



# CLUB HISTORY

**President:** Trevor Hurley

**Vice-President:** Dennis Brisley

**Chairman:** Roland Simmonds

**Vice-Chairman:** Kevin Poulton

**Secretary:** Nicholas Snelson

The original Elstow Abbey Football Club was formed in 1920 and started off in the Bedford & District Football League playing at The Warren, Elstow which is this same ground the club uses today despite a few moves around the village in between. The club's first notable achievement was finishing runners-up in Division Two in 1924 followed by progression to the Bedford Hospital Cup Final in 1925. Elstow Abbey went down 2-1 with a last minute goal from Potton. The 1929/30 season saw more success for the club, lifting the First Division title and going one better in the Hospital Cup Final, the first county title then arrived in 1937 when Elstow Abbey lifted the Bedfordshire FA's Junior Challenge Cup.

The club moved to the South Midlands League in 1950 finishing runners-up in Division Two in 1954 and being promoted to Division 1 but they played just 1 more season in the league before moving back to the Bedford & District League Premier Division. However the club then disbanded for the first time on 11th June 1956 after just 1 season back. During this period however one notable player was Brian Stapleton who while playing for the club helped the Bedfordshire FA win the FA County Youth Cup for the first time in 1955 beating Sheffield & Hallamshire 2-0 on aggregate in the final, Brian scoring both goals in the second leg.

Elstow can also claim to have had on its books one of Bedford's most successful and famous players in Barry Fry before he moved to Manchester United, Bolton Wanderers, Luton Town & Leyton Orient amongst others before injury cut short his playing days, however this was followed by a successful management career at the highest level. The club reformed in May 1958 having missed 2 seasons and by 1960 had made their first Britannia Cup Final appearance but finished runners-up, in 1961 Elstow won the Bedford & District Football League Division 1 title and were runners-up in the Bedfordshire FA Junior Challenge Cup Final losing 3-1 to Stotfold Reserves.

In the early 70s Elstow finished runners-up in the Premier Division followed the next season by again finishing runners-up in the Britannia Cup Final. In 1979 the first team folded but the reserves continued and that season won the Bedford & District Football League Division 4 title, the Diamond Jubilee Cup and the Bedfordshire FA's Junior Challenge Trophy beating Dunton 2-0. They then went on to lift the Division Three title the next season and the Division Two title the season after that. 10 years later the club won the Division Two & Division One titles in successive seasons as well as the Beds FA Junior Cup again in 1993 beating Crawley Green 5-3aet and the reserves runners-up in the Beds FA Junior Trophy in 1995 losing 1-0 to The Compasses.

The turn of the millennium brought about more success, in 2000 the reserves finished runners-up to Royal Oak Kempston in the Beds FA Junior Trophy and then the first team won the Division 1 title in 2002 having been relegated from the premier division the season before. This was followed by the club's one and only Britannia Cup success to date, in 2003, defeating North Park Rangers 2-1 after Extra Time and then the Premier Division title was won in 2004, Elstow finishing 5 points clear of Campton. The Reserves also lifting the Associate Division 1 title in the same season a full 7 points clear of Blunham Reserves.

The club disbanded for the second time in 2005 but was then reformed in 2006 in Division One of the Bedfordshire Football League although what followed was a gradual decline to Division Two. For the 2010/11 season a new structure at the club brought about a change in fortunes under Manager Wesley Matthews, an almost totally rebuilt squad became a real force in Division Two and that continued into the 2011/12 season as the club lifted the Bedfordshire County Football League Division Two title with 2 games to spare, were runners-up in the Jubilee Cup losing 2-1 to AFC Turvey, runners-up in the East Beds Junior Charity Cup losing 2-1 to Caldecote Reserves and also made the semi final of the Beds FA Junior Challenge Cup.

The 2012/13 season brought another chapter to the club's history with a Reserve team, under Manager Dean Phealan, added once again. They finished runners-up in Division Four and secured promotion at the first attempt followed up by promotion the following season too despite a 5th place finish in Division Three. The First Team, under Manager Buzz Leeson now, struggled in the league both seasons but were bang on form in the cups firstly making the league Centenary Cup Final in 2012/13 but losing out 3-1 on penalties to Henlow after a 2-2 draw and then the following season a first appearance in the Bedfordshire FA Intermediate Cup Final which again ended in heartache losing 2-0 to Crawley Green Reserves.

For the 2014/15 season there was another big overhaul in the management teams and players and for the First Team this resulted in a much more successful league campaign which ultimately ended with The Abbey claiming the Runners-Up spot in Division One. The Reserves were inconsistent throughout the campaign but secured a very creditable 5th place finish in Division Two.

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The 2015/16 season should have been a celebration with The Abbey back in the Premier Division but it was ultimately a very challenging season which the club did well to survive. The majority of the First Team squad left during September shortly followed by the manager and the disbanding of the Reserves. Kevin Poulton stepped up to the First Team and did a remarkable job up to keep the side going. At Christmas we had a suspension of fixtures and crisis talks, finally gathering together a small more dedicated group of players to ensure the club could complete the season. Having won just 1 game all season back in September the club eventually picked up another point when a late equaliser from Ickwell & Old Warden prevented the 3 points being claimed in the penultimate Home game.

The 2016/17 season continued to see rebuilding, finishing 10th in Division One. For 2017/18 a league restructure meant that The Abbey were back in Division Two and the stabilising continued in the league with a strong 5th placed finish and the side were also Runners-Up to Sandy in the East Beds Junior Charity Cup losing 4-2 in the Final. Club groundsman Wesley Matthews created some history at the end of 2018 as he became the first Bedfordshire groundsman to be named FA Groundsman of the Year for all clubs at Step 7 & below of the National League System. A truly fantastic achievement and reward for Wesley's effort in producing a superb playing surface over several seasons.

The 2018/19 season saw us welcome Tony Milioti to jointly manage the team with Kevin and it brought immediate success as the side claimed the Division Two title. Tony brought in several new players to strengthen and re-shape the squad. The side remained undefeated in the league until the end of March and faced 2 games in 14 days at the end of April against nearest rivals Sporting Lewsey Park to ultimately decide the fate of the title. The Abbey put in 2 memorable performances blitzing them 7-1 away in the first game and then 5-2 at home to lift the cup that night in a fantastic night at The Warren.

Further changes continued for the 2019/20 season with the management team strengthened by the arrival of Dan Downing, returning to the club having previously been involved in a successful period in the early part of the decade. The side continued from where they left off and despite an early defeat set the running in the division and had defeated nearest rivals Cranfield United Reserves home and away to have a very healthy lead at the top of the table before Covid-19 hit and ultimately the season was declared null & void denying the side a well deserved title.

The 2020/21 season was delayed due to the continued impacts of the Coronavirus but the First Team were rewarded with promotion to the Premier Division and the club formed a new Reserve Team. Unfortunately further lockdowns eventually brought about the curtailment of another season after only 10 games played. A short end of season cup competition saw the First Team narrowly edged out of top spot in the group by eventual winners Biggleswade FC Reserves. The Reserves after a rocky start came through their group and win their cup with a penalties victory over Sharnbrook Reserves in the Final. Jhey Tompkins with a last minute equaliser to force the shoot-out and Ben Holliday was in inspired form in goal to set-up the win.

The 2021/22 season while still affected by several Covid postponements saw the first complete season for 3 years. The Abbey made a decent start and despite a few setbacks were level on points at the top at Christmas. The Abbey led the table into April but with sides behind having games in hand Elstow needed to win all remaining games and see what happens, 3 draws to finish ended any title hopes but it was a very good showing for the first full season back in the Premier Division with a 5th place finish in the end. The Reserve Team under new manager Matt Lawley struggled for consistency but with all players available put in some excellent performances against the top sides in the division. A 6th place finish and a good run in the Watson Shield which saw them lose out to the eventual winners in the Quarter Final in a game that could have easily gone the other way with a better rub of the green.

2022/23 saw the introduction of Tommy McGill to the First Team Management, to work alongside Tony Milioti & Kevin Poulton, as the side looked to build on last season. The end result we couldn't have dreamed of with The Abbey playing every possible game in the season completing the Bedfordshire County Football League Premier Division Championship and Britannia Cup Double along with finishing Runners-Up in the Bedfordshire FA Senior Trophy to Real Bedford. What a season it was! The league was a straight shootout with Cranfield United and having beaten them at home early in the season we secured the Championship in the away game with another victory thanks to an Aaron Jones goal. Having gone behind in the Britannia Cup Final to Sharnbrook, goals from Glenn Tumulty & Steve Gentle secured the Double. The Reserve Team saw another change of management as we welcomed Luke Masih to the club. They lost several games by the odd goal early on and Luke was let down by several players either leaving or not making themselves available regularly enough and he eventually stood down midway through the season. Kieran Patrickson took over and an influx of players brought some encouraging results late in the season and some optimism going into 23-24.