

Reminiscences of a Treasurer and sometime player

Chesterfield Senior Spireites FC

The World's Oldest Continuing Walking Football Club

Walking football, the brainchild of John Croot, originated in Chesterfield in July 2011 under the auspices of Andy Morris (ex Chesterfield striker). That original group soon realised they were fitter than they believed and became a small sided running football team – The Exspires - and they still operate as such.

In June 2012, another attempt was made to start a walking football club. A local coach, Adam Norman under the banner of Chesterfield FC Community Trust, organised sessions in Queen's Park, Chesterfield and Gosforth Fields, Dronfield on the 18th and 19th June respectively. These two sessions merged within a few weeks and played at Queen's Park. This group was to become Senior Spireites WFC and, from an original membership of 5, now boasts a membership of over 100. We now hold 4 sessions per week.

Adam has kindly shown us the original registers he kept showing that the first sessions comprised Eric Bagshaw, Neil Haddy, Chris Cobb and Roy Beresford and Michael (who had to give up after a nasty shoulder injury) – 3 of whom still play (although Neil and Eric are nursing long term injuries) – see the photos of the 4 originals and the registers. In the photo from left to right are Roy, Neil, Eric and Chris.

Those of us who were at those early sessions had no idea what we were about to unleash on the world. Because our numbers were so few, we played on just one half of a 5-a-side pitch, developing our rules as we went along. One rule in particular, now part of the WFA rules, we named George's rule (after an early player George Rennie) who thought we should not be allowed to score from our own half. Often, Adam would join the attacking side, to augment our few players.

In those early days we were subsidised by Chesterfield Community Trust n- I seem to recall we paid £2 a week for one session. Look at the bargain you now have at £7.50 per month for up to 4 sessions a week. The subsidy ceased in 2013 – which was when Senior Spireites FC was formed. The name was suggested by Eric Bagshaw and adopted unanimously. I believe Eric also 'volunteered' Neil as Treasurer. So, we are approaching our 10th anniversary in 2023. The minutes of the first committee meeting

are dated 17th February 2014 – shows the committee as Keith Arrowsmith (Chair), Ian Edmundson (Secretary), Neil Haddy (Treasurer), Roy Beresford and Dave Green. By then, of course, our membership had grown so that we could use the whole pitch!

We have been fortunate with sponsorship – with grants from The Coalfields Regeneration Trust, Mansfield Building Society, NHS Trust at Barlborough and the Rykneld Turnpike at Clay Cross. Thanks to these sponsors we have been able to subsidise kit, rain jackets and a defibrillator, still giving us a bank balance that many league teams would desire!

In the early days, we played a lot of friendlies against other fledgling walking football teams, travelling to exotic venues such as Rotherham, Sheffield, Nottingham and Clay Cross. A picture from the Rotherham local newspaper commemorates this event (see picture).

We also entered some competitions – two, in particular, come to mind. A team went to Blackpool and won the inaugural Warburton's Cup (see picture) – we were given the opportunity to parade the cup around the (then) ProAct Stadium at half time in a League match against Notts County. We also won a walking football tournament organised by Derbyshire FA played at St George's (see picture) alas no England manager was present to sign up our promising "youngsters!" We owe a lot to Derbyshire F.A. – who helped us a lot in those early days. Lauren Mellor was our contact and she organised, amongst other things, "football festivals" at Gosforth Fields, Dronfield which were really pleasurable events. We went international in 2018 – having invited a team from Almelo (Heracles) to Dronfield – see full team photo. This has led to an annual visit by us to Amelo – which is an excellent event.

The club was growing like Topsy – thanks, mainly to the Barclays TV advert which featured walking football and we were outgrowing the Queen's Park pitch so, reluctantly, moved for a few months to the all weather pitch at Clowne (aided by our original coach, Adam Norman), who was a coach there. While big enough (in fact we played some 11 a side games there), it was not easy for a lot of people to get to and so the move to The Akademy, where we remain. We have entered teams in the East Midlands leagues and still have a team playing such fixtures

There is no question that we owe a debt of gratitude to Chesterfield FC Community Trust, John Croot, Andy Morris and Adam Norman – without whom our version of the beautiful game could not exist.

So here we are, 10 years after the original session (June 2012) and almost 10 years since the founding of Senior Spireites FC – membership at its highest ever using at least 3 pitches at Dronfield on Monday and Friday. A long way from 4 players and half a pitch!



The original players (L-R) Roy Beresford, Neil Haddy, Eric Bagshaw and Chris Cobb



SSFC v Rotherham c 2014



SSFC lift the Warburton's Cup



Senior Spireites winning the St George's Tournament



SSFC v Heracles Almelo 2018