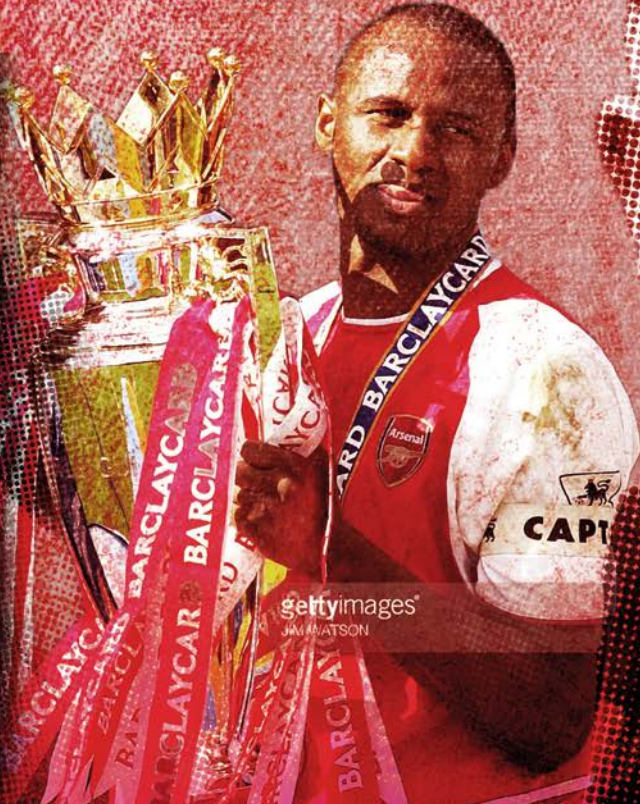




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THE GUNNERS' FIFTY FINEST MATCHES



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JIM WATSON

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GREATEST GAMES
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**THE GUNNERS'
FIFTY FINEST MATCHES**

PAUL DONNELLEY



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THE FIRST TIME ...



Dial Square 6 Eastern Wanderers 0

Friendly. Saturday 11 December 1886, kick-off time unknown

Venue: Tiller Road, London E14

Dial Square: Various colours

Eastern Wanderers: Colours unknown

Referee: Unknown

Attendance: Unknown

Dial Square

Fred Beardsley

David Danskin (captain)

Porteous

Gregory

Bee

Wolfe

George Smith

Moy

Whitehead

Morris

Duggan

Scorers: Unknown

Eastern Wanderers

Unknown

THE story is familiar to all Arsenal fans – on 1 December 1886 a group of workers from the Royal Arsenal armaments factory in Woolwich met at the Royal Oak¹ pub at 27 Woolwich New Road, Greenwich, London SE18, and a football team was formed. The moving force was an exiled Scotsman by the name of David Danskin. He was born on 9 January 1863 on Back Street, Burntisland, Fife, the second child of six of Janet Burton and David Danskin. He began working as an apprentice engine fitter at Kirkcaldy.

In 1885, he moved south and found a job at the Royal Arsenal as a mechanical engineer. A keen amateur footballer, he had already played for Kirkcaldy Wanderers alongside Peter Connolly and Jack McBean, two future Arsenal players. David Danskin moved south to Kent along with thousands of his fellow Scotsmen.

A couple of former Nottingham Forest players, Morris Bates and Fred Beardsley, also arrived at the factory looking for work and, along with Danskin, formed the impetus for a works football team. They named themselves Dial Square, after the gun-machining workshop where many of them worked.

¹ The pub, near to Woolwich Arsenal station, changed its name to The Pullman. In June 2005, construction began on the Docklands Light Railway extension to Woolwich Arsenal, and the pub and several buildings nearby were demolished in 2007.

Arsenal Greatest Games

They arranged a match with Eastern Wanderers and caught the Woolwich Ferry to the Isle of Dogs. The game was played in less than salubrious conditions. Elijah Watkins, a friend and colleague of Danskin, became the club's first secretary.

Of the club's debut match on 11 December 1886, Watkins was to say, 'Talk about a football pitch! This one eclipsed any I ever heard of or saw. I could not venture to say what shape it was, but it was bounded by backyards as to about two-thirds of the area, and the other portion was – I was going to say a ditch, but I think an open sewer would be more appropriate. We could not decide who won the game because when the ball was not in the back gardens, it was in the ditch; and that was full of the loveliest material that could possibly be.

'Well, our fellows did not bring it all away with them, but they looked as though they had been clearing out a mud-shoot when they had done playing. I know, because the attendant at the pub asked me what I was going to give him to clear the muck away.'

In the event, Dial Square ran out 6–0 winners, although the score was disputed because the pitch had no markings and the goals no crossbars.

A fortnight later, on Christmas Day, 15 players gathered in the Royal Oak and officially adopted the title of Royal Arsenal, having decided that no one had heard of Dial Square and everyone was aware of Royal Arsenal.

They each paid a subscription of sixpence, and David Danskin contributed three shillings of his own money from his weekly wage of around 35 shillings. The first item the club bought was a handmade football, which the workers used at lunchtime for a kickabout.

Arsenal were on their way, and soon had a kit when Nottingham Forest kindly donated a set of redcurrant shirts (the same colour that they wore in their last season at Highbury).

Except ... except ... the story of Arsenal's origins raises many more questions than it answers. For a start, why did a team from south London (then Kent) travel to east London for their first match? Were there no suitable pitches in Kent? How did the Dial Square team get there? The official biography by Steve Stammers, among many other books, refers to the side getting 'the ferry from Woolwich but the ferry did not begin running until 23 March 1889. The Blackwall Tunnel? No, that did not open until 22 May 1897. The Greenwich foot tunnel, "the Pipe"? That opened on 4 August 1902.'

In fact, every detail that we have about the 'first' match rests on the testimony of one man – Elijah Watkins – in a letter he wrote to *Football Chat* in 1902. However, he does not mention the date or the final score.

The account is repeated in 1906 in *Association Football and the Men Who Made It*. The game is then mentioned in the *Woolwich Herald* in 1911, which stated that the club was 25 years old, having played its first game on 11 December 1886, beating Eastern Wanderers 6–0.

It is possible that the first match never actually occurred as it is recorded, or never occurred at all – or is it a mélange of different matches, teams and players?

At least that was the view of football historians until the facts emerged. Important research was carried out, and there is a mention in the sporting newspaper *The Referee* published on 12 December. It states: 'Dial Square v. Eastern Wanderers (A).–At Millwall: The first-named won by six goals to nil.' *The Referee* got its information from club secretaries.

In the edition of *The Referee* published on 2 January 1887, Watkins placed an advertisement for opponents: 'Dial Square F.C. (A.) have open for good medium clubs Jan. 22, Feb. 19, all dates in March. E. Watkins, 43 Park-rd., Plumstead.'

So how did they manage to play Eastern Wanderers? Were there no local teams? It would appear not. Erith, their opponents in the club's second game, were not formed at the time of the first match.

Eastern Wanderers had been playing in the previous season and had enough players to put out two teams. Based at Millwall, their secretary was David W. Galliford of 9 Marsh Street, Cahir Street, Millwall, London E14. It may have been that Watkins knew Galliford or knew someone who knew someone at Eastern Wanderers and thus the fixture was arranged.

It is now established beyond any doubt that the first game played by the club now known as Arsenal was on 11 December 1886, that it was against Eastern Wanderers and that they won by the convincing margin of six goals to nil.

THE FIRST LEAGUE MATCH ...



Woolwich Arsenal 2 Newcastle United 2

Football League Division Two. Saturday 2 September 1893, kick-off 3pm

Venue: Manor Field, Plumstead Marshes, Kent

Woolwich Arsenal: Probably red shirts, blue shorts and black stockings

Newcastle United: Black and white striped shirts, white shorts, black stockings

Referee: J.C. Tillotson (Birmingham)

Attendance: 6,000²

Woolwich Arsenal

Charlie Williams
Joe Powell (captain)
Bill Jeffrey
Daniel Devine
Bob Buist
David Howat
Duncan Gemmell
Jim Henderson
Walter Shaw
Arthur Elliott
Charlie Booth

Manager: None – a players' committee consisting of Fred Beardsley, Arthur Brown and Jack Humble selected the team

Scorers: Shaw 6 minutes; Elliott 48 minutes

Newcastle United

Andrew Ramsay
Harry Jeffery
James Miller
Robert Crielly
Walter Graham
Joseph McKane
J. Bowman
Tom Crate
Willie Thompson (captain)
Jock Sorley
Joseph Wallace

Manager: Boardroom committee

Scorers: Crate 65 minutes; Sorley 80 minutes

IN 1888, Royal Arsenal moved to the Manor Ground, then known as Manor Field, where they stayed for two years. The club's first match there was a 3–3 draw against Millwall Rovers, on 11 February 1888. There were no stands, and the club borrowed wagons from the army for spectators to sit in. The club had changed its name to Royal Arsenal some time after its first match and before 7 January 1887. There is a theory that the name was changed to Woolwich Arsenal when the club voted to turn professional in May 1891, as they were not allowed to use the name Royal. This is not true. The name Royal Arsenal was used during the 1891/92 and 1892/93 seasons. In fact, the name change did not become official until 26 April 1893, when The Woolwich Arsenal Football and Athletic Company Limited (company number 38703C) was incorporated. On 28 April, the assets of Royal Arsenal Football Club were transferred to The Woolwich Arsenal Football and Athletic Company Limited.

After a financial disagreement with the owner of the Invicta Ground, Woolwich Arsenal returned to the Manor Ground, where they would stay for 20 years. In 1893, Arsenal became the first club to

² Some sources list the attendance as 10,000.

Woolwich Arsenal 2 Newcastle United 2

issue shares to raise money; 860 people bought 4,000 shares, valued at £1 each.

The scheme was not met with universal praise. One letter writer to the *Kentish Independent*, the local newspaper, commented, 'The funding of a soccer club should be left to working men and those who know the game. Surely allowing clerks or accountants to control a football club by buying shares is a retrograde step.'

The 1893/94 season of the Football League began on the first Saturday in September. After a season playing friendlies against Football League opponents and non-league sides, Woolwich Arsenal had finally been elected to the league (along with Liverpool, Middlesbrough Ironopolis and their first opponents, Newcastle United) that summer.

The first Football League match in London saw the Novocastrians travel down from Tyneside to King's Cross on the morning of the game, as they could not afford to stay in hotels. The Newcastle side then took cabs straight to the Manor Ground.

A crowd of 6,000 (or possibly 10,000) people turned out to watch Woolwich Arsenal take on Newcastle United at the Manor Ground, Plumstead.

The weather was fine, and there was a light wind blowing in Kent. Woolwich Arsenal won the toss and elected to play with the wind behind them. Newcastle kicked off, and Willie Thompson took the first kick in the Football League in London.

With just six minutes (some sources say eight) of play gone, Walter Shaw scored Woolwich Arsenal's first league goal. The first half was not one of high skill, and Shaw's goal was described as very soft. Woolwich Arsenal kept the visitors penned into their own half, and it was not until just before half-time that Newcastle began putting some passes together; they were unlucky not to equalise.

In the second half, Woolwich Arsenal extended their lead in the 48th minute when Arthur Elliott scored. Rather than parking the bus, the Londoners allowed the Geordies to get back into the game.

In the last 15 minutes, the Novocastrians rallied, and Tom Crate scored after 65 minutes before Jock Sorley equalised to ensure the honours were shared. In the last ten minutes, however, the match could have gone either way.

Of the new boys, the season ended with Liverpool as Division Two champions with 50 points, Woolwich Arsenal in ninth place with 28 points, and Newcastle United eight points and five places above them.

Arsenal Greatest Games

Middlesbrough Ironopolis finished 11th in the division, but were in a perilous financial position and resigned from the league on 30 May 1894 and disbanded on 5 June that year, after five years of existence. Bootle (1892/93) and Middlesbrough Ironopolis – the Nops – are the only two clubs to have spent just a solitary season in the Football League.

Woolwich Arsenal goalie Charlie Williams lost his place in the side when the club signed Harry Storer in May 1894, and he left for Manchester City, beginning a long tradition that sadly continues to this day of players joining the Sky Blues. While at Hyde Road, he became the first keeper to score a goal from open play (against Sunderland at Roker Park on 14 April 1900). In 1902, he moved south and signed for Tottenham Hotspur. With his playing career over, he turned to management and managed the Denmark national side. In 1911, he began coaching teams in South America, where he stayed for the rest of his life, dying in 1952.

Joe Powell, Woolwich Arsenal's first captain, also became the first professional Gunner to die. He was serving in the Walsall 80th Staffordshire Regiment when Arsenal signed him in December 1892. He missed just three matches in the inaugural season. The next year, he again missed three games, and in 1895/96 he missed five games out of 30 and scored his only goal in a 5–0 victory against Loughborough Town on 4 January 1896.

He started in eight of the first ten matches of the 1896/97 season, but fell awkwardly while playing in a United League match against Kettering Town on 23 November and broke his arm. Powell came down with tetanus and blood poisoning. The arm was amputated, but he died six days later on 29 November. He was just 26. He had played 203 competitive matches for The Arsenal.

Glasgow-born Duncan Gemmell played in the first five matches of the opening season, lost his place to Gavin Crawford and never played for the first team again. Dumfries-born Jim Henderson scored 86 goals for Woolwich Arsenal in 137 competitive games – averaging a remarkable 0.6 goals per game. He lost form in the 1894/95 season and was released in the summer of 1895, when he returned to Scotland.

The club also released Walter Shaw at the end of the same season. Arthur Elliott is said to have moved to Tottenham in the summer of 1894, but there is no record of him playing for the Lilywhites.

Woolwich Arsenal 2 Newcastle United 2

On 26 January 1895, there was crowd trouble during a match against Burton Wanderers, and the Football League ordered that the Manor Ground be closed for five weeks.

Woolwich Arsenal played a game each at New Brompton's Priestfield Stadium (against Burton Swifts) and at Lyttelton cricket ground, Leyton (against Leicester Fosse). In 1904, the club built a second stand, which became the first to be nicknamed the Spion Kop. At first, attendances at the Manor Ground numbered around 20,000, but they began to drop, not least because of the venue's comparative isolation in an industrial area.

Plumstead was difficult to reach by public transport – northern fans had to get into central London and then take a 40-minute train journey from Cannon Street. On occasion, some opposing teams did not make the ground in time for kick-off.

The engineering works next door spewed out noxious fumes and occasionally raw sewage. The *Liverpool Tribune* said that Arsenal were the 'team who played at the end of the earth'.

The *Derby Post* reported on 15 January 1891, 'One of the Derby chaps was heard to mutter: "A journey to the molten interior of the earth's core would be rather more pleasant and comfortable an experience than our forthcoming visit to the Royal Arsenal."'

In 1910, with Woolwich Arsenal facing bankruptcy, two meetings were convened at Woolwich Town Hall on 22 January, to discuss the club's future. The first gathering was only for shareholders, and they were told about the club's financial crisis.

At the second meeting, open to all, the money problems were again a main topic, and a Voluntary Committee was created to raise £1,000 for the club. In the audience for the second meeting was the London property magnate and Fulham chairman Henry Norris.

On 19 February, Woolwich Arsenal played Fulham in a friendly. Only about 2,000 fans turned up to the match, and the club's league gates stayed low, adding to the financial woes. It looked as if Woolwich Arsenal would go the way of many other football clubs – out of business. Players still joined, though.

On 4 March, the amateur George Grant signed for Woolwich Arsenal from Invicta FC. Turning professional, he played for Woolwich Arsenal, The Arsenal and Arsenal.

On 18 March, again at Woolwich Town Hall, a meeting was held to discuss possible voluntary liquidation and the creation of a new

Arsenal Greatest Games

company to keep a football team in the area. Norris was not there, but his right-hand man, William Hall, was.

Woolwich Arsenal were so short of money that they were unable to pay the players, and by that stage of the season they had only nine games to bring in enough cash to tide them over the close season (May to August).

Fortunately, the club's creditors were not demanding immediate payment and a local tailor, George Leavey, had stepped in on several occasions to pay the players' wages. By 1910, he was owed £3,600 (£410,000 at 2018 values).

At the meeting, someone (it is not known who) suggested that perhaps the solution was for Woolwich Arsenal to move to another ground. The club had debts of around £12,500 (£1.4 million at 2018 values).

On 20 March that year, Dr John Clarke, the head of the Voluntary Committee, began traipsing around Plumstead's pubs trying to sell shares in the new club for £1 each. Three days later, Spurs made an offer to buy all or part of Woolwich Arsenal. Glasgow Rangers did invest in Woolwich Arsenal and held the investment until forced to sell it in 2011, when they faced their own financial problems.

The following month, rumours began circulating that Henry Norris had established a firm interest in the club and was considering a merger with Fulham. It should be pointed out that Fulham would not be buying Woolwich Arsenal – the south-west London club had its own problems and lost £722 that financial year.

The Voluntary Committee did not manage to sell £2,000 worth of shares, managing only £1,200, so, on 25 April – two days after the end of the season – The Woolwich Arsenal Football and Athletic Company Limited was wound up. The following day, a new company with the same name was set up (which continues to this day after various name changes).

George Leavey, in a newspaper interview on 11 May, begged for help, as he was still personally responsible for the club's debts and faced financial ruin. With approaches to Chelsea and Spurs in the offing, Henry Norris was waiting on the sidelines, warming up.

A week later, a meeting was held at the Imperial Hotel in London to discuss the future of Woolwich Arsenal and a possible merger with Fulham. George Leavey was present for Woolwich Arsenal, and J.J. Bentley, Charles Sutcliffe and T. Harris were there on behalf of the

Woolwich Arsenal 2 Newcastle United 2

Football League Management Committee, but it is not known who attended for the Cottagers.

The Football League Management Committee immediately ruled out a merger between the two clubs. At Leavey's suggestion, three directors of Fulham joined the Woolwich Arsenal board, but only for a 12-month period. The Fulham directors would have a year to turn the club around, and guaranteed to keep the club in Plumstead for that duration. A new director on the Woolwich Arsenal board was Henry Norris. Not long after, Norris increased the time the club would guarantee to stay at Plumstead from one year to two.

On 8 June, he sat down with the club's secretary-manager, George Morrell, to assure him that his job was safe. One of the major problems for Woolwich Arsenal was diminishing attendances. A hard-core group of fans – known as the Torpedo Boys – stopped attending when the torpedo factory where they worked was closed and moved to Greenock in Scotland.

A week after Norris had assured Morrell his job was safe, there was more bad news when it was announced that more men would be made redundant as the need for materiel decreased after the end of hostilities in the Boer War.

On 9 July 1910, Woolwich Arsenal signed Willis Rippon, a promising centre-forward, who scored on his debut against Manchester United but then quickly faded and was sold in October 1911. That same week, Arsenal hired George Hardy as the first-team trainer – he stayed much longer than Rippon and was still with the club in 1927.

On 2 February 1927, Arsenal played Port Vale in an FA Cup fourth round replay. According to Tom Whittaker, 'Arsenal were pressing hard, but things were not going just right, and old George Hardy's eyes spotted something he felt could be corrected to help the attack. During the next lull in the game he hopped to the touchline, and cupping his hands, yelled out that one of the forwards was to play a little farther up field.'

Manager Herbert Chapman was furious at what he saw as the usurpation of his power and sent his trainer to the dressing room. After the match, which Arsenal won 1–0, Chapman sacked Hardy for gross insubordination, and he appointed Whittaker the following Monday, 7 February. The same month, Hardy became a first-team coach at Spurs.

Back to 1910, and on 13 July, The Woolwich Arsenal Football and Athletic Company Limited published its accounts, showing that it was £700 in debt, due to paying the players' wages in the close season.

Arsenal Greatest Games

Twelve days later, and two days after Norris's 45th birthday, he formally took over Arsenal in a meeting at the Mortar Hotel, Woolwich. It seems likely that only 20 or so people attended the meeting, at which George Leavey was appointed chairman and solicitor Arthur Gilbert became company secretary. Norris and his business partner William Hall loaned the new company £369 19s 4d (£42,500 at 2018 values), probably to pay the players' wages as they returned for training.

Norris also invited Jack Humble, an occasional early player, to return to the club. In 1891, he had come up with the idea of paying players, and in June 1893 he became the first chairman of Woolwich Arsenal. He retired from the board in 1907, but when Norris called, Humble answered.

Norris and Hall began to restructure the club and took out a loan – repayable over 15 years and at considerable personal risk – to pay off the second mortgage and bank overdraft. George Allison, in his autobiography, wrote that Henry Norris was 'one of the most far seeing men I have ever known. It was he alone who saw the possibility of taking the Woolwich Arsenal club, with all the attractions it could have, away from the obscurity and inaccessibility of Plumstead and putting it somewhere in the heart of London where it would have a chance of receiving better support.'

Norris was a man of foresight, not to mention deviousness, and he realised that Woolwich Arsenal could not flourish in Woolwich – they had just £19 in the bank. Sites in Battersea and Harringay were found and discarded before the club moved to north London and a new home at Highbury.

Woolwich Arsenal played their last match at the Manor Ground on Saturday 26 April 1913, a 1–1 draw against Middlesbrough watched by just 3,000 people. Once the venue was no longer home to football, the ground became derelict. It was later demolished and the land redeveloped. Today, it is an industrial estate once more. The Manor Ground was on the land that is now Nathan Way, Griffin Manor Way and Hadden Road.