



Review of 1912/13 – Part 1 – A fresh start

For Leeds City, the spring of 1912 was a miserable time, with the club forced to apply for re-election as it sank ever deeper into the financial mire. Secretary-manager Frank Scott-Walford resigned his post in March, ground down by a constant struggle to keep the club afloat. Two months later, after failing in an attempt to secure the services of Woolwich Arsenal manager George Morrell, the board announced that Scott-Walford's successor would be Herbert Chapman, his growing reputation founded on the wonderful job he was doing at Southern League Northampton Town.



Chapman, born on 19 January 1878 in Kiveton Park, Sheffield, spent his playing days as a nomadic inside-forward doing the rounds with Stalybridge, Rochdale, Grimsby, Swindon, Sheppey United, Worksop, Northampton, Sheffield United, Notts County and Tottenham, for whom he was leading scorer in 1905/06. Northampton appointed him player-manager a year later and he proved an outstanding success, leading the club to the Southern League title in 1909 a few months after playing his final game for the club.

The Leeds Mercury of 8 August 1912 pictures the new men at Elland Road - manager Herbert Chapman, Billy Scott, Andy Gibson, trainer Dick Murrell, George Law, John Ferguson, Jimmy Robertson and John Allan

The appointment was a real feather in the cap for the City directors; the Athletic News commented, "Leeds City can congratulate themselves on securing such a man as Mr Chapman."

He was to become English football's most successful and celebrated manager of the next two decades, but his great years were still ahead of him. For now, he was an untested novice. Leeds City chairman Norris Hepworth had been impressed by Chapman's success at Northampton; the two men hit it off immediately, sharing a vision of the future that had City soaring to the pinnacle of the English game.

Chapman spoke with confidence following his appointment, "I am here to get Leeds City into the First Division. It is, of course, a matter of time, but if it is humanly possible, it shall be attained."

Before any such ascent to greatness could begin, though, the club's League status had to be secured; everyone connected with Leeds pulled out all the stops to ensure City were re-elected when the time came for the vote at the League's AGM in London on Monday, June 3 1912.

Seven other clubs were in the running for the two places on offer: Gainsborough Trinity (the other club seeking re-election), Cardiff City, Chesterfield Town, Darlington, Doncaster, Lincoln City and Newcastle City.

Leeds vice chairman Joe Henry was in attendance to put the Peacocks' case, and he did so with assurance, saying they were "in the very centre of Northern Union football. There are five important NU clubs in the neighbourhood and our enterprise has been successful; there is a great demand for Association football (Cheers) ... Mistakes have been made, but these have been overcome. By his sportsmanlike action, the president has removed the financial difficulties of the club. We have improved the club and ground, and within its district is a population of close on a million without any first class Association club in its midst. The railway facilities are excellent. I confidently ask your support (Cheers)."

At no time was there a genuine doubt that City would be voted back in. The Yorkshire Post had claimed bullishly, "No doubt is held that ... re-election would be forthcoming". The outcome was emphatic: Leeds finished top of the poll with 33 votes and were duly welcomed back into the League fold, along with Lincoln City (27). Gainsborough (9) and Chesterfield (6) enjoyed some support, but Darlington, Cardiff, Newcastle and Doncaster got just three votes between them.

The Yorkshire Evening Post acknowledged that "it was rather a humiliation for Leeds City to have to apply for re-election", but crowed that the outcome of the voting heralded a "fresh start".

There were other equally pressing matters for the board to address as they sought desperately to resolve their grim financial position; the club held an extraordinary general meeting on August 19 in the Salem Hall in the city centre. With a hall packed to the rafters by City shareholders, Joe Henry presided in the absence of Norris Hepworth.

At the start of the previous season, it had been announced that the club owed £10,733 to Hepworth and were groaning under total debts of £13,297. Schemes to raise funding had been proposed by the board, but shareholders had not been supportive, seeking the opportunity to make alternative proposals, but none had been found acceptable.

The current parlous state of affairs had been provoked in March, when the club's bankers decided to call in City's £7,000 overdraft, prompting them to go into receivership. Hepworth appointed the incorporated accountant Tom Coombs, of 14 King Street, as "receiver on behalf of the debenture holders of the Leeds City Association Football Club Company Limited ... Under the appointment all the assets of the club will now belong to Mr Coombs, on behalf of the debenture holders, to whom



The Yorkshire Evening Post of 3 June 1912 carries the news of Leeds City's re-election

all moneys must be paid and without whose authority no money belonging to the club can be paid.” Coombs was to manage the club’s financial affairs for the next three years.

City held a public meeting at the Grand Central Hotel on 19 April 1912, revealing that the club had incurred total losses of £11,321 since their formation and only been able to keep going on the back of Hepworth’s altruism. By now his total investment had soared to £15,000.

Coombs reported on the club’s financial standing: in total, including subscribed share capital, liabilities amounted to £15,782 5s 10d. Of the assets, around £7,000 related to expenditure on the Elland Road stadium and ground, which would be worth little if the club ceased to exist. This left their liquidity badly holed beneath the surface, plugged only by the generosity of the chairman, who had poured £15,000 into the club over the years. It was clear that a more permanent solution had to be found, as even Norris Hepworth’s pockets were not bottomless.

Shareholders were asked to consider a resolution which would effectively bring the existing receivership arrangement to an end and see the company liquidated. This would allow for the discharge of existing debts and the establishment of a new company with a nominal capital of £7,000, consisting of one thousand preference shares and 6,000 ordinary shares, each of £1. In addition £9,000 worth of debentures would be issued in order to allow existing liabilities to be settled.

Director Alf Masser, after paying tribute to the “businesslike way” in which Coombs had tackled the club’s financial problems, raised a note of caution. He spoke of the significant operating expenses (£2,500) that had been incurred since the preparation of the balance sheet and said that he would have much preferred it if the company had sought to issue a larger number of preference shares in order to increase working capital. Nevertheless, Masser moved the resolution to wind up the company and appoint Coombs as official liquidator.

There then came an intervention from the floor. Outgoing manager Frank Scott-Walford, who remained a shareholder, noted that he was a guarantor to the level of £2,000, and asked how liquidation would affect his position. Coombs confirmed that Scott-Walford and Norris Hepworth stood as joint guarantors on a personal account with the bank, but that this had nothing to do with the club. To discharge the matter, Scott-Walford needed only to sign a cheque relating to the Bradford-Barnsley Cup replay earlier in the year at Elland Road, which would “free a sum of money due to the Leeds City Club.”

Thus appeased, Scott-Walford seconded the resolution, which was duly carried. Joe Henry assured the meeting that there was “a brighter future for the club” and “a better feeling in the city towards it”. Regarding Alf Masser’s plea for more new funding, Henry asserted his belief that “it would be better to come for more capital when the club had proved its success ... There is a determination to have a thoroughly good team”.

Herbert Chapman was working tirelessly in pursuit of that latter aim. He had a significant task, for City had won just one of their previous 11 games and players’ confidence was low.

Chapman had an instinctive feel for what was needed, reasoning that success was most likely to be achieved by the club recruiting proven performers. Scott-Walford’s strategy had been founded on enlisting inexpensive unknowns, many of them from across the Irish Sea, and gambling on their potential. In contrast, Chapman’s recruits were intended to bring immediate improvements.

It was clear where the team's difficulties lay – 78 goals had been conceded, far and away the highest total in the division, and the manager knew he had to reinforce his defence. Among a number of recruits, Chapman signed three internationals to bolster the porous rearguard.

Evelyn Lintott, the Bradford City centre-half, was born in Godalming in November 1883. While with Woking and Plymouth Argyle he won England amateur caps, playing alongside the legendary Vivian Woodward. In 1907 he joined QPR, helping them to win the Southern League the following season. Despite retaining his amateur status, Lintott made his full England debut in February 1908, going on to make seven appearances. Later that year, Lintott turned professional and was sold to Bradford for £1,000. He was the first chairman of the Association Football Players Union (later the PFA) and a schoolteacher, while his brother was a reporter with the Bradford Daily Telegraph, going by the pen name of Preceptor.

Goalkeeper Billy Scott, 28, was the older brother of Liverpool custodian Elisha. Chapman signed him from Everton, with whom he won the FA Cup in 1906; he also helped them finish championship runners up on three occasions. He was awarded the first of 25 Irish caps in 1903 and played 251 League games for the Goodison club.

Rangers full-back George Law was the third international signed. He had been a favourite with the Ibrox fans, winning 3 Scottish caps in 1910 and helping the 'Gers to the Scottish League title a year later.

The signing of the three men was not entirely straightforward, involving some irregularities which brought a number of issues with officialdom. Chapman had agreed to pay all three the full yearly wage of £208 in order to persuade them to sign for City. However, when they joined the club it was already two months since the end of their previous contracts, meaning that they would be receiving more than the maximum weekly wage of £4. There had already been a number of similar cases, including a notable one involving Aston Villa, and when Chapman identified the problem he persuaded the City board to raise the matter with the Football League themselves in the hope of lessening any punishment.

His gamble backfired badly and when the League commission met in October they chose to levy the unexpectedly heavy sanction of a £125 fine, also requiring City to meet the commission's expenses. They decreed that Chapman and two of the players should be censured, and all three players were required to refund their excess wages to the club. This saved City more than £100 towards their fine. The commission made a point of formally noting "the straightforwardness of Mr Chapman in reporting the matter. He adopted an honourable course, which is greatly to his credit and that of the club."

The three signings were typical of Chapman's approach - there were to be few experiments. He was equally committed to clearing the decks and released a host of players in a summer cull, convinced they would never make the grade.

In the run up to the new season, there was a huge degree of optimism in the city and its surrounding area, as exemplified by the Yorkshire Evening Post: "The Leeds City Football Club's prospects



Evelyn Lintott, here pictured in England kit, was one of Herbert Chapman's new signings

from a playing point of view seem of the rosiest. The combination of talent gathered together by Mr Herbert Chapman, the new manager, will probably be found to be the strongest and best in the history of the club.”

To assist him with the task of getting City ready to compete, Chapman had also brought in trainer Dick Murrell, who had worked with him throughout his time at Northampton Town. It was all part of Chapman’s grand scheme to introduce a far more professional attitude to all the club’s operations. Murrell would remain at Elland Road for more than a decade.

Scott, Law and Lintott (assuming the role of captain from the man he replaced at centre-half, Tom Morris) were all on duty for the opening match, away to Fulham on 7 September. Also on debut were John Ferguson (a left-back signed from Dundee), John Allan (right-half, Everton), Jimmy Robertson (inside-right, Barrow) and Andy Gibson (inside-left, Southampton). The rest of the team comprised Stan Cubberley (who was reported to have put on “a lot of weight” during the summer), Hugh Roberts, Billy McLeod and Fred Croot.

With such dramatic change, there was a degree of inevitability about the outcome and City duly went down to defeat at Craven Cottage, although the 4-0 scoreline was very disappointing.

The Londoners took the lead within a minute and that badly unsettled City. Fulham were soon 2-0 ahead when Pearce was given an easy opportunity after Walker beat Law in the air. The whistle went for the interval with City four goals behind and in disarray. The home side began to cruise after the resumption and there was no further score; even though City got into the game they never really threatened a goal.



New City skipper Evelyn Lintott and referee Pellowe watch as Fulham captain Mavin tosses at the start of the opening match of the season at Craven Cottage on 7 September 1912

The Yorkshire Post: “Roberts and Croot on the wings made plenty of openings ... Gibson made an admirable partner to Croot, but showed a tendency to lie back a little too far ... Robertson played better in the second half than in the first, and his judicious footwork should be of much value to his side ... Lintott showed many good points, and effectively proved that there is a lot of good football in him yet.

“Cubberley was as good as usual, and did some neat things against a very clever wing ... but Allan did not look after his forwards so well as he might have done. His defensive work was sound enough, however, and it was as well it was, for Law was unsteady and slow ... The fact that Scott was beaten four times must not be accepted as evidence of weakness on his part. The first two goals were leavened with luck, and Coleman’s shot was practically unstoppable. The Irish international did some remarkably good work and should render the City effective assistance. To sum up, with a strengthening of the right-back position and an improvement in Gibson’s tactics, the City team should make a vastly better showing than last season’s combination in spite of their disastrous initial experience.”

They bounced back the following week with an enterprising 2-0 win against Cup holders Barnsley. The match was watched by a 15,000 Elland Road crowd, the best attendance in a year. Gibson was dropped after his disappointing debut, but with Joe Enright still unfit, Cubberley was switched to inside-left and Mick Foley recalled at left-half.

The Yorkshire Post congratulated the City management on not being panicked into wholesale change after the defeat at Fulham, reasoning that it always takes time for a new combination to settle, but did acknowledge that some modifications would be required: "Changes in two or three departments may be found necessary before a thoroughly balanced and capable combination can be evolved ... The left full-back was slow and rather weak in kicking. Neither outside-half distinguished himself ... Cubberley was not exactly a failure at inside-left, but he lacked speed and incisiveness, and Croot cannot hope to give his abilities full play until he decides to meet resolute backs with equally resolute aggression. In other respects the team played like a good, sound side. Scott was as fine in goal as ever he was for Everton, and really made victory possible by the masterly way in which he dealt with the Barnsley attacks in the first twenty minutes of play. Law, too, was like the full-back that won for himself the highest honour that Scotland can bestow; and Lintott, save possibly in the matter of speed, reached more to his international level than he has done since making his home in Yorkshire. McLeod got little help from his left wing, but was well served by Roberts and Robertson ... The latter pair promise to be more effective on the attack than any of their recent predecessors in the City team."

The match was a little disappointing but the 2-0 victory was a fillip, always on the cards after Robertson gave City a 35th minute lead. Croot took a corner he had forced himself and Allan headed on from fifteen yards out. It fell to Robertson who scored in a flash. Fifteen minutes before the final whistle, Croot made both points secure when he smashed home a penalty awarded for hands.

Chapman stuck by the same eleven a week later, away to Bradford Park Avenue, and was rewarded when his men returned home with a 1-0 win, thanks to "a beauty headed through by Cubberley after pretty combination on the part of Lintott, McLeod and Roberts," according to the Leeds Mercury. Again, Lintott and Scott earned critical acclaim.



Evelyn Lintott clears the City lines during the victory at Bradford on 21 September 1912

Two draws followed, against Wolves and Leicester, and then two goals from McLeod earned a 2-1 victory against Stockport County.

Things were developing nicely for Herbert Chapman, and the locals were enthusiastic; the Wolves match drew a crowd of 20,000, the club's best attendance for a League encounter in four years. Even a 3-2 defeat at Preston on 19 October did nothing to dampen the spirits, for City put on a strong display, recovering from falling behind to a soft goal in the seventh minute. Leeds twice equalised before losing to a third Preston goal which the visitors claimed vehemently was offside.

The Peacocks swiftly returned to winning form by hammering Burnley 4-1, as reported by JRB in the Leeds Mercury.

“Leeds City delighted their supporters not merely by defeating Burnley at Elland Road, but by the brilliant manner in which they rallied in the latter portion of the game.

“Although (McLeod) did not actually score, the home centre-forward was responsible for Leeds City’s first goal. Robertson was the scorer. He had only to tap the ball after Drabble repelled a shot from McLeod to score, and this he did.

“Then came the brilliant rally by Leeds City. Three goals in twenty minutes, all of which were well-merited. Perhaps the best of these three goals was the one registered by Robertson. He was clever in the manner he worked his way between Taylor and Watson and scored. McLeod’s turn came next. Bamford, endeavouring to head away, gave Drabble an awkward shot to stop. He fisted the ball away and then McLeod scored. The last and fourth goal of the match came immediately afterwards. McLeod was again responsible for it, although it was actually scored by Cubberley. It was the result of one of the home centre-forward’s clever runs, and although neatly done, it was not such a well-earned goal as that of Robertson’s or McLeod’s.”

After such a promising run, it was sad to see City slump into a period of startling inconsistency, losing 6-2 at Hull City on 2 November, recovering sharply to defeat Glossop 4-0 with a McLeod hat trick, then surrendering by two goals away to Clapton Orient.

After a 2-2 draw at Elland Road against Lincoln City on 23 November, JRB reported for the Mercury: “I heard it said ... that the changes made in the home team had proved successful.

I do not think so ...

Affleck did not play as

well with Copeland in the rear division as was anticipated, and Cubberley at inside-left was by no means as good as he is at half-back. Allan, too, was not a success in Cubberley’s original position.



From a centre by Fred Croot Billy McLeod on the far left scores City's first goal in the 6-2 defeat at Hull in November 1912

“The display given by the home team was not what it should or could have been. Their combination of a fortnight ago was absent, and the shooting of the forwards should have been improved upon ... With all their faults, Leeds played with determination in the initial half of the game, and for the major portion of the game did the attacking. But what opportunities they missed! In turn each forward was presented with a chance of scoring, but either erratic shooting or hesitation spoil their attacks. Roberts, at outside-right, was chief offender in this respect.

“Leeds were triers, and deserved the goal they secured through Robertson just before the interval. It was in the getting of this goal that Cubberley did his best piece of work during the afternoon. He headed the ball against the crossbar in a very clever manner, the result being that from the rebound Robertson had only the goalkeeper to beat to score.”

Lincoln scored in the first minute of each half and on both occasions Billy Scott should have prevented the goal. On the second occasion, in particular, he seemed to make no serious attempt to save the effort, simply watching transfixed as it entered the net.

It was clear that Herbert Chapman had work to do if he wished to build a side that was capable of challenging for promotion. The Yorkshire Post emphasised the point: “The present players will never blend, as their styles are so dissimilar. Individualism is by no means to be deprecated, but cohesiveness should be the first aim of an attacking line.”

Stephen Studd in *Herbert Chapman Football Emperor*: “Disappointed supporters demanded to know why Chapman had not signed any new players since the summer. It was not, he answered, through want of trying: clubs were either unwilling to sell so early in the season, or were asking too high a fee. Even junior clubs were holding on to their players. It would not, he admitted, be hard to find players who were ‘fairly good’, but they would not strengthen the team; nothing but the best would do. Then in November came a golden opportunity.

“Northampton Town, languishing since Chapman’s departure and losing money at the rate of £30 a week, were open to offers for Fanny Walden. Chapman jumped at the chance, but the Cobblers’ supporters were determined that Walden should stay, and a ‘shilling fund’ was set up to thwart the designs of their former manager. It worked, and by the end of the month the deal was off.”

Walden was an astounding talent and the star of Chapman’s Northampton team, known for his “darting, jinking runs down the right flank”. He may have stood just 5ft 2in, but he was a footballing wizard, later finding fame with Tottenham and England. He also played County cricket for Northamptonshire.

Chapman confessed, “In no instance have I personally suffered so great a disappointment.” He remained hopeful of securing Walden in the future, for he “would be the making of the Leeds City team if only I could get him to Elland Road”.

Thus denied, Chapman did manage to get at least some measure of compensation by taking a young outside-right called Simpson Bainbridge on trial from Seaton Delaval. Following a series of poor performances by Hugh Roberts, Chapman gave Bainbridge his debut on 7 December against Bristol City. The week before, City had won 2-1 at Nottingham Forest and, despite Roberts scoring in the game, it was clear that he had regressed significantly since his outstanding form of the previous campaign. The Leeds Mercury claimed that, “He has yet to show that he is the Roberts of old,” while the Yorkshire Post noted that he “showed no general improvement in his play.”



Simpson Bainbridge was described as the “catch of the season”

The Yorkshire Post described the win at Forest as City’s “best performance of the season. It was not a victory that the team or their friends had any solid reason for anticipating ... Certainly the prospect of success seemed very unlikely when the City had a goal scored against them in the first minute of play. It is a strange fact that in three successive matches Scott, the City custodian, has been beaten four times within a minute of a kick off. All goalkeepers are, of course, liable to be taken by surprise but it really was want of alertness that caused Scott to be beaten at the very opening of last Saturday’s engagement.”

Despite the victory, and Roberts’ goal, Chapman was sorely tried by the winger’s lack of application and resolution; he had decided that enough was enough. Roberts never got another chance in a City shirt. Chapman had already decided that if Bainbridge came up to scratch then he would invite offers for the Welshman. The manager had no hesitation in throwing Bainbridge into the fray against redoubtable opponents.

The youngster was an instant success against Bristol, as reported by the Yorkshire Post: “Much local interest centred round Bainbridge ... It was quite a relief to see a player in that position with skill sufficiently pronounced to justify a lengthy trial, as Bainbridge undoubtedly possesses merit beyond the ordinary. He played with judgement, kept his place and shot accurately. His appearance upon the scene may save the club hundreds of pounds.” The Evening Post enthusiastically pronounced the young winger “the catch of the season”.

Bainbridge did just as well the following week in a 2-2 draw at Birmingham with McLeod getting both goals, one of them coming from an astute centre by the winger. McLeod’s first effort brought up his century of League goals in City colours, a landmark for a great servant.

Leeds City were now well placed to mount a genuine promotion challenge; they were eighth, just six points off the leaders and enjoying matches in hand on most of the teams around them. With four successive home games to come before the end of the year there were high hopes that the Peacocks could catapult themselves right into the thick of things. City had not tasted defeat at Elland Road since the end of March and expected to continue the run when they hosted Huddersfield Town on 21 December. Inexplicably, however, they could not find their form and were on the wrong end of a 3-0 reverse.

Yorkist in the Leeds Mercury: “The opening stages of Saturday’s game did not suggest that defeat was in store for Leeds City, as they began in sparkling style. It looked as if Huddersfield Town were going to be run off their feet. In the end, however, it was Leeds City who were run off their feet ... Huddersfield Town led by a goal to nil at the interval, and they certainly deserved their lead, for they were undoubtedly the better side fore and aft.

“It was thought the second half would see an improvement in Leeds City, but this improvement did not come, whereas Huddersfield Town played even better football than in the opening half. There were only three men on the Leeds City side who played up to anything like form, and these were Foley, Bainbridge and Croot.”

The shocks continued as Grimsby won 2-1 on Christmas Day and Blackpool by two goals to nil the next day. Herbert Chapman could be excused for feeling downhearted at this turn of affairs, but had some positive news to sustain his morale. He had remained on the look out for new talent and enjoyed some notable success in the transfer market during the festive period.

One of his new signings, inside-forward Arthur Price from Worksop Town, was an unknown, but the other was a celebrated and highly regarded talent.

Leeds set a new club record when they paid Bradford City £1,400 for their captain and inside-left, Jimmy Speirs. His goal against Newcastle United in an Old Trafford replay had won the Bantams the FA Cup in 1911 and Speirs had won a Scottish cap during his earlier days at Rangers. He was a renowned and gifted inside-forward and certainly the closest thing to the finished article that Leeds City had ever signed.

The player had a reputation of stellar proportions and was a totemic figure at the Bradford club. However, following the Cup success he had grown disaffected with the regime at Valley Parade and Chapman, who had been following events closely across West Yorkshire, leapt into action at just the right time. He was eloquent in the arguments he put to the player and quickly persuaded Speirs that his future lay at Elland Road. The Yorkshire Evening Post reported, “The enterprise of the

Leeds City management in securing Speirs would have staggered those responsible for the club a few years ago.”

Speirs was signed on 27 December and went straight into the City team the next day against Fulham. Arthur Price was a second debutant and Simpson Bainbridge continued to ply his trade down the right flank. Both these latter two scored and Speirs made a great impression, being “responsible for many fine passes and shots, but he was inclined to wander from his position. Price delighted the spectators and, together with Bainbridge, made a capital right wing,” according to the Leeds Mercury.

City worked themselves into a 2-1 lead, but the Londoners fought back to win 3-2, thanks mainly to late errors by full-backs Copeland and Ferguson. It was disappointing, but the new arrivals had done enough to give long suffering locals genuine hope that fortunes might improve in 1913.

Chapman promised when he arrived at Elland Road that he would get City promoted within two seasons; his initial aim had been to finish this first campaign in the top five, allowing the club to benefit from the newly introduced “talent money”. Their run of defeats in December had seen them slump to 15th, reversing the upward trend of the autumn, but the new manager remained confident it would not take long to turn City’s fortunes around. The signing of Speirs was a master stroke and the Scot had the necessary class to transform a lacklustre Second Division side into genuine title contenders.



Bradford City captain Jimmy Speirs cost City a club record £1,400