

Beacon Hill Rovers, 100 Years Old.

A hundred years ago the villagers of Wickham Bishops held a meeting at the Church Hall for the returning soldiers of the First World War to thank them for their service. Before the meeting finished and the tables were cleared for the music and dancing the troops were asked what they wanted to remember their fallen comrades by. To the surprise of the local dignitaries the request wasn't for a monument but a sports field where life could be lived and memories held dear. This reaction wasn't uncommon across the country and the same thing happened in Maldon where the returning soldiers asked for a community swimming pool but they were ignored. Back in Wickham Bishops the villagers set about providing what the lads wanted and with the help of the pub landlord, Jack Barnes, the field behind the Mitre was cleared for a football pitch.

The War Memorial for Wickham Bishops and the Braxted villages was, quite rightly, still built. It was instigated and paid for by the parents of one of the villages' fallen, Lt. Charles Oscar Wilson. Their son was killed in a battle in Gaza and they wanted it's inauguration to commemorate his and the other twenty-two men from the villages who gave their lives in the War to end all Wars. Charles Wilson died on 26th March 1917 and it was on Saturday 26th March 1921 that the Wilson family and the villagers arranged the inauguration of the war memorial. Col. T. Gibbons DSO of the Essex Regiment unveiled the cross and in his speech acknowledged the bravery and patriotism of the fallen. Yet he also echoed the feelings of the local troops who had returned, safe if not unscathed; when he went on to say "In remembering the dead we should never forget the living. They had all taken their chance in war and now deserve to take their chance of Peace, to live life to the full, enjoying their day with their comrades and families". To rousing cheers and music of the Territorial Army Band everyone paraded down Handley's Lane to the new Sports Field for an afternoon of refreshments, fun and games.

The previous weeks had seen lots of informal kickabouts on the new pitch behind the Mitre and a team of agricultural workers from Warren Farm near Witham had challenged the locals to a game. Returning veterans Harry Stubbings and Bill Heaney arranged the players, Joe Bareham sorted a kit and referee and the village football team could genuinely "live life to the full" as they played the Club's first ever match as part of those 26th March celebrations. Although the game was lost the seeds were sown. More friendlies were played that spring and the following 1921-22 season Wickham Rovers were founder members of the new Kelvedon League. A 1928 move to Snows Corner led to the tag Beacon Hill Rovers and a long future of many highs and some lows for the teams. The early '50s team (pictured) were the most trophy laden (to date!), winning four League titles and the prestigious D'Arcy Cup three times. By the time the Club moved back in 2005 to the field behind the Mitre, Rovers had grown from a single team to a community of 250 players in Men's, Women's, boys and girls teams from u6s through to the 'older generation' playing the newly initiated Walking Football.

Along with the rest of our lives in 2021 the 100 year Celebrations have been constantly modified and the grand Gala Dinner set for the actual 100th Birthday has had to be cancelled but given the circumstances of the birth of Beacon Hill Rovers FC the Club is certainly determined not to be discouraged and will take advantage of an opportunity to party. So the call is out for all former players to get together over the weekend of 24th/25th July 2021 at the Club's ground in Gt Totham Rd. Details are available at the Club's website <https://www.beaconhillrovers.com/> and via <https://linktr.ee/BHRFC100>

Beacon Hill Chairman Merf Roberts is more than happy to do the old school chatting on 01621 857466 and is certainly keen to catch up with old stories and collect team photos, press cuttings etc for the Club's Official History to be published this summer (also at merf.roberts@btinternet.com). If you used to play for Rovers or remember a friend or family member who did then it would be great to hear from you and hopefully catch up in person in July.

Happy Birthday, Beacon Hill Rovers.

Team: Beacon Hill Rovers 1950-51

From back left:

Joe Cousins, John Cadman, Jack Turner, Eddie Layer, Teddy Cousins, Albert Appleton,
John Pook, Stan Mann,
Fred Gooch, Eric Smith, Fred Rule, Ken Fenton, Eric Moss, Doug Banham, Sam Smith.