



# Hoddesdon Town Football Club



## THE HISTORY 1879 - 2010

HODDESDON TOWN F.C., founded on 14<sup>th</sup> April 1879, is the third oldest Club in Hertfordshire, beaten in age only by Bishop's Stortford F.C., founded in 1874, and Royston Town F.C. in 1875. Along with Bishop's Stortford F.C., St. Alban's F.C. (not the City Club) and Watford Rovers F.C., Hoddesdon were co-founders of the Herts. F.A. in 1885, a feat recognised by the County F.A. in their Centenary Year. Under their first captain, George Webster, the Club actually started life as Hoddesdon F.C., on a pitch on Mansers Field, and then in 1899 moved to the present ground at Lowfield. It is reported that Hoddesdon FC purchased goal nets and used them for the first time at Mansers Field on 17<sup>th</sup> December 1892. In 1951/52 the Club shared games between Lowfield and the Essex Road Arena and for the following two seasons played solely at the Arena, before moving back to Lowfield exclusively in 1954. In its early years the Club played only friendly and County Cup matches, with the exception of 1884/85 when Hoddesdon entered the FA Cup and were beaten 8-0 by Foresters. In 1896 Hoddesdon helped to form the East Herts. League, but for reasons unknown, none of the teams playing in Division One of the EHL in 1899/00 played in the competition for the following two seasons, and the competition only ran one Division during that period. In 1908/09 Hoddesdon joined the Herts. County League and played in both competitions until 1921/22.

At a meeting of those interested in local football, held on Saturday evening, 17<sup>th</sup> December 1892 at the Salisbury Arms Hotel on Hoddesdon High Street, an amalgamation was agreed upon of what was left of the old Hoddesdon Club, the Hoddesdon Wanderers and the Broxbourne Club, so that a strong and representative club was formed for the future. It was resolved the name of the club be the Hoddesdon Football Club and that the colours be chocolate & light blue. It was reported in the Mercury of 4<sup>th</sup> October 1890 that "several of the Hoddesdon players appeared with their new colours, chocolate with blue sleeves, which is not much improvement on the old colours but, the appearance might be improved by having blue colours to the shirts". It is not known what colours the 'new' strip replaced. The Club had use of Lowfield from 1<sup>st</sup> October to 1<sup>st</sup> April each season, and also had use of a ground in Broxbourne as they ran two sides after joining the East Herts League. The Club however was still not terribly strong, finishing bottom of the EHL and appearing to scratch a number of games. This was finally addressed in 1903 when Rye Park amalgamated with Hoddesdon to form a stronger team, Park having successfully competed in the EHL for the previous four seasons.

An early player worthy of note was inside left, Albert Aylott, who made 47 appearances for the Herts. County side and would perhaps have made many more but for a leg injury and the advent of the 1914-18 War. Then there were the Haynes brothers, sons of another fine sportsman, W.D. Haynes, three of whom played regularly for the Town. Most notable was W.G. (Wiggle) who, for a long time was one of the mainstays at the back, the other two being H.W. and M. Haynes. Through his son, Peter, now President of the Club, 'Wiggle' Haynes' memory is perpetuated by the trophy in his honour given to the Player of the Year each season. Another family which, somewhat earlier, contributed keen players to the Club were the Nightingales.

Hoddesdon F.C. were the first winners of the Herts. Challenge Cup (now known as the Herts. Senior Cup) in 1887, and went on to win the trophy again in 1888 and 1890, as well as being losing finalists in 1889, 1892 and 1910. Hoddesdon's first success in this cup was a 5-2 victory against Watford Rovers, and their last in 1890 was a 5-0 replay win against St. Albans F.C., after a 3-3 draw. On all the occasions between 1887 and 1890 Hoddesdon's captain was G.R. Newberry, and the players were mainly old public schoolboys and University men. Two in particular, H.C. Newberry and L.L. Cox obtained 'Blues' at Cambridge, whilst a third player, F.B. Debenham played for Oxford.

In 1919, immediately after the First World War, Town was added to the Club's name. In 1924 the Club reached the Herts. Senior Cup final, losing to neighbours Cheshunt, before leaving the Herts. County League to join the Spartan League. Hoddesdon Town stayed in this League for over 50 years and gained many honours during their membership. Between 1923 and 1936 Hoddesdon Town won the local Perry Charity Cup competition on seven occasions, and were runners-up once.

The first Spartan League honours came in 1927/28 when the Club were Division Two, Section B Champions, and in the same season the Waltham Hospital Cup was also won. On February 6<sup>th</sup> 1934 the Hoddesdon Town Committee rejected an invitation from Bedford Town F.C. to join the newly named 'United Counties League', previously the Northants. County League, based in Wellingborough. In

1935/36 Hoddesdon Town were Spartan League, Division One Champions and gained promotion to the Premier Division. Unfortunately, relegation followed the very next season. The first season after World War Two saw the Spartan League run on a regionalised basis, with Hoddesdon Town in the Central Division, but for the 1946/47 season the Club were elected members of the Premier Division where a continuous run of 30 years was enjoyed. For the next few seasons Hoddesdon Town were often amongst the leading clubs in the League.

1948 saw Hoddesdon Town win the Herts. Charity Shield for the first of five occasions. Sadly that year also saw the passing of S.T. Hampton, outside right for Hoddesdon in all the Herts. Challenge Cup finals between 1887 and 1890, and George Crawley, a life long activist with both the Football and Cricket Clubs, who was present at all the early Final appearances. In 1951/52 the final of the Herts. Senior Cup was reached, where the Club lost to Letchworth Town, and in 1953 Hoddesdon Town were losing finalists in the Perry Charity Cup.

Success was generally sparse during the late 1950's and early 1960's, but the appointment of Elmer Elliott as Chairman in 1965 was to prove to be a turning point for the Club. In the 1964/65 season there was an upturn in success when the improvement shown during the previous season was maintained and Hoddesdon Town finished as runners-up in the Spartan League. This success was added to with losing appearances in the Herts. Charity Shield final in 1967/68 and 1968/69. In 1970/71 the Club achieved the unprecedented treble of Spartan League Champions, Spartan League Challenge Cup winners and Herts. Charity Shield winners. The latter two trophies were retained the following season, and the Club finished as League runners-up for the next three campaigns. Twice during this period, 1966/67 and 1969/70, Hoddesdon Town battled through the Qualifying Rounds to reach the 1st Round Proper of the FA Amateur Cup, and also in 1969/70 the Club equalled it's best performance in the FA Cup by reaching the 3rd Qualifying Round.

The Club had floodlights installed in 1973, and these were officially opened on March 7th when West Ham United's visit to Lowfield was watched by an all-time record crowd of 3,500. Hoddesdon Town's greatest achievement to date came in April 1975 when Epsom & Ewell were beaten, 2-1 at Wembley, in front of nearly 10,000 spectators, to make Hoddesdon Town the first ever winners of the FA Challenge Vase. In 1977/78 Hoddesdon Town achieved a long term ambition when they were elected into the more powerful Athenian League, and in 1978/79 the Club won the Herts. Charity Shield for the fourth time, beating Royston Town 4-1 in the Final.

When the Athenian League was disbanded in 1984, Hoddesdon Town joined the South Midlands League to play in their Premier Division, and since then have become one of their leading clubs, gaining considerable success both on and off the field. In 1985/86 Hoddesdon Town beat Selby F.C. to win the South Midlands League Challenge Trophy, and were losing finalists to the same opponents in the Herts. Senior Centenary Trophy. The following season they successfully completed the Challenge Trophy and Centenary Trophy double, and in 1987/88 they once again reached the final of the Centenary Trophy, only to be beaten by Herts. County League side, Wingate F.C. A fourth appearance, in the 1989/90 Final of the Herts. Senior Centenary Trophy resulted in defeat by London Colney, also from the Herts. County League, but in the same season Hoddesdon Town F.C. won the South Midlands Floodlight Cup, beating Vauxhall League side Vauxhall Motors F.C. in a penalty shoot-out, having drawn 2-2 after extra time. As well as the two cup finals during 1989/90, Hoddesdon Town had their best ever run in the London Senior Cup, reaching the semi-final and beating Vauxhall League Premier Division sides Dulwich Hamlet and Barking along the way.

The success during the 1980's was achieved under popular Manager, Terry Scales, who took over at the start of the 1982/83 season and spent eight years at Lowfield building a loyal squad. On 14th December 1988, in his seventh season with the Club, Stuart Parker became the first Hoddesdon Town player to achieve 300 appearances, and during the 1989/90 season both Glenn Swaby and Steve Gooding also notched up their 300th appearance for the Club. The Terry Scales era ended in September 1990 when Ray Greenall took over as Manager, with Jim Briggs as his Assistant and John Walton becoming Coach. A month later, on 20th October, Stuart Parker created another record when he notched up his 400th appearance for the 1st XI.

Hoddesdon Town started the 1990's with a young side developed from the Under 18's, and the decade included a considerable number of high and low spots. In 1991/92 they became only the second club to win the South Midlands League Challenge Cup for a third time when they beat Shillington 2-1 in extra time at Harpenden Town. During the season both Gary Cummins and David Wilson recorded their 300th appearance, and later Gary went on to score his 200th goal in appearance no. 317.

The 1992/93 season for Hoddesdon Town F.C. was probably one of the toughest in their history. In all, the 1st XI played a total of 76 competitive matches, including unsuccessful appearances in the

Finals of the South Midlands Floodlight Trophy, against Rushden & Diamonds, and the O'Brien Premier Division Cup against Luton Old Boys. The highlight of the season was a wonderful run in the FA Vase which finally ended in the 5th Round (last 16) with a narrow 3-2 defeat at Beazer Homes League side, Bilston Town. Early in the season Stuart Parker, in semi-retirement, made his 500th appearance for the Club when he played against Brache Sparta. The achievement was later marked with a celebration match played between a Stuart Parker XI and the Hoddesdon Town FA Vase winning side. Later in the season Glenn Swaby celebrated his 400th appearance for Hoddesdon Town and Martin Smith became the 6th player in recent history to make his 300th appearance.

For the first time since 1978/79, the 1993/94 season saw Hoddesdon Town reach the final of the Herts. Charity Shield. A disappointing 2-0 defeat at the hands of SML Senior Division side, London Colney ended the Club's quest for silverware. However, to brighten the season a nucleus of youngsters was brought into the squad, and a number of achievements were acknowledged. Paul Robbins made his 300th appearance, whilst Gary Cummins and David Wilson each made their 400th. Having come out of retirement to regain his central defender's role, former Club Captain Stuart Parker completed his 550th appearance.

The end of the 1993/94 season will always be remembered for two reasons. Firstly, it marked the completion of ten seasons in the South Midlands League, and secondly, the man who had guided the Club through many difficult times, as well as to FA Vase success at Wembley, Elmer Elliott, decided to step down as Chairman after 30 years at the helm. Elmer's 50 years of dedication to football in Hertfordshire was marked with unique presentations from both the Football Association and the Herts. FA at the Club's Annual Dinner in 1994.

Roger Merton took over as Chairman of the Club and, starting their second decade in the South Midlands League with a much younger squad, Hoddesdon Town finished in a disappointing 10th place. The season was unique in as much that with only sixteen clubs making up the Premier Division, each played the other clubs three times to ensure a full League programme of 45 games. The Town's only chance of success came with an appearance in the final of the Roy Bailey Memorial Trophy against Waltham Abbey. Despite dominating much of the game Hoddesdon went down 1-0 to an extra time penalty to end a frustrating campaign. The Club's Match Programme swept the board for awards this season, and as well as being voted number 1 in Non-League football, it took all three top places in the Wirrall Programme Club 'Specials' Section, as well as the SMFL award for the 6th time in nine years.

The Club enjoyed a much more rewarding 1995/96 season but had no Senior trophy to show for all the hard endeavours. The First Team finished in a creditable seventh place, and the Reserves reached the semi-finals of the South Midlands Floodlight Cup. During the season, David Wilson became only the second Hoddesdon Town player to make 500 appearances for the Club. At the tender age of 23 Jeff Cross celebrated making his 300th Senior appearance, whilst forty-something John Walton finally got his just reward for his loyalty by making his 300th appearance.

Hoddesdon's thirteenth season in the South Midlands Football League brought a disastrous campaign which left them just one from bottom in the Premier Division. However, the whole club was lifted by the Reserves' best ever performance to finish ninth in the Essex & Herts. Border Combination, and an appearance for the Reserves in their first final for twenty six years, losing 2-1 to Wootton Blue Cross in the South Midlands Floodlight Cup. David Wilson equalled the Club's appearance record in the last game of the season and the Club received the Non-League 'Team Talk' magazine award for Programme of the Year.

Following the amalgamation of the South Midlands and Spartan Leagues, Hoddesdon Town faced one of their most important campaigns for twenty years. They strengthened their Management team for 1997/98 by appointing Ray Greenall and Jim Briggs as joint General Managers and promoting Alan Moore to First Team Manager, with Paul Surridge as his Assistant. Needing to finish in the top ten of Premier Division North to guarantee a place in the top Division of the fully amalgamated League for 1998/99, the First Team squad turned round a disappointing first half of the season to achieve fifth spot, their highest position since 1989/90. From early January they won ten and drew two of their last seventeen League games, scoring thirty four goals and conceding just seventeen. The end of the season was capped with a magnificent performance against Beaconsfield SYCOB to take the SSMFL Premier Division Plate, winning 2-0, and Dave Russell was crowned top goalscorer in the Club with thirty five goals, twenty six of which came in League and League Cup competitions to make him joint leading scorer in Premier Division North. The Reserves had their best ever campaign in fifteen seasons of Essex & Herts. Border Combination competition, with a record number of wins, goals scored and points achieved, and they also reached their third consecutive South Midlands Floodlight Cup semi-final. To finish off a highly successful season for the Club the Under-18 side won the Colwyn Minor Challenge Cup, beating much fancied Woodley Wanderers F.C. 2-0. Yet more landmarks were achieved in

1997/98 as David Wilson set up an all-time appearances record of 559 and Jeff Cross made his 400th appearance, at only 25 years of age.

The wet winter of 1998/99 forced many clubs to postpone well in excess of ten games between October and March, to find themselves with a massive fixture pile-up at the end of the 44 game season. Despite the bad weather, Hoddesdon suffered only four home postponements and had one of the best league campaigns in the Club's history. A run of thirteen straight wins in all competitions, just one off the Club record, saw the First Team go from bottom of the table after seven games, to top of the pile, a position they held on several occasions during the season. Their final place of sixth was a magnificent achievement in what was a very strong Premier Division, and twenty four League wins has been bettered only in 1972/73 and 70/71. 65 competitive First Team games included appearances in two cup semi-finals and the Final of the Herts. Charity Shield which was lost 1-0 to London Colney in a very close-fought contest. The Club's Programme finished 2nd in the Wirral Programme Club survey and was again adjudged best in the Spartan South Midlands League by both the Wirral Club and the League's Management Committee. Whilst there were no appearance landmarks for the Club to celebrate during 1998/99, striker Barry White was ever present making a total of sixty five consecutive appearances, matching Martin Smith's record achievement of the 1988/89 season. Only Jeff Cross (74) and Paul Robbins (73) have made more appearances in one season, and those records are unlikely ever to be broken.

The 1999/2000 season was only four months old when Alan Moore resigned his position as Manager, and Paul Surridge took over the reins. He managed to retain team stability and called on the services of Jim Briggs to act as his assistant. Coach, Don Nicholson, was recruited for the final three months of the season and his influence, at training especially, was to prove crucial. The First Team finished in 8th place in the League but scored a record number of goals (85) in the Club's sixteen year residency in the League. Jeff Cross made his 500th appearance for the Club and Pablo Ardiles managed to notch his 300th before moving to Reading University.

The winter of 2000/01 was one of the wettest in living memory and Non-League football competitions everywhere were decimated. All South Midlands League cup competitions were abandoned, and most clubs struggled to fulfil their League campaign in the closing weeks. Hoddesdon fared better than most, suffering only a small number of home postponements, but a poor run of form midway through the season saw them slip slowly down the table after a promising start, and they finished in a disappointing eleventh place. A fourth appearance in a Roy Bailey Memorial Trophy final was a bright spot at the end of the season, but once again they failed to lift the trophy, losing out to local rivals Somerset Ambury in a penalty shoot-out after a two hour 0-0 draw. As the First Team slipped down the table, the Reserves slowly pulled themselves away from the bottom after Christmas to finish tenth, and they also became the first Hoddesdon Town side to reach the final of an Essex and Herts. Border Combination cup competition. They came up against a strong Cheshunt side that had walked away with the Division One title, but acquitted themselves superbly. The Hoddesdon lads were unfortunate not to take the lead in a first half which they dominated, but a goal scored against the run of play, just before half time, eventually separated the two sides. It was left to the Reserves to pick up the Club's only silverware of the season when their exemplary disciplinary record earned them the Essex and Herts. Border Combination Sportsmanship Award for the first time. Off the field there was much to celebrate at Lowfield in 2000/01, as first Jeff Cross created a new Club record with his 560th appearance on October 7th then, in the last League game of the season, he became the first ever Hoddesdon Town player to reach the incredible 600 mark, in just twelve full seasons. Ritchie Simmonds celebrated his ninth season with the Club on March 31st by becoming the eleventh player to make his 300th appearance. Following two seasons with the Reserves he broke into the First Team and achieved his landmark in just under seven full seasons. A few weeks after the end of the campaign the Club learned that its Matchday Programme had, for the second time, won the Wirral Programme Club national survey of Non-League Programmes. This became the Programme's thirty second award after being voted the best Programme nationally and the best in the SSMFL by the Soccer Club Swap Shop.

Hoddesdon Town's early season League form was awful in 2001/02, with four straight defeats and no goals scored, but in both the FA Cup and the FA Vase there were some notable victories before elimination came at the hands of opponents from higher Leagues. The season was only five weeks old when Hoddesdon dispensed with the services of Manager, Paul Surridge, and after a few games in charge his Assistant, Bill O'Driscoll, was appointed as Manager. O'Driscoll had a tough job to do, rebuilding the side after the loss of three key players during the summer and early part of the season, and whilst there were some notable victories there were also some disappointing defeats. Having managed to drag the side away from the bottom of the table in late October, O'Driscoll enjoyed a tremendous 1-0 victory at Ryman League Division One side Bromley, in the London Senior Cup. Hoddesdon's inconsistencies continued through November and December, and January brought four straight defeats in various competition until Ryman League Division Three side Ware were beaten 2-0

in the Roy Bailey Memorial Trophy on the 29th. As the season drew to a close Hoddesdon managed to keep interest alive by getting themselves into three semi-finals, the Premier Division Cup, the Roy Bailey Memorial Trophy and the South Midlands Floodlight Cup. In the end they managed to reach the final of the Floodlight Cup, in which they enjoyed a splendid 3-1 victory against Biggleswade Town at Fairfield. Hoddesdon's final League position of fourteenth was disappointing, but bearing in mind the early season form when only two points were gained from the first six games, keeping away from the potential relegation zone was the ultimate objective, which was comfortably achieved. Off the field the Club's Programme was again adjudged the best in the League by the SSMFL Management Committee, the Soccer Swap Shop, and the Wirral Programme Club in whose national survey it was placed second.

Starting his first full season in charge Bill O'Driscoll began assembling a very useful squad for the 2002/03 campaign. It took a while for them to gel together and the early season form was patchy. However, with several of the younger players starting to perform well under the guidance of the more experienced campaigners, the results started to come together in the middle of the season, and the side rose from the lower reaches of the table into the top six where they remained for quite some while. Having played several more games than some of the teams around them Hoddesdon eventually finished in a creditable tenth place with just about more wins than defeats, and a positive goal difference. A good run in the East Anglian Cup saw the Lowfielders reach the quarter final of the competition proper in which they were beaten 2-0 by the eventual winners, East Thurrock, but the real triumph came in the local Roy Bailey Memorial Trophy. A hard fought 1-0 win over local rivals St. Margaretsbury in the semi-final led to a Final, their fifth, against runaway Ryman League Division Two winners Cheshunt. Starting the game as underdogs, Hoddesdon withstood half an hour of pressure before matching their opponents in every department, and after a hard fought 1-1 draw in normal time, Hoddesdon went on to win 2-1 after extra time thanks to a Paul Evitt penalty. Hoddesdon's Reserves had a poor League campaign, finishing bottom of Division One in the E&HBC, but for the second time in six years they reached the Final of the South Midlands Floodlight Cup in which they were beaten 3-1 by a Dunstable side that contained several key members of the SSMFL Premier Division winning squad. Perhaps the highlight of mid-season for the Hoddesdon Town Club was the visit of Queen Park Rangers and Swindon Town's Under-18 sides in the FA Youth Cup. Already with several early round wins under their belt, and having disposed of QPR in the Second Round proper, Hoddesdon's lads finally went down 4-1 to a talented Swindon side in the Third Round, but were not disgraced by a team that had put nine past Chelmsford City in the previous Round.

The 2003/04 season was the 125th in the Club's history and was also the Club's 20<sup>th</sup> consecutive season in the Premier Division of the (Spartan) South Midlands League. In 2003/04 they were the only side remaining in that Division from the time they joined it at the start of 1984/85. Six of those clubs were demised, two were playing in a lower level of football, six were playing in lower Divisions of the SSMFL and one, Leighton Town, were playing at a higher level in the Ryman League. After early exits from both the FA Cup and FA Vase, and one of their biggest ever League wins at Harefield, Hoddesdon had an average season of results, and could only manage a final place of eleventh in the table. However, the Club did enjoy success in two cup competitions, one of these being the East Anglian Cup in which they reached the semi-finals for the first time in their history, going down 2-0 at UCL Premier Division Champions Spalding Utd. To keep his promise to the Chairman of bringing back a trophy a season, Manager Bill O'Driscoll steered his squad to their fifth success in the Herts. Charity Shield, winning the trophy for the first time since 1979 with a superb 3-2 victory against Welwyn Garden City in a well contested and lively final. Credit must also go to Assistant Manager Paul Wade who, along with Coach Danny Buck, looked after the squad for three months in early 2004 as Bill O'Driscoll recovered from a hip replacement operation. During the course of the season, Pablo Ardiles made his 400th appearance for the Club, Neil Conner reached the 300 game landmark, and the Matchday Programme was again adjudged second best in the Country to the publication of the club relegated from the Football League, Exeter City. For both the Reserves and the under-18 sides it was an average mid-table season, but the Hoddesdon second-string did enjoy plenty of local derbies in the newly formed Herts. Senior Reserves League. Micky Southam capped a successful campaign with thirteen League goals and received an award for being the leading scorer in the competition's inaugural season.

The fickle nature of modern Non-League players was brought home to Hoddesdon in the summer of 2004 when eight of the previous season's squad decided to ply their trade elsewhere. This left Manager Bill O'Driscoll with a race against time to get a squad put together for the start of the season, and with a couple of exceptions, all the early games brought defeat. After going out of the FA Vase at home to Kirkley in October, and with the Club bottom of the Premier Division table with just one League win from 10 starts, Bill O'Driscoll decided to step down. Former Brimsdown Rovers Manager Tony Faulkner was quickly recruited with a remit to keep the Club out of the bottom two at the end of the season, but the mountain was too high to climb. A year after celebrating their 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, and in their 21<sup>st</sup> consecutive season in the SSMFL Premier Division, Hoddesdon Town finished bottom

of a League table for the first time since 1962/63. Having won a trophy in each of their three previous seasons, there was no silverware for Hoddesdon Town to enjoy as they were eliminated from all cup competitions by Christmas. The Reserves season was disrupted early on by the collapse of the Herts. Senior County League Senior Reserves Section, but negotiations with the SSMFL were successfully concluded as five clubs were accepted into their Reserves Division One. Hoddesdon's second string enjoyed a relatively successful campaign, eventually finishing thirteenth in the eighteen club table, and supporting the First Team with players when required. They went out of the South Midlands Floodlight Cup at the quarter final stage losing a very tight game at Stotfold F.C. by a single goal scored late in the game. The Under-18 side had a good early run in both their League competition and the FA Youth Cup, but after couple of defeats before Christmas interest waned in the New Year and they finished fifth in an eight club competition.

Despite the best endeavours of Chairman Roger Merton at the League's AGM, Hoddesdon Town were relegated for the first time in over forty years, and Tony Faulkner decided to step down as Manager. No less than twenty two applications were received for the vacant position, and from a short list of twelve, Geoff O'Vell was the successful candidate whose mandate it was to rebuild the First Team. With only four former players available to him Geoff O'Vell set about putting together a squad for the 2005/06 season, and with his Assistants Mark Mezen and Steve Mair giving him great support he managed to do just that in a very short space of time. The First Team were very solid at home, but just could not put together a string of results away, and so flitted between fourth and eighth place for much of the season. In the end they finished a perhaps disappointing seventh in Division One, but they did manage to reach the Final of the Herts. Senior Centenary Trophy in which they were beaten 2-0 by Herts. County League side Caldecote. The Reserves also had to be built back up from scratch, and it was to their credit that they put in some excellent performances despite being at the bottom end of the table for most of the season. The highs of the season far outweighed the lows which included no less than five players requiring hospital treatment for injuries, two very serious, sustained during the course of the season, believed to be a record for Hoddesdon Town. Geoff O'Vell and his team brought a renewed spirit and camaraderie that had been missing from the Club for a couple of campaigns, and the season ended on a high with the Annual Presentations Dinner being well supported.

The team building continued in the 2006/07 season, and there was high optimism when the pre-season training sessions were extremely well attended. Hoddesdon's new look team negotiated the traditional early season run of away games reasonably well, but then contrived to lose the first three home games against stiff opposition. After that they were always playing catch-up with the top sides, and in the end had to settle for fifth place in the table, two higher than the previous season. Something of a rather unwanted record was achieved by the end of the season, there had not been a single cup tie played at home, and the only home midweek game of the season came in the final week of the Club's tenancy at Lowfield. The Reserves had an outstanding season under the guidance of new Manager Herman Dyer, and after often flirting with the top four or five places in the table settled for a very creditable ninth place. Every club that finished above them had a First Team playing at least one level above Hoddesdon Town. The Youth Team was made up of many boys two years below the Under-18 level, but they often gave a good account of themselves despite finishing bottom of six clubs in the Pegasus Division table. One important facet of the season was the support the Under-18 side gave to the Reserves in providing them with a few players, and this meant that several Reserves were able occasionally to move up to support the First Team. During the course of the season two notable games took place, the first of these pitting a former Hoddesdon Town X1 against the current squad in aid of the Leonard Cheshire Home in Dorchester. No less than twenty-five former players accepted the invitation to support the worthy cause in memory of the Club's former Chairman Stewart Edwards. In just three hours on a Sunday morning £1,050 was raised for the Home that for over twenty years has looked after Stewart's son, Richard. The second game featured Arsenal Ladies who hosted Cardiff Ladies in an FA Premier Division game after torrential rain forced Boreham Wood to call off the game at their ground. At less than seventeen hours notice the game took place at Lowfield on Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> February, despite the ground being completely under water first thing in the morning, and it heralded the first Ladies game ever to be played at Lowfield. Over 250 people turned up to watch the match that was recorded by Sky television, and to make it a notable day, the FA's Drug Agency turned up at the end of the game to test two players from each side for drugs.

Throughout the 2007/08 season there was high optimism that the Club would gain promotion as the First Team flirted with a place in the top two for much of the season, A very disappointing run-in over the final few games led to the side finishing only third, four points off a return to the Premier Division. This huge disappointment was tempered a little by a fine performance against Hertford Heath at the County Ground Letchworth to win the Herts. Senior Centenary Trophy for a second time. At the AGM of the Spartan South Midlands League the Club picked up no less than four awards, all of which would have been traded in return for promotion. The Reserves suffered a real mid-season crisis as they found themselves plunging towards relegation, but a terrific rally in the final few games put them back up the table and well out of danger. Two of the SSMFL awards were won by the Reserves

for their sportsmanship and hospitality. For the first time, the Club ran a Sunday Under-16 side in the Eastern Junior Alliance, and the lads acquitted themselves well, also helping to supplement the midweek Under-18 side in their final season at the Club. Off the field, the Club's matchday Programme won its 50<sup>th</sup> award since 1983, and went on to win two more during the summer. The Stewart Edwards Charity match held in September 2007 raised £1,200 for the Mayor's Charity, the Isobel Hospice in Welwyn Garden City, and nearly 30 Hoddesdon Old Boys turned out to play in the game in remembrance of the Club's former Deputy Chairman. Several of Hoddesdon's experienced players, Richard Howard, Chris Fitkin, Peter Ulatowski and Andy Martin, announced their retirement at the end of the season, and popular goalkeeper Mark Foster, who made his debut in March 1994 and appeared 234 times for the Lilywhites, also decided to hang up his boots.

Having lost several senior players, manager Geoff O'Vell had to start his fourth season in charge with a younger set of players. An overall lack of strike power was to hit the Lilywhites midway through the season when a reckless tackle by an opponent put leading striker Emeka Nwamadi out of action for the rest of the campaign. Despite another cracking run in the Herts. Senior Centenary Trophy, too many points were being dropped in narrow defeats and draws at home, and the First Team had to settle for fifth place in the table. There was still optimism that a lack of facilities at clubs within the Premier Division and a shortcomings at two of the top four clubs in Division One could result in promotion. A tense Final at the County Ground in Letchworth saw Hoddesdon lift the Herts. Senior Centenary Trophy for the second successive year, and the third time overall, after Hatfield Town were beaten 4-2 on penalties. The Reserves had a very chequered season, and although they finished bottom of their Division, they kept the First Team supplied with a steady stream of replacement players, particularly Dane Dyer cementing a place in the back four for most of the season. Hoddesdon's jewel in the crown was seventeen year old Colin Metivier who made fifty First Team appearances, sixteen of them from the subs bench, and he also featured regularly in the Under-18 sides. The Under-18s were playing on Sundays and Wednesdays in two different competitions, and with all their other commitments, at school especially, found it tough going. For the first time in twenty years, the Club supported a Youth section with age groups at Under-14, Under-11, Under-9 and Under-8. The Under-14 side played in the Eastern Junior Alliance, but had to play in an Essex section, and they acquitted themselves well against often strong opposition. The three younger teams all had a successful season, especially the Under-11s who won their Mid-Herts Rural League Division with a fantastic record of nineteen wins and only one defeat, scoring eighty-nine goals and conceding just nine. At the Club's Presentation Dinner, Chairman Roger Merton and his wife Jennifer were presented with an engraved clock to mark thirty years of dedicated service to the Club, and former Chairman Elmer Elliott, in his ninetieth year, received the ultimate accolade - a Lifetime Achievement Award presented by the Club for his services to football and cricket.

Despite finishing fourth in the table, reaching the last sixty-four of the FA Vase and being beaten Finalists in the SSMFL Division One Cup for 2009/10, the general consensus was that a talented First Team squad had not reached the high standards it had set itself at the start of the season. Lack of a recognised striker had possibly been a factor, but Steve Cawley, Tony Neilson and Jason Sorial all appeared in the top nineteen of Division One goalscorers, helping to achieve a Club record in the SSMFL of ninety-eight goals scored. Over the course of the season, the First Team came up against Step Five clubs on eleven occasions in various cup competitions, winning five of those games, and also beating Tring Athletic on penalties after a goalless draw. The Reserves were, for long periods during the first half of the season, at or close to the top of the table, but once leading scorer Tony Cookey was elevated to the First Team results dropped off. They still managed a very creditable eighth place in a strong table, offered good support to the First Team and gave opportunities to several Under-18 players to taste regular senior football. The thriving Youth section once again brought home honours, the Under-18 side completing a League & cup double with the SCFYL Olympian Division title and the Brian Hitchings Challenge Trophy - the first Hoddesdon Town team to win that cup competition. The Under-14 side were runners up in the MHRML U-14 Premier Division and losing finalists in their League cup, and the Under-12s had a late season surge and a play-off win to finish as runners-up in their MHRML U-12 table. Sadly for the Club, during the season their former Chairman Elmer Elliott, and Manager during the 1980s Terry Scales both passed away, and eighteen year old Reserve Team player Ryan Harrison tragically died whilst on holiday in Canada. After a long and arduous season of fifty-nine games the Club was looking forward to a short summer break ready for 2010/11 under newly appointed Manager Andy Crawford who took over when Geoff O'Vell stepped down by mutual consent after five seasons at the helm.

Taking on his first managerial rôle Andy Crawford and his management team brought a new enthusiasm to the Club with high attendances at every pre-season training session and a much greater sense of integration between the three main teams. It turned out to be very much a transitional season with changes to Andy's management team and playing squad taking place inside the first three months. The First Team never consistently realised their full potential, but they did at least have the satisfaction of taking the only home points dropped by runaway Division One champions Berkhamsted in a creditable 2-2 draw. A Division One Cup semi-final defeat at St. Albans City Reserves was disappointing, as was the final League position of ninth, but throughout a long and weather disrupted

campaign of fifty-one games there had been much to celebrate when it came to the Club's Presentation Dinner in mid-May. After a new management team of Glenn Sando and Francesco Piazza had taken over the reins of the Reserves in October, a revival in the team's fortunes hit the rocks with a run of nine straight defeats starting in early March. Nevertheless, the lads pulled themselves around at the end of their campaign with a win in their final game, and staved off any threat of relegation. Just a few weeks into the season the Under-18 side found themselves without a Manager, and two of the First Team players, Dean Barker and Gary Simmonds, came to the rescue. They guided the lads through a very tough campaign against clubs whose Senior teams were at least a couple of levels above Hoddesdon Town, and they acquitted themselves superbly finishing fourth in the table. Whilst a 4-3 extra time defeat at home to Chesham Utd, in the Colwyn Cup quarter final was a creditable result, the Under-18s finest hour came when they hosted Academy side Boreham Wood in the League and stripped them of their 100% record with a memorable 3-1 win. Kevin Metivier was ever present for the First Team in 2010/11, notching up his 200<sup>th</sup> game for the Club during the season, as did Damien Thomas who had an outstanding campaign. With twenty-three goals to his name, twenty-one of them in the League, midfielder Gary Simmonds topped the Hoddesdon Town goalscorers and was joint tenth in the SSMFL Division One chart. Across all Divisions of the SSMFL Hoddesdon Town was the ninth best supported club, and three more Programme Awards came the Club's way from Programme Monthly, The Soccer Club Swap Shop and the SSMFL Management Committee. At the Club's Annual Dinner Jenny Merton, Jane Sinden, Roger Merton, Jimmy Briggs and Colin Sinden were all presented with a certificate by the Herts. FA acknowledging twenty-five years of service to football in Hertfordshire. The one sad note to the season was the passing of stalwart Fred Varney who had been an active Committee member during the 1970s, and who had been recognised by the Club in December 2010 for his seventy-five years of support from the age of eight.

*With grateful thanks to Mark Dell for snippets of early history*



Fred Varney receiving recognition of his 75 years of support for HTFC from Andy Crawford and the players in December 2010