

## **LEWES FC CLUB HISTORY**

### **The Early Years**

Lewes Football Club was formed following a meeting at The Royal Oak pub on 23 September 1885. For the first eight years, the players wore light green shirts which were designed to reflect the scenery of the surrounding South Downs, but black and red finally became the club colours in 1893.

The club has played at the Dripping Pan ever since, apart from a couple of seasons prior to the First World War when the club was banished to the adjoining Convent Field. The early years of the club produced only mediocre results and successes were few and far between. In 1920, Lewes became founder members of the Sussex County League.

### **1960s**

Progress was slow and despite four runners-up places, by the 1960s Lewes had only one Sussex RUR Cup win to their name. In 1965, the club's fortunes changed dramatically, winning the County League title for the first time with a massive nine-point lead over runners-up Lancing, as well as both the RUR and Sussex Senior Cups.

Lewes became members of the Athenian League and after winning the Division 2 title in 1968, promotion to the Premier Division was gained just two years later when the Division 1 title was snatched from Boreham Wood, with a further Sussex Senior Cup triumph added in 1971. Six years later, the club entered the newly expanded Isthmian League.

### **1980s**

Promotion to Division 1 soon followed although two sixth place finishes in 1982 and 1989 were the highest positions attained in Division 1. During that time, Lewes reached the final of the Sussex Senior Cup on three occasions and won the trophy in 1984/85.

### **1990s**

Disaster struck in 1990/91 when Lewes were relegated for the first time in their history. An immediate return as runners-up to Purfleet followed, but that success was short-lived and relegation in successive years meant that by the 1994/95 season the club was down in Division Three.

The slide continued and the first season in the basement division would have been the last in the league if it hadn't been for Cove who conveniently propped-up the league and saved Lewes from automatic demotion.

The club survived rather than thrived until the 1998/99 season when Jimmy Quinn joined as manager, and at the first attempt missed out on promotion by just one place. Midway through the 1999/2000 season Martin Elliott and a new board of Directors stepped in and immediately the fortunes of the club

began to improve, with the capture of the Sussex Senior Cup in 2001 following victory over Bognor Regis.

### **Naughties (2000s)**

There was mixed news on the pitch. The pinnacle of the Men's team's achievement, and what a pinnacle, was to gain promotion to the top of the non-League pyramid in 2007/8. However, the Rooks only lasted one season in the top flight as the Global Credit Crisis hit and funds dried up. The Rooks' new economic reality saw them drop down the divisions.

However, a brand new Women's team was started by Jacquie Agnew and underwent a dramatic rise from park football to the Women's Combination.

### **A New Dawn (2010s)**

Behind the scenes, a group of six supporters calling themselves Rooks125 were working hard to take the club into community ownership having witnessed the serious financial problems that had befallen the club, despite the owners' best efforts.

Finally on July 8th, 2010, Lewes FC was officially transferred out of private ownership into a mass-ownership Community Benefit Society called Lewes Community Football Club, consisting of benefactors and members of the former Management Committee.

The six members of Rooks125 formed the inaugural Executive Board, working as volunteers to install improved working practices and procedures during the season before planning to open up the wider ownership of LCFC to all the club's supporters in 2011/12. The first chairman of the Community Club was appointed in 2013 with club legend Terry Parris taking up the position. Terry was succeeded by Stuart Fuller in 2015. All Board positions now are elected by the whole Ownership base.

In the summer of 2017 the club hit the headlines globally when it announced that it would pay our Men's and Women's squads the same – a first for any semi/professional club in the world. Under the Equality FC banner, the club attracted and continues to attract a number of partners who shared the same beliefs and vision for gender equality in sport.

On the pitch, restricted resources saw the team drop two Leagues, down to Step 4 but under Darren Freeman they gained promotion as runners-up in the Isthmian League South in 2017/18, then came within a whisker of a play-off spot in the Isthmian Premier the following season.

The Lewes Women's side were given a place in the inaugural Women's Championship, the second tier of English football playing alongside sides such as Manchester United, Leicester City and Tottenham Hotspur. In December 2018 they attracted a record attendance when nearly 2,000 fans saw them host Manchester United at the Pan.

## **So where are we now?**

Freeman stepped down in October 2019 after four years in charge to concentrate on his footballing career away from management and after a period when his former assistants Ross Standen and Tony Coade led the side, Hugo Langton took over the hotseat in February 2020, leading the team to 16<sup>th</sup> spot before the COVID-19 pandemic curtailed the season.

In April 2021, the Club appointed Tony Russell as manager and former Lewes player Joe Vines as his assistant. Their appointment and unique playing style brought new impetus and invigoration to the Rooks who finished just four points outside the play off places in 2021/22.

The Rooks had a sluggish start to the first half of the 2022/23 season but found their feet and came agonisingly close to finishing in the play offs, losing out on a goal difference of plus two. The season also saw a sell-out crowd at the Dripping Pan as the Women's team lost to Manchester United in the FA Women's Cup Quarter-Finals.

The club is building a solid foundation on which to build for the future. It has around 2,500 Owners and has gained a great reputation for all its community work and stand-out marketing especially with the continued stance on pay equality and committed stance against the harms of gambling advertisement in football.