

= History of Gillingham F.C. =

For a statistical breakdown by season , see Gillingham F.C. seasons

Gillingham F.C. is an English football club based in Gillingham , Kent . The history of Gillingham F.C. covers the years from the club 's formation to the present day . The club was formed in 1893 , and played in the Southern League until 1920 , when that league 's top division was absorbed into the Football League as its new Division Three . The club was voted out of the league in favour of Ipswich Town at the end of the 1937 ? 38 season , but returned 12 years later , when that league was expanded from 88 to 92 clubs .

Twice in the late 1980s Gillingham came close to winning promotion to the second tier of English football , but a decline then set in and in 1993 the club narrowly avoided relegation to the Football Conference . In 2000 , the " Gills " reached the second tier of the English league for the first time in the club 's history and went on to spend five seasons at this level , achieving a club record highest league finish of eleventh place in 2002 ? 03 . The club has twice won the division comprising the fourth level in the football league pyramid : the Football League Fourth Division championship in 1963 ? 64 and the Football League Two championship in 2012 @-@ 13 .

= = The early years : 1893 ? 1920 = =

The local success of a junior football side , Chatham Excelsior F.C. , encouraged a group of businessmen to meet at the Napier Arms pub on 18 May 1893 , with a view to creating a football club that could compete in larger competitions . To do this , the club required an enclosed playing area where an admission fee could be charged , which Excelsior lacked . New Brompton F.C. was formed at the meeting , incorporating a number of Excelsior players . The gentlemen also purchased the plot of land which would later become Priestfield Stadium , where a pitch was quickly laid and a pavilion constructed . New Brompton 's first team played their first match on 2 September 1893 , with the new team , sporting Excelsior 's black and white stripes , being defeated 1 ? 5 by Woolwich Arsenal 's reserve team in front of a crowd of 2 @,@ 000 . As a " curtain @-@ raiser " immediately prior to this match , New Brompton 's own reserves played a match against Grays , which was therefore technically the first match played by a team representing the club .

New Brompton joined the Southern League upon its creation in 1894 , being placed in Division Two because it was one of the last clubs to be invited to join the league . Upon joining the league , New Brompton turned professional , with the players agreeing to be paid 12 shillings per match , and promptly won the Division Two championship in the 1894 ? 95 season . With a record of one defeat and eleven victories from twelve matches , the team concluded the season with a " test match " against Swindon Town , who had finished bottom of Division One . As 5 ? 1 winners , New Brompton gained promotion to Division One the following season . In 1896 the club appointed its first manager when William Ironside Groombridge , who had previously served as the club 's financial secretary , took charge of team affairs . Groombridge served the club , as secretary and sometimes manager , until well after the First World War .

New Brompton struggled in Division One , generally finishing close to the foot of the table , but did reach the first round proper of the FA Cup for the first time in 1899 ? 1900 , losing 1 ? 0 to Southampton . In the same season the club was forced to play a league fixture at the home ground of Woolwich Arsenal when Priestfield was closed due to crowd trouble in a match against Millwall .

In the 1907 ? 08 season , under the management of the former England international Stephen Smith , New Brompton finished bottom of the table , avoiding relegation only due to the expansion of the league , but did achieve a cup victory over First Division Sunderland , remembered for a hat @-@ trick from Charlie McGibbon .

In 1912 the directors passed a resolution to change the club 's name to Gillingham F.C. , and the team played under this name throughout the 1912 ? 13 season , although the change was not officially ratified by the shareholders until the following year . To coincide with the change , the team began sporting a new kit of red shirts with blue sleeves . The side again finished bottom of the division in the 1914 ? 15 season , but avoided relegation for a second time when the league was

suspended due to the escalation of the First World War .

Once the competition resumed after the war Gillingham , once again wearing black and white , continued to fare poorly , again finishing bottom of Division One in the 1919 ? 20 season . For a third time , however , the club avoided relegation , due to the subsequent elevation of all Southern League Division One clubs to form the new Football League Division Three .

= = Into the Football League : 1920 ? 1938 = =

In the club 's first match in the newly created Football League Division Three , Gillingham held Southampton to a 1 ? 1 draw in front of a new record Priestfield crowd of 11 @, @ 500 , with Tom Gilbey scoring the club 's first goal in league competition . Under new manager John McMillan the team struggled and finished the 1920 ? 21 season bottom of the table , and in the years to follow there was little improvement , with the club regularly finishing in the lower reaches of the bottom division . Gillingham did not manage to finish in the top half of the table until 1925 ? 26 , when the team finished in 10th place , due mainly to the goals of Dick Edmed , who was promptly signed by Liverpool for a fee of £ 1 @, @ 750 , a new Gillingham record . Manager Harry Curtis departed soon afterwards to take over at Brentford , and former Wolverhampton Wanderers manager Albert Hoskins stepped down a division to manage the club , but he could do little to change the team 's fortunes and left in 1929 after Gillingham finished bottom of the table once again .

Striker Fred Cheesmur set a new club record in the 1929 ? 30 season when he scored six goals in a match against Merthyr Town . This remains the highest number of goals scored by a Gillingham player in a professional match , but was a rare high point in a season which saw Gillingham forced to apply for re @-@ election to the league . The following year the club abandoned its traditional black and white striped shirts in favour of blue shirts and white shorts , colours which have remained associated with Gillingham ever since , although the black and white stripes are still visible in the current version of the club 's badge . In 1932 ? 33 former Crystal Palace manager Fred Maven led the club to its highest league finish to date , finishing the season in 7th place , but it was a feat which could not be repeated and the team returned to struggling at the foot of the table the following season .

In the 1934 ? 35 season centre @-@ forward Sim Raleigh , the club 's top scorer the previous season and a player seen as a future star , suffered a brain haemorrhage following a blow to the head in a match against Brighton & Hove Albion on 1 December . Although he played on he collapsed during the second half and died in hospital later the same day . The club launched a fund which raised over £ 250 for his widow and child .

In 1938 the Gills finished bottom of the now @-@ regionalised Third Division South once more , and were required to apply for re @-@ election to the Football League for the fifth time since joining it in 1920 . This time the club 's bid for re @-@ election failed , with Ipswich Town registering 36 votes to Gillingham 's 28 and being promoted into the League . At the time it was considered a distinct possibility that Gillingham , saddled with heavy debts incurred during the preceding unsuccessful seasons , might not survive , but the club carried on , and returned to the Southern League the following season , albeit without manager Alan Ure , who was replaced by Bill Harvey .

= = The wilderness years : 1938 ? 1950 = =

The club 's second stint in the Southern League was interrupted by the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939 , which saw newly appointed manager Archie Clark and most of the players assigned to work at the local dockyards . When competitive football resumed , Gillingham played in the first incarnation of the Kent League , winning the title in both 1944 ? 45 and 1945 ? 46 . In the second of these seasons the team also won the Kent Senior Cup , Kent County Challenge Cup and Kent League Cup , to complete a clean sweep of every senior trophy in the county . Following their Kent League triumphs , the Gills returned to the Southern League for the 1946 ? 47 season , in which the team again won two trophies , claiming both the Southern League Cup and the Southern League title itself , and registered a club record 12 ? 1 victory over Gloucester City . Striker Hughie

Russell scored nine goals in the match , and missed out on double figures when he hit the bar late in the game .

Although Gillingham missed out on the Southern League title the following season , finishing as runners @-@ up , the team again captured the Kent Senior Cup , as well as setting a club record attendance of 23 @,@ 002 for a cup match against Queens Park Rangers . Gillingham applied for re @-@ election to the Football League in the summer of 1948 but , despite producing a glossy brochure detailing the team 's achievements , the club saw its application rejected , with only one vote cast in its favour . Despite this disappointment , the team continued to perform strongly in the Southern League and successfully regained the league title in 1948 ? 49 . In 1950 plans were announced to expand the Third Division South from 22 to 24 teams and , based on the team 's local success in the interim , Gillingham gained re @-@ election to the Football League , receiving the highest number of votes amongst the candidate clubs .

= = Return to the Football League : 1950 ? 1974 = =

Gillingham 's first game back in the Football League saw the Kent club hold fellow new entrants Colchester United to a 0 ? 0 draw at Priestfield in front of 19 @,@ 542 fans . The 1950 ? 51 season saw the Gills both concede and score nine goals in individual matches , and finished with them bottom of the table , a performance which was repeated the following season . In 1952 striker Jimmy Scarth set a Football League record when he scored a hat @-@ trick in approximately 2 minutes 30 seconds against Leyton Orient , which was officially recognised as the fastest hat @-@ trick in the history of the Football League until February 2004 .

Gillingham 's fortunes on the field gradually improved and the team finished in the top half of the Third Division South on three occasions , helped by the goals of Ernie Morgan , who in 1954 ? 55 set a new club record by scoring 31 league goals . In 1956 ? 57 and 1957 ? 58 , however , the Gills found themselves once again rooted firmly to the bottom of the table , and this meant that with the restructuring of the league system for the 1958 ? 59 season , the team was placed in the newly created Fourth Division ? a top @-@ half finish would have led to placement in the new national Third Division . 1958 also saw the departure of long @-@ serving manager Archie Clark , who had held the post since before the Second World War , with Harry Barratt taking over .

The Gills were still in the Fourth Division in 1962 when Barratt was replaced as manager by Freddie Cox , who inherited a team which had just finished 20th in the table . Cox set about fashioning a new team noted for its formidable defensive capabilities . After finishing in 5th place in 1962 ? 63 Gillingham went on to gain promotion the following year , winning the only championship in the club 's history . With goalkeeper John Simpson setting a new club record by conceding only 30 goals all season , the team finished level on 60 points with Carlisle United , but with a fractionally better goal average , and so claimed the championship in the tightest finish in Football League history .

Gillingham initially performed well at the higher level , twice coming close to promotion , but performances then declined and the club was relegated back to the Fourth Division in 1970 ? 71 . The Gills quickly bounced back , however , and were promoted back to the Third Division in 1973 ? 74 under the management of Andy Nelson . With the help of players such as Brian Yeo , who equalled Ernie Morgan 's record for most league goals in a season with 31 , Gillingham scored a club record total of 90 league goals and finished as runners @-@ up to Peterborough United .

= = Consolidation , then collapse : 1974 ? 1995 = =

After guiding the club to promotion Andy Nelson left to take over as manager of Charlton Athletic and was replaced by Len Ashurst , but his managerial reign lasted only 16 months . Gerry Summers took over and was to take the club the closest it had ever come to promotion to Division Two when , in 1978 ? 79 , Gillingham finished just one point off a promotion place , but two years later Summers was replaced by Keith Peacock . Peacock put together a team which developed a reputation for exciting , attacking play , and also brought through the ranks a number of young players who went on to achieve success at a higher level , including Micky Adams , Steve Bruce , and Tony Cascarino

, who was famously bought from non @-@ league Crockenhill in exchange for a set of tracksuits . Gillingham came close to promotion several times during Peacock 's reign , with four top @-@ six finishes in six years , and in 1986 ? 87 reached the play @-@ offs ( in their first year of existence ) only to lose in the final to Swindon Town . Deadlocked at 2 ? 2 after the home and away legs of the final , the two teams had to play a third match at a neutral venue , which Swindon won 2 ? 0 .

The club 's failure to gain promotion meant that it was unable to hang on to the ambitious Cascarino , who was sold to Millwall for £ 225 @, @ 000 , but despite the loss of the team 's star striker the Gills ' 1987 ? 88 season began with a flurry of goals . On consecutive Saturdays Gillingham beat Southend United 8 ? 1 and Chesterfield 10 ? 0 ( the latter a new club record for a professional match ) , but the early @-@ season promise faded and in December Peacock was controversially sacked after a 6 ? 0 defeat to Aldershot . His assistant , Paul Taylor , was promoted to manager , but after an unsuccessful spell in charge Taylor was himself replaced in October 1988 by former Tottenham Hotspur manager Keith Burkinshaw . Burkinshaw was unable to turn the team 's fortunes around , however , and departed shortly before the club 's relegation to Division Four was confirmed at the end of the 1988 ? 89 season .

Former Gillingham player Damien Richardson became the club 's next manager , with veteran goalkeeper Ron Hillyard as his assistant , but the club 's financial situation was poor and the pair struggled to produce results with a squad composed of ageing journeymen and untried youngsters , and both men were sacked in September 1992 , with Glenn Roeder taking over as manager . Gillingham 's league status was in jeopardy for most of the 1992 ? 93 Division Three campaign , with relegation to the Football Conference a distinct possibility until the last home match of the season , when a 2 ? 0 win over Halifax Town ensured the club 's survival . Nonetheless , the financial crisis continued at Priestfield , and steadily improving league form over the next two seasons did little to disguise the fact that the club was in real danger of going out of existence .

The club eventually went into receivership in January 1995 , and by the end of the 1994 ? 95 season , with Gillingham facing the threat of being expelled from the Football League and closed down , fans were wondering whether they had seen the last ever Gills match . However , help was on its way in the form of a last @-@ ditch purchase of the club .

= = Revival : 1995 ? 2000 = =

In June 1995 a London @-@ based former office supplies salesman , Paul Scally , stepped in and bought the club for a nominal fee . Scally brought in new manager Tony Pulis , who signed almost a complete new team and led Gillingham to promotion in his first season , finishing second in Division Three ( now Football League Two ) . This season was also notable for the fact that the team only conceded 20 league goals ? a league record for a 46 @-@ game season . In 1999 Gillingham reached the playoffs , but lost in the Second Division play @-@ off final against Manchester City . Following goals by the prolific partnership of Robert Taylor and Carl Asaba , the Gills led 2 ? 0 with less than two minutes left , only to see Manchester City score twice , the equaliser in injury time , and then win a penalty shoot @-@ out 3 ? 1 .

Soon after the play @-@ off loss , Pulis was sacked for gross misconduct , with Peter Taylor replacing him as manager . In the 1999 ? 00 season Gillingham went on a club record breaking FA Cup run , beating then @-@ Premiership teams Bradford City and Sheffield Wednesday before losing 5 ? 0 to Chelsea in the quarter @-@ finals . The team also finished in third place in the league and thus qualified for the play @-@ offs again , facing Wigan Athletic at Wembley Stadium in the final . The game finished 1 ? 1 after 90 minutes but thanks to goals in extra time from Gillingham substitutes Steve Butler and Andy Thomson the club was promoted to the second tier of the English league ( Division One ) for the first time . As Taylor had only signed a one @-@ year deal , Leicester City , then in the Premiership , approached him to be their new manager .

= = The Division One years : 2000 ? 2005 = =

Former team captain Andy Hessenthaler was appointed player @-@ manager , having previously

served as player @-@ coach , and led the club to league finishes of 13th , 12th and 11th in his first three seasons in charge . In contrast , the 2003 ? 04 season saw the club escape relegation by the narrowest of margins , with a last day goalless draw keeping Gillingham above Walsall on goal difference , with just one goal separating the two teams . John Gorman was appointed to help Hessenthaler as the side started the 2004 ? 05 season poorly , but as the team continued to struggle at the wrong end of the table Hessenthaler resigned as manager in late November . Somewhat unusually he continued to be employed as a player . Gorman succeeded Hessenthaler in a caretaker capacity but left the club to take the manager 's job at Wycombe Wanderers . Gillingham then appointed former Burnley boss Stan Ternent as manager , but despite a late run of positive results , he couldn 't prevent the Gills ' relegation to League One on the last day of the season . In a reversal of the previous season 's fortunes , Crewe Alexandra , the team immediately above Gillingham in the table , survived by just one goal .

= = Setback : 2005 ? present = =

The 2005 ? 06 season started with Neale Cooper being appointed as the new manager , but despite achieving a 3 ? 2 victory over Premiership side Portsmouth in the Football League Cup , the team struggled in the league , and shortly after defeat in the first round of the FA Cup by Northern Premier League side Burscough , Cooper resigned . He was replaced by Ronnie Jepson , who led the team to a mid @-@ table finish , which he repeated in 2006 ? 07 . After a poor start to the 2007 ? 08 season Jepson resigned , and Mick Docherty and Iffy Onuora were appointed joint caretaker managers . Docherty left the club a month later , but Onuora remained in charge until the appointment of Mark Stimson on 1 November 2007 . At the end of the 2007 ? 08 season the club was relegated from League One . The following season the Gills earned promotion through the play @-@ offs after finishing fifth in the league , Simeon Jackson scoring the only goal in the final against Shrewsbury Town at Wembley Stadium . In the 2009 ? 10 season , however , the Gills were relegated back to League Two , with Stimson leaving the club by mutual consent two days after the end of the season . Within two weeks , Andy Hessenthaler returned for a second spell as manager .

For two consecutive seasons the Gills finished just outside the play @-@ off places in League Two , following which Hessenthaler was moved to the position of Director of Football and Martin Allen appointed as manager . In the 2012 ? 13 season , helped by a new club record of eleven away wins in a season , the club once again gained promotion back to League One , winning the League Two championship , only the second title the club had ever won at a professional level . The following October , however , Allen was sacked after a poor start to the season and Peter Taylor was appointed manager for a second time .