

# Football in Bishop's Waltham

By Joel Turner



## Early football - before World War II

Forming in 1901, Bishop's Waltham Town FC was a founding member of the Meon Valley Football League as one of six teams from the local area that competed in the league's inaugural 1906-07 season. Whilst the league ran up until the outbreak of war in 1914, its post World War One format appears to have been substantially more successful: both for the club and for the league itself.



*Gus Crook, local football player (BW00901934)*

For many across Europe, World War One created a longing for football, with the sport encapsulating the homelands they had left. In addition to the famous 1914 Christmas Day match that took place in no-man's Land on a battlefield in France, poet Siegfried Sassoon was known to read out football news and scores to his troops before battle in an attempt to calm the nerves. With

soldiers travelling across borders to unknown lands, football became a universal language and a new-found enthusiasm for the game carried home back to England once the fighting ceased.



*Meon Valley League medal of 1924-5 presented to E. Pyle of Chase Rovers FC, another local team (BW00901885)*

With Bishop's Waltham's own White Swan pub used as the meeting point for the league, the Meon Valley Football League decided to expand into two divisions and add multiple cup competitions in 1919 after substantial local interest.

The restructured format saw early successes for BW Town, with the side boasting consecutive league wins in 1921-22 and 1922-23, as well as a hat-trick of Pink Cup wins between 1921 and 1923. The club's cup triumphs were especially fitting; with the Pink Cup named after

Bishop Waltham's own Thomas Pink, who donated the silverware to the league and would go on to become league president in 1928.

At this time, local football was strictly kept as such; with rules in place to ensure that players were turning out for the local team. When one player found out that only a portion of his house fell within a two-mile radius of the local post-office (one means of regulation), he simply limited his dwellings to the favourable half of his residency.



*1923-4 Winchester and District Football League winners medal presented to W. Parvin of BWFC (BWMMT:2023.8 Donated by Fred Butter)*

## Bishop's Waltham F.C., 1921-22

**Winners -**

Meon Valley League, Division 1, 1921-22.  
South Hants Hospital Cup, 1921-22.  
Pink's Cup, 1920-21-22.



W. Blackman, A.E. Apps, R. Chalk(Capt.)  
Mr. T. Pink(Chairman), Mr. C. Etheridge, Sen.(Committee), H.B. Apps, R.F. Apps, T. King, Mr E. Edwards(Committee), Mr. J.C. Blaver(Committee).  
A.C. Cook, C. Moore, W. Parvin, H.L. Levers, C.E. Etheridge, F. Houghton.



The 1921-22 successful team (BW00100033 above) and before a game against Hedge End, being greeted by W. G. Nicholson, MP for Petersfield (BW01102390 below)

Whilst the early 1920's represented the club's best success in this era, Bishop's Waltham did boast further glory between the league's reformation and the Second World War (which unsurprisingly halted league proceedings once again). With the Meon Valley League seemingly not enough to quench the thirst for local football, Bishop's Waltham also entered the Winchester and Direct Football League and were able to win the competition at least once; with Town noted victors of the 1923-24 season. As seasons went on, the side ran out as victors of the Meon Valley Football League a further time (1938-39) as well as winning the Second Division (1927-28), as well as a handful of local cup competitions.

This era also allowed Bishop's Waltham to produce two Meon Valley Football League presidents; the aforementioned Mr. Thomas Pink – described as “one of the greatest personalities the league has ever known” in the Meon Valley Football League centenary almanac – and Mr. A L Bishop, who was credited with Bishop Waltham's strong finish to the 1930s and succeeded Thomas Pink as league president in 1948.



*Fixture cards for 1921-22 (above) and 1920-1 (below) showing team formation (BW00901933)*

The fixture list for Bishop's Waltham's 1920-21 and 1921-22 season; during which the club managed a League-Cup double, winning both the First Division and The Pink Cup. The latter was named after then-club chairman Thomas Pink (credited as such on the reverse of the booklet) and would be a notable avenue of success for the club, winning three of the competition's first four instalments.

In addition to this, the team's formation has been sketched on the back of the fixture list by the owner. Bishop's Waltham (without the Town suffix) would line up in the then-widespread 2-3-5 formation; a system popularised in the 1880s to better accommodate the revolutionary tactic of passing the ball to teammates (solo runs of unrelenting dribbling had previously dominated the game) and initially criticised for being too defensive.



## 1945-Present.

Following the end of World War Two, local football wasted little time in reforming; with the Meon Valley Football League up-and-running once again by 1946. Bishop's Waltham was an excellent illustration of the area's desire to get local football back in their lives; with the town fielding as many as four different sides in the following years. Town were joined by Bishop's Waltham Social, BW British Legion and a Bishop's Waltham Youth side across the Meon Valley League tiers.



*BWFC 1951-2 team. Back row: Veck, Hudson, Don Cole, Stubbington, Colbourne, Sillence, Veck Snr. Front row: Dave Cole, Gray, C. Crossley, Belstone, J. Crossley*

When the Meon Valley League took a near decade-long break in 1956 (reforming in 1965 as a Sunday League), a new Bishop's Waltham side emerged; replacing the existing side formed in the 1900s but maintaining the same name. The new side – founded in 1955 as a youth team – plied its trade in the Southampton League instead.



*BWFC Game day collection box (BWMMT:2016.7)*

When Meon Valley did reform, Bishop's Waltham side re-entered a youth team rather as opposed to their senior side.

In addition to their league commitments, Bishop's Waltham participated in a number of charity games including hosting a series of matches against ex-Portsmouth FC players that started in the 1960s. Spectators would be treated to a host of notable players from Pompey's history; none more spectacular than Jimmy Dickinson, Portsmouth all-time

appearance holder (764 games). Dickinson, who played at left-half for club and country, has his fingerprints all over English footballing history; not only being capped by England 48 times but also appearing in the 1954 World Cup and “The Game of the Century” in 1953; where England’s assumed footballing supremacy was dismantled by a legendary Hungarian side at Wembley. Dickinson also managed to play in the repeat fixture a year later in Budapest, where Hungary’s “Magical Magyars” ran out 7-1 winners. Dickinson was awarded an MBE for services to football in 1964 and participated in numerous charity matches against Bishop’s Waltham.

The charity matches continued into the later decades too; with a Bishop’s Waltham XI facing off against the curiously named “Top Ten XI” – a team consisting of celebrities and sports personalities – in 1975 which included the likes of famed ornithologist Bill Oddie and former radio DJ David Hamilton. One would have to assume Bill Oddie played on the wing.



*Programme for Charity Game in 1970s (T. Hiscock)*

Participation in the Meon Valley League for Bishop’s Waltham based sides continued into the 1970s; with BW Social playing alongside Blunt Brothers I and IIs as well as pub side Mafeking Hero. Blunt



*The first BW v. Ex Pompey players charity match 13th March 1966, Hoe Road, Bishop’s Waltham (BW00901874)*



Brothers (a construction company rather than a family able to field two full football teams) were one of 12 original members as the league reformed in 1965 as a Sunday League. The team would see several successes in the 1970s with a host of cup wins in addition to a Division Two title in 1971-72; an achievement Mafeking Hero would also manage by the end of the decade. Former Brothers player Brian “Brandy” Blunt would go on to become mayor of Winchester in the 1990s.

BW Social were also able to expand their trophy cabinet during the decade by winning The Pink Cup in 1975-76. Social ran out 1-0 victors over South Star (Wickham) with an own goal in extra time deciding the outcome. Despite the narrow scoreline, Social were said to have deserved the victory; with a journalist noting they recorded more shots on goal than their opponents. The same match report states that Bishop’s Waltham Social are the first local side to win the Pink Cup – named after the local man – in 53 years, although this may be overlooking that Blunt Brothers managed it three seasons earlier.



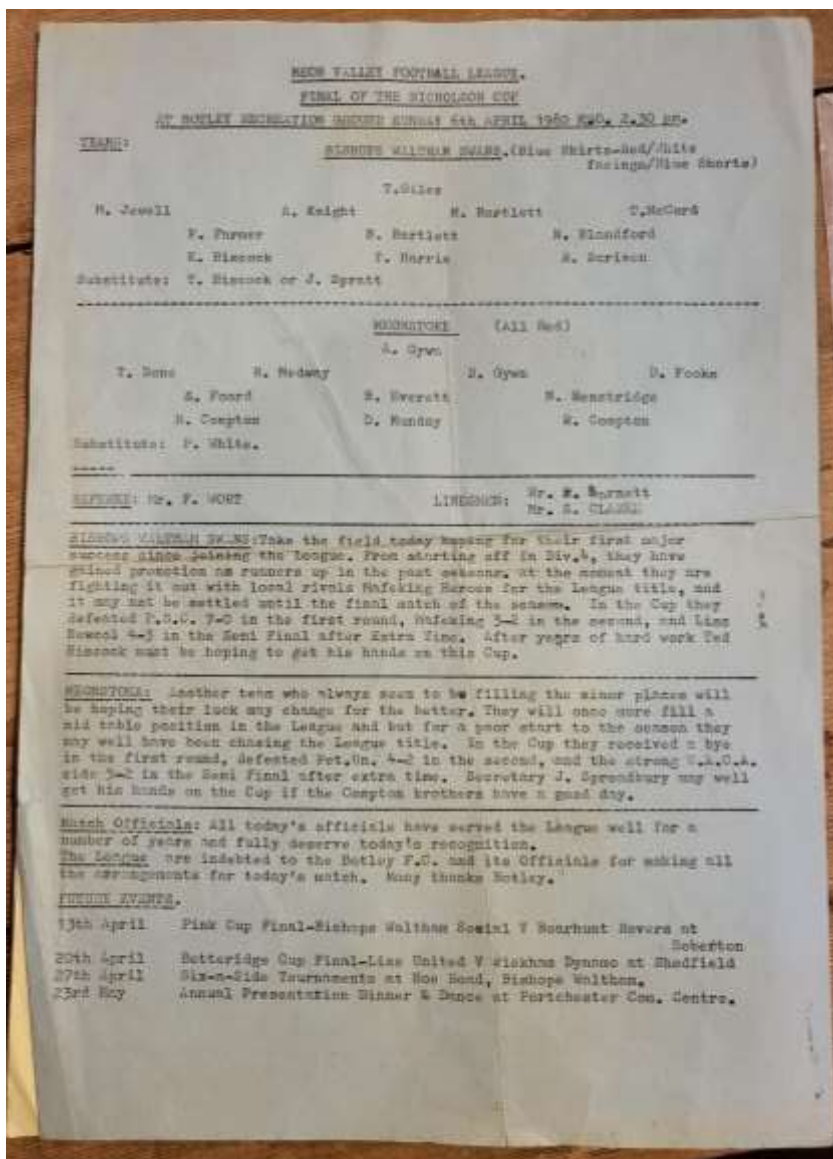
*Bishop's Waltham Social Club team Autumn 1976. John Bosworth (BW00901871)*

Meanwhile, Bishop’s Waltham Town were enduring a tough stint in the middle of the 1970s; with a lack of players and a departing manager at the start of the 1973-74 season almost condemning the side to relegation to the third tier of the Southampton Senior League pyramid. The club’s second side were not so lucky and did drop down to Junior Seven during the same season. In lieu of a manager, the club operated under a selection committee until July 1976 with the hiring of Jimmy Spratt.

The 1970s also saw concerns about the quality of the playing surface at Hoe Road; with an impassioned article published in a parish magazine lamenting the absence of a full-time groundsman. Despite boggy surfaces and grass-free goalmouths being a British institution (and indeed a key contributing role to England’s reliance on long-ball football), there are suggestions that the ground was bordering on the unplayable during this period. The writer also namechecks Mafeking Hero and grasses them up for using the pitches without permission and “erecting posts and carrying out an unofficial fixture one Sunday morning” despite the pitch being closed for reseeding.

Perhaps the golden era of Bishop’s Waltham football was to be found in the 1980s with the emergence of Bishop’s Waltham Swans; a pub side named after the same White Swan that hosted the return of

the Meon Valley League in 1919. After being founded in 1974 and working their way up from Meon Valley Division Four, the Swans attained promotion to the league's top division and enjoyed back-to-back trebles in the 1983-84 and 1984-85 seasons. Their First Division triumphs were coupled with Pink Cup and Col. Parker Cup (six-a-side) trophies. Success was also found outside of these two outstanding seasons: with the Swans securing a third league title and a Nicholson Cup (attributed to their reserves) in the following season as well as a further Pink Cup win (1982-83) and being crowned as the first ever winners of the Dave Blunt Memorial Cup (1985-86). Similarly to their close connections with the Pink Cup, Dave Blunt was a former Meon Valley League president who hailed from Bishop's Waltham; meaning it was only fitting his home-town team were the first to lift the cup. Notable players for Swans during this period included Terry Hiscock, a very familiar name when researching local football during this era. Hiscock was named MOTM in a Bishop's Waltham charity match in 1974 as well as Second Team Player of the Year in 1974-75. Terry would hold a dual player-secretary role for Bishop's Waltham Swans and would go on to be honoured by the Meon Valley Football League for his services to the club.



Programme for Nicholson Cup Final of the Meon Valley Football League 1980 (T. Hiscock)

1986 saw Bishops Waltham Town join the Hampshire League, entering in the Second Division and earning promotion in their debut season. Bishop's Waltham Youth opted to remain in Meon Valley League and their decision was rewarded with a Division Two title in 1987-88.

Bishop's Waltham's representation in the Meon Valley League grew further in the late 1990s with the addition of Priory Inn FC. Fielding a squad consisting almost entirely of local players, Priory Inn FC managed a league-cup double in their debut season (1998-99) in Meon Valley's Fourth Division and managed a further two cup final appearances shortly after the turn of the century.

However, the late 1990s and early 2000s drew difficult times for Bishop's Waltham FC. The club had

dropped to Hampshire Division Three before being placed back in the League's top division (rebranded as the Hampshire Premier League) following a league restructure that demanded top-flight teams played at a stadium that met certain specific requirements – something Priory Park was able to do. This tumultuous existence continued into the 2000s when the Hampshire League was absorbed by the Wessex League; placing Bishop's Waltham into the newly formed second tier.

Difficulties continued for the club as seasons progressed; with Bishop's Waltham forced to pull out of the 2006-07 league season and deciding to combine with another local side called Sporting BTC in Southampton to form Sporting Bishop's Waltham in an attempt to improve their fortunes. This unfortunately did not yield positive results and by 2013 the club – once again known as Bishop's Waltham Town – was forced to fold due to a lack of support and loss of key personnel.

Luckily, football still lives on in Bishop's Waltham following the formation of Bishop's Waltham Dynamos. The club – who play at Priory Park (former home of BW Town) – boast several youth teams as well as a senior side has just won the Southampton Saturday League whilst going unbeaten in the process.