

GARY EDWARDS

FIXTURES, 1907-8.

Date	Home	Away	Result
Sep. 3	Gloucester	H	1 4
9	Leicester Fosse	A	3 2
14	Clapton Orient	H	3 2
21	Blackpool	A	0 1
28	Stoke	A	0 1
Oct. 5	West Bromwich A.	H	0 0
12	Hull City	A	2 2
19	Derby County	H	2 2
26	Lincoln City	A	2 2
Nov. 2	Fulham	H	1 1
9	Barnsley	A	2 1
16	Chesterfield	H	2 1
23	Burnley	A	2 1
30	Oldham Athletic	H	0 0
Dec. 14	Queensy Town	A	0 0
21	Waterhampton W.	H	0 0
28	Stockport County	A	2 2
31	Gainsborough T.	H	0 0

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FOOTBALL TEAM 1908



EVERY CLOUD

How Leeds City Became United



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Chapter One

A Menace to the Rugby Game

LEEDS, 12 February 1896. It is dusk as two shrouded figures emerge from a dark alley; they stand beneath a gas lamp totally engulfed in dense fog. The taller of the two men leans towards the cupped hands of the more diminutive one, his face instantly illuminated by a struck match as deep shadows dance around the wrinkles on his face, highlighting his furrowed brow.

His Woodbine sparks to life, and he draws down the smoke before exhaling a long stream that disappears into the night. Joe Adams will be 41 in a month's time, but his face hides his age – he looks 20 years older than he is. The taller man, John Bennett, who is three years senior to Joe, uses the still-lit match to light his lamplighter's pole as he reaches up to bring the lamp to life, revealing a decrepit and fading pub sign – 'Green Dragon Hotel'.

The outline of Leeds Town Hall stands just 200 yards further down The Headrow, just visible through the mist, but the clock which John was hoping to see was engulfed.

Inside, through the orange glowing windows of the Green Dragon, silhouetted figures can be seen... 'Wonder what's going on in there?' asks Joe Adams.

'It's some sort of a football meeting,' John replies. 'They're trying to bring the game up here from down south. There's more chance of 'em catching Jack the Ripper! This is rugby territory, always will be.'

Joe looks at him, 'What do you mean, "football"? Do you mean that association football that some people are talking about? Round ball thing?' He simulates a circle with both his hands. 'I've heard that they're already playing it somewhere in Yorkshire.'

'Aye,' says John. 'Remember when we were watching Holbeck Rugby week 'afore last and people were saying that some big-wigs are coming up from London to try and get association football played around here, "socket" they call it.' He laughs. 'My nephew, Harry, plays soccer as a half-back, whatever that means. His team is called Leeds Northern, they play up near the tram depot at Chapeltown, but to my shame, I've never seen him play. But I will, I need to,' he says, then he remembers he is supposed to be against the round ball sport, and points to a shop adjacent to the Green Dragon, which was at No 15 Guildford Street. 'That shop there is for the southern softies.' It was called Brown, Carson & Co. Wine Merchants.

‘We’ve just about finished here,’ says Bennett looking down the dark alley still shrouded in the thick smog caused by the combination of fog rising from the River Aire and smoke from coal fires. Small pools of glowing yellow light disappear into the distance. It is now 6.45pm. ‘Why don’t we go in and see what they’re on about?’

‘What do you mean? Can anybody go in?’ asks Adams.

Bennett has laid his extinguished pole down in the alley and is already trying the door handle when the door opens. ‘Let’s go in and find out,’ he says.

‘Good evening gentlemen, come in. Sit down, we’re just about to get started,’ says James Spittle, sitting behind a large table that faces a congregation of around 30 men, hunched around tables glugging ale. Many of them are facing away from the speaker.

Spittle is a rather imposing figure, easily over 6ft. His bushy greying side whiskers extend to his moustache, that bears the yellowing inflicted upon it by a clay pipe which he clutches in his right hand. Alongside Spittle to his left is William Hirst and to his right, W. H. Shaw. All three men, from Huddersfield, have been pioneering association football in that area; three weeks earlier they had presided over a similar gathering at the White Swan Hotel in nearby Halifax and they had left suitably encouraged by the outcome. This evening’s meeting was to assess the interest and gauge the opinion of football in Leeds and the possibility of forming an official West Yorkshire Association before taking their proposal to the Football Association in London for permission.

It is believed that the first ever association football match in Leeds took place at Holbeck Recreation Ground on Boxing Day, 1877. It had been organised by Mr Fred Sanderson, who was president of the Sheffield New Association. He brought two teams from Sheffield who came with their own kit, goalposts, a ball and even umpires. Despite freezing cold temperatures and vicious high winds, a good crowd gathered. At that time there was no penalty area as the penalty kick hadn't yet been introduced and the goal area was marked off with a semi-circle. There were no nets and the two-handed throw-in was, as yet, unheard of. The crowd weren't overly impressed, being mainly rugby followers, and more disappointment came for the Sheffield Association when after the match they discovered that almost all the spectators had been season ticket holders of Holbeck Rugby Club and had therefore not paid to watch the game, leaving the Association without a single penny in payment. Football in Leeds was certainly going to be a slow process.

Spittle lights and puffs on his clay pipe, 'Gentlemen, my colleagues and I have been greatly impressed with the progress this city has made in its endeavour to establish association football in Yorkshire; last month we met with the same enthusiasm in Halifax and we are supremely confident that we can take the required criteria to London with great expectation of a favourable result.'

There had been several teams in areas of Leeds since 1880 and amongst them two different teams called Leeds FC, both of which had disbanded due to lack of interest, and a club called Leeds Albion that lasted four years before

folding in 1892. However, in February 1894, the West Yorkshire League was established with a new team, Leeds AFC, winning the first ever league by eight points. It had been this renewed interest in football and Leeds AFC's success in particular that had alerted Spittle and his men to the idea of expanding soccer across West Yorkshire.

John and Joe have found two chairs at a small table near the back and close to the door. 'I don't think we'll be long here,' whispers John. 'We'll just slip out unnoticed. I don't want to be too late anyway. I'm famished.' He lights up another Woodbine and passes one to Joe. John looks around, the brass of the rails and pumps at the bar are in need of a good polish and some of the damp air from outside has infiltrated the room, but it is homely and has a good feel. 'It's a while since we were in here, eh?' he whispers to Joe who nods and whispers back, 'Aye, about seven or eight years I'd say.'

This gathering was a direct result of that meeting chaired by the three men from Huddersfield at the White Swan Hotel in Halifax the previous month; the first known instance of an interest from Huddersfield in soccer.

This particular meeting in Leeds lasted for over two hours, resulting in Spittle being appointed as the Association's divisional representative with Hirst filling the post of president and Shaw becoming vice president. Overall it was a very positive meeting and the three men left feeling sufficiently armed with enough interest and enthusiasm to take their findings to the Football Association's headquarters in London.

Forty minutes later, John Bennett had walked back to his home two miles away in Holbeck, and now sat alone in his kitchen, his wife Mary having retired to bed hours earlier, but not before she had left his supper on the kitchen table. As he sat and ate his cold offal he reflected on the evening's meeting. There seemed to be a possibility of first-class football in Leeds; but he still maintained in his mind that it would never replace rugby, which had dominated northern England, particularly Yorkshire and Lancashire, for around 30 years. Besides, both John and Joe were rugby men; although John's nephew had started playing 'socket' a couple of years ago, he wasn't sold on the idea. But John admitted to himself that Spittle and his associates had been very convincing at the Green Dragon meeting. Bennett pondered this as he pulled a small crumpled leaflet from his pocket that he had picked up at the pub earlier. 'Association Football in Leeds. Meeting at Green Dragon Wednesday, February, 12. 7 o'clock.' He then poked around at the remains of the sheep's brain and heart on his plate before picking up a tankard of ale, which he drank quickly before resting his head on his kitchen table and lapsing into a deep sleep.

Meanwhile Joe, who lived with his wife Myrtle in a small dwelling close to the Crooked Billet public house in Hunslet, sat down to his table and opened a bottle of beer: he had to be back on the streets of Leeds with John at 6.30 the next morning to put out those gas lamps. He reflected on whether or not 'socket', which was rapidly being branded by the oval ball fraternity as 'a menace to rugby', could really happen.

Although the early form of the official Football Association came about in 1863, rugby, and cricket, were by far the most popular sports with the working class of the north of England. The English Rugby Union had always been staunchly pro-amateurism, but in Yorkshire and Lancashire they believed that the large sums of money coming in the way of gate receipts and such could only lead to one thing – professionalism. In the summer of 1895, 22 clubs resigned from the English Union and the Northern Union was founded with the following clubs: Bradford, Brighouse Rangers, Batley, Broughton Rangers, Halifax, Hunslet, Hull, Huddersfield, Liversedge, Leeds, Leigh, Manningham, Oldham, Rochdale Hornets, Runcorn, St Helens, Stockport, Tyldesley, Wakefield Trinity, Warrington and Widnes. After the first season, however, Tyldesley, Liversedge and Stockport dropped out. But the Northern Union quickly expanded and further clubs such as Salford, Swinton, Morecambe, Castleford, Bramley, Heckmondwike, Holbeck and Leeds Parish Church joined. To accommodate the increasing influx of new clubs the league was reconstructed and also the Challenge Cup competition was inaugurated.

After the introduction of professionalism in 1898 payment for time lost through playing was followed by the legalisation of compensation in the form of wages, but restricted by a stipulation of a supplementary occupation. In 1901, around the time of the death of Queen Victoria, the Northern League was formed and this was to have

far-reaching consequences for the world of rugby, and indeed, association football.

The reconstruction of the league and the forming of two divisions would result in a conflict between the union and league bodies. The union had rendered the interests of the richer clubs identical to that of the less fortunately placed. The league on the other hand provided the opportunity for leading clubs to play each other irrespective of their geographical position and so the subsequent two-tier league system was introduced, placing the elite of the crop in the top tier and the less effective teams into the second tier. Eventually, they split the leagues into Yorkshire and Lancashire.

Bradford club Manningham, who only the year before had become the world's first ever rugby league champions, now found themselves relegated to the lower division and fell on hard times. Perplexed and angry at being 'left out in the cold', Manningham considered resigning its membership.

Association football was still trying to force its way into the sporting structure in the north and in March 1903 Manningham offered to share their Valley Parade ground with a professional football club by the name of Bradford City. Two months later, however, a hostile meeting called by Manningham's president Alfred Ayrton saw a vote of 75 votes to 34 in favour of football and not rugby being played at Valley Parade. Manningham disbanded and Bradford City was born.

The first Association Football League had been formed in 1888 by Aston Villa director William McGregor, whose

club had been the most successful English club of the Victorian era and by the time of the death of the Queen had won five league titles and three FA Cups. With other prominent clubs of that era, such as Blackburn, Sunderland and Preston, the end of the 19th century saw Britain being swept by football mania attracting huge crowds of largely working-class men, but Leeds was the largest city in Britain not to have a major football team.

Joe was still thinking about the idea of football breaking through into West Yorkshire as he began to eat his supper – turtle soup. He loved the green jelly-like fat which was used to flavour the soup made from the long-boiled stringy flesh of the animal. When he had finished his soup he gulped the last few drops of his beer down and his gaze turned to a photograph on the nearby mantelpiece. It was of him and Myrtle and between them was their daughter Rose, who had died of diphtheria, aged 13, just three months earlier. In the photograph Rose sat up in bed looking straight at the camera, flanked by her solemn parents. Photography was still in its infancy, but it was quite common in those Victorian times when a loved one died to have a family photograph taken with the corpse in a pose. Often in those post-mortem photographs the subject's eyes were propped open, or even pupils painted on the eyes of the finished photographic print. Looking at this Adams family portrait, no one would guess that Rose in the middle of the photograph was in fact dead. For many Victorians, partly due to the expense, this would be the only time they would be photographed.

Interestingly, the nearby Crooked Billet, which Joe often frequented, had housed a mortuary until only recently. The Aire and Calder Navigation, a canalised section of the River Aire, ran behind the pub and bodies would often be fished out and taken to the morgue. A reward was given to anyone retrieving a body from the River Aire, but it was double if a body should be retrieved from the Aire and Calder Navigation. Often then, if a body was fished out of the River Aire, it would be taken to the Navigation and hopefully fished out in front of witnesses before being taken to the morgue for a double reward.

Joe Adams and John Bennett had been firm friends and work colleagues for many years. They had fought side by side in the infamous Leeds Gas Strike in 1890. Although the dispute didn't affect Joe or John directly, both men, being gas street lighters, felt compelled to stand shoulder to shoulder with their Leeds Gas colleagues. However, neither of them, nor anyone else, could have foreseen the large-scale disruption and riots that would unfold. Initially, in the dispute's infancy, Leeds Gas workers had been prevented from entering their respective gasworks across Leeds and replacements, blacklegs in effect, were brought in from other gasworks across London and Lancashire by train. These replacements would carry out the tasks of the stokers, the engineers, general labourers and any other roles that needed filling in the forcefully vacated gasworks. These replacements would become known only as 'Strangers' by Leeds Gas workers and things quickly escalated as the Strangers

entered the different Leeds gasworks under police guard. Violence erupted at Meadow Lane and York Street and as a procession of Strangers surrounded by armed police made their way to New Wortley Gasworks, hundreds of Leeds Gas workers lay in wait on top of Wortley Bridge. The Strangers had come to realise by now that they had been brought to Leeds by the Gas Committee under false pretences but they were attacked from the bridge by a cascade of boulders, bricks, concrete slabs, iron pipes and anything that came to hand.

Hundreds of police reinforcements, including the mounted constabulary, were brought in, in an attempt to stabilise the situation and even the military was called in. Foot-soldiers from the Leeds barracks arrived armed with light, long gun firearms often used by high-mobility troops. Also ordered to the fray was a company of Carabineers from the 6th Dragoon Guard from the Strensall barracks at York.

Thousands upon thousands of Leeds Gas men stood firm and united and by the time the strike ended nine days after it had begun, hundreds had been injured or hospitalised – miraculously there had been no fatalities.

Joe and John also stood together on the touchline at Holbeck Recreation Ground on Elland Road as staunch supporters of Holbeck Rugby League Club, who had joined the Northern Union in 1896. They were actually founder members of the Leeds and District organisation after a meeting held at the Green Dragon, which John and Joe had attended, had decided to form a more local league with the other founder clubs being Bramley, Hunslet,

Kirkstall, Leeds Parish Church and the forerunner of Leeds Rhinos, Leeds St John's.

Known locally as the 'Reckry', Holbeck Recreation Ground was one of the best in Leeds. It was used for both codes of football and cricket. Pre-Headingley, Yorkshire County Cricket Club played there and among the records is a game in 1868 in which Yorkshire dismissed Lancashire for 30 and 34 in the second innings. The Holbeck Cricket Club used to play on Holbeck Moor, before moving to the Recreation Ground. The Reckry was well-appointed and extensive. It was situated on the top side of Holbeck Moor, where the streets known as 'the Recreations' now stand. It extended from the Waggon and Horses public house to Brown Lane, and from Top Moor Side, along Elland Road to the Neville Works, along Brown Lane to the vicarage. On one side of the ground was a grandstand – and it had a unique history. It once graced the old Leeds Racecourse at Pontefract Road. When this closed, it was dismantled and taken to Holbeck. While the Recreation Ground was occasionally used for soccer, it was in all intents and purposes a rugby ground, and so it came as a shock to the rugby public when in 1897, they were informed that their lease would not be renewed.

Later that same year, Holbeck purchased the Old Peacock Ground from Bentley's brewery. It had been located by the club's secretary, Mr Robert Walker, who had contacted the brewery, who in turn were no doubt influenced by the fact that there were two of their own licensed houses in the district and they would benefit

further from the proposed scheme. The Old Peacock Ground was an open grass field at the foot of Beeston Hill and had taken its name from the nearby pub. Holbeck paid £1,100 on condition that it should remain first and foremost a football ground for at least seven years and Bentley's also insisted on retaining the catering rights. A new stand was erected by Holbeck as the ground gradually became known as Elland Road. The first ever soccer match to be played at Elland Road was the West Yorkshire Cup Final on 23 April 1898, Hunslet retaining the trophy by beating Harrogate 1-0.

Initially, however, Mr Walker's proposal met with strong opposition, many supporters contending that the ground was too far away, and at a crowded meeting in Holbeck schoolroom, there were some heated arguments between Mr Walker and local councillor J. Henry, one of the directors, who led the opposition. But in the end, when the vote was finally taken, the proposal to move to Elland Road received a large majority.

But, the making of the ground was soon beset with difficulties, chief of which was the shortage of labour. It so happened that the firms whose services were required were engaged upon a big scheme of demolition and building in the centre of Leeds – the scheme that swept away Wood Street, and established the Empire Theatre, County Arcade, Queen Victoria Street and King Edward Street. Work did proceed at Elland Road, however, but not without problems, one of which being the need to build a grandstand there. The provision of a new stand hadn't been in Mr Walker's original plans as he had intended

buying one from the West Riding Ground, which had come to the end of its existence as a sports centre. But the stand at Meanwood Road was no ordinary structure. It had been designed to project over the beck that ran behind the ground, and its peculiar construction rendered it unsuitable for re-erection on another site, meaning that the deal was off and that a new stand would have to be built at Holbeck. The new ground, however, was not as pretentious as the present one. The pitch, for instance, was at right-angles to the direction it takes today, with the touchlines running parallel with Elland Road – it was a compact little ground.

At the end of the season 1902/03 Holbeck finished joint second with St Helens behind champions Wakefield Trinity. However, in the promotion play-off with St Helens on 14 May 1904, Holbeck were defeated 7-0, a result that put paid to Holbeck's ambition and indeed their future. The club decided, much as Mannigham had done the year before, that it would be financially unable to continue in the Second Division and folded. So, following the 7-0 defeat, Joe and John, along with another fan, John Brewer, trudged along to the Old Peacock to drown their sorrows. Even before the news had broken, everyone in the pub figured they had seen Holbeck's last game. And it certainly wasn't any compensation to them that professional football in the area was becoming a real possibility.