



## History of the Club – Football in Yorkshire

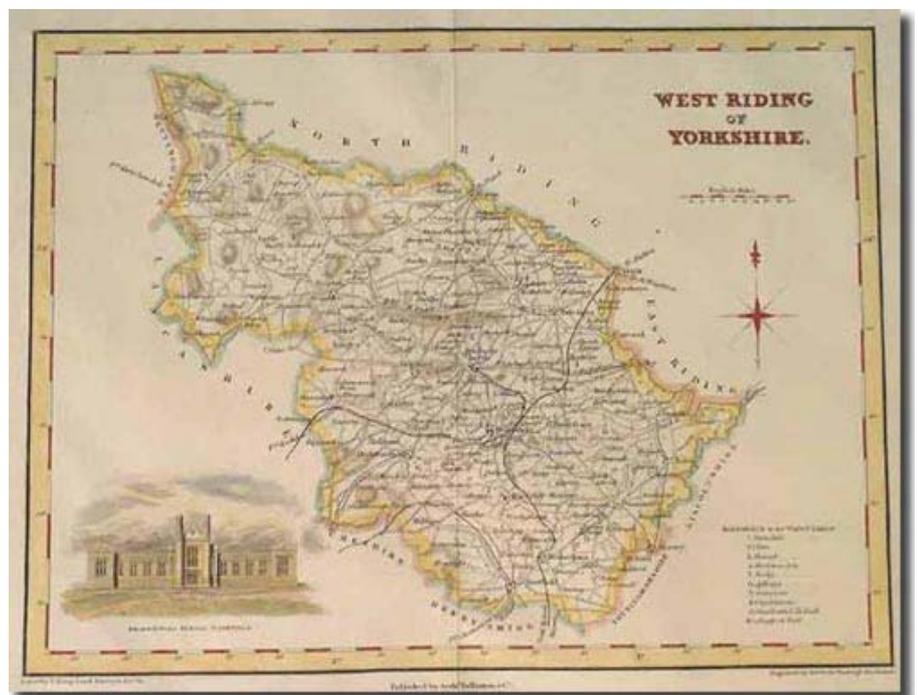
### Football comes to Yorkshire – Up to 1905

The Victorian gentlemen of London and the Home Counties laid many foundations for the future during the second half of the Nineteenth Century. Among their greatest achievements was to bring organisation and order to sport, and in particular Association Football.

They formed the Football Association in 1863, defined the first popularly accepted rules of the game and invented the FA Cup. In a jealously guarded amateur era for the game, the Corinthian spirit of these footballing pioneers was a catalyst for an approach that the game badly needed to encourage its progress.

After the sudden rush of initial development and the advent of firstly shamateurism and then true professionalism, however, the power base of the game shifted. The universities and schools of the Home Counties became anachronisms and the focus fell instead on the industries and working men of the North, with Lancashire clubs coming to prominence and inspiring many young men to careers in the game, despite the many financial restrictions still in place.

The story was not so positive in the dark, satanic mills of Yorkshire. Most of the public and potential players in the Broad Acres were more interested in rugby or cricket; soccer was a game for toffs and a bit of a Nancy Boy Southerner's pastime in the eyes of the typical, hard-bitten Yorkshireman and early efforts by some pioneers to get a football scene going had limited success. There were small oases of popularity and genuinely pioneering spirit in places such as Sheffield, but for the most part, Yorkshire was immune to the beauties of 'Socker'. Leeds in particular, and West Yorkshire in general, were centres for cynicism and stereotypical denunciation of the 'Southern jessies'.



A map of the West Riding of Yorkshire in 1840 - this was difficult country for the football missionaries to convert

According to the Bantams Past website, "In the late 1800s working men began to discover leisure. The Factory Act of 1850 stopped work in textile mills after 2pm on a Saturday. The legislation was primarily aimed at restricting the working hours of women and children, but adult males benefited, as it was uneconomic to keep the mills open without the labour of women and children who formed a large proportion of the workforce. By the early 1870s Bradford workers were given all Saturday afternoon off, it allowed time for sports to be played as an escape from the rigours of work. Cricket and rugby were the main pastimes, in fact a good proportion of rugby clubs were formed by members of cricket clubs who wished to have some sport in the winter months. Although football - or the association game as it was known - had a toehold, it was the oval ball game that ruled the roost once bat and pad had been put into hibernation."

The menfolk of West Yorkshire had plenty of time and enthusiasm for sport, but their preoccupation was cricket in the summer and rugby in the winter months. Association football got barely a look in between these two preserves and was frowned upon by the establishment. Yorkshire County Cricket Club were formed on 8th January, 1863 at the Adelphi Hotel in Sheffield, while the first record of a rugby club in Leeds dates back to 1864 when H I Jenkinson placed an advert in the Leeds Mercury inviting players to meet up at Woodhouse Moor a few days a week from 7 to 8am. That advert attracted over 500 members. From this initial interest several clubs were formed including Leeds St Johns who went on to become the professional rugby league club based at Headingley, known today as Leeds Rhinos.



A Victorian's eye view of Leeds

There were those in the area who tried to promote the merits of soccer, but they faced an uphill struggle to convince their fellows. The main conurbations of the West Riding, Leeds and Bradford, lacked any professional teams, in stark contrast to even small towns like Burton, Gainsborough and Glossop, which could point to their own local football club. In fact, Burton enjoyed the presence of two, United and Wanderers, both of whom were in the Football League during the 1890's.

Other towns and cities in Yorkshire were more receptive to the delights of the association game, and Sheffield, in particular, was a beacon of pioneering spirit. Sheffield FC are recognised as the oldest club in the world, having been formed in 1857, and took part in the FA Cup for the first time in 1874. The club failed to gain admittance to the London-based Football Association when it was formed in 1863, because of irreconcilable differences between the interpretation of the rules between the two, and the Sheffield Football Association was formed as a consequence in 1867. Sheffield Wednesday followed, initially styled simply The Wednesday, their birth coinciding with that of the Sheffield FA.

Wednesday lost 6-1 in the 1890 Cup Final to Blackburn, but came back in 1896 to beat Wolves 2-1 and take the Cup back to Yorkshire for the first time. Their two-goal match-winner that day was England international Fred Spiksley, a left-winger who was to play a small part in the story of Leeds City.

Sheffield United were another major club from the area and became Yorkshire's first League champions when they won the title in 1899. They also won the Cup in 1898.

Representatives from the Sheffield area strove to spread the gospel of the new dribbling game

among their neighbours and were responsible for what is generally acknowledged to be the first soccer match ever played in Leeds in 1877.

Martin Jarred and Malcolm Macdonald: "It was arranged by Fred Sanderson, president of the Sheffield Association, who took two teams from Sheffield to play an exhibition match at Holbeck Recreation Ground on Boxing Day 1877. They turned up with all their kit, a ball, umpires and even a set of posts, like missionaries spreading the soccer gospel.

"Despite a bitterly cold wind the game attracted a good crowd and the Sheffield visitors reckoned they had covered their expenses - until they discovered that most of the spectators were Holbeck Rugby Club season ticket holders who had got in without playing. With so many rugby folk at the ground it was not surprising that soccer was given a lukewarm reception by people who 'reckoned nowt to it'."



Sheffield FC - the oldest known football club. They came in the 19th Century to educate the savages of Leeds

Some areas within the city of Leeds did take to soccer - teams like Rothwell, Oulton, Hunslet Wesleyans and Meanwood sprang up around 1880, and in 1885 Leeds FC were formed. The latter played its home games on the Star and Garter ground at Kirkstall, but struggled to build a following. The club disbanded in 1887, but another club by the same name was founded in 1888, the year the Football League was formed, before again folding in 1890. Another club, Leeds Albion was set up in 1888, but lasted only four years before also fading into oblivion. It seemed soccer in Leeds was dead in its tracks.

Things started to pick up, however, as the end of the century drew near and in February 1894 there were two significant events: the forming of yet another Leeds AFC and, on the 26th of the month, the establishment of the West Yorkshire League, which Leeds duly won by eight points that first season.

On January 29 1896, there came the first recorded instance of a serious interest from the Huddersfield area in soccer. Sporting interests in the town were represented at a meeting at the White Swan Hotel, Halifax, when Messrs William Hirst and James Spittle assessed the continued growth of the game in the region. On 12 February, at the Green Dragon Hotel, Leeds, another meeting was held with the intention of applying to the Football Association for permission to form a West Yorkshire Association. An all Huddersfield



Local team Horsforth with trophies - there were a number of small sides in and around Leeds, but it was a struggle to survive for any length of time

board was elected to handle its affairs. Spittle, who presided over the proceedings, was nominated as its divisional representative with Hirst and Mr W H Shaw filling the posts of president and vice president respectively.

Leeds had to move around a bit in the club's early years, variously housing themselves at Roundhay, Headingley (shared with the Rugby Club and next door to the international cricket ground), Meanwood and Headingley again. The club folded in 1898, when Headingley's owners, the Leeds Cricket, Football and Athletic Club, asked them to increase attendances to pay their way. Only three members of the football club turned up at its annual meeting on 22 June 1898 to discuss the problem and the lack of interest effectively sealed the club's fate.

However, there was another set of challengers on the way.

Sheffield-born Sam Gilbert, the cricket professional at Hunslet cricket club, shared with many other of the Steel City's sons a desire to widen the popularity of the new game, and acted as a kind of footballing missionary to the West Riding. It was he who founded the first Hunslet Association Football Club in 1878 and his enthusiasm and commitment kept the club going for five challenging seasons, though regular fixtures were hard to come by. The lack of local interest and money led to Hunslet AFC fading away in 1883.

Gilbert's vision of a successful club was given fresh impetus, however, in 1889 when employees of Leeds Steelworks formed a club, eventually to be rechristened as Hunslet FC when they joined the West Yorkshire League in 1894. Hunslet, known locally as 'The Twinklers', became a formidable outfit, winning the West Yorkshire Cup four times and reaching the FA Amateur Cup quarter-finals twice, including one celebrated victory over the mighty Old Etonians, who had won the Cup in 1879 and 1882, and were runners-up in 1875, 1876, 1881 and 1883.



The Hunslet cricket ground in the 1900s. The site was purchased by the Leeds Cricket, Football and Athletic Club and the pavilion was built in 1889

The match came during a wonderful Cup run which saw Hunslet defeating West Hartlepool, Loftus and Buxton to earn a home tie with Old Etonians in the second round proper on 15 February 1896. There were few who gave Hunslet any chance of progressing, and when they fell 2-0 behind within seven minutes it looked like a heavy defeat would follow. However, the Yorkshiremen fought back with an inspiring display to earn a shock 3-2 victory, one of the goals coming from 'Tipper' Heffron, a winger who went on to play for Leeds City. Hunslet sadly lost to Darlington in the next round and ended the season with a loss of £35, demonstrating the size of the financial challenge facing football in Yorkshire.

In 1897, Hunslet was among the leading local clubs which formed the Yorkshire League. Leeds, Bradford, Huddersfield, Halifax, Mexborough, Barnsley St Peter's, Doncaster Rovers Reserves, Sheffield United Reserves and Sheffield Wednesday Reserves completed the line-up.

That season saw Hunslet beat Leeds in a replay to win the Leeds Workpeople's Hospital Cup. The original match had attracted 7,000 spectators. The same month, Hunslet also secured the West Yorkshire Cup, beating Harrogate with the only goal of the game before a crowd of 3,400. The

attendances gave some evidence of the increasing interest in association football among the West Yorkshire public.

As the new century dawned, Hunslet were the local game's leading force: in 1900, they won the West Yorkshire Cup for the fourth successive year, also winning the Leeds Workpeople's Hospital Cup for a fourth time. They had a formidable team, good enough to hold mighty Blackburn Rovers to a 1-1 draw on Easter Tuesday 1900. Amongst their ranks was Harold Lemoine, who became one of the best goalkeepers in the country, going on to play for Shepherd's Bush and Clapton and winning three amateur caps for England between 1908 and 1910.



The New Peacock Inn, pictured in 1963, was owned by Bentley's Yorkshire Brewery (like the Old Inn) and was close to the Elland Road ground. It was at one time owned by John Charles

As powerful an outfit as Hunslet were, however, they had no ground of their own and were constantly in danger of going out of existence. They had moved from the Wellington Ground in Low Road to the Laburnum Ground at Parkside, only a narrow strip of land separating it from the Hunslet Rugby Ground, and then on to their final home at the Nelson Ground in Low Road. The club were all ready to join the reformed West Yorkshire League in 1902, but lost the lease on their ground. They could not find an alternative base in time and disbanded, with many of their supporters vowing to raise the necessary capital to get a new club off the ground. The men behind the club remained convinced that Leeds could sustain a Football League club.

Just round the turn of the century, some of the West Riding's rugby clubs were in dire straits. A couple of them decided to call it a day, leading to unexpected opportunities for association football in the area.

Bradford's Manningham and Holbeck of Leeds were both disbanded, and their descent into oblivion gave rise to the birth of the Bradford City and Leeds City Football Clubs.



A Bradford City team group from 1903

In 1880, Manningham Rugby Club was formed after the Manningham Albion Club was disbanded. They originally played at a field in Whetley Hill, known as Carlisle Road, but in 1886 they relocated to Valley Parade, a ground that was hacked out of a hillside over a few months. Manningham were one of a number of leading clubs that formed the Northern Union in 1895 and a

year later were the inaugural winners of the championship of what became the Rugby League. However, the club fell upon hard times after being relegated, and in 1903 only the successful staging of an archery tournament kept the club going.

At the same time a number of locals were doing their best to get an association football club off the ground, with the Bradford Observer's sub-editor James Whyte one of the driving forces. In March 1903, the committee of Manningham Rugby Club indicated they were prepared to share Valley Parade with a professional football team, with the two organisations playing on alternate Saturdays. They later decided to suspend the activities of the Rugby club for twelve months, paving the way for the newly established Bradford City Football Club to successfully apply to join the Football League that summer. According to the Bantams Past website, "A delegation travelled to London on 25th May to apply for admission. The infant club was accepted with open arms and the delegation returned to Bradford in triumph. At the Belle Vue public house they celebrated what was described as 'the greatest football scoop ever known'. City were the only side to have joined the League without having played a single match!

"The fateful meeting was held in St Paul's Schoolroom, Manningham on 29th May. For two hours a furious debate raged. No one was deceived - this was about making an irreversible decision to completely abandon rugby in favour of - in the now famous words of Manningham President Alfred Ayrton - 'a game that would pay'. Although a call for rugby to be retained was 'met with great cheers', the adoption of professional football was passed by 75 votes to 34. Bradford City was born."

Meanwhile, the demise of Holbeck Rugby Club in 1904 left their Elland Road ground up for grabs. The availability of regular headquarters and markedly superior facilities was among the main factors that improved the odds of a football club succeeding in Leeds.

In 1896 Holbeck had joined the Northern Union (the forerunner of the Rugby League), and enjoyed some decent facilities. Bentley's Brewery owned a large plot of land at the foot of Beeston Hill on the main road to Elland. It was known as the Old Peacock Ground, taking its name from a local pub, the Peacock Inn, which stood opposite. This was the source of the Peacocks nickname associated in the years to come with both Leeds City and United.

Holbeck Rugby Club had originally played further down Elland Road at Holbeck Recreation Ground, but in 1897 when the lease was not renewed, Holbeck bought the Old Peacock Ground in 1897 for £1,100. Bentley's sold on condition that it should remain as a football ground for seven years and that they should hold the catering rights. Holbeck built a new stand ready for the following season and the ground soon became popularly known as Elland Road. The location was also used for association football, with the first competitive soccer match seeing Hunslet beat Harrogate 1-0 to win the West Yorkshire Cup on 23 April 1898.



Boar Lane, pictured on 1 June 1902. Two years later, Griffin Hotel hosted the meeting which gave birth to Leeds City AFC

Leeds Woodville of the Leeds League shared the ground with Holbeck during 1902-03, but in 1904 Holbeck folded after losing a play off against St Helens for the honour of a place in division one of the Northern Union. The Elland Road ground was put on the market.

That August, a number of interested parties gathered at a meeting in the Griffin Hotel in Boar Lane to discuss the creation of a 'good association club in Leeds'. A number of the men behind the disbanded Hunslet Football Club were among the participants and the outcome of the meeting was that a new club, to be named Leeds City Association Football Club, should be formed. It was agreed that the Elland Road ground should be rented for use by Leeds City in the season to come.

Officials of the new club gave instructions to sign the lease on 13 October 1904, for an annual rent of £75 with an option to buy for not more than £5,000 the following March. When the lease was finally signed, in November, the purchase figure was reduced to £4,500.

A group of players was quickly enlisted and the club joined the reformed West Yorkshire League. Their first competitive game was at Morley's Scratcherd Lane on 1 September when City struggled to a 2-2 draw.

Two days after the all-clear to sign the lease, Leeds City played their first game at Elland Road on 15th October, a friendly against Hull City, which they lost 2-0.

The management of the club had their sights set firmly on a future in the Football League and their strategy was to arrange a series of high profile friendly games against Football League opponents. West Yorkshire League fixtures were treated with scant respect and several games were called off as City entertained top sides like Sheffield United, Preston and Derby. Many players were invited to Elland Road to play for City, but very few were kept on. Some famous names appeared for the club in the bigger friendlies, including Tom Morren (Sheffield United) and Fred Spiksley (Sheffield Wednesday's FA Cup-winner), both England internationals, but City were unable to retain either player.

At that time, some 16 years after the formation of the Football League, Leeds was the biggest city in England without a League club. City officials, however, were convinced that was about to change as the League Management Committee was keen on increasing membership. Their confidence led them to float Leeds City as a limited company in April 1905 with 15 directors and an initial capital of 10,000 £1 shares, mainly held by three local businessmen: Norris Hepworth, a noted wholesale clothier, the club's first chairman; Mr Ralph Younger landlord of the Old Peacock Inn; and Mr A W Pullin, better known as 'Old Ebor', a Yorkshire Evening Post sports journalist.



Fred Spiksley - an FA Cup-winner with Sheffield Wednesday in 1890 and a guest with Leeds City in 1904

The ground regularly enjoyed attendances of 2,000 and there was potential for even greater numbers. The new chairman recognised the advantage of a ground 'in the centre of the working classes' and did all he could to encourage support from the local populace.

Leeds City's financial stability and potential support were the key considerations for the Football League when assessing the club's application, rather than their modest results in the West Yorkshire League. On 29 May 1905, 25 votes saw City, along with Chelsea, Hull City, Clapton Orient and Stockport County, elected into an expanded Second Division.

The admission of City and Hull increased the growing band of Yorkshire clubs in the new competition. Both Sheffield United and Sheffield Wednesday had been elected when the Second Division was formed in 1892. Rotherham Town were admitted a year later, but only lasted three seasons, while Barnsley (1898), Doncaster Rovers (1901) and Bradford City (1903) had also joined them. Hull and Leeds were followed by Bradford Park Avenue in 1908 and Huddersfield Town in 1910.

After more than a quarter of a century of hesitant stumbles and stop-go interludes, Leeds City AFC had finally brought big time football to the city, although it would not be easy to make a success of life in this exciting and challenging new world.



Leeds paper boys on 28 February 1900 - football in the city got scant few column inches, even when a professional club was formed