

071

Edgar Street

HEREFORD UNITED FOOTBALL CLUB

Football in Hereford dates back to the mid-1870s with the formation of Nil Desperandum FC, an offshoot of the Hereford Rugby Club. The Nils renamed to Hereford FC in September 1880 and according to a series of articles in the *Hereford Times* of 1899, 'The first ground acquired by the club was curiously enough the present meadow in Edgar Street which was opened on November 1st, 1884, with a match against Malvern.'

Meetings were regularly held there by the Hereford & County Amateur Athletics Club and help explain the oval perimeter that became a feature of the ground. It is difficult to say with absolute certainty if the Edgar Street used for the Malvern game is the same one as today. At the time, the area was largely rural. Football fields, often consisting of little more than goals and a roped-off spectator area, could be moved with relative ease within the same locale.

Hereford FC flitted between Edgar Street and other venues through the early to mid-1890s. Acceptance to the Birmingham & District League in 1896 (prompting a name change to Hereford Town, possibly to avoid confusion with league rivals Hereford Thistle who played at the Barracks Ground) saw Edgar Street's flimsy material enclosure replaced with boarding in 1898 to prevent 'the loss of gate money occasioned by the wind taking the old-time canvas heavenward'. The cost of the improvement was met by private subscription via the committee.

Hereford FC (or Hereford Town FC as they latterly appeared in league tables) folded around 1901/02. As time progressed, it became clear the remaining clutch of amateur sides in the town might be better equipped to challenge for honours by joining forces, leading to the merger of St Martins and RAOC Depot in 1924, creating Hereford United. The same year, the Hereford Athletic Ground Company, a body of citizens formed to provide a multi-purpose sporting facility in the heart of the city who purchased the ground from Bulmers in 1920, restricted the number of football clubs using Edgar Street. Going forward, only two would be allowed to play there, one being Hereford United. Around this time, the athletic club ceased meetings at the ground due to lack of support.

United joined the Birmingham Combination, constructing a stand on the Edgar Street side and a similar-sized structure opposite. Desirous of a higher standard of football, the club successfully applied to the Birmingham League for 1928/29. Hereford City FC continued playing at Edgar Street until folding at some point in the late 1930s. With City gone, United were uncontested as the town's leading club and in 1939 were elected to the Southern League from the Birmingham League. To accommodate a surge of post-war interest a new shelter was erected on the popular side and floodlights added in 1953, a coronation gift by local company Painter Brothers. The four, 50ft pylons were highly advanced and installed at a time when the technology was still in its infancy.