



LEDBURY TOWN FOOTBALL CLUB (EST. 1893): THE STORY SO FAR



Below is a decorated history of the many highs and lows of Ledbury Town Football Club, charting its successes, three falls from grace and the three subsequent recoveries which followed from its formation back in 1893 right up until the present day:

1893 – 1974: Humble Beginnings

Ledbury Town Football Club was established in 1893, playing at Pound Meadow in Ledbury during their early days in a number of small local leagues. The early 1960s saw them join the Worcestershire League under local stalwarts Ken Long and Jim Smith, playing at the present New Street ground which was donated as a gift to the people of Ledbury by local businessman Lord Biddulph in 1934. The club then returned to the Hereford League in the latter part of the 1960s, winning all before them under the management of Bob Pullen.

1974 – 1983: West Midlands Success

Ledbury entered the West Midlands League in 1974 under new manager Roy Green, progressing up the ranks quickly and installing a set of floodlights at New Street to allow evening fixtures to be played in this more prestigious league, and it was at this time that a highly successful clubhouse was added to the already-thriving ground which The Friesians called home.

Many players were also sold to high-profile clubs during this period, including Kevin Rose being acquired by Lincoln City in a £10,000 deal, Herrington Kelly going to Bristol Rovers, Mark Payne being sold to a Dutch side for £7,000, and Merrick Kowski going on to play for Holland.

Ledbury's squad during this period also featured Tony Berne, an Irish international player, as well as Mick Hill, who had previously played for both Ipswich and the Welsh national side. Local player Steve Emery also went on to play for Hereford United and Derby, while Phil Preedy, now general manager of the club having managed the first team over more recent seasons, also went on to have a stint at Hereford. Influential player Kevin Rose was also bought by the New Street outfit and then sold back to The Bulls in a lucrative deal.

1983 – 2000: First Problems and Recovery

The dream ended in 1983 when the club went into liquidation. The deeds to the ground at New Street had been used as collateral over the previous ten years, and because of the mounting debt which the club had accrued, these deeds were lost to the people of Ledbury.

Town's first of three swift comebacks then occurred however, with the club reforming the following year with Phil Herbert at the helm of a new committee. The team had to start back in Division Four of the Hereford League, but they quickly rose undefeated over the course of the next five years, going on to win the Hereford Premier Division in 1989 before re-entering the West Midlands Regional League in the early 1990s to mark a quite remarkable recovery.

2000 – 2010: The Pinnacle

The new millennium saw Ledbury Town reach what has so far been the pinnacle of their achievements under the continued leadership of chairman Chris Stephens. They became West Midlands League Division One champions at the end of the 2000/01 season, finished fourth in the Premier Division and reached round four of the coveted FA Vase competition during the 2004/05 season, and also won the Herefordshire County Challenge Cup twice during the 2006/07 and 2009/10 seasons.

November 13th 2003 was also a very memorable date for the club, when a very special charity match was played against a Manchester United XI side at New Street in memory of a local family of avid United supporters who ran a popular newsagents in Ledbury, after the summer of that year saw them tragically lose three family members in a horrific motorway crash. For a period until 2006, the club's squad also featured Latvian international Alex Volosanovs, as well as Bulgarian goalkeeper Dimitar Dimitrov.

It was at this time however that the club started paying rent to a developer who had purchased the deeds to the ground following the events of the mid-80s, which would eventually result in disaster for Ledbury Town FC entering the second decade of the 2000s.

2010 – 2013: Second Collapse and Reformation

Again for financial reasons, the club had to resign from the West Midlands League at the end of the 2009/10 season, but under another new committee headed by prolific local figure Andy Kibble who sadly passed away in 2015, the first team once again arose from the ashes to compete back down in the Herefordshire Football League Premier Division under the new joint management of Chris Powell and Phil Preedy. They marked their recovery in stunning style by returning to Division One of the West Midlands League in the space of just three seasons.

Back in the West Midlands Regional League once more for the 2012/13 season, Ledbury Town finished runners-up in Division Two, gaining promotion back to Division One once more in the process. The previous season also saw them lift the Worcester Infirmary Junior Cup after defeating Malvern Town Reserves at New Street, as well as finishing runners-up in the County Challenge Cup competition following a thrilling final against high-flying Westfields FC at Hereford United's Edgar Street ground.

This period also saw the Strongbow Senior cup being added to Town's trophy cabinet, with Ledbury's reserves side continuing to hold their own in the Herefordshire Football League, acquiring the Ross Cup to join the silverware accumulated by the senior squad.

A number of enhancements also took place at the New Street ground under the leadership of Kibble, who very much wished for the club to have a much prominent focus on the local community having himself been a staunch member of the Ledbury Swifts Junior Football Club. A newly-refurbished clubhouse provided better hospitality for the numerous darts and skittles teams who continued to enjoy playing from the New Street venue on a weekly basis, with a new members' lounge and outside children's play area being added as well as a fresh main stand to commemorate the new lucrative sponsorship deal which the club had struck with long-established local cider-brewing firm Westons of Much Marcle.

2013 – 2014: Young Guns Take the Helm

After finishing Division One of the West Midlands League safe from relegation under the management of Paul Mann and Chris Stone at the end of the 2012/13 season, with the club's committee undergoing another reshaping as long-term director Colin Brandt stepped up as chairman assisted by long-serving groundsman Steve Watkins as vice chairman, Ledbury Town's next chapter saw former Pershore Town midfielder Zac

Blood and former Ledbury first team captain Pete Boyle take charge of the first team as these young player-managers looked to guide a squad made up of young players entirely new to the club as well as established team personnel to further success in this regional league.

The reserves continued their campaign in the Herefordshire League, while newcomer to the club Richard Thick, who brought much experience of managing junior sides at neighbouring villages to the table, was successful in forming a third Colts squad for the first time at the club made up of youngsters from his own previous youth team who had played from Cradley Sports Club.

Sadly, Boyle and Blood's ambition of making it back into the Premier Division of the West Midlands League wasn't to be as a run of poor results and financial problems forced the committee to make the difficult decision to pull its struggling first team out of the West Midlands League well before Christmas of that season, effectively signaling the beginning of what would be Ledbury Town FC's bleakest days.

2014 – 2015: The Darkest Hours

Three months later, escalating debts caused a cash-strapped Ledbury Town Football Club to announce the closure of its clubhouse at New Street, ending the wide range of social activities such as darts, skittles and other functions which had played such an important part in the life of the club for many years.

Ledbury Town FC had failed to honour the debts which had been mounting up over the last fifteen years since it had started paying rent to the developers, culminating in the landowners pulling the plug and evicting the club from the ground at the end of 2014.

All was not quite lost however, as a series of emergency meetings and negotiations throughout the start of 2015 with Mann chosen to chair a new committee resulted in the club's landowners agreeing to allow the existing reserves and Colts sides to continue to use the pitch and changing rooms at New Street to allow them to finish their remaining fixtures of the 2014/15 season.

Ledbury Town were not out of the woods yet however, and it would be no exaggeration to state at this point that extinction for the club after an illustrious 125-year history was still a very real possibility.

Negotiations with both the landowners and also the Ledbury Swifts Junior Football Club continued, with long-term club stalwart John Preedy being elected to take on the mammoth task of reversing Ledbury Town's fortunes.

2015 – 2016: Back from the Brink

Further uncertainty followed throughout the summer of 2015, until in the October, a new deal was struck between the landowners and Ledbury Swifts which allowed Ledbury Town to return to New Street once more, albeit with the ground now under the control of the Swifts.

The first team struggled to make progress throughout the 2015/16 season as a number of cancelled home fixtures as the wait for New Street to become available again during the early months of the season caused many problems, but the reserves side, now being managed by the duo of Mitch Preedy and Mark Davis, stormed to victory in Division Two of the Herefordshire League.

2016 to 2020: Return Home, Financial Recovery and a Brighter Future

With the first team remaining in the Premier Division of the newly-reformed Herefordshire County League and the reserves being promoted to Division One, everything was in place for the club to enjoy a much more stable twelve months as the above deal between the landowners and the Swifts was extended, with diligent fundraising together with an extremely successful Presentation Evening at the end of the 2015/16 season seeing the club rise to a remarkably healthier financial position in the space of just eighteen months.

The focus is now on acquiring a brand new ground in order to facilitate and safeguard the future of senior-level football in Ledbury, and although recent times have seen a number of hopes being dashed with several potential sites for a new facility falling through, the club, having had control of New Street granted back to them once again as work continues with Property Solutions Ltd to find a brand new home, is back afloat in the Herefordshire FA County League, also being able to use its clubhouse on match days to provide hospitality and light refreshments to compliment the income it needs for a move to a new ground.

The first team are now managed by Worcestershire coach Dean Rutter and are staying in contention in the Herefordshire League Premier Division, having won the HFA Charity Bowl cup last season, while the reserves, now managed by former goalkeeper Nick Blakeway and young team stalwart David Butcher, are currently troubling the top five positions of Division One of this local league.

Ledbury Town Football Club has bounced back from extinction on more than one occasion in the past in order to preserve an illustrious history which now spans nearly 130 years, and the current committee are more determined than ever to keep football forever a part of Ledbury, being just as optimistic that their vision of a brand new facility in order to allow both senior and junior level football to continue to be played in town will eventually come to fruition as the club looks forward to a bright and prosperous future.