

## **Senior Football in Ramsgate 1919 – 1932**

Football in Kent restarted after the Great War in February 1919 with two competitions, one each for junior and senior clubs, called Victory Cups.

Ramsgate Town re-formed, partly due to the enterprise of W.J. Ballard and W.E. Smith, one of Town's old guard, but were now known simply as Ramsgate. A concerted local effort, plus the generosity of Henry Weigall JP and Lady Rose Weigall, who obtained Southwood for the Club, gave Ballard's team a good send-off. They re-joined the Kent League where the pre-war format was resumed with a first division and two second divisions for east and west.

Ramsgate and Folkestone were two of the seven applicants accepted for the premier division, which brought the number of clubs to eighteen. At a Kent FA meeting at Maidstone Mr Ballard put a very strong case for the extended representation of east Kent into the county league football, with special reference to the claims of Ramsgate FC – described as 'a representative club, worthy of the locality'.

First class football seemed assured and a key signing was right back Harry Collyer (right) who had joined Crystal Palace in their 2<sup>nd</sup> season in 1906 and remained with them until 1915, his 281 appearances assisting their rise in the Southern League. He also played in the England International trial match in 1909/10, but failed to displace the famous and immensely popular England captain, Bob Crompton of Blackburn Rovers, from the national side - but the fact that a comparison was even made indicates just what sort of player Harry Collyer was.



Collyer at Palace

Ramsgate started the 1920/21 league campaign away to Sheppey, the line-up that day comprising Martin, Collyer, O'Connor, Dewery, Butler, Wells, Williamson, Sayer, Lawrence, Devonshire and Caldwell, with centre-forward Lawrence scoring the new boys' 1<sup>st</sup> goal.



The second fixture was a local derby with Margate, and the preview of the match that appeared in print at the time had a familiar ring to it –

‘All roads today lead to Margate’s ground at Garlinge where a local derby game takes place between the Thanet teams. Kent League points are at stake, but, apart from that the keen sporting rivalry between the two towns will, in itself, be sufficient to ensure a strenuous struggle for predominance.’

The game, on 18<sup>th</sup> September 1920, was almost washed-out by continuous rain, with Ramsgate dampening Margate’s spirits by beating them 3-1 in front of 1000 people thanks to two goals from Sayer and a 3<sup>rd</sup> from Devonshire.



After such a good start Ramsgate continued strongly, winning the return fixture 1-0 on 20<sup>th</sup> November, and were up to 3<sup>rd</sup> place by the turn of the year. They also reached the Kent Senior Cup but lost the Easter Monday battle at Maidstone 1-0 to Northfleet United before a crowd of 10,000 people. Despite just missing out on the trophy it was a good season for Ramsgate, taking 3 points off league champions Charlton Athletic, beating Margate three times, and finishing 3<sup>rd</sup> in the league (to Charlton and Maidstone), even though they fielded a number of reserves in the latter part of the season in order to cut costs.

The A team also had a good season, and finished runners-up to Depot Machine Gun Corps in Kent League Division 2 (Eastern) on goal difference alone.

Kent League Div 2 (Eastern) – 1920/21		Pl'd	W	D	L	GF	GA	Pts
1	Machine Gun Corps Depot	18	12	2	4	55	20	26
2	Ramsgate Res.	18	11	4	3	46	23	26
3	Dover United	18	11	3	4	48	29	25
4	Eythorne	18	10	1	7	37	43	21
5	Whitstable	18	8	4	6	45	37	20
6	Depot Royal Marines (Walmer)	18	7	3	8	33	46	17
7	Folkestone Res.	18	8	3	7	42	32	19
8	Ashford R.W.Res.	18	4	5	9	38	41	13
9	S.E.R.Mechanics Institute	18	5	2	11	30	57	12
10	Margate Res.	18	0	1	17	13	52	1

Ramsgate's 3<sup>rd</sup> eleven also enjoyed success that season, winning the Folkestone District League, with a 3-1 win at Dover United in front of a crowd of more than 1,500 along the way (and winning the home fixture 4-1).

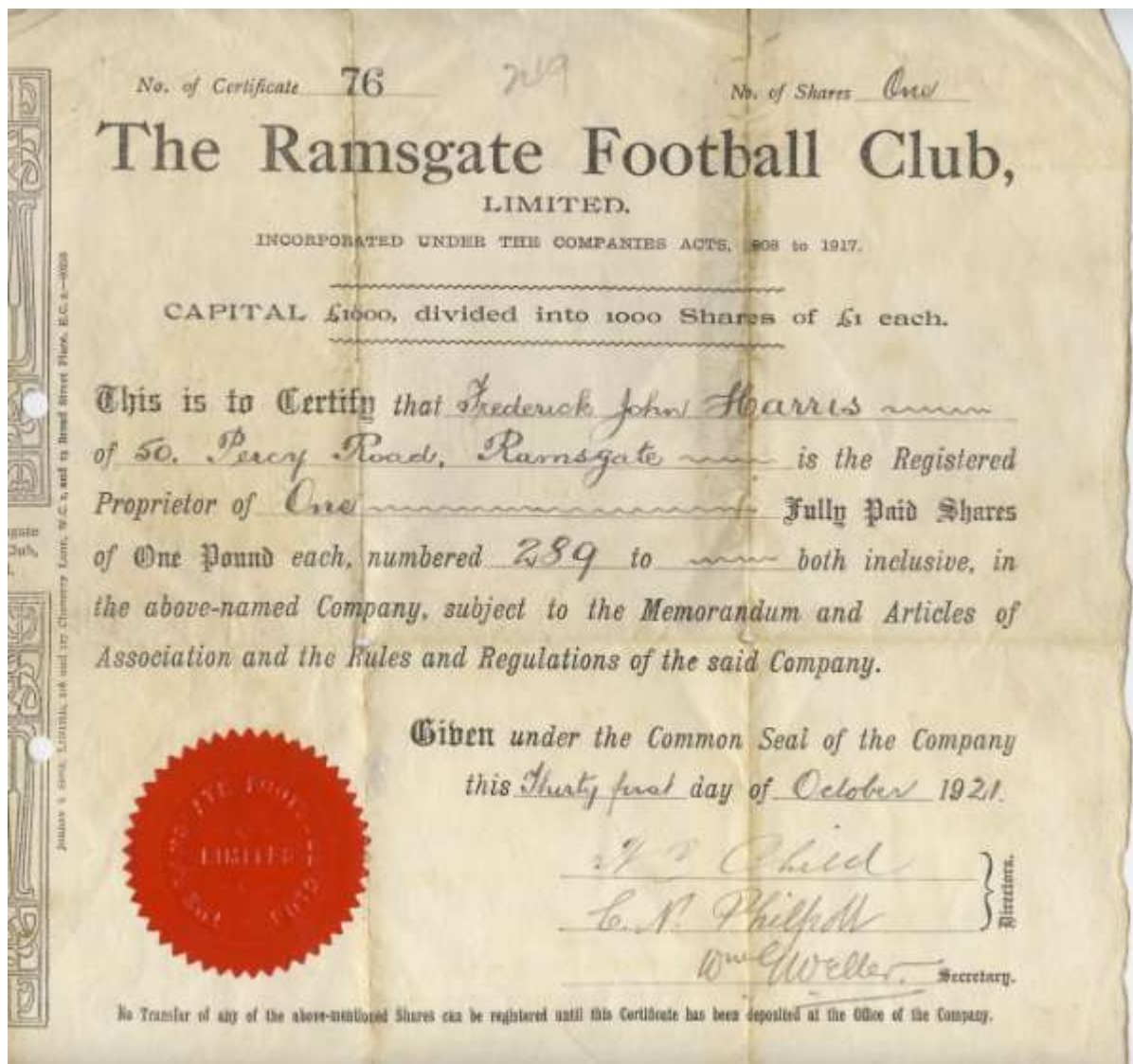
Folkestone & Dist Senior – 1920/21		Pl'd	W	D	L	GF	GA	Pts
1	Ramsgate Res.	15	12	0	3	47	22	24
2	Folkestone Res.	14	11	0	3	52	13	22
3	Dover United	15	9	1	5	30	16	19
4	Ashford R.W.Res.	13	6	3	4	29	21	15
5	Machine Gun Corps Depot	12	6	0	6	23	22	12
6	Eythorne	12	4	3	5	25	32	11
7	2nd.Connaught Rangers	13	2	5	6	13	27	9
8	Royal Irish Fusiliers	13	1	2	10	17	47	4
9	S.E.R.Mechanics Institute	10	1	0	9	12	48	2
	4 <sup>th</sup> Brigade, Royal Field Art'y	Withdrawn - results deleted.						

Ramsgate Grenville, an amateur side who had been a strong counter attraction locally on a Saturday afternoon, was forced to disband as they could not find a ground, with many of their players being signed for Ramsgate's A team by secretary W.E. Smith. Some of the players who came across were R. Fletcher, G. Clarke, L. Darby, H. Scott, R.S. Commerford, A. Martin, W. Redwood, W.G. Woodward, N. Lanning, J. Wilson and A. Smith.

Prospects looked bright for the Rams in 1921/22 with Harry Collyer being appointed player/manager and new signings including goalkeeper Pleasants and inside-forward Makepeace from Charlton, outside-left Morrison from Northfleet, and centre-half Gallagher (formerly with Tottenham and Luton). Simultaneously, Sayer left for Millwall and Wells for Crystal Palace.



Off the field Ramsgate were handicapped by a debt of £1,342 from the previous season, when although gate money had totalled £2,379, players' wages had been £2,205 alone. The accounts also showed that the Club received a fee of £350 from Charlton for Sayers, of which £70 was paid to the player. To overcome these problems the Club arranged a share issue at the start of the season.



In their preliminary round tie of the FA Cup Ramsgate lost 2-1 to Dartford but league form was steady, scoring 7 goals against Bexleyheath, and by mid-October they were top of the table. Ramsgate were again victorious at Margate, winning 1-0 in front of 3,000 on 29<sup>th</sup> October. However, on 12<sup>th</sup> November Lawrence (scorer of the 1<sup>st</sup> Ramsgate league goal the season before) transferred to Dartford, leaving Harry Collyer as the only player remaining from the Ramsgate XI that went to Sheppey. Ramsgate and Margate drew 2-2 at Southwood on 26<sup>th</sup> November, and Ramsgate finished the year in 2<sup>nd</sup> place.

In the New Year Ramsgate were showing a financial loss of approximately £200 on the season, and in an attempt to cut costs fielded several Reserves in the remaining games. The team was still strong enough to overcome the majority of Kent League opposition though, including a 7-1 victory over Woolwich on 11<sup>th</sup> January. Ramsgate's team was Pleasants, Collyer, Bourne, Bowley, Whittaker, Page, Banks, Fletcher, Bryan, Francis and Makepeace. Ramsgate ended the season in 4<sup>th</sup> place on 33 points, while Maidstone took the championship with 51 points.

The Reserves didn't fare so well this season and finished 6<sup>th</sup> (of 8) in Division 2 Eastern section, albeit with several players drafted into the 1<sup>st</sup> team near the end of the season, while the 3<sup>rd</sup> XI finished 4<sup>th</sup> in the Folkestone & District Senior League.

Despite the financial problems Ramsgate decided to continue in 1922/23, but were handicapped early by the loss of their goalkeeper, Pleasants, who signed professional forms for his old club Charlton Athletic (who had progressed to the then Division 3 of the League). Circumstances compelled changes in the Club's constitution and Ramsgate started the 1922/23 season with almost a new team - 90% amateur players, supplemented by local talent.

Players brought in included H. Skermer from Norwich City (right); backs W. Simpson (Fenton Colliery) and J.W. Clay (Worksop Town); half-backs R. Dobson and D. Hindley (Atherton), W. Higgerty (Plank Lane) and S.H. Todhunter (Bishops Auckland); and forwards R. Sibley (Uxbridge Town) and A. Machado (Bordeaux).



Local players included goalkeepers L. Darby and D. Evans; backs R. Fletcher, E. Newton and Bourne; half-backs H. Scott, W. Woodward, L. Bowley, R. Commerford and W. Marks; and forwards F. Day, R. Day, A. Newton, J. Fletcher, Clark and Shaw.

From the start of the season Ramsgate languished at the foot of the league, which further reduced support. Heavy home defeats, including 7 goals by Maidstone in the Ramsgate net, didn't help matters, and it wasn't until 12<sup>th</sup> October that the 1<sup>st</sup> win was accomplished when they beat Ashford R.W. 2-0 (which sports correspondents of the day attributed to a fine display in the Ramsgate goal by the 'dark skinned' Martineau). Performances improved as the season progressed and, following a 1-1 draw at Margate on Christmas Day, Ramsgate started 1923 3<sup>rd</sup> from bottom.

Although they went down to Margate on 1<sup>st</sup> February, a 5-0 win in the return match at Southwood on 17<sup>th</sup> February confirmed the change in form, and Ramsgate finished the season in the middle of the table.

The Reserves finished 5<sup>th</sup> (of 6) in Division 2 East, and the 3<sup>rd</sup> XI again finished 4<sup>th</sup> in the Folkestone League.

Finances were still a great concern, as it was with many clubs in Kent at that time, with Folkestone FC organising a house-to-house collection to wipe off their debts of over £1,300, while Margate withdrew from the Kent League the following season.

Ramsgate Grenville, later to secure the services of the majority of Ramsgate's local players, restarted this season, ground-sharing at the Warre Recreation ground and winning the Thanet League with 27 points from 16 games. Albert Newton, their prolific scoring centre-forward, netted exactly 50 goals in the 1922/23 season.

Harry Collyer started the 1923/24 season still in command at Ramsgate, and an encouraging 'gate' turned up for the initial home fixture with Maidstone, hopeful in seeing an improvement in performance over the previous campaign. Unfortunately it proved to be a disastrous season and, as defeat followed defeat, support moved away to amateur clubs.

Ramsgate didn't win a league game until 15<sup>th</sup> March 1924 and finished bottom of the Kent League with only 10 points from 3 wins and 4 draws out of the 30 games played (34 goals for and 96 against). Surprisingly the same team did well in the English Cup competition, beating Whitstable 2-0 away, Erith & Belvedere 2-1 away, Northfleet 4-2 at home, and Dartford 1-0 at home. The cup run came to an end at Folkestone, where Ramsgate succumbed to 4 clear goals to Southern League Folkestone Town.

The Reserves and the 3<sup>rd</sup> XI both struggled, finishing in last place of Kent League 2 and the Folkestone League, 3<sup>rd</sup> of 3 and 9<sup>th</sup> of 9 respectively (although the Reserves did beat Dover United 10-0 at Ramsgate).

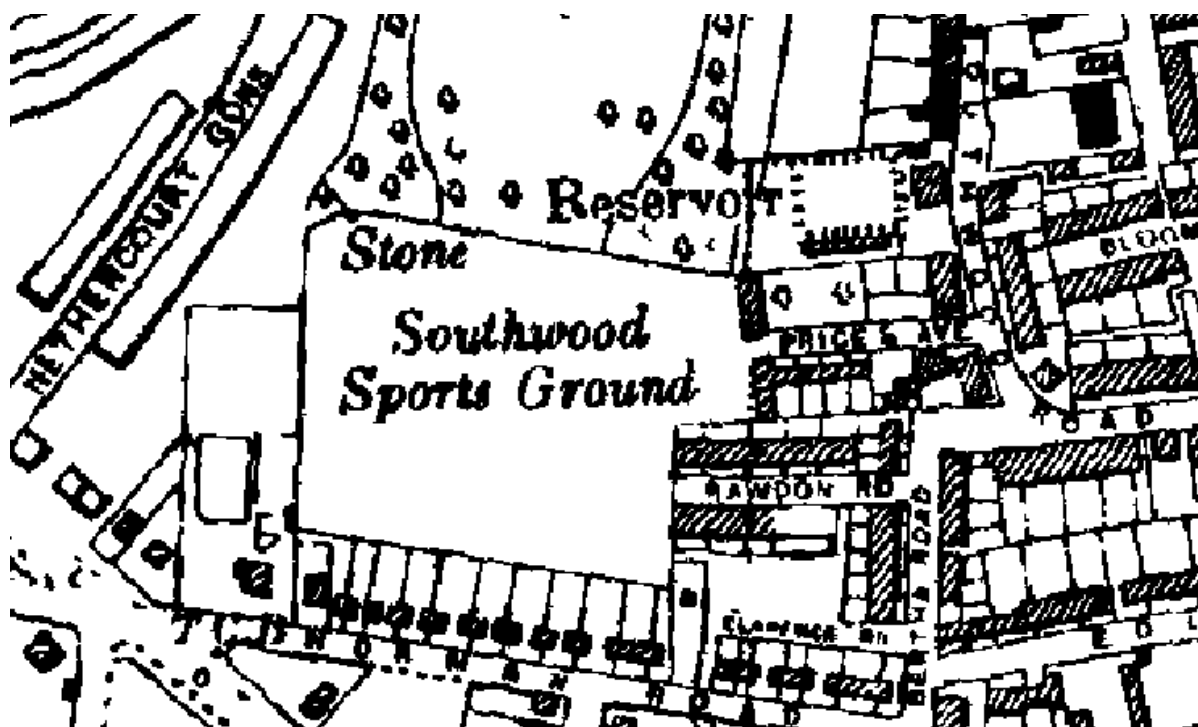
But the financial strain took its toll, and senior football on the Channel side of the island came to an end on 9<sup>th</sup> August 1924 when Ramsgate's directors decided not to re-enter the Kent League, and packed their bags. One particular bag, a trainer's 'Gladstone' bag (below), is now held at the FIFA Museum Collection.



Southwood was eventually taken over by Grenville, but details of their performances at this time are scarce. Dover United's records show that Grenville had a team in the Folkestone & District Senior League in 1925/26, who beat Dover 6-2 at home but lost to them 9-1 away, and finished the season in 3<sup>rd</sup> place.

In 1926/27 Grenville again beat Dover at Ramsgate, 7-2 this time, but lost 4-1 away and finished 3<sup>rd</sup> in the League for the second season running.

In August 1927 the Town Clerk of the Borough of Ramsgate was instructed to investigate the purchase of 'Southwood Field' from Grummants Brothers Builders, who by now had acquired the land from the Weigall family, to provide playing fields. A price of £3,000 was eventually agreed and the Borough completed the purchase later that year of all the land of the current football ground but excluding the Norman Road frontage, where Homes and Grummants builders constructed the present houses that same year.



The League results were reversed in 1927/28, with Dover winning 2-1 in Ramsgate and Grenville winning 4-2 away, with Grenville ending up in 5<sup>th</sup> slot.

In 1928 a joint committee, comprising members of the Borough's recreation grounds and education committees, was established to control and manage the grounds at Southwood. Later that year the Committee resolved to lay out a full size football pitch, a schoolboys' league pitch, and a cricket area. The plans also included the use of the building to the left of the entrance as ladies' dressing room, referees' room, and cloakroom. Conveniences were also to be provided and the Superintendent Groundsman was granted 50 shillings for the purchase of a lawnmower, to be kept for use at the ground.

At this time a Mr Philpott, a butcher of Aberdeen House at High Street St Lawrence, had summer grazing rights for his sheep on the field at Southwood at a cost of 35 shillings per month (70% of the cost of the lawnmower), with the sheep being moved to the adjoining Southwood Meadow when the ground was in use.

Grenville again had a team in the Folkestone League in 1928/29 and, having lost 4-0 at Dover in front of a crowd of 1,021, they beat Dover at Southwood 7-1, finishing in 4<sup>th</sup> place. St Luke's were playing in the Kent Amateur League (Eastern) in 1928/29, but finished in 11<sup>th</sup> place out of 11, while Margate was without senior football again during this period, with Margate Town folding at the end of 1927/28, eventually being replaced by Margate Football & Athletic Club for the 1929/30 season.

Grenville continued in the Folkestone League in 1929/30, and lost 5-3 at Dover in the 1<sup>st</sup> Qualifying Round of the Kent Senior Cup in front of a crowd of 1,956. Grenville also played in the Folkestone League in 1930/31. Gas was installed at Southwood by Grenville in 1931, to supply tea to patrons and to light the dressing rooms.

Grenville did the double over Dover in cup-ties in 1931/32, knocking them out of the Kent Amateur Cup 4-2 at Dover in front of 1,500, and beating them 3-0 at Southwood in the semi-final of the Deal Hospital Charity Cup. Both Grenville Reserves and St Luke's were playing in the Kent Amateur League (Eastern Section).

In 1932 when the French introduced 'professionalism' to the game, Harry Ward of Grenville, who had been a miner at the Chislet Colliery, escaped from a dangerous occupation by transferring to Nimes for £20 per week, where Andy Wilson (QPR) and Alex Cheyne (Chelsea) also went. The 'French Menace', as it became known, saw a number of players induced to break their contracts and play abroad in a period when British associations had left FIFA. Two of Ward's Grenville team mates, Albert Newton and Calypso Pedder, signed for AS Brest, the latter pictured 'crouching' in the front row of the Brest team photo below.



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