

TILBURY FOOTBALL CLUB



THE HISTORY OF "THE DOCKERS"

FOUNDED:

1889:

FULL MEMBERS:

The Football Association:

Chadfields. The home of Tilbury Football Club.



Club Honours:

Champions:

1901/02 Grays & District League:
1902/03 Grays & District League:
1907/08 Grays & District League:
1909/10 Grays & District League:
1922/23 South Essex League:
1924/25 South Essex League:
1958/59 London League:
1959/60 London League:
1960/61 London League:
1961/62 London League:
1963/64 Athenian League Division Two:
1968/69 Athenian League Division One:
1975/76 Isthmian League Division One:

Runners Up:

1921/22 South Essex League Division Two:
1926/27 South Essex League:
1946/47 London League:
1947/48 London League:
1949/50 London League:

Promotion:

1991/92 Isthmian League Division Three:
1999/00 Isthmian League Division Three
2005/06 Essex Senior League:

Other Achievements:

1946/47 F.A. Amateur Cup. Quarter Final:
1949/50 F.A. Cup. 1st Round Proper:
1977/78 F.A. Cup. 3rd Round:

Cup Winners:

1908/09 Essex Junior Cup:
1922/23 Tilbury Hospital Cup:
1924/25 Essex Junior Cup:
1926/27 Tilbury Hospital Cup:
1929/30 Tilbury & District Cup:
1938/39 Grays & Tilbury Cup:
1938/39 Tilbury Hospital Cup:
1956/57 Grays & District Cup:
1958/59 London League Cup:
1960/61 Essex Senior Cup:
1960/61 London League Cup:
1961/62 London League Cup:
1962/63 Stanford Charity Cup:
1963/64 Essex Senior Cup:
1963/64 Essex Elizabethan Trophy:
1963/64 Stanford Charity Cup:
1968/69 Essex Elizabethan Trophy:
1968/69 Essex Floodlight Cup:
1972/73 Essex Senior Cup:
1972/73 Mithras Cup:
1974/75 Essex Senior Cup:
1974/75 Isthmian League Cup:
1974/75 Mithras Cup:
1975/75 Essex Professional Cup:
1975/76 Mithras Cup:
1977/78 Mithras Cup:
2008/09 Isthmian League Cup:
2008/09 East Anglian Cup:

Cup Finalists:

1901/02 Leigh Junior Cup:
1901/02 Tilbury Hospital Cup:
1903/04 Essex Junior Cup:
1925/26 Tilbury Hospital Cup:
1928/29 Grays & District Cup:
1933/34 Grays & District Cup:
1935/36 London League Cup:
1946/47 Essex Senior Cup:
1947/48 Essex Senior Cup:
1948/49 Tilbury Hospital Cup:
1950/51 Grays & Tilbury Cup:
1955/56 Corinthian League Cup:
1955/56 Essex Elizabethan Trophy:
1959/60 Essex Elizabethan Trophy:
1962/63 Thames & Medway Cup:
1964/65 Essex Elizabethan Trophy:
1967/68 Essex Elizabethan Trophy:
1967/68 Essex Floodlight Cup:
1968/69 Mithras Cup:
1969/70 Essex Senior Cup:
1969/70 Essex Floodlight Cup:
1970/71 East Anglian Cup:
1970/71 Essex Elizabethan Trophy:
1971/71 Essex Senior Cup:
1971/72 Mithras Cup:
1975/76 Isthmian League Cup:
1976/77 Mithras Cup:
1977/78 Essex Floodlight Cup:
1978/79 Essex Senior Cup:
1987/88 Essex Thameside Trophy:
2001/02 Essex Thameside Trophy:

TILBURY FOOTBALL CLUB was founded in 1889. For decades, until recently, the Club had no proof of its date of formation, and the widely accepted date among older Supporters and Officials was 1900. We were later informed by the Essex County F.A. that the 1900 date must be wrong, as they had records of Tilbury competing in the Essex Junior Cup back in 1895, but they could not go further back than that.

Then, while in the process of very extensive research into the Club's past, conclusive written proof of 1889 was discovered, in the shape of a record of the very first Annual Dinner and AGM of the Club, held at the conclusion of the 1889/90 season, in which Tilbury F.C. competed in the Gravesend League. This record was printed in the local paper, the Thurrock Gazette.

We were not the first Football Club in the Town, for several years a handful of "works" and/or "neighbourhood" teams had been playing at a very local level. Tilbury was a very small Town in those days, hardly larger than a Village, but as the Town began to grow, with the influx of people coming in to work in the Docks and on the Railways, there began to be talk of forming a single Town Football Club, with the view of competing at County level and even one day bringing Senior status Football to Tilbury.

The other Clubs in the Town, such as Tilbury Swifts, Tilbury Invicta and Tilbury Athletic, were approached with the idea of all merging into one Club. However, they all rejected the invitation, determined to retain their own identity. This, though, did not deter those in favour of a single Town club, and they went ahead and, in the Summer of 1889, Tilbury Football Club came into being, and were accepted into the Gravesend league.

Over the next several years, the other Clubs in Tilbury gradually disappeared. Only Tilbury Athletic remained as rivals to the new Club, and even they eventually disappeared in the mid-1920's. Tilbury's nickname has always been "The Dockers" for the blatantly obvious reason that, at the time of formation, Tilbury Docks and the various Companies within were by far and away the largest employers in the Town, and the majority of Players, Officials and Supporters came from these sources. These days, the Docks are part of the Forth Ports group, and they are very much appreciated as major Sponsors of the Club.

Once formed, and with a Committee elected. The first big obstacle the new Club had to overcome was that of finding a "home ground" on which to play. Once again, that connection with the Docks paid off when one of the major Companies, Green & Silley Weir Ltd. came forward and offered the Club the use of their sporting facilities. In the years since, and before settling on the present Chadfields site, grounds at Tilbury Fort, King George V Field (Daisy Field) and the Orient Field housed the Club.

As with the nickname, the playing colours of the Club have remained the same throughout its existence. Tilbury have always played in Black & White, using all the varieties over the years, Plain White, Stripes, Hoops, Halves and Quarters, all with Black Shorts. Until 2022/23, when Hoops were adopted, Stripes had been the dominant variety over the preceding 40 years.

Once the Club started actually playing, being able to trace information from the early years has been very difficult, as there was virtually no coverage of "Junior" level Football in the local Press for many years. In fact, at times, there was none at all. This, allied to the fact that the Club's own records have twice been destroyed, in World War Two and a Clubhouse fire in the 1990's, has made it almost impossible to recover much of those early exploits. The records that we do now possess have come largely from the Archives of the Thurrock Gazette, and have taken many years to research and compile. That task has still, now in 2023, not been completed.

From their inception, Tilbury competed regularly up until 1899, when they lost the use of their ground at Tilbury Fort, which had become their home a couple of years earlier. They had to take a one season break, but then were able to return to the field in 1900, when Green & Silley Weir once again stepped in to help out. In 1901, Tilbury joined the local Grays and District League, winning the Championship at the first attempt by winning all 12 games, scoring 74 goals and conceding just 1.

In those early years, travelling was nowhere near as easy or normal as it was to become. This was reflected in the make up of Leagues at the "junior" level. Most of these, as with the Grays and District, were very locally based and consisting of a small number of clubs, therefore leading to a small fixture list. It had become normal, then, for clubs to compete in two separate Leagues per Season, and from 1902 onwards Tilbury followed this example, as they also entered the South Essex League. The Club remained with this League until achieving Senior status in 1927.

Tilbury's Committee had made no secret of the fact that they wanted to get the Club into a position where it could push for advancement, but acknowledged that this would be a long job. They knew that to do this would need them to be successful in County Junior circles over a good number of years. With Leagues being very local, the main vehicle for gaining notice was always going to be the Essex Junior Cup, and Tilbury didn't have to wait long before making their first mark.

They reached the Final for the first time in 1903/04, where they were defeated by Chelmsford Arc Works in a replay at the ground of Chelmsford City. Tilbury were winning the Grays & District title every season, but it was not until 1908/09 that they again reached the Junior Cup Final. This time, the outcome was much more to our liking as, at the home of Grays Athletic, the Trophy was secured thanks to a 1-0 victory over the County's oldest club, Saffron Walden Town.

Unfortunately, this success was not to be the forerunner of the consistent successes that the Club would need to achieve their aims. In fact, it was to prove the end of an era in many ways. Apart from their Cup matches, Tilbury had been struggling to attract the necessary support for their ordinary League matches. In 1910, Grays Athletic had been granted Senior status and had joined the London League. At this time, there was another Senior outfit in Grays. This was Grays Thurrock United, a Professional Club, competing in the Southern League against the likes of QPR, Tottenham Hotspur, Southampton, Millwall and Reading.

Not surprisingly, the majority of local fans were attending these games and, by the end of the 1911/12 season, Tilbury found themselves not only in dire financial straits but without a home ground, having to vacate the Green & Silley Weir ground. With no funds available, and no hopes of securing a new base, Tilbury had to withdraw from both the Grays & District and South Essex Leagues. The Committee maintained the Club's registration, and began to look for a new base.

What had been intended as a short break from playing stretched into an extended hiatus due to two factors. The search for a new ground proved much more difficult than thought, but then, when they were on the verge of doing so, along came the outbreak of World War One, which extended the break for another five years.

The Committee continued to function and keep the Club alive during the War Years, and finally managed to secure the use of the King George V Playing Field in St. Chads Road in time for them to resume for the 1919/20 season. With the advances in the ease and availability of travel over the years, Football was spreading its wings and becoming less "local" in nature. The various Leagues were now beginning to expand in size, and Tilbury now competed solely in the much larger South Essex League.

The ambition within the Club was still to eventually advance into Senior ranks, and now they were able to attract the levels of support necessary to make that ambition a real possibility. The first season back in action was not a great success, though Tilbury were able to consolidate into a mid-table position. From 1921 onwards, the Club entered upon its most successful period as a "junior" outfit. They won Promotion to Division One of the South Essex League, and a year later they took the Championship of that top Division.

Further League success followed and, in 1924/24, Tilbury were not only League Champions again, but also captured the Essex Junior Cup for a second time. This "double" was completed with the defeat of Wellington Athletic in the Final, played at Grays Athletic, by 3-1 and had established Tilbury as one of the dominant players on the County stage. This was recognised by the Essex Football Association, and they now invited the Club to forego the Junior Cup and enter the Essex Senior Cup as guests, which the Club eagerly accepted.

Tilbury's first venture in the top competition was unremarkable, though it was a Senior club in the shape of Brentwood & Warley F.C. that knocked them out. The Committee persevered with the Senior Cup, as they realised that one good season could be the stepping-stone they needed, and so it proved to be. In 1926/27, Tilbury became the first "Junior" club to reach Round 2 of the Senior Cup, and then achieved a result that staggered the entire County.

Drawn at home to the mighty Walthamstow Avenue, Tilbury stuck to their guns and refused several financial offers from the Avenue to switch the venue of the Tie to Green Pond Road, feeling that this recognised just how far Tilbury had come and that Walthamstow were aware of just how difficult Tilbury would be. They were justified in their concern as, in front of a large crowd, Tilbury recorded a superb 3-2 victory, becoming the first "junior" club ever to knock a "Senior" opponent out of the competition.

In the next round Tilbury were drawn away to Barking, who ended the season undefeated on their own patch and also reached the Final of the F.A. Amateur Cup. In a thrilling game, Barking came out as 3-2 victors but, according to all of the Press Reports, Tilbury had been desperately unlucky not to go through, having dominated the game for long spells. These performances were noticed by the County Association and when, in the Summer, Tilbury applied to be granted Senior status, they had no hesitation in approving it.

The Committee wasted no time in firing off applications to several Leagues, including the Isthmian, Athenian, London and Kent competitions. After attending all of the relevant Annual General Meetings, the Club could only sit and wait in growing despair as, one-by-one, their applications were rejected. With the 1927/28 season very close to starting, Tilbury had no League to compete in and, as a return to Junior ranks was out of the question, they were in danger of being left "high and dry" with the real prospect of having to fold.

Thankfully, that scenario was avoided at the last moment when the Kent League stepped in and offered Tilbury a place which they eagerly and gratefully accepted. It was no secret that the Kent competition had been the least favourite of the Club's options, for two reasons. One was the difficulties of continually having to cross the Thames, the second being that it was a Semi-Professional League. It contained the Reserve teams of several Southern League sides who were allowed to field their Professional players.

Tilbury, though, entered as and remained as a fully Amateur club, being one of only five clubs to do so. They realised that by competing against teams filled with Professionals, they were going to find things very tough on the field of play, and it came as no surprise that they mostly occupied a lower mid-table position. Despite this, all at the Club enjoyed the standard of Football on offer and the friendships made and, to this day, Kent League sides are regular opponents in pre-season.

Posted below is the Thurrock Gazette's report of Tilbury's first ever match as a Senior Club, as you can see we made a very good, and probably unexpected, start to life at this level.

Saturday August 27th 1927.

Kent League:

<u>MARGATE TOWN</u>			3	v	5	<u>TILBURY</u>		
1	WRAIGHT		1	A.	BERRY			
2	MORAN		2	W.	McNALLY			
3	CARPENTER		3	C.	GODWIN			
4	DAND		4	H.	BAILEY			
5	GAVIN		5	W.	HILLS			
6	RAMSAY		6	C.	EDMONDSON			
7	HARDING		7	W.	JAMES	1:		
8	GIBSON		8	A.	ROUNCE	3:		
9	BROOKES	1:	9	J.	McNALLY	1:		
10	CAMPBELL		10	J.	FENWICK			
11	KITTO	2:	11	C.	WAKEMAN			

MATCH REPORT (from the Thurrock Gazette): **Att: 2,500:**

Tilbury made their first appearance as a Senior ranked club in this Kent League encounter at Margate. Over 500 fans made the journey from Tilbury to see this debut, against a Margate side that was Semi-Professional in make up, containing 8 professionals and just 3 amateurs, and last season's Kent League runner up. The Committee had worked hard during the Summer to strengthen the side in order to be able to compete at Senior level, and Saturday's line up contained six of last season's "Junior" outfit and 5 new signings. They were rewarded with a fine display, and were complimented by Margate afterwards as the finest Senior debutants they had ever seen.

The first moment of note was a timely tackle by **Bailey**, who then set **James** free on the right, but his final effort went just wide. The home team took up the running and, after some clever combined play, Kitto shot wide. It was soon apparent that Tilbury were playing opponents with much greater experience, but the speed and enthusiasm of the younger eleven gradually gained the ascendancy. After 10 minutes, **Arthur Rounce** received a cross from **James** and gave Tilbury the lead with a great first time effort that left **Wraight** helpless.

Margate played on undismayed, and Kitto cleverly beat **Bailey** and **W. McNally**, but his final shot was well saved by **Berry**. Shortly afterwards, a fine effort from **Wakeman** grazed the crossbar. Tilbury continued to attack, and after a fine team movement went further ahead when **Rounce** scored with a fine shot. Margate rallied strongly, and **Berry** was forced into action, saving well from Kitto and then even more cleverly dealing with stinging shots from **Harding** and **Gibson**. Tilbury then resumed their attacking, and soon increased their lead to three goals. **Wakeman** escaped his markers on the left and from his centre **J. McNally** scored a magnificent goal with a spectacular overhead kick which took everyone by surprise.

The latter stages of the half saw Margate pressing strongly, **Brookes** especially making his presence felt. On 35 minutes, Kitto showed a clean pair of heels to the Tilbury defence and centred for **Brookes** to score with a neat header. The interval arrived with Tilbury leading 3-1.

The men from Essex now had to face the fierce Sun, and Margate started at a rare pace. **Harding** eluded **Edmondson**, but a very timely tackle by **Godwin** averted disaster. **Gavin** returned the ball to the goalmouth, where **Berry** pulled off a magnificent save from **Brookes**. Margate were constantly probing, but the Tilbury defence were holding firm. Eventually, though, their persistence paid off. Kitto received the ball from **Campbell** and went round **W. McNally** and **Godwin**, then practically walked the ball into the net.

Tilbury took up the offensive again, with some glorious runs down the right from **Rounce** and **James** who were working well together, but the home defence gave nothing away, and from a breakaway Margate levelled the scores. **Dand** passed to **Gibson** who passed it on to **Harding**, he centred the ball and Kitto was able to shoot past **Berry** from close range. This set back stung Tilbury into more action, **Fenwick** raced through on goal but **Carpenter** appeared as if from nowhere to take the ball off his feet as he was in the act of shooting.

A successful tackle by **Edmondson** and a fine pass to **Wakeman** brought more pressure to bear on the home defence and, after **Wraight** had saved finely on several occasions, **Rounce** received from **Wakeman** and coolly completed his hat-trick to put Tilbury back into the lead. Play now became even more exciting and end-to-end in nature. **James** had a shot well save by **Wraight**, then **Campbell** and **Gibson** combined to draw a fine save from **Berry**. With about 5 minutes to go, **Wakeman** ran down the left flank and passed to **James**, who rounded **Carpenter** and went on to score with a fast shot. Margate attacked desperately in the final minutes, and **Hills** needed to make a goalmouth clearance, but the final whistle declared Tilbury the victors of a thrilling game.

In each of their seasons as members of the Kent League, the “Dockers” had seen the number of clubs in membership increase, eventually in 1930/31 reaching 19 Clubs. This was in the days of no Floodlights, with Saturday games kicking off sometimes as early as 1.30pm and midweek as early as 4pm. The latter led in 1929/30 and 1930/31 to Tilbury facing an end of season fixture pile up and having to play many games with a much weakened team, as being Amateurs meant that many of their players could not get time off work. So, it was with real sadness that, in the Summer of 1931, they resigned from the Kent League, and moved into the London League.

The change of Leagues solved the fixture congestion and travel problems that Tilbury had faced, though one aspect of their previous competition remained, as the London League also allowed clubs to field a certain number of “Permit” Professional players in matches, and again hosted the Reserve sides of some of the top Southern League clubs. Apart from those clubs, though, most members remained fully Amateur. The overall standard of Football was equal to that of the Kent League, and in the seasons up to the outbreak of World War Two in 1939, Tilbury’s playing record was no more than a “qualified success”.

As in the Kent League seasons, Tilbury were mostly to be found occupying a lower mid-table position though, in two of those campaigns they did climb up to a fourth place finish. They did, on one occasion, reach the Final of the London League Cup, losing to Streatham Town in somewhat unfortunate circumstances. In the relevant season, Tilbury had finished 4th and Streatham down near the bottom, and Tilbury would surely have won the Cup had the Final been played that season. However, it had to be held over to the following season, by which time the fortunes of the two clubs had reversed, a fact of which Streatham took full advantage.

The biggest bonus of making the switch into the London League was the renewal of a regular rivalry with local neighbours Grays Athletic. These “derbies” created enormous local interest, being played on Christmas Day with the return on Boxing Day. Big crowds attended these games, and tensions ran high, and at times that tension spilled over. This tradition of playing on Christmas and Boxing Day carried on well into the 1950’s, before Christmas Day fixtures became a thing of the past.

This immediate pre-War spell was to be the first of Tilbury’s three spells in that Competition, and it came to an abrupt end in September 1939 after just one League match had been played. The cause was the outbreak of World War Two and the Fuel Rationing and Travel restrictions put in place by the Government, meaning that many Leagues had to disband and Football return to the days of local areas only competition.

Fortunately, no time was wasted and negotiations were immediately begun, with results almost straight away. These saw the formation of a War-Time South Essex Combination, which consisted of ten Clubs. Those ten were Tilbury, Leytonstone, Grays, Athletic, Romford, Walthamstow Avenue, Barking, Dagenham Town, Ilford, Leyton and Clapton. The League continued throughout the War, sadly, Tilbury were unable to do so.

Tilbury started the season well, but then began to feel the “bite” of losing players to the Armed Forces. Many clubs were able to cover for this by using “Guest” players from the Forces stationed in their areas, but with only Canadian and United States Forces in the Town, the club was unable to pursue this option. Even then, the Club was happy to continue, using some younger players and being greatly helped by several veteran players who now came out of retirement to play.

The season was completed, and the Club looked forward to continuing, but then came the hammer blow that forced them to disband for the duration of the War. With the Tilbury Docks proving a big attraction for the Luftwaffe, batteries of Anti-Aircraft Guns were brought in to the Town to afford some protection, and Tilbury’s Orient Field ground was one of the sites commandeered to host them.

The damage done to the Orient Field was such that it was impossible to be ready for the 1945/46 season, and the London League generously allowed Tilbury a year’s grace in order to be in a position to resume. When they did resume, in 1946/47, it was the start of the most successful spell in the Club’s history as a Senior outfit, beginning in that first post-War season by finishing as League Runner-Up, behind only the “professionals” of Chelmsford City, and Essex Senior Cup Finalists. They also reached the Quarter Finals of the F.A. Amateur Cup where, after being reduced to ten men through injury, they took hosts Wimbledon to extra time before finally going down 4-8. Wimbledon went on to win the Cup.

However, at the end of that season, another heavy blow was landed upon the Club. The Orient Field was so-named because it was owned by a Director of Leyton Orient. He now issued Tilbury with the ultimatum of either becoming a “Nursery Club” for Leyton Orient or being evicted from the Ground. All at the Club were determined that, whatever the cost, Tilbury Football Club would retain its independence, and so began the search for a new home.

Adjacent to the Orient Field as the present day Chadfields site which, prior to the War, had been a Greyhound and Whippet Racing arena, but was now unused. Some quick negotiations saw Tilbury gain permission to use this arena as their home. A tremendous amount of work was needed, in a fairly short space of time, to get it into a fit condition for Football, and this was achieved thanks to an “Army” of Volunteers and great support from Firms within the Docks and the Docks themselves, so that for the 1947/48 season, Tilbury were ready to go.

The Essex Senior Cup Final was reached for the second consecutive season, but once again Tilbury fell at the final hurdle. The two County Finals were both played at the old Lynn Road home of Ilford F.C. which doubled as the “County Ground”, and both drew crowds in excess of 15,000. Tilbury’s conquerors in those finals were Leytonstone and Romford.

Two fourth place finishes followed, and then Tilbury made a big impact upon the Football scene, which gained detailed coverage from the National Press. In 1949/50, the "Dockers" started in the Extra Preliminary Round of the F.A. Cup and fought through to reach the First Round Proper for the first time in their History. 28,584 spectators turned up at Meadow Lane to watch them take on a Notts County side containing three England Internationals, including the legendary centre forward, Tommy Lawton. Such was Tilbury's performance on the day, that Players, Officials and Supporters of County stood to applaud them off the field. The Thurrock Gazette report on that match is printed below.

Saturday November 26th 1949. F.A. Cup. Round 1. Notts County v Tilbury:

Eleven tired and mud-splattered Tilbury players walked from the field at Meadow Lane, Nottingham on Saturday to the cheering of thousands of spectators, after one of the pluckiest fights seen on a Football field for years. Tilbury had lost by four clear goals to Notts County in the First Round of the F.A. Cup, but they had not disgraced themselves and the Nottingham crowd showed their appreciation. To say that Tilbury were not outclassed would be unfair to the Notts County boys, they were and expected to be. I doubt if any other Amateur side in the Country could have stood up to Tommy Lawton and his colleagues for 90 minutes and only conceded four goals.

Many professional clubs have fared worse at Meadow Lane than Tilbury, and many more will do so before the season ends. Notts have a forward line of stars, who's brilliance is reflected in every move they make. Yet many came unstuck on Saturday due to great anticipation and first time tackling by the "Dockers" defence. For nearly half an hour Tilbury held their own and surprised the crowd with their neat footwork. There were no signs of nervousness throughout the match, and Tilbury might well have taken the lead inside the first 15 minutes with a little bit of luck.

County kicked off after winning the toss, and after a spurt by the home forwards Tilbury retaliated with a nice move of their own. **Norton Whipps** sent in a cross to "**Buckle**" **Ashford** and he was on the verge of flashing the ball goalwards when he was dispossessed by Deans. **Tommy Scannell** was then called into action to keep the Tilbury goal intact, and he punted the ball upfield to **Ashford**, who beat two defenders before crossing the ball to **Whipps** who made a gallant effort at getting in a shot. Shortly afterwards. County keeper Smith had to race from his line to clear from **Sid Lighten**.

The game was fast, despite the muddy conditions, and **Scannell** received applause when saving a fierce shot from Sewell, and a few minutes later **Hockley** blocked another shot from the same player that was hit so hard that he was severely winded and incapacitated for a few minutes. A goalmouth scramble took place in the Tilbury area, and the defence held out splendidly, culminating in a fine full length save by **Scannell** to deny Lawton.

The "Dockers" were doing remarkably well, and home supporters were saying that they were playing as well as some League clubs. **Chris Waterman** was his usual tower of strength at centre half as was half back **Charlie Chapman**, and they combined to repel many Notts attacks. **Len Hockley**, too, was playing with rare confidence and time and again he proved more than a match for England winger Broome. "**Flash**" **Lighten** got within shooting range and was on the point of firing in a shot when a defender rushed across to block him just in time.

Tommy Lawton, however, was delightful to watch, and there was another hectic time in front of the Tilbury goal. Shot after shot rained in, but the "Dockers" blocked everything. **Scannell** then went full length for another superb save to turn away a shot from Lawton, who hit a rasping effort on the turn. With all this pressure, though, the break through was sure to come, and it did so in the 28th minute, Lawton this time managing to get the ball past **Scannell** and into the Tilbury net.

Five minutes later, the Tilbury keeper looked to have made another great stop, from Sewell, but after consulting a Linesman the Referee awarded a goal, saying that the ball had crossed the line. Tilbury left the field at half time to a great roar of appreciation from both sets of supporters, who were generous with their applause.

In the second half, I thought Tilbury would fade out. They did tire towards the end, as was to be expected, but they put up a splendid show and were always trying. **Scannell** was soon in action again, and **Hockley** surprised Lawton by taking the ball off his toe when about to shoot. Notts County came on and on, Sewell missed by inches, and **Scannell** leapt well to save a shot destined for the top corner of the net. There was still plenty of fight left in the Tilbury players, and the home defence was caught napping when **Whipps** got away from them, only to be brought down for a free kick.

21 minutes of the second half had gone when Lawton made a long pass out to Broome, who was unmarked. In a flash, he hammered the ball into the top corner of the net for a spectacular goal. County were now able to take things more leisurely, though shots still rained in on the Tilbury goal. A Tilbury defender was usually in the way though, and **Scannell** was making no mistakes but, a few minutes from time, Broome scored the 4th goal for County, and so the curtain fell on one of the most dramatic epics of Football in which a side from Thurrock has ever been engaged.

Such was the interest in this game back in Thurrock that all afternoon large crowds gathered outside the Gazette offices, where regular progress reports on the game were relayed to them.

Tilbury Team:

1. Tommy Scannell: 2. Malcolm Lawson, 3. Len Hockley: 4. Roy Baker, 5. Chris Waterman, 6. Eddie Chapman: 7. Harry Ashford, 8. George Thompson, 9. Norton Whipps, 10. Arthur Webb, 11. Sid Lighten.

Tilbury were again Runners Up in the London League. They had gone into the final game, away to Cheshunt needing to win to claim the Title, but now gave their worst performance of the season, going down by 2-4, the result actually securing the Championship for the Hertfordshire Club. Always anxious to progress, at the end on the 1949/50 season Tilbury felt that it was time to move on, and applied to several Leagues higher up the Amateur rankings, and were accepted by the Corinthian League. Unfortunately, Tilbury were not the only club to abandon the London League at this time, and some bad feeling ensued, which almost came back to haunt Tilbury in later years.

The Corinthian League was ranked joint third in Amateur circles, behind the Isthmian and Athenian competitions and on a par with the Northern League. Making such a move with a now ageing squad that began to break up was a big gamble for the Club to take, but was felt to be a chance worth taking. Sadly, that gamble did not really pay off, as the players coming in to replace the departures were, with one or two exceptions, not of equal standard, and Tilbury were generally to be found in the lower reaches of the League, sixth place in 1953/54 was the best they could manage.

Tilbury did achieve one small measure of success when, in 1955/56, they reached the Final of the League Cup where they went down to champions Maidstone United, in a match played at the Hampden Oval ground of Eastbourne United. In the very next season, Maidstone were to feature again in an extraordinary turn of events. The Kent Club had been one of the first Amateur sides to install Floodlights, and on a Tuesday night Tilbury visited them for a League Match.

Tilbury had never played nor even trained under Lights before, and went down to a thumping 0-10 defeat. Tilbury's claims that it was the totally unfamiliar situation that was responsible were initially treated with disbelief but when, just three weeks later, on a traditional Saturday afternoon, Maidstone came to Tilbury for the return, those claims were given credibility as Tilbury romped to a 3-0 win setting, in their minds, the record straight.

Tilbury's stay in the Corinthian League came to an end in 1957, in very controversial circumstances. In those days, League Meetings were held weekly, on a Monday, when clubs would receive their fixtures for the coming weekend. For the past 18 Months, Tilbury's secretary, Mr. John Taylor, had been in very poor health and had not been attending the meetings, though the Club was totally unaware of this as he had assured the Club that all was okay.

It came as a huge shock when the League Committee told Tilbury what had been occurring and that they were going to introduce a proposal at the Annual General Meeting that Tilbury be expelled from the League. As soon as they became aware of this, Tilbury elected a new secretary and, from then on matters were properly attended to. At the AGM, the League acknowledged the improvement, but refused to withdraw their proposal. Tilbury were appalled to sit and watch as several Clubs, thought of as friends, who had expressed their support, then voted against us. One of those was local rivals Grays Athletic, and the bad feeling from this lasted many years.

Tilbury immediately made application to rejoin the London League, but it was now that the hostility caused by the multiple departures from that League in 1950 came out of hiding to haunt the Club. This hostility from the clubs left behind looked as though it would see Tilbury handed a firm rejection, but support for the Club came from three sources and proved vital. The first source was the London League Secretary, Mr. Harry Hawke, who argued fiercely that it was wrong to penalise any club for having tried to improve their status.

The second source came in the shape of former League Secretary and now Football Association General Secretary, Sir Stanley Rous, who went on to become the long-serving Secretary-General of FIFA. During his time with the League he had been a frequent visitor to Tilbury. The third source was a surprise and came from a direction totally unexpected. Back in 1935, Tilbury had visited Hitchin Town for a Friendly and, despite having had no contact with them since, the Hertfordshire club now circulated an open Letter condemning the attitude of the recalcitrant clubs and urging that they back down and accept Tilbury into the League.

These interventions proved successful, and Tilbury were elected back into the London League at the 1957 Annual General Meeting, and grateful thanks were expressed for the hard work and support shown. Following the break up of the 1940's squad, and the mediocre years in the Corinthian League, the return now coincided with the emergence of another crop of very talented local players who were to be in at the start of what was to be the "Golden Period" in Tilbury's History. The years from 1957 to 1979 were prolific in terms of Trophies won, as the Club progressed up to the very top levels of the Non-League game.

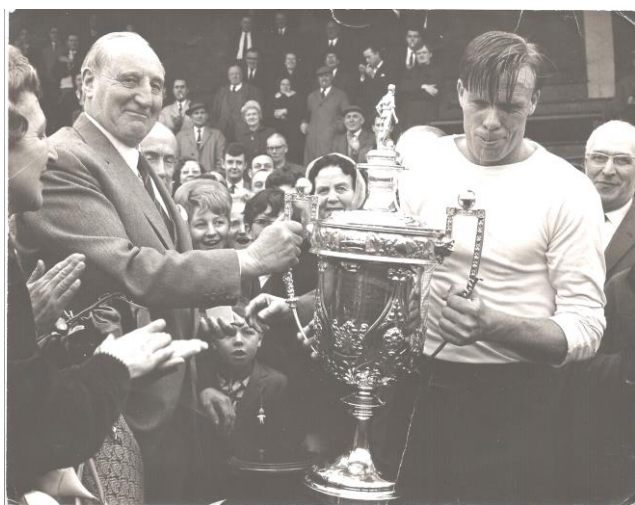
This rise through the ranks started fairly slowly as, in 1957/58, Tilbury finished third in the London League. It was a piece of irony that the first match back in the League was against Cheshunt, who had been our last opponents in the Competition back in 1950. This was to be their lowest final placing in their five year spell in the League. In each of the next four seasons, Tilbury were London League Champions, on three occasions also capturing the League Cup.

In 1958/59 the margin was two points, ahead of runners-up East Ham United, and Cheshunt were again to feature as they were the side that Tilbury defeated in the League Cup Final. One year later, East Ham were again runners up, but this time the margin had extended to a massive ten points. So, as the 1950's came to an end, Tilbury's fortunes had turned almost a full circle. From riding high, to plumbing the depths and then riding high once again, as they entered the 1960's once more full of optimism for the future.

1960/61 saw the same two Clubs at the top of the table, in the same order. However, the gap between Tilbury and East Ham had risen to fifteen points. This, don't forget, was in the days of just two points for a win. The League Cup again found it's way to Tilbury. As far as the Club was concerned, the most notable success of this season came in the Essex Senior Cup, which was won for the first time, and Tilbury were the first London League Club to do this.

In the first round, Tilbury were favourites against Wapping Town, but had a hard struggle in beating the Parthenon League side. In each game after that, Tilbury were firm underdogs. Excellent wins over Leytonstone and Harwich & Parkestone saw Tilbury into the Final, at the Lynn Road headquarters of Ilford F.C. The opponents were mighty Walthamstow Avenue who, just three weeks earlier, had won the F.A. Amateur Cup at Wembley. Tilbury were given no chance by all the Pundits. Prior to kick-off, in a tactic surely meant to intimidate, Tilbury were made to stand and Watch as Avenue paraded the Amateur Cup around the ground.

However, in scorching heat, Tilbury were having none of that, dominating the first half and going in at the interval 1-0 ahead. When Avenue raised their game and equalised midway through the second half, even the Tilbury fans thought that the Cup was now headed to East London. The team, though, thought otherwise, holding on to force Extra Time and then running riot as they hammered their illustrious opponents into a 4-1 defeat. Credit went also to the Players and Fans of the Avenue who, at the end, gave Tilbury a Standing Ovation. The Thurrock Gazette report is printed below.



Essex Senior Cup. Final: Saturday May 13th 1961:

at Ilford F.C.

TILBURY 4 WALTHAMSTOW AVENUE 1: (aet):

Eric King.	1	G. McGuire.
Tony Marshall	2	B. Edwards.
Bernard Smith	3	R. Bainbridge.
John Brennan	4	D. Andrews.
"Ginger" Shovlar.	5	S. Prince.
Alex McCarthy.	6	T. Keenes.
John Simmonds.	7	R. Groves.
Brian Russell.	8	A. Minall.
Ross Livermore.	9	D. Gough.
David Drum.	10	J. Sully.
Fred Ryder.	11	B. Harvey.

Bewitched, bothered and bewildered, Amateur Cup holders Walthamstow Avenue slumped badly to a 4-1 defeat by giant-killers Tilbury in the Essex Senior Cup Final at Ilford on Saturday. Although the Isthmian League side were weakened by the absence of their star, Jim Lewis, they had chances and missed them, writes **TERRY SMITH**.

Yet, the result does not do justice to Tilbury. Had the occasion not been so nerve wracking, I think the "Dockers" would have won without the extra 30 minutes. Both sides had records at stake, Walthamstow Avenue were after an Amateur Cup and Essex Cup double and also trying to become the first team to win the Senior Cup for four consecutive years. Tilbury were fighting to win the Cup for the first time in their History, after two previous defeats at the Final stage, and to become the first side from the London League to hold the Trophy. The ground was very hard when the players took the field, and Walthamstow Avenue started hot favourites. For the first ten minutes, it looked as though the predictions were going to come true.

From the first whistle, Walthamstow went into the attack, and after centre forward D. Gough had headed over the Tilbury crossbar, he then lashed a shot against an upright. Suddenly, the Tilbury players seemed to sense that they could match the play of the champions, and put their own attack into action. In the tenth minute the "Dockers" had their first chance, when the combined efforts of **John Simmonds**, **Brian Russell** and **Ross Livermore** swept the ball out to **Fred Ryder**, but his shot went just wide.

Soon after, **Livermore** took too long on the ball in front of goal, giving Avenue keeper McGuire the chance to position himself and save the shot. The first real test for McGuire came in the 14th minute, when he magnificently saved a header by inside forward **David Drum** from a corner kick. The Tilbury defence kept calm under the sternest pressure, but they were having difficulty in keeping in check the brilliant wingers, Groves and Harvey. Walthamstow were positioning themselves well, and always finding their man with good passes. Whenever the "Dockers" did break out, they played equally well and were not having great trouble in breaking the defence.

Almost on half time, outside right **John Simmonds** streaked down the wing and crossed the ball to **Fred Ryder**, who was waiting near the far post to put it in the net. The Tilbury supporters went mad with delight, and even the Walthamstow fans applauded the underdogs' play. There were few corners in the first half, Tilbury gaining two to the Avenue's one. Tilbury deserved to be in the lead, and although Walthamstow played very good Football their finishing was at fault.

Determined to get on level terms in the second half, Walthamstow soon had the ball in the Tilbury area, and after outside left Harvey had shot just wide, inside right Minall had a good shot well saved by **Eric King**. It was obvious that Tilbury would be lucky to hold the Avenue by the odd goal, and a good move in the 65th minute caught the Tilbury defence out of position, and from just outside the area Harvey netted the equaliser. "Dockers" keeper **Eric King** was well tested after this, and gave a magnificent display, but Tilbury, too, had chances, and by this stage were looking the more dangerous of the two sides. Perhaps their unluckiest try came from **Ross Livermore**, who ran through on his own, waited for McGuire to leave his line and intelligently lobbed the ball over his head, only to see it go just wide of a post. Ensuring that the extra thirty minutes would be required.

By the start of Extra Time, the hot Sun had sapped most of the energy from the players, and it was here that Tilbury had the advantage. It was not long before they piled on the pressure against a team which looked finished. In the space of nine minutes, the "Dockers" scored three excellent goals which decided the match. The first came after four minutes of extra time. Tilbury right half **John Brennan** hit a good high cross over McGuire's head for **Livermore** to tap the ball over the line. Six minutes later, **Livermore** gave a good cross for inside right **Brian Russell** to score. Another three minutes and **Fred Ryder** ran the ball around McGuire and into the net, Tilbury's fourth and his second.

So tired were the players that the rest of the game was without incident, except for a Walthamstow effort which smashed against the crossbar. At the final whistle, dozens of small boys mobbed the Tilbury players off the field. It was the greatest moment of his career for Jim "Ginger" Shovlar when he held the Trophy aloft. Making the presentation was Col. Sir Stuart Mallinson CBE, DSO, the President of the Essex County Football Association (see the above Photograph). The other players, too, received a tremendous ovation as they received their Medals in front of the 3,500 strong crowd, and every one of them thoroughly deserved it.

That season had seen the League won with only one game lost. 1961/62 saw even that improved upon, as Tilbury completed the League campaign undefeated, emulating the feat achieved way back in 1932 by Park Royal., winning 19 of the 24 games and scoring 105 goals. The winning margin this time was seven points, and it was Chingford who were to replace East Ham United as runners up. The League Cup was also captured again.

In that Final, played at East Ham United's ground, the opponents were Chalfont National who had finished bottom of the League, and most were wondering just how they got to the Final. Tilbury won by a ridiculous scoreline for a Cup Final, hammering National by 10-1. In the next Fortnight, the two sides met twice more, in League fixtures, and Tilbury were victorious in these by 11-2 and 13-2. Chalfont national must have been sick of the sight of Tilbury !

1961/62 was to be Tilbury's last ever season in the London League. They had clearly outgrown that Competition and felt the need to move upwards. The next "rung on the Amateur ladder" was the Delphian League, and Tilbury were accepted into this for the 1962/63 season. Unlike the move back in 1950, this time Tilbury had a squad that was still very much in it's prime, and they were optimistic that they would adapt easily to the higher standard.

However, as seems the usual run of affairs with Tilbury, once again nothing was to run smoothly. This time, though, it was the Weather that proved the toughest opponent. By the time the season had entered 1963, the fixture list had been decimated. The Winter was so bad, becoming known as "The Big Freeze", that for over two whole months virtually no Football had been played, as grounds across the whole Country were frozen solid and/or covered deep in Snow.

When the Thaw did set in, a few games were played, but it soon became clear that there was no way in which the full complement of fixtures could be completed. The League was split into two Emergency Sections (East & West) of eight clubs each, who played the others in their section just once. That meant that some clubs, of which Tilbury were one, found themselves with three home games and four away from home. Hertford Town won the East Section, but were then defeated for the Championship by the winners of the West Section, Edmonton. Tilbury had, though, demonstrated that they were indeed capable of competing at the higher level.

As if all that drama was not enough, 1962/63 now also became the very last in the existence of the Delphian League. In a move ahead of it's time, and seemingly designed to challenge the superiority of the Isthmians, the Athenian League now decided to expand into a three Division set up with full promotion and relegation. As a result of negotiations, the Athenian now became the Premier Division, the Corinthian League became Division One and the Delphian League became Division Two. So, Tilbury found themselves competing in their third different League in three seasons, though against the same opposition. This was to be the start of the next rise in the status of the Club.

So, in 1963/64, Tilbury found themselves members of the Athenian League as one of the founders of the new Division Two. Unlike in the 1950 move into the Corinthian League, this upward move proved an immediate success, as they carried off the Division Two title at the first attempt, finishing above Harrow Town on Goal Average, thanks to the 5-0 defeat of Windsor & Eton on the final day. It was not only League success that season, as they also carried off three Cup competitions, The Essex Senior, Essex Elizabethan and Stanford Charity Cups.

The Essex Senior Cup Final was the first ever to be contested over two legs, and Tilbury's opponents were Ford United who proved very difficult to overcome. In a desperately close tie, it was only a late extra time goal from Ross Livermore that brought the Cup to Tilbury. Ford United, also over two legs, were again the opposition in the Final of the Essex Elizabethan Trophy and were again the victims. The Stanford Charity Cup, played the home of Lathol Athletic, was won by defeating Bowers United in the Final.

1964/65 found Tilbury once again competing at a higher level, for the third time in four seasons. The next three campaigns were ones of consolidation for them, as they now found themselves back among their former Corinthian adversaries. With the immensely successful squad that came together in the London League now beginning to age and break up, Tommy Harris was faced with the task of bringing in new blood to rebuild the Team. Over the next few years, many of the most talented players available were brought to Tilbury, and the reward for this began to come in 1967/68.

In the Summer of 1965, the Club undertook a 5 night Whitsun Tour to Holland, during which they played two games. The first two nights were spent in the resort of Zaandvoort, the home of the Dutch Formula One Grand Prix, with the final 3 nights spent in the Capital, Amsterdam. The two games played were against two sides from the same regional League, CSV. Castricum and Uithoorn, with one defeat and one high-scoring draw.

After their seasons of consolidation, Tilbury mounted a serious challenge for Promotion in 1967/68, only narrowly missing out. Going into the final game, away to Chesham United, Tilbury needed a win to take them into the Premier Division, but then proceeded to give possibly their worst display of the season, going down heavily, 0-4, in a result that handed the Promotion to Wembley F.C. whose people were at the game and overjoyed at our downfall.

The disappointment was wiped away just twelve Months later, as they clinched the Division One Championship and, therefore, the much desired promotion to the Premier Division. As late as the Easter period it seemed that Tilbury would have to settle for the Runner-Up position. The favourites for the Title, Eastbourne United, came to Tilbury on Easter Monday and won convincingly by 4-2, and that margin did not accurately reflect their superiority on the day. For whatever reason, immediately following this, the Sussex side suffered a dramatic collapse of form, failing to win another game, and Tilbury clinched the Championship on the final day by beating Hertford Town 2-1.

This was, in fact, a remarkable achievement by the Club. Back in October, Tilbury had been rocked when Tommy Harris resigned as Manager to take over at Grays Athletic, followed by several players. The Club acted quickly, and another former Tilbury player from the 1950's, Tony Oakley, was brought in from Sittingbourne United. Tony brought in just two new players and recalled two who had been languishing in the Reserves for most of the season, and the bandwagon just rolled on.

The two recalled players proved an inspiration, and proved the supporters right, as they had been critical all season of the decisions to drop Dai Evans and Willie Flood. Much of the creativity from Midfield came from the skill and intelligence of Flood, while Evans applied the finishing touches. In fact Evans, who had not made his debut until November, went on to score an incredible 31 goals. As was usual with Tilbury, whenever they enjoyed League success, Cup success accompanied it. This season Tilbury won the Essex Elizabethan Trophy and the Essex Floodlight Cup, and finished as losing Finalists in the Mithras Cup.

1969/70 was Tilbury's first in the Athenian Premier Division, and they finished a creditable mid-table 8th position and reached two Cup Finals. Defeat occurred in both, losing to Barking in the Essex Senior Cup and to Dagenham in the Essex Floodlight Cup. Twelve months later, Tilbury had improved one place, to 7th, in the League, and again reached two Cup Finals. Again, though, it was defeat in both, as Ilford won the Essex Floodlight Final and Lowestoft Town, very controversially, the East Anglian Cup Final.

1971/72 saw Tilbury improve their placing once again, climbing to 4th position, and again reaching two Cup Finals. Yet again, for the third consecutive season, they were defeated in both. The Essex Senior Cup went to Walthamstow Avenue, while the Isthmians of St. Albans City took the Mithras Cup. Thankfully, this Cup Final "Hoodoo" was not to continue, and ended just twelve months later and, ironically, that ending came about in the same two Cup Finals.

For the fourth successive season, Tilbury improved upon their League position, now climbing to third. Victory over two legs against Dagenham in the Final captured the Essex Senior Cup, and then the Mithras Cup, also over two legs, was won by defeating Ilford in the Final. The end of this season brought about another of the seismic changes to the make up of the Amateur Football scene in the South of England. Almost since organised Leagues had come into being, the Isthmian League had been recognised as being at the pinnacle of the standings, and the League that all ambitious clubs wanted to join.

Tilbury were no exception, and had made several unsuccessful applications over the years. Now, their ambition was to be realised. The expansion of the Athenian League in 1963 saw the superiority of the Isthmians gradually being eroded. Now, in a bid to protect their status, they decide upon their own expansion. They invited 16 clubs, mostly Athenians, to form a new Isthmian Division Two, and Tilbury was among them. This move led to the gradual decline of the Athenian League, and another Isthmian expansion several years later was the final nail in it's coffin.

This first expansion did more than just reinforce the Isthmian status, it turned it into a different type of competition. From being a staid and insular competition, slowly declining, it changed into probably the most forward looking and innovative in the Country, being the first anywhere to introduce Sponsorship and the first to adopt Three Points for a Win. Under the guidance of two excellent Chairmen, Barry East and Alan Turvey, the League prospered. They were never afraid to ask their clubs to consider embracing something new.

For once in their history, Tilbury's move into a new League did go smoothly, with no crises or obstacles presenting themselves, and they were very happy with their initial 6th place finish in 1973/74. This was the season in which the three points for a win system was introduced into Football, several years before it became widespread. The Summer of 1974 also saw a change in the Management of the Team, as Terry Mathews came in from local rivals Aveley and Larry Hutson, the man he replaced, going in the opposite direction.

In 1974/75, Tilbury narrowly missed out on Promotion, finishing in 3rd position in what had now been renamed Division One. However, some compensation came in the winning of three major Cup competitions. Tilbury became the first ever winners of the Isthmian League Cup, and followed that up by beating Barking on their own ground to capture the Mithras Cup. Best of all, though, was a thrilling Essex Senior Cup Final at the ground of Chelmsford City, when an all-headed hat-trick from Steve Scudder defeated Dagenham 3-2.

During the Summer of 1975, the Essex County F.A. decided that the clubs in the County should be divided into two categories. Those in the higher category, like Tilbury, were now moved into the Essex Professional Cup. This move made absolutely no difference to Tilbury as another hugely successful season ensued. The Division One Championship was won, with a then points record total of 102, but even that was only just enough to see off a superb challenge from Croydon FC, who finished on 98, having completed the entire League campaign undefeated, their downfall was too many drawn games.

Tilbury also reached three Cup Finals, winning two of them. First of all came the defeat, when losing the Final of the Isthmian League Cup to Slough Town, at Hayes FC. The Mithras Cup was won with a fine victory in the Final against Cheshunt FC in Hertfordshire. Once again, though, the best of all came in the Essex competition, this time in the Essex Professional Cup. The opponents were Southend United, and their new Manager, Dave Smith, brought his entire First Team to Tilbury only to have to watch them dismantled by a brilliant Tilbury display. Mr. Smith and his skipper Alan Moody were both gracious enough afterwards to say that their side had been lucky not to lose by more.

These successes were the fore-runner to their opening campaign as members of the Isthmian League Premier Division, which turned out to be their best in their four season stay at this level. It did not get off to the best of starts, as they struggled in the early games, before recovering their confidence and form to climb rapidly up the League Table. Many at the club believed that, had their start been equally good, they would have carried off the Championship, which went to Enfield, despite the "Dockers" doing the League "Double" over the North Londoners.

Another memorable occurrence this season was Tilbury's participation in the Barrassi Cup. This was played every season for several years between the Italian Amateur Cup Winners and the Champions of the Isthmian Division One, over two legs. Tilbury's opponents in this match it turned out to be a thriller of a game, and I can honestly say that I've never seen such a fine game played in such awful conditions, as the rain never ceased throughout the match. Tilbury came from behind, after conceding an early goal, and enjoyed the better of play, but could not find a second goal.

After the season ended, Terry Mathews left the Club to take over at Walthamstow Avenue, taking several players with him. The Club responded quickly, and brought about the return as Manager of Tommy Harris. A fairly miserable League season followed, as Tilbury slumped down to 18th position, but in the Cup competitions Tilbury enjoyed probably the finest moment in their History to date. The Mithras Cup was won, with victory over two legs in the Final over Hertford Town, but suffered defeat to Billericay Town in the Final of the Essex Floodlight Cup.

It was in the F.A. Cup that Tilbury's proudest moment came, bringing National recognition. Starting in the Preliminary Round, they fought all the way through to the 3rd Round proper, so far the only Thurrock Club to achieve this. Victories over Kingstonian, Bracknell Town, Witney Town, Feltham and Tonbridge too "The Dockers" into the 1st Round Proper, where they were drawn at home to Kettering Town. This tie provoked real controversy, with the first game being declared Void after Kettering were found to have fielded an ineligible player, in the shape of former Leicester City and Charlton Athletic winger Len Glover, for whom they failed to gain the necessary International Clearance following his return from the North American Soccer league.

In the re-staged tie, Kettering returned to Tilbury and achieved a 2-2 draw and, 48 hours later at Kettering, they were 2-0 ahead after 15 minutes in the replay. So on top were they, that many thought Tilbury were in for a heavy defeat, but not Tilbury's players, who settled and responded superbly to come back and win 3-2. The reward for this was an away tie in Round 2 against Nuneaton Borough, who had beaten Football League side Oxford United in Round 1, and again Tilbury were given little chance. Nuneaton adopted a very physical approach, and especially targeted Tilbury keeper, Tony Armstrong. These tactics failed though as, once again, "The Dockers" were superb as goals from Colin Wallace and Ken Gray earned a 2-1 win.

In Round 3, Tilbury were drawn away to Stoke City on a cold January afternoon. A crowd in excess of 16,000 saw the game, with some 2,500 travelling up from Thurrock by Car, Coach and Special Train. Stoke took a very early lead with a goal that should have been ruled out, as the ball had clearly burst when the shot was made, leaving Tony Armstrong stranded. However, as well as Tilbury played on the day, there can be no doubt that Stoke were the better side and would have won in any case. The final score was 4-0, and at the end the entire Stoke crowd rose to give Tilbury and especially Ken Gray a standing ovation. The Thurrock Gazette Match Report is printed below.

Saturday January 7th 1978.

F.A. Cup. Third Round:

		<u>STOKE CITY</u>	4	v	0	<u>TILBURY</u>		
1.	Roger	JONES				1.	Tony	ARMSTRONG
2.	John	MARSH				2.	Neil	PARTNER
3.	Alec	LINDSAY				3.	Ted	MARJORAM
4.	Howard	KENDALL				4.	Gerry	SULLIVAN
5.	Alan	DODD				5.	Dave	BARNETT
6.	Ian	BOWERS				6.	Malcolm	LINTON
7.	Steve	WADDINGTON	27:			7.	Alan	DENNIS
8.	David	GREGORY	25:			8.	Kim	RUSSELL
9.	Viv	BUSBY				9.	John	WALLACE
10.	Geoff	SCOTT				10.	Ken	GRAY
11.	Jeff	COOK	5: 84:			11.	Colin	WALLACE

SUBSTITUTES

12.	Garth	CROOKS (45 minutes. for 9):	12	Dave	KNOWLES (76 minutes. for 10):
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MATCH REPORT. (by Chris Francis of the Thurrock Gazette):

ATTENDANCE. 16,103:

At Stoke on Saturday, it proved to be a case of History repeating itself as the valiant "Dockers" went out of the Country's premier Cup competition. Back in 1949, when Tilbury last played Football League opposition in the F.A. Cup, they went out by the same score away at Notts County. The Gazette headline of the day, "Dockers, disgraced, go down fighting", was just as appropriate after Saturday's very memorable game at the Victoria Ground. At the end of the greatest 90 minutes in the Club's history, the Tilbury players were applauded off the pitch by the Stoke City team and an appreciative 16,000 crowd. It was a wonderful gesture not in recognition of a major cup upset of which Tilbury had dreamed, but of a fine performance which was a credit to everyone connected with the Club. Tilbury have played better this season, but in such awe-inspiring surroundings the part-timers had to be admired for keeping calm and avoiding a massacre.

I was one who thought that if Stoke grabbed an early goal it could mean annihilation for Tilbury, yet the locals overcame a shattering 5th minute set-back and, in the second half, looked like denying the "Potters" any more than the three goals they scored in the first half. Stoke did finally notch a 4th goal, after 84 minutes, but it couldn't detract from Tilbury's spirited rearguard action which deservedly earned them that after-match ovation.

There were certainly many other moments to cherish, not least of all being the way **John Wallace** turned former Liverpool left back Alec Lindsay in front of a packed main stand within a minute of the opening whistle. That piece of skill perfectly illustrated the way Tilbury started their big match. There wasn't any sign of nerves and not even Stoke's early breakthrough could dampen Tilbury's fire. The goal came out of nothing, Viv Busby deflecting an Alec Lindsay throw-in into the path of Jeff Cook, and his speculative shot from at least 35 yards sneaked inside the far post.

This early set-back made the performance of **Armstrong** and his team mates during the next 85 minutes even more commendable. All 12 players were heroes, but skipper **Dave Barnett** stood out like a giant in defence. He was quick into the tackle and stopped so many Stoke City attacks that it was difficult to understand why he is not still commanding a regular place in a Football League side, and why Southend United let him go in the first place.

In the early stages, Stoke took advantage of their extra pace to exploit the space they were being given. Their finishing was also explosive, with two perfect illustrations coming in the space of only two minutes. After 25 minutes, Ian Bowers came storming up field and his fine pass gave Jeff Cook the chance to send over a cross which David Gregory smashed home first time. It was another cross from the right, just two minutes later, from John Marsh, that had Tilbury in trouble. There was a hectic scramble before Steve Waddington almost burst the net with a blistering drive.

Tilbury were by no means non-threatening. They carved out two chances in the first half, **Kim Russell** firing over the bar after a **Gerry Sullivan** cross was teed up for him by a fine piece of control from **John Wallace**. The best of the two chances, however, came just before the half time whistle, and it was unfortunate that it fell to a defender. **Colin Wallace** and **Gerry Sullivan** combined neatly on the right and the resulting cross had Stoke keeper Roger Jones in all kinds of trouble. **Alan Dennis** found himself with a golden opportunity at the far post, but was off balance, and his weak shot was finally smothered by a grateful Jones.

After the break, Tilbury began to find their men with greater regularity, and despite the promptings of midfield master Howard Kendall, Stoke didn't look nearly as effective. Even so, **Malcolm Linton** and **Neil Partner** had to make fine goal-line clearances before a great solo run by David Gregory set up a late second goal for Jeff Cook. Tilbury's best chance of the half came when Stoke keeper Roger Jones made a bad error after coming yards out of his area in a failed attempt to intercept what was a splendid through ball by **Dave Barnett**. The keeper's error presented the ball to **Gerry Sullivan**, but he had to hurriedly hit a first time shot and it skewed off the side of his boot and went wide.

This was not only to be the “high spot” in the Club’s history, but also the start of a long and gradual decline in the Club’s fortunes, which would eventually see them lose their Isthmian status and drop to County League level. In truth, Tilbury had been living beyond their means for several seasons and had run up heavy debts which would come back to haunt them. In 198/79, they finished 14th in the Premier Division and reached the Final of the Essex Senior Cup, the last time they have done so to date. At the Roots Hall home of Southend United, they went down 0-1 to Harlow Town.

The effects of their over-spending now fell upon their heads, and 1979/80 was a miserable season for all at the Club. Tilbury slumped to the bottom of the Premier Division and, just 12 months later, only avoided further relegation by the narrowest of margins. As the 1980/81 season ended, there was no certainty that the Club would survive the Summer, as it was existing on a day-to-day basis which at any time could have seen one or more of its creditors pull the plug that would see Tilbury F.C. wound up. Fortunately, a new Committee was formed, and they managed to persuade creditors that obligations would be met.

Much hard work and many sleepless nights followed, but gradually relations with the creditors was repaired, and a few years of hard work and tightened purse strings brought the Club back onto a secure footing and the debts cleared. Following their 20th place finish in 1980/81, life in Division One did not get any easier for “The Dockers”, and in the following campaign relegation was again only narrowly avoided. Only once in this spell, 1984/85, did Tilbury not face a battle against the drop. In fact, they climbed to a respectable, mid-table, 7th place. Surviving in this manner could not last and, in 1986/87, Tilbury could not escape and dropped into Division Two North.

A 3rd place finish in the first season down proved to be a false dawn for the Club, and the decade ended with Tilbury firmly ensconced in the bottom Division. In 1990/91, the Isthmian League decided to end the regionalisation of the Divisions Two, and adopt a Linear system of Premier, One, Two and Three. Sadly, by ending in the bottom half of Two North, the Club was one of those relegated to form the new Division Three. However, fortunes now changed, and Tilbury gained immediate Promotion back to Division Two at the first attempt.

They managed to maintain this status for five seasons, despite never finishing higher than 11th, but then in 1997/98 they dropped back into Division Three. This time, it took them two campaigns to escape from the bottom Division, winning Promotion back to Division Two in defeat on the Isle of Wight, against Cowes Sports.

In the previous round, Tilbury had achieved a remarkable victory over Falmouth Town. Rather fortunate to escape with a draw at home, Tilbury showed great character in the replay down in Cornwall. Falmouth had a great chance to win as 90 minutes approached, winning a Penalty kick with Tilbury down to ten men. However, Tilbury keeper Mark Hardingham now came into his own. He made a super save that took the game into extra time and then Penalties. In the shoot out, Hardingham amazingly saved another three spot kicks as Falmouth missed with all their efforts. I wonder just how many keepers can claim to have saved four penalties in one game ?

As the 21st Century got underway, the next two seasons saw Tilbury finish 10th and 16th in Division Two. It was at this point that the Football Association imposed the first of its many reorganisations of the Football Pyramid. There are many in the Non-League game who think that, even now, they have never managed to get it completely right. This led to the Isthmian League being reduced to three Divisions, and regionalisation being reintroduced, with Tilbury finding themselves in Division One North. Further finishes of 20th and 22nd (out of 24) saw Tilbury continue to struggle.

Now, the Football Association decided to impose a second seriously flawed reorganisation on the pyramid. Many Isthmians, Tilbury included, now found themselves switched to the Southern League, while a similar number from that League were switched into Isthmian ranks, in a move that left most of us dumbfounded. Tilbury’s struggles continued and by finishing bottom of the Southern League Division One East they now dropped in to the Essex Senior League for the 2005/06 season. To their great relief, their stay in this League lasted just the ones season.

Tilbury finished 3rd, behind AFC. Hornchurch and Great Wakering Rovers, thereby gaining Promotion. In the meantime, the F.A. had realised their earlier mistake, and the Clubs moved sideways were now returned to their original Leagues, so it was that Tilbury now found themselves back in the Isthmian League. Hornchurch had run away with the Title and, in all honesty, Tilbury were probably lucky to scrape into that 3rd position. For most of the season, Burnham Ramblers had been pressing Hornchurch, but then suffered an inexplicable collapse. Tilbury sneaked in by virtue of a final day win away to Romford. Had they even just drawn, Barkingside would have gone up instead.

Initially, the previous pattern of struggle in the Isthmian ranks continued, with finished of 19th and 20th just enough to enable survival in Division One North. Optimism and Confidence were not high as the 2008/09 season began, but a new management team brought success back to the Club, with a comfortable mid-table placing and the winning of two Cups, Tilbury’s first Trophies for twenty years. Three Premier Division sides were knocked out as Tilbury made the Final of the Isthmian League Cup and a fourth, Harrow Borough, were defeated in that Final.

The other Trophy won was the East Anglian Cup, though the Final itself had to be held over until the following season. In the Final, at Tilbury, Halstead Town were the victims. Technically, I suppose, Tilbury are still the Holders of this Cup, as no competition under this banner has ever been completed or staged at all since then, and at the time of writing it no longer exists. League fortunes in this and the next season showed only minor improvements, with two 11th placed finishes, and at the end of the 2009/10 season the management team were dismissed.

2010/11 saw Paul Vaughan installed as Manager, his first post in Senior Football. His inexperience at this level showed in his first season, but he proved a quick learner. After a poor start left the Club struggling near the foot of the Division, he turned things around with some astute signings that saw Tilbury climb the table in the second half of the campaign, and gain confidence for the next season. This confidence proved to be well justified.

A very fine season was enjoyed by “The Dockers”, but even they were probably a little surprised by just how well they did. They started well, and maintained that form throughout, as they mounted a serious challenge for Promotion. In the end, they just missed out. A 3rd place finish earned them a place in the Promotion Play-Offs but, in a thriller at Chadfields, it was the visitors Needham Market who ran out 4-3 winners.

In each of the following three seasons, Vaughan was hampered by having to rebuild his squad, as a number of players moved to Clubs at a higher level, and Tilbury could not repeat that promotion challenge. With the Club struggling in a lowly position, Vaughan stepped down in October 2014, being replaced by skipper Gary Henty who brought in another former Tilbury player, Danny Smith as his Assistant.

They quickly improved the squad and, once again, a second half of the season revival ensured safety. Further improvement was made in the following campaign, and Tilbury were narrowly unsuccessful in achieving a play-off place. Also in 2015/16, good runs were enjoyed in the F.A. Trophy and Essex Senior Cup, with no fewer than three National League sides were defeated. Sadly, a run of late season injuries derailed the League campaign.

This seemed to set a pattern for the next couple of seasons, a poor first half rescued by a good second and, in October 2017, Henty and Smith resigned following a poor start to the season, despite the Club trying very hard to keep them. Once again, the new man in charge was another former “Docker” in the shape of Joe Keith, and the second half revival again led to a climb up the Table. This pattern appeared yet again in 2018/19 and, in October, Joe Keith was replaced by Marc Harrison and Liam Wallace. From being 2nd from bottom, the revival saw Tilbury race up to 7th at the end of the season.

Then came two seasons of awful luck for the Club. 2019/20 saw the Club almost certain of a play-off place when Covid 19 ended the season early and caused it to be declared Void. 2020/21 was even more disappointing. This time, Tilbury found themselves on top of the Division, when once again Covid caused it to be Voided. The disappointment and frustration at the Club was immense.

Sadly, Tilbury have not been able to reproduce that type of form since these disruptions. The Club has gone through a very unstable period when no fewer than six managers, Keith Rowland, Luke Wilson (caretaker) Eljay Worrell (caretaker), John Coventry, Kurt Smith (caretaker), Scott Dash all failed to improve things before, in March 2023, Marc Harrison and Liam Wallace returned to the Club. However, this return was too late to prevent Tilbury suffering relegation (on Goal Difference of 1) down to the Essex Senior League.

They will be desperate in 2023/24 to effect an immediate return to the Isthmian League, as they did in 2005/06, which would coincide very nicely with the move into a brand new purpose-built Stadium on the land adjacent to the current site, but realise that this is not going to be easy to achieve.