

Harrow Referees' Society - A Brief History

THIS HISTORY was written for the 75th Anniversary Dinner. It draws on articles penned by former member Geoff Donald, published in *The Harrow Referee* between December 1996 and October 1997.

In The Beginning

Seventy-five years ago, on 9 October 1935 the Harrow & District Society of Association Football Referees held their inaugural meeting. Ernie Trafford took the chair and went on to serve the society as long-standing chairman and later as president until ill health forced his retirement in 1957. The rather splendidly-named L F Cadwallader, was the society's first secretary, combining the role with that of treasurer.

This inaugural meeting was held at 443 Alexandra Avenue, Rayners Lane, attracting an attendance of 37 referees.

Chris Forsdike

The Baptist Free Church in Imperial Drive was the venue of the first general meeting, on 20 November. The first set of rules was approved and a full committee elected, including the first president, G W Pitts. Mr C L Forsdike, who became another key figure in the society's development, was appointed to the committee as auditor. This was but a stepping stone to his appointment

just a year later as secretary, a post he held for twenty years. Decades later Chris donated a sum of money to establish an award in his name which is now presented annually to the society's Young Referee of the Year.

Moving On

The committee meeting of 6 December 1935 was held at the Mission Hall, West Street, Harrow on the Hill. Present were Messrs Trafford, Herbert, Cadwallader, Butterworth, Lacey, Price, Short and Watts. For future meetings the committee had booked the club room of Wealdstone FC for a fee of 7/6d (37½p) which it was felt could just be afforded by our limited membership.

Some 29 members attended the general meeting in Lower Mead on 11 December, agreeing to fix the venue as a permanent HQ providing 'the meetings did not grow too large for the accommodation available'.

Despite that resolution we have had many, many homes over the decades and even by season 1937-8

we had a new HQ, at The Royal Oak pub adjacent to what is now the St George's Centre.

An Unusual Guest Speaker

The first social function - a whist drive - was held on 24 March 1936 in the Embassy café, North Harrow, above what was then a cinema, later a bowling alley and now an incongruous development of flats.

Our July 1937 meeting had an unusual guest speaker, a very aggrieved player who was brought along at the request of the society member who had cautioned him and with whom he had had a serious altercation just a few weeks before. It seems the debate was thrashed out for all to hear. How about that for an original idea?

World War II

The outbreak of war led to conscription for 16-40 year olds. The meeting on 13 September 1939 resolved to carry the society on but that seemingly proved impossible.

The next entry in the minute book was not until 27 July 1945 when an informal meeting of past members was held where it was resolved to reform the society.

The first formal meeting took place on 21 September with the prime purpose of electing officers. By this stage the Reverend G H Woolley had become president.

The Rev G H Woolley

Geoffrey Woolley served in both world wars, being the first

Territorial Army officer to win a VC which he did at Ypres in 1915. He was later awarded the Military Cross and an OBE. Prior to WWII he was chaplain at Harrow School but was commissioned in 1940. He was vicar of St Mary's from 1944-1952.

Post-war Challenges

The post-war period presented many problems for the game, not least of which was the availability of playing fields. Many of the former pitches were turned over to allotments, air raid shelters or became barrage balloon sites. Northwick Park became cornfields. It was some time before they were fit to be played on again.

It was also very hard to obtain the necessary kit and equipment as you needed 'purchasing certificates'. Several county associations existed as issuing agents for the Board of Trade, to supply the certificates. The solution rested almost entirely with club members who pooled spare clothing coupons. The Football Association also helped. It had a special allocation of coupons to give to clubs needing a few to make up the required number.

Even the *Football Referee* magazine was reduced to just a four-page broadsheet owing to newsprint restrictions.

Harrow Society continued to develop, growing its membership and bank balance. In 1947 the committee seemed very happy to be able to report a credit balance of £4 7s 2d which was minuted as a 'healthy state of affairs'!

The Harrow Referee is Born

In 1948 the first edition of the *Harrow Referee* appeared. And it arrived with a bang. Under the editorship of Mr Sloley it contained something highly critical of County executive officers. The minutes show a fair old rumpus over what was written. Complaints poured in from the aggrieved parties, much to the embarrassment of the rest of the Harrow officers. Eventually matters were smoothed over with no little effort.

The committee agreed that, to avoid a recurrence, all future copy should be submitted to the president and secretary for approval. Mr Sloley promptly resigned as editor but remained as press secretary.

Ernie Trafford & Tom Burrell

In 1948 Ernie Trafford became the first member of a Middlesex RA to receive the RA Long & Meritorious Service Award; and he barely mentioned it in his minutes.

The 1950s saw Tom Burrell take over as chairman. He was an extraordinary chap: not only was he a Football League referee but also a cricket umpire who had officiated at Lords and other county grounds. As if that was not enough he was also a highly respected professional boxing referee and an international table tennis umpire!

We had by this time moved back to Wealdstone FC and then to Churchill Hall (for the first time).

The *Harrow Referee* of September 1952 passed on its best wishes to a list of new members, which included one Mr E H Gale, another character who stamped his personality indelibly on the society.

We're Twenty-one

We celebrated our 21st birthday in May 1957 with a dinner and dance at the Rest Hotel in Kenton, ticket price 17/6d (87.5p). The annual membership fee was 10 shillings (50p). This was the same year Chris Forsdike stood down as secretary with the following tribute to "*Our hard working honorary secretary, Mr C L Forsdike, who is resigning after serving the society faithfully and well for those twenty-one years. Being the secretary of a society such as ours is an arduous task calling for hard work, diplomacy and tact, a full knowledge of the refereeing world and the game. The job takes up a lot of spare time. Mr Forsdike has certainly lived up to the motto 'Service before self'.*" He was replaced by Ted Gale.



Chris Forsdike (glasses) received his RA Long & Meritorious Service award in 1957. Pictured with Tom Burrell (left) and Ted Gale (right)

Into the Swinging 60s

During the late 50s and early 60s the society played several football matches on senior amateur grounds against other societies as well as against the Showbiz XI who, with Tommy Steele and Sean Connery, were very good indeed.



The 21st Anniversary Dinner at the Rest Hotel in 1957. Dress was 'informal'.

Sadly, in 1958, we lost founder member Ernie Trafford who had done so much to develop the society and to promote its interests and those of refereeing in general.

The Swinging 60s saw us move from Kenton to return for a long spell to The Case is Altered in Wealdstone before moving to Vale Farm in, Sudbury.

In 1966 Ted Gale moved from his role as secretary to become vice-chairman. He was replaced by a young Gordon Isaacs. The following year Ted took over as chairman

with the incumbent, Tom Burrell, becoming president.

If at First You Don't Succeed

Over the years Gordon has been instrumental in bringing many top quality guest speakers to Harrow. It has not always been a smooth

process though: in 1968 Kenneth Wolstenholme responded to an invitation by informing Gordon that the only way he would come to speak to us would be for a professional fee!

Gordon did not allow this setback to put him off as Harrow saw a succession of high profile speakers through the 70s and 80s including World Cup winner George Cohen, Barry Davies, managers Graham Taylor and David Pleat, FA chief executive Ted Croker and, in 1971 alone former sports minister Denis Howell and Sir Stanley Rous.

Some New Faces

Our meeting venue chopped and changed from Earlsmead to Lower Mead, Tithe Farm Social Club, The Travellers' Rest and other places.

Peter Clayton, current MCFA chief executive, graced our membership book from 1969 to 1984, even taking over editorship of *The Harrow Referee* for two seasons. Cyril Harrison, who much later became mayor of Harrow, took on the role of treasurer in 1969 and then took over as auditor in 1972, a role he continued in for 32 years. And a promising referee by the name of D R Elleray started his long membership in 1982.

Ted Gale

That was the same year Ted Gale passed away. Since 1956 he had held the offices of assistant secretary, secretary, vice-chairman, chairman, magazine editor, MRA delegate and, lastly, president. But he was also well known around the country: the loud cry of "Gale...Harrow" was the only-too-well-known opening to many an RA Conference speech and was usually a prelude to forceful comments made with conviction.

'Gentleman' George Ruffell took over from Ted as president, a post he held for ten years.

Golden Anniversary

Our 50th birthday celebration was held at the Travellers' Rest, just as

the 21st had been, although the price had risen to £9.50 a ticket for which Gordon Isaacs had secured...a meal, speakers and entertainment. Plus ça change.

In December 1987 Gordon was presented with the RA's Long & Meritorious Service Award prior to which the then-president, George Ruffell, produced a short biography where he wrote: "*I can say without any shadow of doubt that I do not know of anyone who over the last twenty or more years has shown greater dedication to the interests of referees at large but in particular of course to his beloved Harrow Society*".

The 1990s and Beyond

The end of the 80s saw a short period of uncertainty owing to problems filling the positions of secretary and treasurer but in 1990 David Kostis and Graeme Thorley were recruited and filled those two posts, respectively, for the next decade and a half.

In 1992 Tony Basham became the first recipient of the Chris Forsdike Young Referees of the Year award. He now lives in Denmark where he has continued to referee.

It might be a new decade but we continued our nomadic existence through the 90s and noughties with stints at, among other places, the Wealdstone Labour Club, Riley's Snooker Club (also in Wealdstone), Churchill Hall (again) and most recently at Broadfields.

Communicating to Members

The *Harrow Referee* celebrated its 50th anniversary in 1998 and our first web site appeared in 2000, instigated by far-sighted editor Roger Kelly and designed by Stuart Aitken. Now in its third design, this has replaced the magazine, the last edition of which appeared in May 2006.

Meritorious Service Award. This was presented by RAE board member Bart O'Toole at a society meeting as Fred was by then too ill to attend to Conference.

Sadly Fred passed away in 2008, two years after his close friend and colleague Keith Sloggett with whom he had established a training double act which continued for



*From l to r
Tom Burrell
(president),
Sir Stanley
Rous, Ted Gale
(chairman)
and Gordon
Isaacs
(secretary)
at the Rayners
Lane Hotel in
February 1971
where Sir
Stanley spoke
to a packed
house*

In that same year Derek Carter, who had assiduously minuted society meetings since 1977, stood down. A year later Brian Wheatley did likewise, having served on the committee for twenty years, much of this as one of our MRA delegates.

Gordon & Fred: RAE Awards

In 2005 Gordon Isaacs was awarded life membership of the Referees' Association of England, only the third Middlesex recipient ever.

And in 2007 Fred Kempton was delighted to receive his RAE Long &

the best part of two decades.

And in Conclusion...

Geoff Donald concluded his series of articles with the following: "Today we may not care to give any thought for those gentlemen who, in 1935, sat down in Rayners Lane, each one appending their signature with the anachronistic preface "Mr" and deciding on that far-off day to form a refereeing society. But really, aren't you glad they did?"

Indeed I rather think we are.

