

THE BRIGHTON LEAGUE – A HISTORY



BRIGHTON, HOVE & DISTRICT LEAGUE 1919/20								BRIGHTON, HOVE & DISTRICT LEAGUE 1947/48							
	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts		P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Lewes	14	11	2	1	37	23	24	Lancing Athletic	20	17	2	1	74	13	36
Worthing	14	8	3	3	40	13	19	Hastings Reserves	20	10	5	5	52	37	25
Vernon Athletic	14	8	2	4	27	19	18	Southwick Reserves	20	11	2	7	52	33	24
Brighton & Hove Amateurs	14	7	3	4	32	29	17	Crawley	20	9	4	7	43	41	22
Newhaven	14	6	2	6	23	27	14	Brighton Old Grammarians	20	9	3	8	48	35	21
Brighton Railway Athletic	14	3	3	8	20	37	9	Portslade St Andrews	20	9	3	8	43	40	21
Shoreham	14	2	4	8	17	28	8	Horsham Reserves	20	7	6	7	42	47	20
St Margaret's Athletic	14	0	3	11	11	39	3	Moulseccomb Rovers	20	9	1	10	43	56	19
								Worthing Reserves	20	5	5	10	35	52	15
								Burgess Hill	20	3	4	13	40	62	10
								Lewes Reserves	20	2	3	15	30	80	7

BRIGHTON, HOVE & DISTRICT LEAGUE 2007/8							
	P	W	D	L	F	A	P
American Express	16	12	1	3	6	20	37
Montpelier Villa	16	9	4	3	3	20	31
Brighton Electricity	16	7	4	5	2	22	25
O & G United	16	8	1	7	3	30	25
Hanover	16	7	2	7	2	22	23
Portslade Athletic	16	6	1	9	2	38	19
Master Tiles	16	4	6	6	2	35	18
Real Brunswick	16	4	3	9	1	32	15
Ovingdean	16	3	2	11	1	38	11

Photos:
RINGMER FC (left) and HASSOCKS FC (right)
 Former members of League now in Sussex County League

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RECENT CHAMPIONS			
	Premier	One	Two
2001/2	Royal Sovereign	Whitehawk Vets	South Central Wanderers
2002/3	Old Varndeanians	Hanover	Brighton Electricity
2003/4	Hanover	Portslade Athletic	Master Tiles
2004/5	Hanover	Master Tiles	Brighton 1664
2005/6	Rottingdean Village	Blue House	Ovingdean
2006/7	Hanover	Real Brunswick	C.C.K.
2007/8	American Express	C.C.K.	Brighton North End

Introduction

For Sussex football, the season just concluded (2007/8) is remarkable. Brighton & Hove Albion, the county's Football League club, have concluded a ten-year battle for a new ground and will move to their new 22,000 Falmer Stadium in 2010. Crawley Town, having incurred various points' deductions, have survived in the Blue Square Premier to play a fourth campaign in 2008/09. They will be joined by Lewes, who have resolved the grading of their historic Dripping Pan ground, and Eastbourne Borough, who little more than 40 years ago were formed as Langney Sports playing in Division 5 of the Eastbourne & Hastings District League.

A County League

Lewes was instrumental in asking the Sussex FA to form a county league in 1920. The four area leagues, West Sussex (WSL), Mid Sussex (MSL), Brighton & Hove (BHL) and East Sussex (ESL) had previously provided the top level with some clubs fielding teams in more than one competition. Brighton Railway Athletic having played in the MSL and BHL opted to join the Southern Suburban League. From the Brighton area County League members included Brighton & Hove Amateurs who were replaced by Hove in 1922, Allen West, an engineering company, at one time the town's largest employer who had three seasons before rejoining the BHL in 1927. They last played in the BHL top division in 1946/47. Vernon Athletic, had also previously played in the WSL, and were champions in 1923 resigning to join the BHL in 1937. They were the team of the Royal Navy 'training ship'.

The County League membership changed little between the wars. East Grinstead opted to play in the BHL after losing their County League place in 1924 before joining the Southern Amateur League. They joined Eastbourne, an SAL founder member, who had played in the Sussex League in 1890/91. In 1949, as the BHL introduced a Senior Division, the county FA took over the County League. The BHL was won and then retained by the Skyways FC. They were a works team based just outside the county boundary. They were not elected to the County League and opted for the Metropolitan & District League (M&DL).

The Second Division was introduced in 1952 and accorded senior status with the top two divisions of each area league returning to intermediate status. Status moves with the division the club plays in. Thus long standing members Newhaven and Haywards Heath who play in the Third Division have intermediate status.

In recent seasons as more and more clubs from the county play in external leagues the area leagues now comprise of intermediate and junior clubs as does the district leagues of Crawley and Worthing.

The Brighton League

The Brighton & District League had been formed in 1903. Five years later the Hove & District League came on the scene. In 1919 the BHL was created. In 1921 after the WSL amended their player eligibility rules County League reserve teams joined the BHL. It operated with 61 teams in five divisions. Two years later, the Worthing Section broke away to form the Worthing & District League.

Other clubs in membership between the wars were Old Varndeanians, the old boys of Varndean Grammar School, and Burgess Hill alongside the reserve teams of Hove and Southwick. The county FA had introduced its Intermediate Cup in 1926. The first winners were Hove St Andrews. Other winners to the outbreak of the Second World War included Brighton based teams of the Mental Hospital, the Corporation Tramways, the Belgravia Diaries and Norton Athletic.

In 1945 the BHL restarted with a single division of 10 clubs. This included Moulseccomb Rovers, a team of a residential community association, one of the estates built in the later 1930s as Brighton's slum clearance programme gathered pace, Whitehawk, Manor Farm, Falmer and Bevendean were others. The football section of Lancing Athletic had been formed in 1941. Its ambitious team won the BHL First Division in 1947 and after failing to be elected to the county league won it again. With Worthing elected to the Corinthian League they were voted in.

Horsham moved to the M&DL in 1951 and were joined by Southwick and Haywards Heath in 1952 Brighton Old Grammarians and Crawley had moved from the BHL to the County League as replacements. The BHL suffered again in 1952 when the County League, now with only two past champions remaining in membership, took Whitehawk & Manor Farm Old Boys directly in the First Division and Goldstone, Hove White Rovers. Moulseccomb Rovers and Seaford Town into its the new 12-strong Second Division. Old Varndeanians followed in 1956 and Portslade Rovers in 1957 as membership of the County League grew reaching 32 clubs in 1959. the BHL Premier Division comprised of ten reserve teams with Peacehaven & Telcombe, Regal Athletic, Steyning, and West Hove. Portslade Rovers closed in 1963 while in the County League. One year later Portslade Nicholas Old Boys (formed 1951) became Portslade Athletic. They continued in the Worthing League before joining the BHL in 1970 as Premier Division Champions. They immediately won the BHL Second Division.

Overall the BHL membership continued to grow and in 1964 had 113 teams in nine divisions, , three of which were senior. This included Goldstone and Moulseccomb Rovers who returned from the County League in 1963 and 1964 respectively. Brighton Old Grammarians followed in 1969 and Old Varndeanians in 1971. Both grammar schools became sixth form colleges in 1975. The latter's alumni strength continues through the college and a specialist status school which occupies part of a 60-acre site. They won the Premier Division in 2003 and joined the MSL. In the five seasons since they have secured top three finishes with two championships. They play at the University of Brighton Sports Ground in Falmer.

In 1972 the County League created a reserve team section but one year earlier the BHL had lost many of its reserve teams to the new Southern Counties Combination, which also accepted clubs from Surrey. Franklands Village went to this competition in 1980 as did Mile Oak in 1986. It began a slow death after the County League added a Third Division in 1983. Its advertised aim was to help district leagues sides make the jump to county football and beyond. The Combination ceased league operation in the early 1990..

The BHL lost the reformed Seaford Town, St Francis Hospital and Lower Bevendean to the Third Division. The last named had only one season before returning to the BHL. They ceased operation in August 2002. By 1994 the BHL had 72 teams in seven divisions. In 2006 Rottingdean Village (previously AFC Falcons) returned to the County League as champions They prevented a hat-trick by Hanover who nevertheless made it three titles in four seasons. Hanover had won the First Division in 2002/03.

Of the other current BHL Premier Division clubs Brighton Electricity (reformed 1964) and Montpelier Villa (formed 1987) had fairly rapid rises through the divisions. The latter started in Division 6 in 1991 and won six divisional titles in seven seasons and have now been in the Premier Division for nine seasons with a best of runner-up. In the opposite direction went Legal & General and Brighton BBOB now in Division 4 having been in the top division in the early 1990s. Goldstones are also in this division but its continuity to the former County League club is not proven. The BHL now has 50 teams in five divisions.

In recent seasons the WSL has provided most graduates to the Third Division, whose grading requires an enclosed pitch and dugouts, The MSL is also looked to by Brighton clubs not wanting or unable to play county football.. The Third Division has probably not grown as its management committee envisaged. Yet its continuation will leave the BHL, like several strong district leagues, with a glorious past and an uncertain future.●

POST SECOND WAR COUNTY LEAGUE GRADUATES

Figures in brackets—County League Divisional Record to 2007/08

Dates against name indicate known BHL membership periods

Crawley 1946-51

Crawley joined the BHL between the wars. They played in the County League's interim competition in 1945/46 as the village together with Ifield and Three Bridges was designated as one of the first wave of eight new towns. They joined the County League in 1951 (4*1*0) before joining the M&DL in 1956. They became Crawley Town in 1958 and joined the Southern League in 1963.

Franklands Village 1976-80

The Village joined the Southern Counties Combination before becoming a founder member of the County League's Third Division in 1983. (0*5*16) They opted for the Mid Sussex League in 2004 joining the First Division and were relegated in their first season. They were promoted back for 2007/08.

Hassocks 1966-72

The Robins joined County League's Second Division in 1981 (13*9*5) from the Southern Counties Combination. In Division 1 since 1995 their best placing is 5th

Lancing Athletic 1946-48

Elected to the County League in 1948 they became Lancing in 1957 after their first relegation (29*31*0). First Division runners-up and Second Division champions both twice.

Mile Oak 1960-86

They won the BHL in 1981 and had one season in Southern Counties Combination (1986/87) being promotion to the County League's Third Division (3*13*5). The three First Division campaigns were battles against relegation after winning Second Division in 1995.

Peacehaven & Telscombe 1953-55; 1959-61; 1964-69

Peacehaven & Telscombe were formed in 1923 by the merger of Peacehaven Rangers and Telscombe Tye. They had three separate spells in the BHL before joining the County League's Second Division in 1969 (24*14*1). During the 1980s and 1990s they won seven First Division titles but were relegated from the Second Division in 2005 returning immediately as Third Division champions.

Ringmer 1951-63

The Blues formed in 1905 played in the Lewes & District League winning the First Division in 1949 and 1951. During their BHL membership won Intermediate Division 2 in 1954 and played from 1960 in the top division. Ringmer joined the County League's Second Division (36*9*0) and were champions in 1969 then winning the First in 1971 when they also entered the FA Cup for the first time losing at Layer Road to Colchester United in the First Round Proper. They achieved their best Vase performance in 2007/08 (3rd Round)

St Francis Hospital 1973-83

The Hospital were a founder member of the County League's Third Division but left after two seasons. They returned in 1992 as champions of the MSL. The Hospital closed in 1995 and in 1999 the club became St Francis. In 2002 they merged with Ansty Rangers to become St Francis Rangers. They continue to use the closed Hospital's sports facilities which are under the threat of development. They were promoted to the First Division in 2007 (1*3*18).

Seaford Town 1948-50 1982-83

Seaford (Town) were founder members of the Second Division in 1952 remaining in the County League (9*29*9) for 26 seasons. They played in the BHL in 1982/83 and were a founder member of the Third Division the following year. They left again in 1997 to play in the ESL and returned for a second time in 1999 after a merger with a local youth side.

Saltdean United 1966-1984

The Tigers were formed in 1966 and are known to have played in the BHL First Division from the late 1970s. United joined the County League in 1984 (6*12*6). Third Division champions in 1989 they added the Second Division in 1996. Their best was First Division runners-up but were relegated in 2002 and 2007 to return to the Third Division.

Steyning (Town) 1952-64

Steyning Town had two seasons in the in the Wessex League (1986/88) and five years in the Combined Counties League (1988/93) after winning the County League's (8*24*5) First Division twice.

Uckfield (Town) 1949-55; 1966/67

Uckfield joined the County League (0*12*13) in 1955 leaving in 1966 to play in the BHL. In the early 1990s Uckfield Town have been traced in the MSL. They returned to the County League in 1996 but have yet to regain senior status.

Whitehawk (& Manor Farm Old Boys) 1950-52

The club were directly elected to the County League in 1952 (51*5*0). They changed their title in 1960. They have won three First Division titles, two in the 1960s and again in 1983/84. They were relegated in 1966 but immediately returned as champions having a further four year spell ((1978/81) in Division 2 before returning again as champions.

Withdean 1987-89

Westdene, a Brighton estate team, were formed to play in the new Third Division of the Sussex County League in 1983. In 1984 they became Withdean on moving to the Withdean Stadium. They had two seasons in the BHL before returning to the County League. (0*6*8). They won the Third Division in 1993 but in 2000 attempted to cross the Pyramid. A new club, Withdean 2000, were formed but spent the season in abeyance. The Combined Counties League was won in 2003. Tenancy problems ,in part caused by the ground share with the Seagulls, they closed in 2004.