

Fanzine

150 Years

A Royal Review



The Tilehurst End

Foreword

Simeon Pickup

For a supposedly small and irrelevant entity, there's an awful lot to cram into a 150-year review about Reading Football Club.

The oldest Football League club south of the Trent, Reading were a founding member of the Southern League in 1894, conquered Italy in a famous 1913 tour, triumphed in the 1988 Simod Cup, modernised in the 1990s, rocketed into the Premier League in 2006 and have stubbornly punched above their weight ever since.

This club has endured the threat of being overtaken by rival district clubs in the 1880s, a breakaway side when professionalisation was controversially enacted in the 1890s, a callous merger attempt with bitter rivals in the 1980s, and the trying times through which we're living right now. Getting all the way to 150 not out shouldn't be taken for granted – it's actually quite the achievement.

It's a club that refuses to stay down or know its place, one that's less glamorous or laden with trophies than others, sure, but still one of which Loyal Royals – from all walks of life and from all across the globe – are rightly immensely proud.

Paying tribute to Reading's history and echoing that pride were the aims of this fanzine. *150 Years: A Royal Review* is 72 pages of Reading Football Club memories, quirks, highs, lows and everything in between – written by the fans, for the fans.

Creating it wouldn't have been possible without the hard work of many contributors, to whom I'm immensely grateful. I'm also hugely appreciative to you for reading it.

I hope you enjoy it, and have a very Merry Christmas.

Contents

Click the title to jump to that page

- 4. What makes Reading Football Club so special? *Harry Chafer*
- 6. The history of Reading Football Club**
- 7. **Graphic:** 150 years of Reading: a timeline
- 8. The defining moments in Reading's history, *Simeon Pickup*
- 13. **Graphic:** Reading's history in numbers
- 14. **Graphic:** The rise, fall and rise of Reading FC
- 15. The Reading fans of great-grandad's time, *Roger Titford*
- 19. The best a fan can get: From perpetual non-achievers to the joy of 106, *Jon Keen*
- 26. The homes of Reading Football Club**
- 27. A home much missed: The uniqueness of Elm Park, *Dave Harris*
- 30. Home sweet home: ~~The Select Car Leasing Stadium~~ The Mad Stad, *Ben Thomas*
- 34. The identity of Reading F.C.**
- 35. Playing for the badge: The evolution of Reading's logo, *Will Jones and Simeon Pickup*
- 38. The Maiwand Lion: A proud symbol for Reading, *Simeon Pickup*
- 40. The evolution of Reading's kits, *Will Jones*
- 43. The people of Reading Football Club**
- 44. **Graphic:** Reading's managers: a timeline
- 45. In the dugout: The managers of Reading Football Club, *Marc Mayo*
- 49. All-star Royals: The perfect Reading XI, *Adam Jones*
- 54. Reading Women: From semi-pro to one of the elite, *Marc Mayo*
- 57. A conveyor belt of talent: The success of Reading's academy, *Olly Allen*
- 61. **Graphic:** Reading's academy graduates: a timeline
- 62. Covering and following Reading Football Club**
- 63. Royals in the media, *Dan Wimbush*
- 69. The view from Dusseldorf: Following Reading from overseas, *Marco Bader*

What makes Reading Football Club so special?

Harry Chafer

I think it's fair to say that supporting Reading Football Club is somewhat of a unique experience. Now, I'm sure that all fans would say exactly the same about their respective club, and that's the beauty of football. The rollercoaster of emotions your team takes you on in the space of 90 minutes, let alone a lifetime of following, is why we all love this sport at the end of the day.

A short period of highs can outweigh months and months of lows, and we've had our fair share of the latter, particularly in recent years. My first Reading game was actually in the 106 season: an away game in Burnley which we won 3-0, with Bobby Convey, Ibrahima Sonko and David Kitson getting on the scoresheet. Those were the days, weren't they?

At the time I was an impressionable six-year-old. And I remember clear as day, when Sonko planted in that header to make it 2-0, my cousin James lifting up his Reading shirt to reveal a 'Sonko Is Superman' t-shirt underneath. From then on Reading was my football club. It just had to be.

I didn't start regularly going to games until our next promotion campaign, due to myself and my dad living in the Midlands. But from then on, I've hardly missed a game. I just fell in love with the place and the club. It was probably easier for me to fall in love with the 'Ding as my first games were the aforementioned win at Burnley, a 4-3 comeback at home to Doncaster and a 4-3 comeback away to Nottingham Forest. But I think that, even if we'd have been pumped 4-0 in all of those games, I would've still kept coming back.

We all have our journeys to become Reading fans, and that's a part of what makes it all so special. We all have different stories, different backgrounds, but they all bring us together to watch Reading on a Saturday afternoon.

And no matter how awful and disastrous it is, we're back the next Saturday to do it all over again.

Some of the best moments of my life have been following Reading. The night when Alfie's double set the Royals alight, Yann Kermogant's penalty against Fulham and Mo Barrow's last-minute winner at Ipswich all spring instantly to mind. Because in those moments, I wasn't on my own. I was with thousands of others who were experiencing exactly the same feeling as me.

I said it earlier that any fan of any football club will say exactly the same about their experiences following their team. But Reading Football Club, to us, is different. In the same way the bad times can divide us and make emotions run wild in the worst kind of ways, the good times we've experienced have brought us all together. Fans, players, management, owners. Good times at Reading just feel so good (so good, so good).

I consistently get asked, particularly in recent years when we haven't really been that good, why I keep driving 200 miles every Saturday to watch Reading play (that's just for home games). I don't really have an answer. I just do it because I love it. Reading Football Club is both my poison and my medicine. The club that can make my blood boil, but provide me with 90 minutes on a Saturday afternoon when nothing else in the world matters. And I know I'm not the only one in that boat. We're all the same.

This isn't just any old club. This is Coppell's 106-point record-breakers, John Madejski's magic and McDermott's unbeaten run. It's McAnuff's "Are we up?!", Murty's penalty and Alfie's double at St Mary's. It's Eamonn Dolan, Ryan Duval and Steve Death. It's all that we love and all that we hate rolled into one. This is little ol' Reading Football Club.

So, happy 150th birthday to my numero uno (I hope my girlfriend doesn't see this). I'll see you on Saturday. And the one after that, and the one after that, and the one after that...

The history of Reading Football Club

H. Hadley.

W. Knight.

T. Currihan.

W. Sheppard.

J. Inglis.

F. Fletcher.

F. Dickenson. E. Eynott.



J. Stewart.

M. T. Cannon.

F. Deane (Capt.).

C. White.

F. Kelsey.

READING.

Reading's 1894/95 team, December 19 1894

Photo: Alamy



The defining moments in Reading's history

Simeon Pickup

1871 The foundation of Reading Football Club

While Christmas Day 1871 has gone down as being when Reading Football Club was born into the world, that specific date isn't known for a fact – just that the club was created around this time. Still, if you're going to settle on a date, it may as well be Christmas Day.

We do however know that the club was formed during a meeting on Gun Street by a mixture of businessmen, shopkeepers and students, while James Simonds and Joseph Sydenham would be Reading's first president and secretary respectively. A first competitive match would come a couple of months later: a 0-0 draw with Reading School at the Reading Recreation Ground on February 21 1872.

1895 The move to professionalism...

One of the biggest differences between the Reading of today and its early years is over professionalism. Nowadays it goes without saying that footballers are paid for their labour, but Reading was an amateur club for more than 20 years.

Moves to change this came about in September 1894 – the same year when Reading entered the Southern League as a founding member. The argument in favour was primarily that paying players would allow for a higher-quality, more competitive team, while opponents – including president James Simonds – cautioned against mixing money with football. Despite their concerns, the move was voted into effect in June 1895.

The next step was to find a new ground to play at.

1896 ...and then to Elm Park

For the club to be successful as a professional outfit, it needed reliable gate receipts, and that meant a good ground in the right location. In previous years the club had played at Reading Recreation Ground, Reading Cricket Ground, Coley Park (lasting here for the 1888/89 season before being kicked out by owner WB Monck due to rowdyism) and Caversham Cricket Ground, but eventually managed to acquire Elm Park, thanks to financial support from wealthy supporters.

The first game at the new ground would be held on September 5 1896. Reading had been 7-1 up against a Roston Bourke XI before the contest was abandoned due to heavy rain. A damp squib first time out, but Elm Park would be our home for the next 102 years.

1913 The finest foreign team seen in Italy

Few English clubs can say they've beaten Italian giants AC Milan; even fewer can say they've defeated the Italian national side. But Reading pulled off both achievements in a famous tour of Italy in 1913, defeating Genoa 4-2, Milan 5-0, Pro Vercelli 6-0 and the national team 2-0 – in addition to a 2-1 loss to Casale Monterrato.

The second of those wins, which featured a hat-trick from Allen Foster, would lead to Reading being described as “without doubt the finest foreign team seen in Italy” by Milan newspaper *Corriere della Sera*.

The tour feels especially poignant given the horrors of what was to come in the next few years. Foster and Joe Bailey – who scored in all five of Reading's games in Italy – were among those to fight for their country in the First World War. Foster was one of the 15 players to represent Reading who lost their lives in that conflict.

1920 Joining the Football League

Nowadays we take it for granted that Reading are a Football League club, but this wasn't always the case. In fact, it took Reading half a century to get to that stage, having previously played in the Southern League. However, the creation of a new Third Division allowed Reading entry into the Football League.

That era began in perfect fashion: a 1-0 win at Newport County on August 28 1920. Bailey, a heavily decorated veteran of the First World War, struck the only goal of the game, Reading shut up shop and went home with the points.

1983 Thames Valley Royals

Had events turned out slightly differently in 1983, we wouldn't have a Reading Football Club to support at all. Perhaps 'Thames Valley Royals' would have taken MK Dons' place as the widely hated club of English football, with 'AFC Reading' the true source of local pride.

It was the brainchild of Oxford United chairman Robert Maxwell, who argued that a merger would allow football in the region to thrive, but had no regard for the clubs' identities. Such a move would have destroyed 112 years' worth of Reading history.

After mass protests by both sets of fans, including a march to Elm Park by Reading supporters before a game against Millwall on April 30, Maxwell's plan unravelled behind the scenes. Crucial work by former Reading player Roger Smee and director Roy Tranter led to a successful legal challenge blocking the merger, with Smee later taking over as chairman. He would retain that role during two promotions (from Division Four in 1984 and Division Three in 1986) and 1988's Simod Cup win, before Sir John Madejski's takeover in 1990.

1988 Simod Cup winners

Beating Luton Town 4-1 on March 27 1988 in the final of the Simod Cup, or the Full Members' Cup to use the non-sponsor name, was a unique moment for Reading Football Club. Not only was it a rare case of success at Wembley, but it also remains our only major trophy – with apologies to the Football League Third Division South Cup (1938) and London War Cup (1941).

Reading had got there via a 2-1 win at QPR, before triumphs against Oxford United (1-0), Nottingham Forest (2-1) and Bradford City (2-1), culminating in a penalty shoot-out victory at Elm Park over Coventry City. Michael Gilkes struck the deciding spot-kick.

Gilkes was among the scorers on the day at Wembley, too. He levelled the game at 1-1 after Mick Harford found the opener for Luton, before goals from Stuart Beavon, Mick Tait and Neil Smillie sealed the win.

1998 ...and finally to the Mad Stad

If there's a moment in Reading's history at which this club entered its modern era, it's probably this one. Moving across town to the 24,161-capacity, all-seater Madejski Stadium meant leaving an old home with 102 years' worth of memories, but it also helped take the Royals into the 21st century.

The new era kicked off with, again, a win against Luton Town. On August 22 1998, Grant Brebner, Jim McIntyre and Robert Fleck were the scorers in a 3-0 victory.

The Mad Stad has been through plenty of changes since 1998, not least 2021's name change, making it The Select Car Leasing Stadium. In addition, we've seen the North Stand be renamed The Eamonn Dolan Stand in honour of the Royals' late former academy manager, the East Stand become The Sir John Madejski Stand, and the introduction of Club 1871 in the South Stand.

2006 106, 106, we've got the record, 106

Without doubt, the 2005/06 season is the crowning achievement in Reading's 150-year history. It's one of the finest league campaigns by any team in the history of English football, and has become a benchmark for all second-tier sides since. As we've seen time and time again, it's a standard none can live up to, regardless of a team's historical clout or financial strength.

Getting into the top flight at all was a huge achievement in itself for Reading, who'd been waiting for 135 years at that point. But to do so with such extreme dominance was truly staggering: 99 goals scored (with every regular outfield player chipping in), just two losses all season (either side of a 33-game unbeaten run, a new league record), and promotion confirmed in March.

The long-term effect of this season was not only to bring Premier League football to Berkshire, but also to put the Royals on the map as a significant player in English football. It's hard to think that Reading Football Club would carry the status it does to this day were it not for the groundbreaking achievement of 2005/06.

Reading's history in numbers

Honours

Football League Championship (second tier): 2006, 2012

Football League Division Two (third tier): 1994

Football League Division Three (third tier): 1986

Football League Division Three South (third tier): 1926

Football League Division Four (fourth tier): 1979

Southern League Division Two: 1911

Full Members' Cup: 1988

London War Cup: 1941

Football League Division Three South Cup: 1938

Berks & Bucks Senior Cup: 1879, 1892, 1995

Reading's first...

Match: Reading 0-0 Reading School, February 21 1872

Football League match: Newport County 0-1 Reading, August 28 1920

Premier League match: Reading 3-2 Middlesbrough, August 19 2006

Match under floodlights: Reading 3-0 Racing Club de Paris, October 6 1954

Goalscorer: Edward Brownlow Haygarth

Hat-trick scorer: Edward Brownlow Haygarth

Football League goalscorer: Joe Bailey, August 28 1920

Football League hat-trick scorer: Joe Bailey, September 4 1920

Player of the season: Colin Meldrum, 1964

Player to feature for England: Edward Brownlow Haygarth, March 6 1875
(England 2-2 Scotland)

Reading's biggest...

Win: Reading 10-2 Crystal Palace, September 4 1946

Defeat: Preston North End 18-0 Reading, January 27 1894

Points tally: 106

Run without conceding: 1,103 minutes

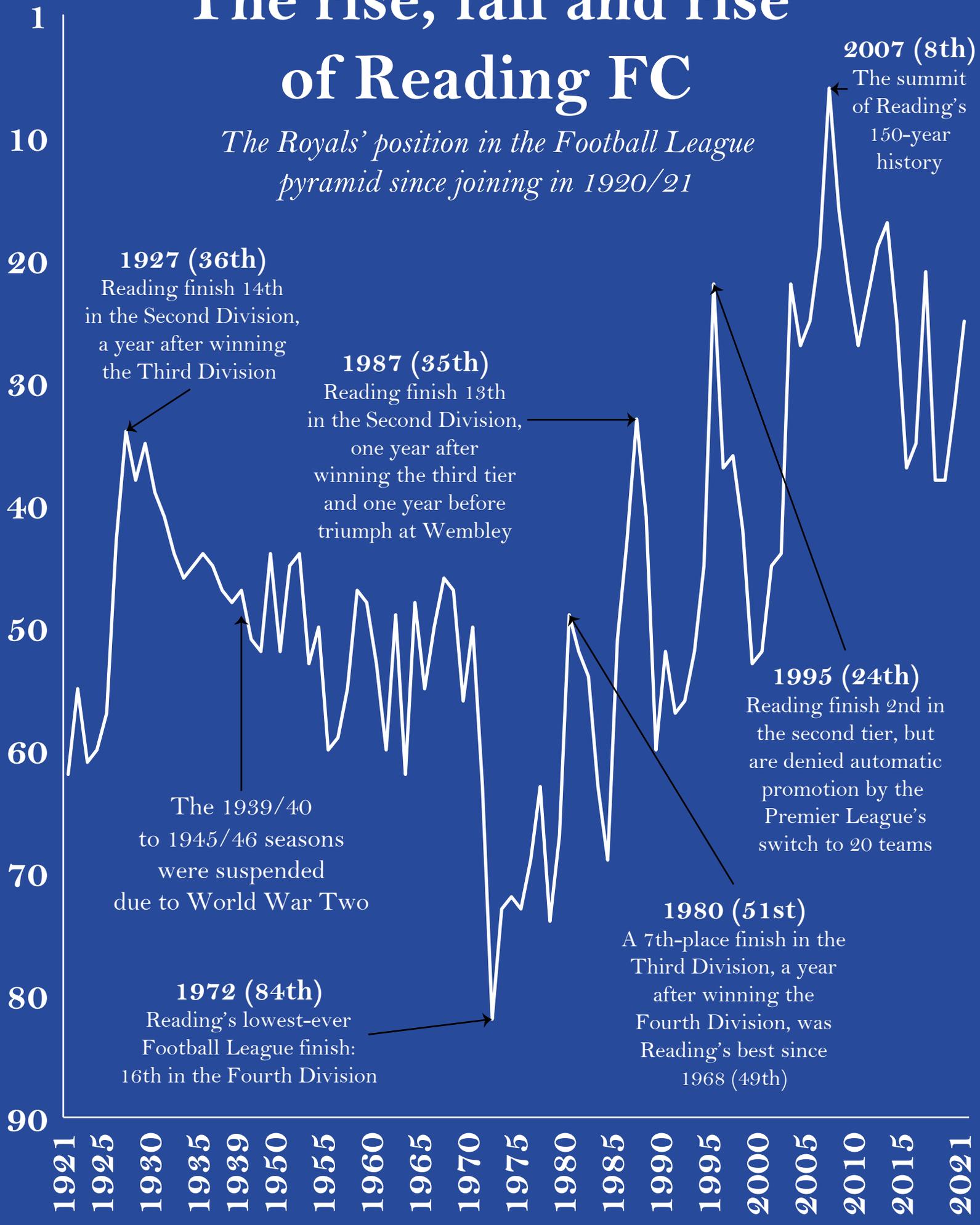
Winning run at the start of a season: 13

Appearance-maker: Martin Hicks, 603

Goalscorer: Trevor Senior, 191

The rise, fall and rise of Reading FC

The Royals' position in the Football League pyramid since joining in 1920/21



The Reading fans of great-granddad's time

Roger Titford

As we hit the 150th anniversary of Reading FC we should offer a deserved nod in the direction of the fans of long ago. Without their contribution back in the 19th century, we wouldn't have a club to support in the 21st.

At the start in 1872 it would just be friends of the players and interested bystanders gathering on Kings Meadow, a public park, on a weekday afternoon. But, as interest grew and more control over who came to watch was needed, in 1876 the club moved a few yards downstream of the Thames to the enclosed Reading Cricket Ground and started charging for admission.

So begins the tale of the paying spectator. And by 1900 their experience was as different as the highly stewarded SCL Stadium is from late 1990s free-range Elm Park. Even so, our supporting experiences are often not that different to our football brothers and sisters over a hundred years ago.

Now, subject to bandwidth contention in the stadium, we can access scores on our phones from all around the country in an instant. Back in the 1880s we had to rely on messages by telegraph down the railway lines and a messenger boy on a bicycle bringing scores. Up north they were even more sophisticated. For a big cup tie, as each goal went in a carrier pigeon bearing the latest score would be released in, say, Wolverhampton and make its way back to Birmingham!

Here in Reading in the 1870s and 1880s you could purchase membership of the club which entitled you to play (if selected, of course) or to spectate free of additional charge (in effect a season ticket). As a member you had voting rights on club business. We have the membership list for 1880/81. It contains 94 names. Fewer than half were potential players though one listed was the England captain Francis Sparkes - who never actually played for us.

But most spectators (you can't quite say supporters yet) paid 2.5p (in old money obviously) at the gate and stood around the pitch behind a rope, rain or shine. At the beginning, going to football was casual and irregular. There was a fair chance you would know some of the Reading players personally – they were schoolmasters, shopkeepers or the odd 'celebrity' like the deputy coroner or the son of the local Member of Parliament.

Often the team would be announced in the newspapers a week in advance – no tactical mind games in those days, but if a fellow missed his train another club member present in the crowd would be asked to replace him. The shirts had no numbers (not until 1938), matches often kicked off late and finished in semi-darkness and sometimes players played under false names so you could never be that sure who you were watching, especially on the opposition side.

“At the beginning, going to football was casual and irregular. There was a fair chance you would know some of the Reading players personally – they were schoolmasters, shopkeepers or the odd ‘celebrity’ like the deputy coroner or the son of the local Member of Parliament”

At Reading's early grounds, getting to the game wasn't that easy. Our three grounds by the Thames were accessed often by very muddy roads and the Caversham ground by ferry punt over the river. In a move imitated by Brighton over a century later, the club offered a combined travel (by punt) and match-ticket deal.

To play opposition from outside the town the railway network was crucial and served Reading's development well. By the mid-1880s football specials were running for big matches and, by the early 1890s, arranging cheap ticket football specials was one of the secretary's jobs. Just as now, back then the travel often cost more than the match ticket.

In 1892 we reached the Berks & Bucks Cup Final, played in neutral Maidenhead. Probably 2,000 travelled, overwhelming the trains and the entrance gates. In scenes of chaos and multiple pitch invasions we won our first honour in 13 years.

The press reports suggest a level of excitement, nigh-on hysteria, in excess of what we usually have today. Hats, sticks and umbrellas carelessly thrown in the air, thousands converging on Reading Station to welcome home and serenade victorious teams (shades of 2002 and the team coach arriving back at the Mad Stad after Brentford).

Consistent home support for Reading was slow to build. This was largely because in the 1880s the focus shifted to district teams like South Reading, Reading Albions and Caversham who had more localised and passionate support (and also because the 1880s was the worst decade in Reading's history).

Town cup matches could draw 1,500-2,000 while Reading might play an old-boys team in front of a hundred. Throughout the decade fans (described as 'leather hunters') could choose from several matches in town. On 10 November 1883 there were two FA Cup ties: Reading v South Reading at Coley Park and, not far away on Parkside Road, Reading Minster v Old Carthusians.

Passions ran high at local derby matches and there were many reports of pitch invasions, fighting amongst fans, players and referees assaulted by fists and missiles. At some away games Reading supporters had to gather around the players to protect them from attack by displeased home supporters. Rivalry and bad feeling sometimes extended into newspaper reports and correspondence (the Twitter storms of the day) and almost unbelievably as early as 1893 there was a defamatory 'fanzine' on sale at the ground which was denounced as 'scurrilous' by the club.

Football as a business took off in about 1890. It became a Saturday afternoon sport. Another stimulus was the increased media coverage of the game, a parallel with the online/social media explosion of today. The oldest Reading programme in existence (1894) carries an advert for the town centre newsagent. Besides the three local papers he stocked six national football publications, some of which had their own regular Reading correspondents. 'Biscuit Boy' in particular could be very scathing about our still-amateur players.

As football boomed in the early 1890s the district sides like South Reading and Reading Albions fell away and support consolidated around a newly successful Reading FC, now playing other quasi-professional clubs like Swindon, Millwall and Southampton. The true and devoted, home and away, Reading supporters were born.

Roger Titford

You can read more about this era in his book 'The Lost Years of Reading FC'

The best a fan can get: From perpetual non-achievers to the joy of 106

Jon Keen

Just like Reading FC, I have a landmark birthday this month, so it's only natural to spend a little time looking back.

For me, that means looking back to the mid-70s, when I first fell in love with this football club. The "it may be a dump but it's OUR dump" appeal of Elm Park is covered elsewhere in this fanzine so I won't dwell on that here, but that wonderful, anachronistic, falling-down place, with its leaking roof, peeling paint and crumbling concrete – not to mention the infamous pools of water (rain and who knows what else!) outside the toilets at the back of the South Bank – got under my skin.

The 70s had some truly memorable moments – who can forget Robin Friday's brilliance and unpredictability; promotion from Division Four in 1976 (the first for 50 years) and relegation straight back down the following season; and then another promotion in the last season of that decade, as champions with Steve Death setting a record for minutes without conceding a goal?

As the 80s dawned, things were bleak. Racism and hooliganism were rampant, and attendances were noticeably getting smaller, with many games where the players' shouts echoed across thinly populated terraces. Despite the presence of exciting young players like Neil Webb, Lawrie Sanchez and Kerry Dixon, all of whom would go on to great things elsewhere, anything more than around 4,000 at Elm Park was a good crowd, and the club, like many others at this time, was in severe financial crisis as well as teetering on the edge of relegation back to Division Four.

It was obvious to all that something had to change, but no-one knew quite what, until a corrupt entrepreneur from the wrong end of the A4074 came up with the novel idea to kill off the club completely!

Thus began the Frankenstein “Thames Valley Royals” proposal, eventually defeated by the diligence of Roy Tranter, but for a number of months it realistically looked as though the football club might cease to exist altogether.

In many ways that was the low point for Reading. The following season, with a new chairman, Roger Smee, there was a sense of change around the club. Trevor Senior replaced the departed Kerry Dixon and announced his arrival with a four-minute hat-trick on his home debut and 36 goals in what turned out to be a promotion season.

Two years later, with Senior still rampant, the unthinkable happened with Reading promoted to the second tier after that incredible record-breaking run of 13 straight wins, in a season that also included a never-to-be-forgotten comeback from 3-0 down to beat Plymouth 4-3 at Elm Park – which the bloke next to me on the South Bank missed as he stormed out when Reading conceded the third, loudly proclaiming to those around nearby that “this bunch of rubbish won’t score in a million years...”. Simod Cup glory followed two years later, tinged with the sadness of relegation, and we went into the 90s back in what many regarded as our natural home in Division Three.

And that’s probably a good place to pause for a while and take stock. Because although these memories are precious to me and to everyone else who experienced them, in the wider scheme of football records these were mere footnotes. Assorted promotions and relegations between the bottom two tiers of the league were of little interest to the wider world of football, and whilst Loyal Royals may cherish the memory of the Simod Cup triumph, at the time it was largely a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to see the team at Wembley, as they’d never get close to FA Cup or League Cup glory – and I wonder how

many supporters from outside the five clubs which won it even remember the competition! Certainly, many of the biggest clubs held it in such contempt that they didn't bother to take part.

When Reading did win promotion to Division Two, they only survived there for two years, and that reinforced the club's place in the football world and set supporter expectations. You didn't support Reading for glory or for honours – you supported them because they were your local team, or maybe the team your family supported, but you essentially realised that they were perennially destined to rattle around the bottom two divisions of the league, a lower-division team playing in a ramshackle, falling-down ground. Yes, there might be occasional moments of elation, but these were all relative and to be taken and enjoyed when they came along.

“You didn't support Reading for glory or for honours – you supported them because they were your local team, or maybe the team your family supported, but you essentially realised that they were perennially destined to rattle around the bottom two divisions of the league”

There was no expectation of fame, glory or publicity, and although the club might set interesting records every now and then, these were quirks of statistics – the “and finally” feature on football programmes.

Watching “Match of the Day”, you might see a player who you'd seen as a Royal earlier in their career, but the thought of seeing Reading appear on that programme, and indeed the thought of Reading ever competing on an equal level with the elite of the First Division was, quite frankly, ridiculous. To have any higher levels of expectation for a club like Reading would lead to constant disappointment, so you were realistic and embraced the good moments when they came along. But all that was to change.

That change started towards the end of 1990, when local businessman John Madejski bought the club from Roger Smee, whose property empire had been battered by recession. Not a football fan, and always happy to admit that he had no knowledge of the game, Madejski saved the club because he recognised that it was part of the social fabric and of the town, an essential community asset.

His arrival, and the changes he oversaw, would alter the club beyond all recognition and leave long-term Loyal Royals pinching themselves in disbelief as they witnessed events that they never thought would come to pass in their lifetimes. And the longer someone had been a Loyal Royal, the more incredulous they were at what came to pass.

Because, 15 years after Madejski's rescue of the club, they were playing in a new stadium on the edge of town, a stadium that was state-of-the-art and innovative for its time, and a world apart from the shabby delights of Elm Park. The club also had a similarly modern training ground, youth-development programmes and a highly developed footballing infrastructure, complete with director of football – all these things were a quantum leap away from the Reading of 1990 and brought home to the long-term fans just how far the club had come in that time.

More obvious to all, though, was the change on the field. Instead of being a fixture in the two bottom divisions, the club was at the top of the Championship, in the middle of a run of 10 straight wins and on the way to building an unassailable lead at the top of the table which would end up in a record-breaking haul of 106 points.

For a brief period of less than three years, the planets aligned perfectly and all the factors necessary to be successful came together at the same time to create a simply wonderful, record-breaking team, one that was not just a supremely effective footballing machine but was also an absolute joy to watch, as well as doing things in absolutely the best way, on and off the pitch.

These factors all came together at the right time to make the 106-point team of 2005/06 possible – although if anyone wants a much more detailed account and analysis of this I will happily direct them towards *The Sum of the Parts – The Evolution of the Perfect Team*.

But I will say that this journey to the pinnacle of excellence was a long one, for which Alan Pardew deserves as much credit as Steve Coppell and the others who built the team onto the foundations he'd put in place.

“What they built between them was simply miraculous, and something that long-term fans could never, in their wildest dreams, have thought they would ever see from their unfashionable, insignificant and unfancied local team”

For what they built between them was simply miraculous, and something that long-term fans could never, in their wildest dreams, have thought they would ever see from their unfashionable, insignificant and unfancied local team. As the season went on, expectations were surpassed on an almost weekly basis, after an inauspicious opening-day home defeat to Plymouth that made us all think “here we go again, the start of another long, hard season...”

But away wins at Brighton and Preston (the match when I first started to think there might be something special about this team) and a 5-0 thrashing of Millwall made people think again, and as the season progressed, with Reading taking 59 points out of a possible 69 and overhauling early leaders Sheffield United at the top, attitudes went from “it’s a flash in the pan, it won’t last long” to “is this really happening?” to “my God, this is amazing...”. This run included what I consider the most entertaining game I’ve ever seen – at home to Crystal Palace, a game when you literally daren’t take your eyes off the pitch for a second because there was 90 minutes of continuous drama and excitement.

Prior to the New Year's Day match away at Wolves there was still a feeling that "it'll all fall apart after Christmas, it always does", but a superb win at Molineux quietened those doubters and from there it was an absolutely joyful ride to the end of the season, with more and more incredible and previously unimaginable experiences for supporters.

And when the unthinkable did actually happen, it happened in the most perfect circumstances – with promotion clinched in front of the travelling supporters at Leicester and then the title achieved a week later in front of the home crowd. I still vividly remember the emotional scenes of those days – how unreal and impossible it seemed, when 30+ years of built-up emotion could finally be released. If a scriptwriter had set down a story of such unimaginative perfection it would have quickly been thrown out as unrealistic and far too contrived, but it really did happen and it really was that good to experience.

But there was more to come. An unbelievable Premier League season, finishing eighth and missing out on Europe by just one point; an incredible first-match comeback over Middlesbrough and being first up on Match of the Day; beating Manchester City home and away; drawing with Manchester United and Chelsea; the New Year's Day massacre of West Ham; and also the Petr Cech incident.

While unsavoury and undignified, it did mean that my football club was on the front page of the world's football pages – again something outside my wildest expectations. And, most satisfying of all, seeing the supporters of other teams and the pantheon of football journalists eating their words that "Reading wouldn't cut it in the Premier League – they'll go straight back down".

Yes, the following season the planets moved out of alignment and those critical success factors evaporated – for various reasons – but before that happened Reading weren't just a small-town team from the lower reaches of the league, justifying hardly a mention in the football media.

They were a team in the top league, setting the football agenda, making their own headlines and competing on the same stage as the biggest clubs in the country – and emerging with credit from the experience.

A lifetime of following the team and the low expectations that had set were blown away, to be replaced by a mixture of pride and total disbelief, and the most incredible set of experiences that football supporters could ever have. Because when you support a “big” club, you expect success and take it in your stride, but when you support a “small” club you don’t realistically ever expect any success – when it does come along, after many years’ wait, that makes it so much more joyous.

“It actually happened. We got to experience things in that short period that most football supporters don’t get to experience in a whole lifetime”

Sometimes now, 15 years later, I look back and question myself and my memories. Surely, the team can’t have been that good, can’t have played that fast and that well, with such intensity? Did it all really happen like that? Was this team playing with such pace, such style and such confidence in front of a full house in such a magnificent arena the same one that I’d seen losing at home to Bradford in 1991, alongside just 1,933 other supporters? Was it, in essence, the absolutely perfect time to be a Reading supporter, when we experienced things we’d previously not even imagined and would have laughed at the idea of on the South Bank in the 70s, 80s or even 90s?

Yes. Yes, it was.

It actually happened. We got to experience things in that short period that most football supporters don’t get to experience in a whole lifetime. I was there to see it and to be part of it – and it was a wonderous and unbelievable time that I will never, ever forget – the best time ever to be a Reading supporter.

The homes of Reading Football Club



Elm Park before a 2-0 win against Oldham on March 30 1996

Photo: Marco Bader

A home much missed: The uniqueness of Elm Park

Dave Harris

150 years, where did that go eh? 102 of which were spent at what the national press once described as “rusting old Elm Park”. The old girl bore witness to many a memorable moment in Reading’s history: six promotions, seven relegations, an FA Cup quarter final, a League Cup quarter final, an epic Simod Cup semi-final in which Reading progressed to Wembley for the first time, a glorious play-off semi-final when we progressed to Wembley for a second time, and countless other individual moments encapsulated in the fabric of Royals history.

Personally I only saw the last nine years of Elm Park, but that was more than enough time to build a strong affinity with the place that isn’t quite the same as that which I hold for the Madejski Stadium. It’s the ground in which I bore witness to my first-ever match, a fairly drab 1-1 draw with Bristol City in November 1989 under Ian Porterfield (quelle surprise it was a draw!) and the ground which lit the football spark in me. The names that day, hardly household around the country: Steve Francis, Linden Jones, Steve Richardson, Trevor Senior, Mick Tait, Martin Hicks, Stuart Beavon, Steve Moran and my one and only true player love at Reading, Michael Gilkes.

Gilkesy, of course, will remain synonymous with the club and indeed is now a part of the coaching staff, but those names hark back to an era of more simple times, a more straightforward game of 4-4-2, knock it long into the channels, getting stuck in and getting the crosses in.

And off the pitch as well, a much more simple time for fans. No need to worry about loyalty points, just get a voucher in the preceding matchday programme for priority for the upcoming big game.

No need to worry about buying a ticket in advance either, just rock up with your fiver (or less in pre-decimal days!) and give it to the turnstile operator. If you were lucky your entry counted on the official attendance...

And the simple travel. Park your car along the Tilehurst Road, Liebenrood Road or the multitude of terrace house-lined streets heading down to the Oxford Road and walk. Or get the bus along the Oxford Road, Tilehurst Road or Bath Road and walk. And the pubs synonymous with the club, particularly the Spread Eagle, Mansion House, Rose and Thistle and of course the Royals Rendezvous! The places to get a pint before the game and saunter back post-match...[sigh].

“Everything about the place was unique, from the shape of the terraces to the dugouts to the floodlights... to the goal”

I talked on my Terrace Memoirs podcast with Crystal Palace fan Kevin Day, who spoke with an affinity for Selhurst Park, describing it as “...a sh*thole, but it’s our sh*thole”. Burger vans instead of concourse catering, puddles of piss from an overflowing trough dug in the ground that passed as a toilet, and the luxury of a roof over your head in said toilet in the Southbank and Tilehurst End (bad luck away fans, just a wall maintaining your dignity for you).

Elm Park to a tee, although he did speak of an affection for the place having visited in ‘96, no doubt aided by his team strolling away with a 6-1 win! But that was just it, you were just as likely to see a 3-0 win as a 3-0 defeat there, a provincial club to the hilt.

Everything about the place was unique, from the shape of the terraces to the dugouts to the floodlights (there isn’t much that can get my juices flowing more than a good old-fashioned ground with four floodlight pylons!) to the goal. Solid metal goals, good full stanchions arcing down to the ground and a good deep in-goal area.

I often reminisce about Trevor Senior, Stuart Lovell, Jimmy Quinn, Trevor Morley et al smashing the ball into the diamond net we had between 1989 when I first started going, to 1992/93, or the hexagonal net we had between 1993/94 and 1995/96, or the square net we had between 1996/97 and 1997/98. I look back to the days when I hoped for a then more exotic, continental-style box net when we moved to the Madejski Stadium, but I now look on at places like Brisbane Road and York Road and my heart goes aflutter. I really wish we had kept the goals. No doubt we could do with that type of stinginess now!

And to the matches. Little did we know that Michael Meaker's solo effort in a 2-0 win against relegation rivals Stoke City was to be the last goal scored by a Reading player at the ground. Little did we know that Nicky Hammond's penalty save against Cardiff City in the fourth-round FA Cup replay was to be the last cup action at the place. But the memories of those nine years that I witnessed will remain with me, from Jimmy Quinn smacking it back from where it came from against Bristol Rovers, to those two last-minute goals to beat Mark McGhee's promotion-chasing Wolves, to the damp squib that was the last ever match, match.

150 years, two thirds of which were spent in the western suburbs of the town. We needed to move to progress the club, otherwise we'd almost certainly have remained in the third tier, but my God, if you gave me the opportunity to bear witness to just one more match at Elm Park, even if it meant never watching another football match again... I think I'd snap your hand off.

Home sweet home: ~~The Select Car Leasing Stadium~~ The Mad Stad

Ben Thomas

The Whitley Bowl. The Berkshire Arena. The South Reading Coliseum. The Mad Stad. The SCL.

Whatever you call it, it's currently home to our heroes and has been since 1998 when it opened its doors for the very first time. A lot has been said about the place since then. Soulless, ugly, marooned on a hill, as plastic as you can get... these are some of the phrases I've heard over the years.

Another criticism is that there's no atmosphere. I've always been of the opinion that it's what you make it. We know there are large pockets of the crowd who, in most cases, don't generate a lot of noise. That's just fact. But, on its day, the stadium is a glorious place to be. Anyone who was in attendance at the "classics" (Boro in the first Premier League game, the Wigan and Fulham play-off semi-finals, Bradford in the cup etc) will tell what our fans are capable of noise-wise.

From my own point of view, my first experience of live football was heading off with my dad to Elm Park in 1992 at the age of six. It was at a time when football was changing rapidly. I'd seen some football on TV, and so to go to a game was exciting. I then had six years of the old ground which, even to my very young mind, wasn't the most ideal place to be. There were times when, particularly on the terraces, I didn't feel massively safe. That's the one thing about our "new" ground – it's safe.

You see a lot more families now than ever before. Some fans take umbrage with that, but for me, it's a good thing.

It's validation that the environment is right for those people and I have always been a big supporter of the fact that children and families attend games. It's a safe, comfortable place to be – I know some of our fanbase hate that. They want it to be intimidating and dangerous but you have to move with the times. Football is a business and a club is judged by how much money they pull in, not the amount of arrests that are chalked up (of course, you could argue that both are low at the moment...).

My own children are six and I've started taking them to games (albeit sparingly) because I know that, where I sit, the people are consistent, interested in supporting the team and won't turn the whole thing into a swear-a-thon. And I'm fine with that. Some of my best memories are going to footie with my dad at Elm Park and I hope that they will look back on going to games with me as a positive too (although I've had to take my own sweets now – the range on offer in the concourse isn't "exciting enough", apparently...).

“On its day, the stadium is a glorious place to be. Anyone who was in attendance at the “classics” will tell what our fans are capable of noise-wise”

Having been at the stadium since day one, there've been ups and downs, amazing games and truly horrific ones. I've been in there when we've had 6,000 for a league game – that was pretty grim. We've played Oman (?!), we've had an Elton John gig, the Olympic torch came through the stadium in 2012 and recently we've been a vaccination hub for Covid. Some of the stands have been renamed, the singing section has moved around a bit and the catering has been varied. We've had more half-term initiatives than new signings it seems (although I do still long for the day when the Domino's pizza giveaway returns – that was so tense). One thing remains consistent though: it's one of the coldest places I've ever been.

I remember one game, just before the first lockdown, when I actually took a couple of blankets and a hot water bottle with me. It must have been at least -10 up in the Dolan. At least. Although some Reading fans would try to blame the weather on the club, there does seem to be an extra cold bite to the ground itself. No idea why, it's just always freezing in the seated bowl.

I guess the other rhino in the room is the sound system. It basically feels like it's been broken since the stadium opened. It's either ear-bleedingly loud or church-mouse quiet. Or it's just a muffled noise of random words and phrases. Either way, it's never audible to the human ear. The only thing that is crystal-clear is the safety announcement, which I learned recently is always done live. Always.

*“We’ve swapped wooden seats for plastic ones,
fighting for families, a fan hut for a fanstore, in town
for out of town, the lower leagues for the dizzy heights of
the Premier League”*

There have been upgrades over the last 20 years or so, of course. Some of these have been respectful and necessary (naming the North Stand the Dolan and the East Stand the Sir John Madejski). Others have been thrust upon us, such as those horrific video-advertising boards that give me migraines and spook me out.

But I guess, really, the biggest change of all has come with the actual naming of the stadium, something that most fans agree was a necessary evil in the current climate. I think most of us knew deep down it was coming and this season we aren't removed enough from calling it the Mad Stad and aren't comfortable enough with labelling it the SCL. It felt to me, when the name change was announced, that some of that previous success we'd enjoyed disappeared with the name.

And I guess that's the point. Since it opened, we've mostly only known success. Our time in RG2 has mostly been spent at the higher end of the league pyramid and has bred a new type of fan, one that requires chicken tenders and pale ale as opposed to blokes pissing up against a wall in the pouring rain on a concrete terrace. We've swapped wooden seats for plastic ones, fighting for families, a fan hut for a fanstore, in town for out of town, the lower leagues for the dizzy heights of the Premier League. It was the next logical step for the club to create an all-purpose stadium and it's a world away from what we left behind in West Reading. The SCL makes for a comfortable, predictable, safe atmosphere. Over the past few years, it's remained mostly constant when all the other aspects of the club have changed around us.

It's not perfect, it won't win any awards, but it's given our fans some of the happiest memories we have ever had and, as result, we should all be proud to call it our home.

**THE IDENTITY OF
READING F.C.**



Playing for the badge: The evolution of Reading's logo

Will Jones and Simeon Pickup



1953

This was the first badge that ever appeared on our kits. It was only used for one season, which was probably a good thing given how boring it looks.



1965

This badge appeared the same year the club decided to change our kit to all sky blue. The pre-season team photo features some players wearing kits with this crest, but it isn't clear if that continued into the season. What is sure is that this badge disappeared very quickly.



1981

This crest features three elm trees and the two blue moustaches that are a nod to the rivers Thames and Kennet. It only lasted two seasons, which is a shame because its simple design looks good and represents the club and town.



1987

This was a simple presentation of the colours the club wore at the time. It's possibly the most iconic of all our club badges as it was worn through some of our most notable achievements: winning the Simod Cup, Division Two and almost getting into the Premier League.



1996

In honour of Reading's centenary at Elm Park, the club adopted not one but two almost identical badges. The overall design is a nice updated version of the original elm trees badge from 1981.

The one used on the club's kits (top) was a simple crest, but the one used on programmes (bottom), and therefore the one you would think to be the official badge, had a banderole beneath it.





1998 and 2021

Reading's current crest was introduced to coincide with the move to the Madejski Stadium in 1998. It includes the club colours, a crown to represent the county of Berkshire and a Maiwand Lion to represent Reading.

At the time the club had worn red as an away colour for four seasons in a row, so its inclusion on the badge made sense. However, it's less relevant nowadays, given the switches between different colours for away kits.



Like in 1996, the club released a second edition of the existing badge – this time recolouring the whole thing to be white and gold. It's a stylish, smart update for the club's 150th.

The Maiwand Lion: A proud symbol for Reading

Simeon Pickup

The importance of parts of Reading's current badge is immediately apparent: the club's name, home-kit colours, year of foundation and a crown as reference to the 'Royals' nickname. The final element, a black lion in the upper right quarter, is more subtle in its importance than the other symbols – to those unfamiliar with the club at least – but is just as significant.

It is, of course, the Maiwand Lion in Forbury Gardens. Unveiled in 1886, the Lion commemorates 329 soldiers from the 66th (Berkshire) Regiment of Foot who lost their lives during the Battle of Maiwand (1880) in the Second Anglo-Afghan War.

The Lion is certainly distinctive. For a start it towers over the area around it, coming in at a lofty 31 feet. As for the design, the Lion is captured mid-roar and upright on all fours – neither quietly prowling nor overly aggressive. All in all, you're left with a reserved sense of pride: this is a statue designed to invoke majesty by standing tall rather than look intimidating.



A fitting symbol of commemoration for the fallen then, but also for Reading Football Club, having been on the badge since 1998. The Lion's sporting links are therefore clearly established; the Royals even took their 2016/17 squad photo in front of the statue, and of course it was also the inspiration for *The Tilehurst End's* logo.

It's absolutely right that the Lion is included on Reading's official badge. Not only does it provide a clear link between the club and town, but the idea of standing tall and proud is something that should always be significant to a club that has shown it can do just that in the upper reaches of English football.

However, the Maiwand Lion has also taken on tragic poignance that extends beyond football. In June 2020, Joe Ritchie-Bennett, James Furlong and David Wails were killed during a terrorist attack in Forbury Gardens itself – a horrifying act that shook us all.

In the days that followed, the Lion was used as a positive symbol in both non-footballing and footballing contexts. It went viral on social media in the form of a white silhouette of the statue against a black background, with a broken heart and the letters RDG below.

The club followed suit when the players warmed up for a home game against Brentford with t-shirts, made by *Elm Park Royals*, featuring the word 'Together' imposed over the Lion. A similar design was used on a huge flag draped over seats in the East Stand, with football at that point in its early days of being played behind closed doors.

All of that goes to show the power of the Maiwand Lion as a symbol for the town, club and link between the two. I dearly hope that, when Reading FC next changes its logo – for that will surely happen one day – the Maiwand Lion and all it represents retains its place.

The evolution of Reading's kits

Will Jones

Think of Reading FC and you think of a blue and white hooped kit. The two are synonymous and there would be outrage if any owner ever tried to change it. Yet it was not always the case. In fact, it was not until 1938 that we even wore blue and white, and not until 1948 when the broader hoops that became associated with the club first appeared.

For the first 67 years of Reading's history the club's kit was not only navy and white, but also featured stripes. That's why this season's 150th anniversary kit is as much a tribute to the mostly fairly mediocre modern-day home kits Reading have had as the original one worn back in 1871.

The change in 1948 to a kit we would now recognise did not last long. In the following decade Reading adopted plain white shirts for a couple of seasons before returning to hoops. The next 10 years featured some classic shirts, including the retro Robin Friday one still on sale today.

Bizarrely though, in 1965 Reading ditched the hoops and adopted an all-sky-blue strip in imitation of Coventry City. Yes, you did read that right! The manager at the time, Roy Bentley, had said "new colours are a number-one must, I want a new look all round [for the new] season". Apparently some fans agreed with the move, saying that the hoops were "outdated", or "anything would be an improvement", though some did feel that they were "smart" or "distinctive". The homage to Coventry would last just four years before another return to hoops.

The 1970s might have featured some smart blue and white hooped kits but it remains the darkest decade in Reading's history, with seven seasons in the fourth tier. However, just as the 1980s was a decade of change for the UK, so it was for Reading and their kits.

The club started the decade dropping back into Division Four, almost went out of business and narrowly avoided being merged with Oxford United into Thames Valley Royals.

A return to sky blue, firstly in a striped look and then Ajax-style design, coincided with the club rising through the divisions and returning to the second tier for the first time in 55 years. The return would only last two seasons but did include the club winning the Simod Cup.

Four years of mediocre mid-table third-tier football followed in another sky-blue design and a kit that can best be described as a fuzzy-TV design. In 1992 the club moved back to blue and white hooped shirts, and have never changed since, though there were rumours of a special striped shirt for the last season at Elm Park.

Since the move to the Madejski Stadium in 1998, Reading have had 21 different home kits with only three being worn a second season. Not surprisingly the constant change has sometimes meant the kit designers running out of ideas. This was most noticeable in 2016 when Puma literally just swapped the blue and white around in the design from the previous season's kit.

If the only difference between the modern-day home kits is often simply whether the shorts and socks are blue or white, then the range of away kits is as colourful as a bag of M&M's. That's ironic, because while the club pre-1992 were changing the colours and designs of the home kit on a regular basis, the away kits remained either red or yellow. Indeed, it wasn't until the 1999/2000 season when Reading were to sport an away kit of another colour – a fetching orange and navy design by Mizuno.

In the 21st century Reading have rarely sported a traditional red or yellow away kit and instead we have seen black, white, fluorescent yellow and even African violet.

The less said about the latter two the better, but the most iconic and smartest away kits have always been the traditional red and yellow ones.

When in 2018 we asked you to vote for your favourite away kit you voted for the blue and yellow hooped kit worn between 1992 and 1994. The red and yellow hooped third kit from the same two years was voted in third place.

If we were to run that vote again then you would have to fancy the famous Simod Cup kit to win, due to the tribute to it in this season's away kit. Given how good and unique the kit is, the club would be sensible to use 2021 as the year when they follow Brentford's example and return to kits lasting longer than a year, because 2021/22's away kit deserves more than a fleeting season.

The people of Reading Football Club



Steve Coppel holds the Championship trophy aloft, April 30 2006

Photo: Alamy

Reading's managers

1897 - 1901	Thomas Sefton
1901 - 1902	James Sharp
1902 - 1920	Harry Matthews
Feb 1920 - Dec 1920	Harry Marshall
Dec 1920 - May 1922	Jack Smith
Jan 1923 - Oct 1925	Arthur Chadwick
Oct 1925 - Jun 1926	Harold Bray
Jul 1926 - Jun 1931	Angus Wylie
Jun 1931 - Aug 1935	Joe Smith
Aug 1935 - Mar 1939	Billy Butler
Mar 1939 - Apr 1939	Johnny Cochrane
Apr 1939 - Jun 1947	Joe Edelston
Jun 1947 - Jun 1952	Ted Drake
Jun 1952 - Oct 1955	Arthur (Jack) Smith
Nov 1955 - Jan 1963	Harry Johnston
Jan 1963 - Feb 1969	Roy Bentley
Apr 1969 - Oct 1971	Jack Mansell
Jan 1972 - Feb 1977	Charlie Hurley
Feb 1977 - Jan 1984	Maurice Evans
Jan 1984 - Oct 1989	Ian Branfoot
Nov 1989 - Apr 1991	Ian Porterfield
May 1991 - Dec 1994	Mark McGhee
Jan 1995 - May 1997	Jimmy Quinn and Mick Gooding
Jun 1997 - Mar 1998	Terry Bullivant
Mar 1998 - Sep 1999	Tommy Burns
Sep 1999 - Sep 2003	Alan Pardew
Oct 2003 - May 2009	Steve Coppell
Jun 2009 - Dec 2009	Brendan Rodgers
Dec 2009 - Mar 2013	Brian McDermott
Mar 2013 - Dec 2014	Nigel Adkins
Dec 2014 - Dec 2015	Steve Clarke
Dec 2015 - May 2016	Brian McDermott
Jun 2016 - Mar 2018	Jaap Stam
Mar 2018 - Dec 2018	Paul Clement
Dec 2018 - Oct 2019	Jose Gomes
Oct 2019 - Aug 2020	Mark Bowen
Aug 2020 - Present	Veljko Paunovic

In the dugout: The managers of Reading Football Club

Marc Mayo

The majority of Reading's greatest era was overseen by its two greatest managers over a total period of less than a decade – with their spells divided by the short reign of a man who may yet prove to be the most-decorated coach to ever lead the team.

Steve Coppell was appointed the manager of a Royals side without a win in four games after the departure of Alan Pardew, the new West Ham manager and the man behind a promotion and surprise run to the play-offs the season before. A good start maintained the hugely ambitious sentiment around the club, assuring fans that the bubble would not be burst by Pardew's exit.

Patience would be required. Finishes of ninth and seventh, the latter following three straight defeats to miss out on the top six by three points, showed progress and gave Coppell the authority to make the changes he needed to move the club to the next level. Sentiment was cast aside as Ady Williams and Nicky Forster were among those moved on. The former England winger then drew up a cast of youngsters, top-club academy by-products and veterans to build a dynamic, hungry team.

Some were even plucked from his Brentford team that lost out to Pardew in 2002 to complete the assembly of the legendary 106 squad. Coppell's unique role in this was formed around his tactical clarity and credibility. Reading played a 4-4-2 with wingers, tenacious strikers and technically gifted, overlapping full backs.

Goals could come from any angle and defending started from the front. As the team began to excel, Coppell's incredible calmness ensured even the best team in the league's history did not get ahead of itself.

He was more often seen watching first halves from the directors' box than berating his stars from the touchline – a job he left to second-lieutenants Kevin Dillon and Wally Downes.

In the Premier League, Coppell's belief in himself and his players brewed a consistency in his approach, and the momentum of the previous year's feat was carried to a club-best eighth-place finish. The Liverpoolian's dignity and humility made him an ideal ambassador for the Royals on the big stage, as this was not a starry-eyed club lost in the big city or a rambunctious rabble-rouser, and Coppell embodied that quiet confidence perfectly.

Key moments went against Reading in the second Premier League season that arguably were not Coppell's fault, with poor new signings the major issue, and he appeared genuinely taken aback that a final-day 4-0 win at Derby was not enough to prevent relegation.

Fan pleas held Coppell back from resigning that summer. However, his team had run out of steam back in the Championship and a limp play-off semi-final defeat to Burnley consigned the club's greatest-ever manager to the sort of end more befitting a Roman emperor after a lost battle. At the end of a quiet, dark night which the Reading faithful had left long ago, he announced his resignation.

Looking back, it does not feel like only seven months and four days had passed before Brian McDermott took over. The club the former Slough boss stepped into was drastically different; many of the 106 members had been sold, a new playing style had been implemented ahead of its time by Brendan Rodgers and the club was fighting relegation.

McDermott brought the fun back to Reading, instilling that same attack-first, 4-4-2 setup that Coppell had based his team around. A play-off final defeat, to Rodgers no less, was not enough to perturb the Royals and that hunger was back for an unlikely Championship title in 2012.

Much like Coppel, McDermott was completely unmoved by the glory in front of him. His one-game-at-a-time mantra served a desperately difficult run-in perfectly and, aided by a boisterous dressing room, he could simply light the fuse and watch the fireworks as he ordered his teams to sit deep and launch devastating counter-attacks with great effect. Taking a backseat on the hype side of things suited McDermott to a tee; his down to earth nature made him both the fans' ideal bloke to go down the pub with while also maintaining an unerringly human, compassionate side.

McDermott's team, off the back of increasingly non-existent management from above, could not survive the Premier League and his sacking in spring 2013, combined with his treatment from the fans who saw him as yesterday's man upon his brief return in late 2015, remain among the most sour episodes in the club's history.

Now and then

At the club's formation in 1871, managers as we know them simply did not exist. Instead, the captain picked the team – much akin to cricket, the game many of our players back then returned to in the summer. Horace Walker is credited with saving the club from an early death in 1890 and, a speedy winger on the pitch, he effectively managed the team off it too.

Thomas Sefton was officially the club's first professional manager in 1897 and Harry Matthews took over in 1902, holding the role until 1920 as the club's longest-serving manager to this day. Matthews also won Reading's first trophies and is, rather disgracefully, cut off from Wikipedia's learned archive of club managers. According to that reference (which has guided little else of this article, I assure you!), Joe Smith boasts the best win rate of any manager to serve over a year in charge, with exactly half of his 184 games won in a series of top-four Southern League 2 finishes between 1931 and 1935.

Since McDermott's second exit, seven men have overseen matches, two of whom have been caretakers. Eddie Niedzwiecki holds the curious honour of managing the club twice as caretaker – with a gap of 29 years, four months and six days between his 1991 2-1 defeat to Bradford and 3-1 win over Colchester United in 2020.

Arguably the most popular manager of recent times has been Jose Gomes, who was bestowed a Portugal Day celebration after saving the club from relegation in 2019. Gomes, something of a journeyman whose team did not play fantastically and ultimately declined in his second season, talked up the need for a connection between the supporters and the club at a time it was sourly missing. That fans took to him so quickly in an otherwise subpar season shows the intense desire for that connection, and that the manager will always be the most important face of the club.

Make good with that responsibility, and we will love you forever.

All-star Royals: The perfect Reading XI

Adam Jones

During Reading's 150-year history, many fine players have graced the hallowed turfs of Elm Park and the Select Car Leasing Stadium (formerly known as the Madejski Stadium). Witnessing two promotions to the Premier League in my lifetime, you could argue many squad members that played their part during the 2005/06 and 2011/12 seasons deserve to be included, considering they were undoubtedly two of the most successful campaigns of all time for the Royals.

However, there are those that had a crucial role in getting us to that point - and this is why players of various eras are included in this all-time best XI. It was a torturous task leaving out some of our greatest names, but it was a challenge well worth undertaking as we highlight some of the most influential figures throughout a successful 150 years.



GK Steve Death

Spending 13 years at the club and making 500 appearances between 1969 and 1982, Death goes down as the club's greatest-ever goalkeeper. He won four player-of-the-season awards during his time at Elm Park, becoming the second-leading appearances maker of all time for the Royals, and went 1,103 minutes without conceding a goal – a record that lasted until 2009. He did all of this while fighting against the adversity of being just 5'8" – almost unheard of in the professional game nowadays.

RB Graeme Murty

Captaining the 106 team to Championship glory, Murty was an exceptional servant to the club and managed to fill the boots of Phil Parkinson in 2003 as skipper when the midfielder departed the Mad Stad. He was a central part of one of the club's most memorable moments of the 21st century when he converted a penalty on the final day of the 2005/06 season against QPR to score his first and the Royals' 99th and final goal of an unbelievable campaign.

CB Martin Hicks

64-year-old Hicks remains the club's leading appearance-maker of all time with a whopping 603 to his name. In a magnificent 13-season stint at Elm Park, he won three promotions and has arguably played a huge part in elevating the club to being an established second-tier side.

He may have made more than 600 appearances and achieved multiple promotions, but his biggest achievement is pulling off the sheer miracle of a Reading win at Wembley – the Simod Cup triumph in 1988. Another one soon would be nice.

CB Ady Williams

There have been many fine centre-backs to have plied their trade in Berkshire during our 150-year history, but not many former players are as passionate about the club as Wales-capped Williams. The former skipper made more than 300 appearances during two permanent stints at Reading, and can now be heard covering us on BBC Radio Berkshire. Considering how much of a legend he is, we can forget his spell at Swindon Town.

LB Nicky Shorey

The twice-capped former England international had a wand of a left foot and certainly knew how to take a set-piece as he guided the Royals to the Premier League and a ninth-place finish in the top flight. His set-piece quality remained with him during his second spell at the club, most memorably scoring in the League Cup away at QPR and recording two assists from corners at home to Manchester United in the Premier League.

“There have been many fine centre-backs to have plied their trade in Berkshire during our 150-year history, but not many former players are as passionate about the club as Ady Williams”

RM Maurice Evans

Evans was a Brian McDermott-esque figure at the club as a player, manager and chief scout. Though his death in 2000 was way before his time, he made a huge impact during his time with Reading and devoted a huge chunk of his life to the cause. Perhaps best known by many young supporters as a manager at Elm Park, he also made over 450 appearances as a player for the club and will go down as one of the most influential figures of all time in Reading’s history.

CM Steve Sidwell

Forming a vital part of the 106 team's midfield alongside James Harper, Sidwell stands out as one of the most talented players to don the blue and white hoops.

The best moment of his Reading career may have come on the opening day of the 2006/07 season, firing the ball past Mark Schwarzer to draw level against Middlesbrough, but he was a vital player throughout his four-and-a-half-year spell and adapted seamlessly to the top flight. With this, he secured himself a move to Jose Mourinho's Chelsea in 2007 and was hugely missed after his departure.

CM Phil Parkinson

Known for his commitment and no-nonsense style in midfield, 'Parky' deserves his spot in this line-up. He enjoyed a 10-year career with Reading between 1992 and 2002, winning two promotions and two player-of-the-season awards as he saw the club rise from the third tier to what is now known as the Championship. He's not a bad manager either, overseeing League Two side Bradford City's remarkable journey to the League Cup final in 2013.

LM Michael Gilkes

Making more than 450 appearances in 13 years and scoring 52 goals, Gilkes has to go down as one of the best free transfers in the club's history. Not only was he a born goalscorer, but the winger also had an incredible turn of pace and the necessary close-control to match, making him such a prolific goalscorer from out wide. He may have left the club as a player in 1997, but he is now Reading's academy manager, tasked with the important job of bringing the next generation through.

ST Trevor Senior

He loved Reading so much, he couldn't stay away! Enjoying two separate spells at the club and scoring 190 goals in total, Senior is one of the Royals' greatest-ever strikers.

First joining the club in 1983, he is a name known even by some of our youngest fans, a ringing endorsement of his impact and how fondly he's remembered as one of the greats.

ST Jimmy Quinn

Oliver Norwood may have played in the Premier League and been a real asset for Reading during his time at the Select Car Leasing Stadium, but he certainly isn't the most influential Northern Ireland international to grace the Berkshire turf. Plying his trade at the club between 1992 and 1997, he even managed the Royals alongside Mick Gooding, though his goalscoring prowess is the one thing that comes to mind when thinking about the Belfast-born forward. His 94 goals in 216 displays and an incredible goals-to-game ratio cements his place as a legend.

Bench: Shaka Hislop, Steve Richardson, Keith McPherson, Mick Gooding, Jimmy Kebe, Jimmy Wheeler, Robin Friday

Reading Women: From semi-pro to one of the elite

Marc Mayo

The rise of women's football over the past decade has coincided with Reading being among the pioneers of a second generation of teams within the game.

When the Royals successfully applied to join the new Women's Super League 2 in 2014, it was Notts County and Doncaster Rovers Belles who were among the mainstays of the English game. Gaining a foothold as an established club in the following years allowed Kelly Chambers' side to compete with the newly enriched Premier League giants such as Tottenham and Manchester United, who have since belatedly turned their hand to the women's game.

It is no coincidence that Reading have been able to park themselves among this elite. In 2006, community manager and long-time club servant Lee Herron oversaw the official creation of Reading Women – the club having previously been linked to the local team Reading Royals LFC.

One key member of the team was Chambers, who helped secure an immediate Southern League title before another promotion landed the Royals in the Premier League Northern Division. It perhaps says a lot about the not-too-distant attitudes to women's football that the authorities were effectively struggling to fill the Northern Division, in comparison to its Southern counterpart.

Another promotion landed the team, then still semi-pro, in the Premier League National Division – then the second tier – before moving to WSL2 upon its foundation in 2014. Throughout this period Chambers became increasingly instrumental, working with youngsters at the John Madejski Academy after retiring due to injury.

Coaching and leading the club was always her passion and, while working on her UEFA badges, former Arsenal star Jayne Ludlow was hired to briefly manage the team.

Chambers took over in 2015 to lead the side to the WSL2 title. The stand-out player was Fran Kirby, a once-in-a-generation talent with mercurial skills on the ball who represented the Royals while playing for England in that year's World Cup. A move to Chelsea has meant the Berkshire product going from strength to strength – and finishing in the top 10 of the 2021 Ballon d'Or Feminin.

The opportunity to play at Adams Park gave Reading Women a solid, league-worthy home before eventually switching to the Select Car Leasing Stadium – fully integrating the women's side into the fabric of the club as a whole.

“The vision, execution and timing of Reading Women’s rise mean the foundation is there for the side to remain a force in the English game for years to come”

Chambers recently admitted the “hardest and lowest part” of her career came after the birth of her daughter midway through the 2016 season. The incredibly difficult balancing act for any young mum, between family and career, is something that sport is only just getting to grips with and the manager revealed the support of her family was key to overcoming the self-doubt it raised. Her determination to maintain her focus on Reading underlined her clear vision in growing the club as a serious, professional endeavour for the long term.

The next big challenge was the emergence of English football's heavy hitters. Reading turned to veterans of the game, such as England record cap-holder Fara Williams, to guide them after a fantastic fourth-place finish in 2017/18.

The following season, the team came within a penalty shootout of a maiden FA Cup final berth.

Now a new generation of talent is emerging, with Chambers' team a mix of the experienced, in captain Brooke Chaplen and long-serving goalkeeper Grace Moloney, and emerging stars such as Emma Harries and Deanne Rose.

The vision, execution and timing of Reading Women's rise mean the foundation is there for the side to remain a force in the English game for years to come.

A conveyor belt of talent: The success of Reading's academy

Olly Allen

I have interviewed a few players who have spent time in Reading's academy – some for a decade or more, some for only a couple of years – and they all say the same thing: there are few better clubs in the country to train and develop as a young footballer.

Considering our historical standing in English football, with just three years spent in the top flight, that is quite the statement. It is not an exaggeration either. The statistics show that Reading's track record of producing stars of the future rivals the best teams in the land.

Perhaps there is a fundamental reason behind this. Reading understand that a successful academy is absolutely essential to the success of the entire football club. Until relatively recently, we'd never had lavish transfer budgets to buy the very best players. That has created a necessity to nurture them ourselves, which has happened consistently for the last two decades.

The academy was created in 1999, replacing the centre of excellence, which allowed Reading to compete against the country's best youth teams. It was opened a year after the opening of the Madejski Stadium, making the late 1990s an extremely exciting and progressive time for Reading Football Club as a whole.

The very first academy graduate was Alex Haddow, who made his debut against Peterborough United in August 1999. I interviewed Alex a couple of years ago and he remains one of the best footballers/ex-footballers I have spoken to. His stories – from being throttled by Alan Pardew to being cleaned out in training by Neil Smith – were so engaging. He now runs a sports physiotherapy company in Austria.

John Stephenson was the first academy manager, but was succeeded by former Royals goalkeeper Nick Hammond in 2000. Hammond is one of several individuals who deserve a namecheck with regards to the vital role they played in the evolution and success of the academy, along with Brian McDermott and Brendan Rodgers, and later David Dodds and Martin Kuhl.

But the greatest acclaim should be reserved for Eamonn Dolan, who became academy manager in 2004. Speak to anyone about him and they do not have a bad word to say; many players credit their entire careers to him.

Dolan developed youngsters not just as footballers, but also as human beings, and for many he was so much more than a coach. He was a confidant, a mentor and a friend. Dolan sadly lost his battle with cancer in June 2016 and is sorely missed. The renaming of the North Stand as The Eamonn Dolan Stand was a fitting tribute to one of the most influential men in the club's history.

The early years of the academy included the emergence of the likes of Darius Henderson, Nathan Tyson and Jamie Ashdown, but it was in the late 2000s that a real golden period arose. Over the course of two years, Alex Pearce, Jem Karacan, Gylfi Sigurdsson, Simon Church and Hal Robson-Kanu all broke into the first team.

In the 2009/10 campaign, Sigurdsson scored 20 goals in 44 appearances to win the club's player of the season award at the age of just 20 and he was sold for a club record fee to Hoffenheim that summer. The other four players became established in the first team and played key roles in promotion to the Premier League in 2012, with Pearce winning player of the season.

That cohort is seen as the barometer which every generation of academy players since has been held up against. It has proved incredibly difficult to match their achievements in senior football, but the successes at youth level in the 2013/14 season are also remembered fondly.

That was the year the under-18 team reached the semi-final of the FA Youth Cup – the furthest the club has ever got in the competition – losing to Fulham in the dying seconds of the second leg. Meanwhile, the under-21 side won the inaugural Premier League Cup, beating Patrick Vieira’s Manchester City in the final. Players from those squads have gone on to have flourishing careers, such as Jack Stacey and Rob Dickie. It’s a shame they were not quite able to make their mark on Reading’s first team.

In truth, each and every academy player whose name is proudly displayed on The Mad Stad’s graduates board is a success story. To date, 72 players have come through the youth system at Reading to appear in the first team. That number includes individuals who have captained the club, won player-of-the-season awards and appeared in the Premier League, Champions League and major international tournaments. It is no wonder that Reading’s development system is so widely respected.

“To date, 72 players have come through the youth system at Reading to appear in the first team. That number includes individuals who have captained the club, won player-of-the-season awards and appeared in the Premier League, Champions League and major international tournaments”

The academy remains a shining light at Reading. No matter what else goes on – managerial sackings, relegation battles, a points deduction – the Royals’ youth development is always a source of pride and hope.

I would probably say it is what I love most about the football club. There are very few things better than seeing one of our own out on the pitch. Although slightly bittersweet, seeing graduates go on and have brilliant careers elsewhere is also immensely heart-warming, knowing that their journeys in senior football started in Berkshire.

Only this year we bid farewell to Michael Olise, who headed to the Premier League with Crystal Palace, and Omar Richards, who is now playing with world superstars in the Champions League at Bayern Munich. Richards probably goes down as the most remarkable story to come out of the academy and it is still quite hard to believe, but he is another example of the talent the club has produced.

The current first team contains a healthy dose of academy graduates and there has been an increasing reliance on youngsters this season due to an injury crisis. Luke Southwood is having his breakthrough campaign in goal, Tom Holmes and Tom McIntyre have the makings of a centre-back partnership for years to come and Andy Rinomhota has been hugely missed while he has been on the sidelines. Against Birmingham City in November, 18-year-old Jahmari Clarke became an instant hero when he came off the bench to score twice to win the game.

Reading were awarded category-one academy status under the Elite Player Performance Plan in 2012; this is given to clubs that excel in areas such as productivity rates, training facilities and coaching standards. The fact that Reading still hold this standing, despite being out of the Premier League for so long, is testament to just how superb the development setup is.

It also highlights the importance of the new Bearwood Park training ground, which is used by the first team, academy and women's side. The facilities are considered to be among the best in the country and are a huge draw in attracting players of all ages to the club.

With regards to productivity rates, recent analysis from *Training Ground Guru* ranked Reading as the third-best academy in England outside of the Premier League for producing professional footballers. In other words, its imprint can be seen far and wide at all levels of the pyramid.

That would make Eamonn Dolan very proud indeed.

Reading's academy graduates

<i>August 1999...</i>	Alex Hadow	<i>May 2015</i>	Tariqe Fosu...
<i>March 2000...</i>	Darius Henderson	<i>March 2016</i>	Josh Barrett...
<i>April 2000...</i>	Nathan Tyson	<i>May 2016</i>	Rob Dickie...
<i>September 2000...</i>	Jamie Ashdown	<i>August 2016</i>	Tennai Watson...
<i>April 2003...</i>	Darren Campbell	<i>August 2016</i>	Liam Kelly...
<i>April 2003...</i>	Peter Castle	<i>August 2017</i>	Omar Richards...
<i>March 2004...</i>	Jamie Young	<i>August 2017</i>	Sam Smith...
<i>September 2005...</i>	Simon Cox	<i>August 2017</i>	Andy Rinomhota...
<i>December 2005...</i>	Shane Long	<i>August 2017</i>	Axel Andresson...
<i>January 2006...</i>	Curtis Osano	<i>August 2017</i>	Danny Loader...
<i>January 2007...</i>	Alex Pearce	<i>March 2018</i>	Tom Holmes...
<i>September 2007...</i>	James Henry	<i>December 2018</i>	Tom McIntyre...
<i>August 2008...</i>	Julian Kelly	<i>December 2018</i>	Gabriel Osho...
<i>August 2008...</i>	Gylfi Sigurdsson	<i>March 2019</i>	Ryan East...
<i>August 2008...</i>	Jem Karacan	<i>March 2019</i>	Michael Olise...
<i>January 2009...</i>	Simon Church	<i>May 2019</i>	Teddy Howe...
<i>August 2009...</i>	Hal Robson-Kanu	<i>August 2019</i>	Akinwale Odimayo...
<i>August 2009...</i>	Scott Davies	<i>January 2020</i>	Andre Burley...
<i>August 2009...</i>	Nicholas Bignall	<i>Jan' 2020</i>	Ramarni Medford-Smith...
<i>August 2009...</i>	Ben Hamer	<i>January 2020</i>	Jeriel Dorsett...
<i>August 2010...</i>	Jordan Obita	<i>January 2020</i>	Ben House...
<i>August 2010...</i>	Jake Taylor	<i>September 2020</i>	Luke Southwood...
<i>February 2011...</i>	Alex McCarthy	<i>September 2020</i>	Ethan Bristow...
<i>January 2012...</i>	Lawson D'Ath	<i>Sep' 2020</i>	Nahum Melvin-Lambert...
<i>December 2012...</i>	Dominic Samuel	<i>September 2020</i>	Dejan Tetek...
<i>January 2014...</i>	Michael Hector	<i>September 2020</i>	Lynford Sackey...
<i>August 2014...</i>	Ryan Edwards	<i>September 2020</i>	Nelson Abbey...
<i>August 2014...</i>	Craig Tanner	<i>January 2020</i>	Oliver Pendlebury...
<i>August 2014...</i>	Jake Cooper	<i>January 2020</i>	Conor Lawless...
<i>August 2014...</i>	Jack Stacey	<i>January 2020</i>	Mamadi Camara...
<i>August 2014...</i>	Aaron Kuhl	<i>August 2021</i>	Claudio Osorio...
<i>August 2014...</i>	Aaron Tshibola	<i>August 2021</i>	Kian Leavy...
<i>August 2014...</i>	Sean Long	<i>August 2021</i>	Kelvin Ehibhationghan...
<i>September 2014...</i>	Mikkel Andersen	<i>August 2021</i>	Michael Stickland...
<i>March 2015...</i>	Niall Keown	<i>August 2021</i>	Jahmari Clarke...
<i>March 2015...</i>	Andrija Novakovich	<i>November 2021</i>	Tyrell Ashcroft...

Covering and following Reading Football Club



Royals in the media

Dan Wimbush

As I sat attending a wedding during a wet and windy day in Stoke (are there any other weather conditions for that part of the world?) my smart watch gave me a polite buzz. West Brom 1-0 Reading read the message, and with that it was time to check the phone for more details.

Instantly at my fingertips I could see we were being thoroughly outplayed, with detailed statistics available on the Sky Sports website. Likewise, Twitter was awash with opinion on everything from our tactical set-up, the long-time woes of the club, amusing gifs and CAP-LADEN RANTS. I could even see clips of the goal from people who had access to international streams, watching in far flung time zones.

How far we've come in our ability to follow and support our beloved club.

My experiences only stretch back to the mid-1990s but in truth, very little had changed in the previous 30 years or so for following events at Elm Park. Coverage was mostly restricted to the local press, with the *Reading Evening Post* and *Reading Chronicle* ruling the roost.

Instead of having 140 characters of opinion from a thousand sources, it was mostly the opinion of one or two key men, most notably 'The Hound' Clive Baskerville who was the Evening Post's chief reporter at the time. We had to wait days to see his player ratings then, lovingly printed along the sidebar of one of the back pages and to see what he thought of goings-on at the club.

Jonny Fordham, Charles Watts and Jonathan Low would all pick up Evening Post duties, with Anthony Smith also admirably cracking on at the Chronicle. Yet no matter how good their efforts, Reading's print media only shrank as the years went on, with daily soon replaced by bi-weekly, and in the Evening Post's case, non-weekly and online only.

The Post didn't even get to keep its name as it was soon swallowed up by a larger online media group, their dozens-strong staff moved from mighty premises at the print works near the Rivermead Centre to small offices and a team you can count on both hands.

National print coverage was largely restricted to the results section or a four-line match report that just about covered who scored and won the game. Yet those pages did provide some solace for fans abroad who, in the pre-internet era, relied on a two-day-old copy of a national paper to actually get the results at all!

Fans themselves also had a go, with *The Whiff* the last in a line of fanzines printed by fans and sold outside Elm Park and the Mad Stad. Cartoons including Hapless Hammond, Colin the Cheeselog and a description of Mark McGhee once as a Tagnut (use Urban Dictionary at your own discretion) helped provide chuckles on the terraces and in those early years at a half-empty Madejski Stadium.

There was, and still is, BBC Radio Berkshire, where the likes of John Southall, Joel Hufford and now Tim Dellor would provide your vocal soundtrack on those cold midweek nights when leaving the house just wasn't an option. Likewise you'd be able to nip into the car after a Saturday trip to the park just in time to hear their dulcet tones all the way from far-flung corners of the UK. There were a few hiccups over the years, the ill-fated trial merger between BBC Radio Berkshire and BBC Radio Oxford to bring us BBC Radio Thames Valley was never going to work (who'd ever think to merge things based in Oxford and Reading?).

Radio rights did briefly leave Auntie Beeb and were picked up by Classic Gold and Reading 107. However, the esteem to which BBC Berks was held was shown when, after losing the rights ahead of our first Premier League journey, a petition was launched to keep Reading coverage on their airwaves.

Just as *The Whiff* gave DIY journalists a chance to debate the Royals, podcasts provided an audio outlet for supporters. Alan West and Paul Williams were the first to give it a go, with their *Royals Football Fancast* quickly rising in popularity, with the duo recording on an old keyboard in Westy's dining room. Soon the Evening Post's Jonny Fordham would join the fray and eventually the pod would be absorbed by the paper, until Fordham himself moved on and the pod needed a new home, one we'll come on to later.

Plenty of other fans have also had a crack, with *Elm Park Royals* today producing podcasts and vodcasts, meaning Reading fans are now able to enjoy plenty of options for fan-based opinions.

“Full live games were a rare thing of beauty, with our First Division run in 1994/95 including the memorable 4-2 win over Wolves being covered in all its glory by the dulcet tones of the great Brian Moore”

Television was, and still is, a bit more hit-and-miss. In the late 90s and beforehand you'd often have to wait until Monday night to see the weekend's goals on BBC South Today or Meridian. National coverage was even more sparse, as evidenced by the fact that my dad would record the one or two times a year we might just sneak onto Match of the Day's FA Cup coverage. I can still remember the excitement at how our 1996 tie with Manchester United was given top billing on MOTD due to a cold snap that wiped out most of the fixture list.

Full live games were a rare thing of beauty, with our First Division run in 1994/95 including the memorable 4-2 win over Wolves being covered in all its glory by the dulcet tones of the great Brian Moore. Sky Sports would eventually pick up the coverage and suddenly a Friday night spectacle against Nottingham Forest, when a James Lambert wonder goal and a Steve

Stone miss of the decade could be enjoyed in our living rooms or our nearest licensed establishment.

ITV Digital briefly threatened to start a revolution. However, it would go on to fail in spectacular fashion and nearly take down half of the Football League with it.

Things became a lot easier as the years wore on and, by the time of our Premier League adventure, fans could now see every minute of every game – an experience that had to return due to the pandemic. Today, highlights are available at the touch of an app, or a simple type into YouTube, something I only wish could have existed for THAT Robin Friday goal.

While Sir John Madejski was plotting a Royal revolution and a move to the Madejski Stadium, an-even bigger revolution was playing out in the digital world as the World Wide Web made its entry into the wider fandom.

When it comes to Reading and cyber space there's only one place to start and it's the work of one man – Graham Loader and his message board Hob Nob Anyone? – which itself is now 27 years old. Before Twitter, message boards WERE social media. In the days of dial-up, simple text-based spaces proved a haven for fans to connect with each other and post things like match reports, debate transfers and organise the occasional underwear-based protest.

Such early portals were not without their flaws of course. Toxicity and online bullying didn't begin and end with modern social media. However, by and large message boards helped bring many people together, with more than just Reading Football club being discussed. Lifelong friendships started with debates over Robinson v Shorey, developing into football teams, social meet-ups and the odd romance too.

HNA wasn't the only message board of course, with numerous offshoots springing up, not least those on the BBC 606 website and its successor *The Royals Rendezvous*.

The birth of The Tilehurst End

While those sites provided a fine place for debate, they didn't really offer the kind of long-form opinion that was rapidly disappearing from a shrinking local media.

The Whiff was on its way out and Reading were fading from national prominence after the heady years under Steve Coppell. Enter some bloke that sounds like a tennis tournament and a rag-tag group of social media lovers, authors, historians and aspiring journalists, and in April 2011 *The Tilehurst End* was born.

Why did we call it *The Tilehurst End*? As well as being part of Elm Park and a nod to the past, *The Tilehurst End* terrace itself was often the place for those fans who enjoyed a bit more passion than the seated Norfolk Road stand, but perhaps didn't want the fire of the South Bank. In essence, it was the middle ground and that's how we wanted TTE to be: a place where opinions were welcome but that balance should always be presented, or at least considered.

Over time we took podcasting duties from the Football Fancast, with the TTE Podcast now well over 200 episodes into its run and Marc doing a fantastic job in the host's chair.

The biggest success story of *The Tilehurst End* is not its popularity or the recognition from media worldwide. Instead, the success has come from giving aspiring journalists, writers and broadcasters a place to hone their craft and make strides within the industry.

Along the way I hope we've provided entertainment and helped fans feel more connected to the team. It's been great to be able to interview legends from the past, staff of the present and get views from fans across the generations and around the world.

I profoundly hope that TTE exists for our 200-year celebrations but to do so it will need your help.

Those who work on the site do so for free but I hold out hope that somehow the digital economy evolves to a point where more people can make a genuine living. Simeon and the team who keep the site alive do a fantastic job, but like myself, will no doubt one day have to move on and I hope there are people out there who will be happy to pick it up and carry on.

With local television, radio and print media seemingly shrinking year by year, there must remain places for Reading fans to not just throw opinions around, but to have researched, considered pieces to mull over when they get into work on a Monday morning, or on the train home from a game.

I hope that remains TTE and while history has shown us that much can change, there will always be somewhere for Reading fans to connect with the team they love.

Dan Wimbush

Tilehurst End founder and editor 2011-17

The view from Dusseldorf: Following Reading from overseas

Marco Bader

150 years of Reading Football Club is an incredible achievement. A club with such a long and proud history written by an enormous number of people full of passion for the blue and white shirt. A club that has always been very special to me personally even though I wasn't born or have lived in Reading.

I started following the Royals at the age of 10, although "following" at that time meant buying a German football magazine where I could see at least the league table. The reason for my interest in the Royals was due to the twin-town relationship of Reading with my hometown Düsseldorf and the fact that I always liked the special atmosphere in Britain's football stadiums.

After my first year of English in school (aged 12) I gathered all my courage and wrote a letter to the club, with the very precise address "To Reading FC" - no street, no postcode. But some weeks later, I was probably the happiest boy in Düsseldorf when former Royal Uwe Hartenberger answered! He sent a poster and player cards. Definitely these are the kind of moments that mark you.

From that moment on there was no doubt in my mind which club to support. I travelled many times to Reading, in the beginning years with my parents who have been always very supportive. The first time was in 1995 against Oldham at the old Elm Park stadium, the last one some weeks ago for the home ties against Nottingham Forest and Sheffield United.

More than 26 years full of incredible moments: the last home win at Elm Park against Stoke in 1998, the 2-1 against Wigan in the the play-offs in 2001, Curo's so important equaliser against Steve Coppell's Brentford, the promotion party against QPR in 2006 or even the less successful experiences at Wembley.

But apart from all those visits, supporting and following the Royals from abroad was always something different.

And also the way of doing that changed a lot during the mentioned period. In the 90s two main sources of information were available to me: BFBS Radio and the football magazines *Match* and *Shoot*.

Many Saturdays passed with me sitting in front of my parent's radio waiting for the half-time and full-time results. Sometimes they even offered live coverage. I still remember very well Reading's home win against Bolton in 1997 with Jimmy Quinn in goal and Trevor Morley grabbing a hat trick. And at the beginning of each week, my parents had to drive me to the central train station of Düsseldorf, where the only shop was located that sold *Match* and *Shoot*. Looking for the line-ups and player marks was a real highlight to me.

“It is fantastic to see that football has no frontiers and this kind of relationship can exist between two countries that are so often rivals”

The millennium and the development of the internet offered new possibilities. Reading's own club homepage meant I could stay up to date with everything: the latest signings, pictures of the players, match reports... it was just fantastic and gave you a much stronger feeling to be part of it. The radio station Classic Goal soon offered a live commentary of the whole 90 minutes. A further step forward.

These days things go even beyond that. After iFollow there is now RoyalsTV and the possibility of watching every single game (if broadcast restrictions allow it) online. For someone living outside the UK it's a brilliant way to stay even more in touch with your club, although the emotions in front of a computer are never a substitute for a matchday experience in the stadium.

All in all, there are countless unforgettable memories I could experience as a Reading supporter. The club with all its players and staff, fans that became friends, there is so much I connect with the Royals. I am very thankful for every single moment.

It is fantastic to see that football has no frontiers and this kind of relationship can exist between two countries that are so often rivals... it is just a great feeling that one chant sums all up: "Reading til I die", of course!

Thanks for reading 150 Years: A Royal Review

Happy birthday, Reading Football Club