA Trophy at Edgar Street in what was to be the last home game the club ever played. Two weeks later a 1-1 draw away at Dunstable Town was the last time anyone pulled on the famous white shirt, with Danny Sullivan scoring the last ever competitive goal for the club.

On the 10th December the Football Association suspended Hereford United from all forms of footballing activity, although this only lasted 24 hours. However, it was the outstanding debt of the club that finally spelt the end as a Winding-Up order was granted in the High Court a few days later. Hereford United were no more.

The Hereford United Supporters Trust (HUST) picked up the embers still alight in the financial fire and vowed to reform the club as Hereford FC. In February the Trust agreed a lease with the council who owned Edgar Street although significant work was required to bring it back up to a standard to host football once more. Four locals stumped up the £200,000 to get the work done and HUST have now contributed over £25,000 on their own and are hoping to raise a total of £200,000 to become 50% fan owned although it may be some time before they reach this milestone. In May it was confirmed that the club will play in the Midland Football League Premier Division from this season.

That in itself will cause a number of headaches. Clubs such as Dunkirk where the capacity of the Ron Steel Sport Park is 1,500 or Walsall Wood with its ancient main stand dating back to the 1930's will certainly need to plan carefully for the visit of Hereford and the anticipated hundreds of fans – a similar story to what happened with AFC Wimbledon, Darlington and FC United of Manchester when they began their rise up the lower leagues.

In fact it was at Edgar Street this weekend that Hereford FC started their long climb back up the leagues when FC United were the visitors. Over 4,000 saw the game, including over 1,000 new season ticket holders. The future is certainly bright once again for the club after the dark days of last season.