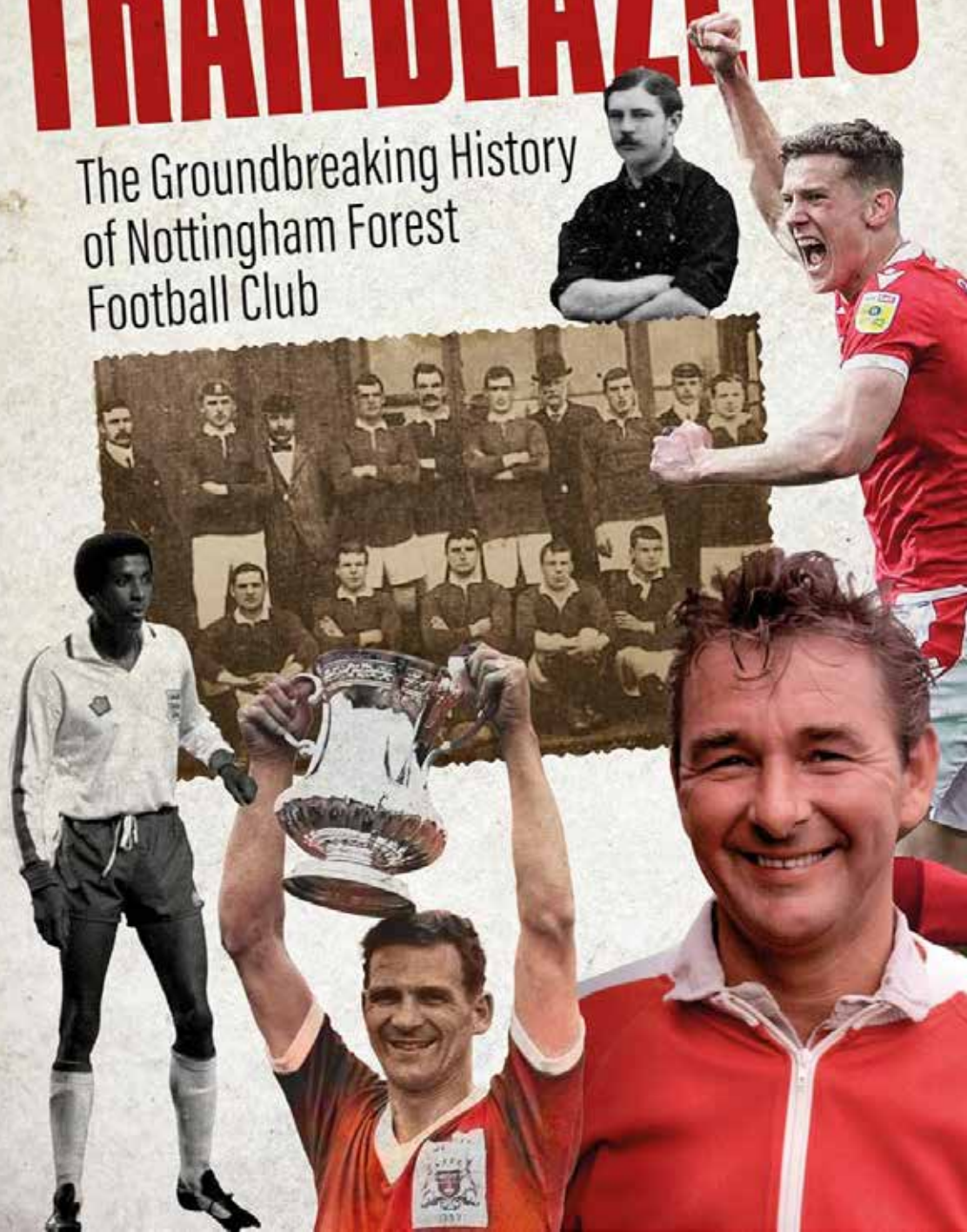


Matthew Oldroyd

TRAILBLAZERS

The Groundbreaking History
of Nottingham Forest
Football Club



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A Modern Encounter

IN 1865, a new 'Forest' began to take root in Nottingham. Fifteen individuals gathered at the Clinton Arms on Shakespeare Street to consider the proposal of Jason Shepherd Scrimshaw to form a new football club. The 15 had played a sport called shinney, a robust form of hockey, but favoured a switch to football. Their colours, it was agreed, would honour an Italian general named Giuseppe Garibaldi who had led his men into conflict dressed in red battledress. Nottingham became home to football's original reds, and this ensemble of talented sportsmen also shared the revolutionary tendencies of the man who inspired their new colour.

This new football club would take its name from the open space less than a mile north of the Clinton Arms that would function as a home ground for its future organised footballing activities. The Forest Recreation Ground was that place. It originally formed the most southern part of Sherwood Forest, an area known as 'The Lings'. The 1845 Nottingham Inclosure Act guaranteed areas for recreation around the town, 130 acres in total, which was a greater area than provided anywhere else in England. It took two decades for these areas to be fully established, but the Inclosure Act gifted space to the residents of Nottingham, protecting this land from

being owned or industrialised. 'It was in that momentous year of 1865 that substantially the ground plan of Nottingham was laid out after twenty years following that Act of Inclosure which had insisted on a generous allocation of land for public use in the form of the Arboretum and the Forest. Civic-minded pioneers through this Act fought the growing tide of bricks and mortar,' wrote Arthur Turner in the Nottingham Forest centenary book, *The Hundred Years Story of Nottingham Forest*, published in 1966.

It is fitting that it was these 'pioneers' who cleared the way for a club that would become football's groundbreakers. Nottingham Forest Football Club, as they would become known, found their home on the 'Forest Rec'. This green space just outside of the town of Nottingham (city status was not granted until 1897) already held a sporting heritage. It was the venue for the Nottingham Racecourse from 1773 until the early 1890s and hosted cricket matches each summer, while also providing a venue for various other sport and leisure pursuits including shinney and football. The Inclosure Act protected these sporting pursuits, which was of huge importance to the newly founded Nottingham Forest.

Early in 1866 the local press was used as an early method of inviting players along to the Forest Recreation Ground to join in with football games, presumably trials for the new Forest team, that would take place. A small advert, just below a larger one for pigeon shooting, appeared on page eight of the *Nottingham Journal* on 17 February 1866 and read, 'The Nottingham Forest Foot-Ball Club – Weather permitting, Ball kicked off every Saturday Afternoon at 2.30pm on the Forest Cricket Ground.'

It is often suggested that the club originally began as just the 'Forest Football Club' although in this advert from the earliest months of their existence, the full Nottingham Forest name was

being used. The message was signed at the bottom by one of the 15 founding members, Jonathan Milford, who labelled himself as honorary secretary. The formation date of Nottingham Forest has never been definitively agreed but the autumn seems feasible, given that it was only in early 1866 when they began to fully organise themselves. Another theory offered is a date earlier in 1865, possibly in the early summer, which does tie in with the idea that the club initially continued with their shinney activities for a short period after reorganising as a football team. It's also likely that the Forest Recreation Ground had played host to Forest's early footballers for some time, certainly with shinney sticks in hand, but perhaps as an unorganised football venture too.

Elsewhere in the town the Notts Football Club had been established sometime prior. They would later take the title of Notts County and proclaim themselves as the oldest professional club in the world. Notts mark their inception as being in 1862 although reports of the time point to the later stages of 1864 as being when they first appeared, at least officially. Indeed, a match report following a game against Sheffield FC, the world's oldest football club, in January 1865 specifically references that 'the Nottinghamshire club has only just been formed'. Another recollection supports this by suggesting that football was 'literally unknown' prior to 1864 in Nottingham. The answer possibly lies in Notts beginning casually for their first few years before organising themselves properly as a club later. In a similar manner, it seems feasible that 1866 was the year when Forest truly began to mobilise themselves as a competing football club.

The two Nottingham establishments were not entirely separate entities. Jason Scrimshaw was part of the early Notts movement as was Charles Daft, another of the Clinton Arms 15. In March

1866 when Notts again faced Sheffield the great Walter Lymbery, described as the 'grandfather' of Forest and another present at the Clinton Arms formation, lined up for the Nottingham team which points to the emergence of Nottingham Forest from Notts County's members. One theory for the branching off into a separate club was that Scrimshaw identified the obvious need for opposition to face Notts. Another possibility is that Scrimshaw himself did not hold the same upper-class status as his fellow Notts members and may have felt some discomfort at the Notts perception that football was a sport strictly for the highest portion of society. Social status would define the Notts and Forest rivalry for the early part of their coexistence.

While other football sides did exist in the area and continued to come to life, the limited number of opponents and the association between members of both Notts and Forest meant that an eventual meet was always likely, despite the concerns from some of Notts' team about facing the lower-class individuals of the Foresters. Forest's members included affluent businessmen and esteemed members of the Nottingham community, but they did not meet the same elite standing as the Notts men. This first encounter with Notts was also Forest's inaugural fixture and it took place on 22 March 1866. Differing sources point to Scrimshaw either turning out for Notts or taking on the role as umpire. This may have been because the numbers were heavily weighted in favour of Forest who had a team of 17 players against only 11 from Notts.

It was on the wide green expanse of the Forest Recreation Ground that the first modern football derby took place. The rivalry between Sheffield FC and Sheffield Hallam is an older local fixture but has remained a quarrel far down the league ladder at amateur level. The Nottingham derby can boast the status as the

oldest derby match in professional football. The many famous and passionate elite football conflicts across the world from Merseyside to Glasgow, Milan to Moscow and São Paulo to Buenos Aires all followed in the wake of two Nottingham clubs that stepped out together one early spring afternoon in 1866.

This encounter can also logically be pointed to as being the first football match between two future professional clubs, even if the sport remained a strictly amateur pursuit for many years to come. Other professional clubs across England have staked claims to be the oldest organisation behind Notts County but lack legitimacy. This first encounter between these Nottingham clubs was later described by Michael Slade in *The History Of the English Football League* as ‘the first hint of a game that the modern supporter might be able to identify with’, which supports the idea that this was the starting point for football as it’s known today. A report of the time noted, ‘The field looked exceedingly picturesque, with the orange and black stripes of the Notts, and the red and white of the Foresters.’ This was not, it should be said, two teams in full strip; the colours were mainly confined to headwear, with Forest sporting ‘Garibaldi Red’ tasselled hats. Notts, unlike Forest, had varied colours before settling on their ‘magpie’ combination. Forest began in red and have remained in the colour ever since, making their colours the most long-standing in the professional game. The exact location on the Forest Rec that the game took place isn’t clear, but it has been suggested that it would have likely been very close to the edge of the existing Nottingham tram car park.

The game was played under the ‘Nottingham Rules’ which was a combination of the London ‘Association Rules’ developed in 1863, the earlier ‘Sheffield Rules’ of 1858 and a dose of the ‘Rugby Rules’. Various towns and regions developed their own codes, and it was

many years until football aligned itself under the association rules. Prior to this nationwide uniformity, confusion often reigned as clubs from different regions faced each other not understanding or always converting to each other's way of playing the game. It was this bespoke Nottingham code that benefitted the new Garibaldi Reds in this game via the use of the 'rouge' which would be interpreted best as a touchdown.

The game remained scoreless until close to its end, but a breakthrough eventually arrived for Forest when 'a sort of steeplechase race' occurred due to the ball going out of bounds. The Nottingham rule book permitted players to pursue the ball which Revis of Forest and Browne of Notts did, bounding over the railings to win possession. Revis won the battle, and the rules enabled him to place the ball as a set piece. Revis struck the ball 'fifteen yards at right angles from the goal' and managed to steer it between the posts, a task made easier with the crossbar not yet having been introduced. Rugby's influence on the early Nottingham game is clear from this description.

A Nottingham derby encounter was born with the initial spoils to the younger Forest side. 'The pair quickly established a combative relationship and considerable local followings,' wrote David Goldblatt in *The Ball Is Round – A Global History of Football*, and a return fixture was swiftly arranged for the following month at the Meadows Cricket Ground on 19 April. This time it ended goalless, but the *Nottingham Journal* remarked that 'many splendid kicks were made by both sides' in this second Nottingham derby and, revealingly, listed Scrimshaw as being part of the Notts team.

Further fixtures naturally followed between Notts and Forest, but the frequency of these meetings was not as regular as might be anticipated. This could be attributed to the growth of football

and the increasing choice of varied opposition. Yet the class divide certainly played its part, fuelled by an irritation from the Notts County members who continued to feel that their Forest counterparts were below them, perhaps mixed with some sense of threat from their new rivals. A local journalist noted that Notts viewed themselves as the ‘superior persons who fancied they were people of importance’, while in contrast Forest were simply a ‘town club which would appeal more to the middle classes’. Within the earliest clubs the sport was seen as a gentrified activity and Forest were arguably the first to try to break free from that and open football up to a larger audience.

The socially driven values of Notts were the cause of encounters coming to a halt in February 1867 for nearly three years, referred to as ‘social climbing’ by the Notts team. ‘Forest, with their artisan background, did not fit into the “gentlemanly” pattern of clubs now being met,’ according to the Notts County book, *The Magpies*. It’s interesting to consider how Forest were of a different make-up to the typical background of the early football organisations and how this helped to push the game into the feet of the many, not a select few. In 1868 Forest broadened their limited fixture list to incorporate matches against Sheffield Norfolk, Newark and Sawley while the following season they arranged games with a variety of Derbyshire-based sides and the Nottingham Manufacturing club. Notts often chose to pursue matches largely with those who shared their socially elite tendencies, particularly with southern clubs and Sheffield FC. Sheffield have been accused of sharing Notts’ view of being dismissive of fellow clubs from their area and while they met Notts regularly there is no record of them facing Forest until drawn together in a cup tie in 1878. Forest were more readily inclusive and assisted the development of other teams in the Midlands and South

Yorkshire by agreeing to fixtures with them, thus broadening the appeal of the game further.

The class matter set in place a deep-rooted division in the Nottingham derby which spanned several years. This dislike was captured in the match report by the *Nottinghamshire Guardian* in 1878, 12 years after the first fixture between the two teams, 'A great deal of interest was felt in the result of the match as a certain amount of jealousy has existed for some time between the two clubs. "Notts. v. Forest," moreover is not found in the ordinary list of fixtures, as but for the accident of being drawn together in the cup ties they would have had no chance of trying conclusions with one another.'

A year prior to this game, Notts had again refused any further fixtures with Forest on account of the bitterness between them. There was therefore no little irony when in November 1878 the two met again having been drawn together in the FA Cup. This was Forest's first participation in the competition and the regionalised draw had paired them with their rivals. The *Nottinghamshire Guardian* further noted that, despite being the away team, the 'spectators were manifestly in favour of the Forest and their efforts were much more cheered than the Notts men'. While there is little evidence to support this, it's possible that Forest's approach to opening the game up to the lower classes had led to a greater volume of support from the Nottingham public. The tie was played at the enclosed Beeston Cricket Ground which allowed an entry fee to be charged. Some 500 supporters paid to witness the first competitive Nottingham derby and saw Forest secure a fine 3-1 victory. One reason behind Forest's perceived improvement was that they had recently been reinforced by the Notts Castle club ceasing their activities and many of their players had joined the Reds. It was

a performance of such quality that Forest drew plaudits for their superiority over their near neighbours.

This game did mark the beginning of a short spell of dominance in the fixture for Forest; the two sides met twice the following season, and the Reds recorded a 4-0 win in the cup and triumphed 7-1 in a friendly. This, however, was only the natural back and forth of a local derby and Notts certainly enjoyed their own periods of success in the fixture. Of greater significance was that there was a resumption of the matches between the Nottingham teams following 1878's cup tie; the fixture continuing each season without interruption into the next century from this point. This regular stream of matches should, however, not be interpreted as a full building of relations. In 1882 the *Nottingham Journal* felt moved to raise the subject of whether the fixture should continue as a regular exhibition due to the ill-feeling it provoked, 'It may be mentioned that in some quarters it is felt that this match should not be continued, as it certainly has no tendency to promote or foster those friendly feelings that should exist amongst our local players.'

A considerable milestone occurred in 1888 when Notts were accepted into the inaugural 12-team Football League. Forest had participated in the initial meetings to discuss and promote the notion of a competitive league structure, but their application was rejected. Various factors were thought to have counted against Forest, but it is likely that the new league did not favour admitting two clubs from the same town. Notts, arguably seen as the bigger of the two at the time, were successful and became founding members.

Forest's exclusion stirred up some resentment, with supporters of each club exchanging feisty correspondence in the pages of the *Nottingham Journal* in 1891 as talk again turned to the prospect of Forest joining the Football League. They sparred over the merits of

the Reds' claim and whether Nottingham could support two elite football establishments. One of the more rumbustious submissions remarked, 'It is evident by their arguments that the Notts supporters are so afraid of their club being extinguished that they would use any means to crush out of existence the Nottingham Forest Football Club.' Another accused Notts of sabotaging Forest's admission in order to protect their attendances which would, it was claimed, 'suffer' with two Nottingham sides in the Football League.

The raised tension across town led to one member of the local council drawing comparisons with the warring Montague and Capulet families that form the central conflict in Shakespeare's *Romeo & Juliet*. Wisely, it was also stated for the record by the same gentleman that he felt both clubs should represent Nottingham in the Football League. Forest were eventually admitted to the expanded Football League in 1892 and owing to their success in the equivalent Football Alliance, they joined Notts in the First Division. Nottingham, as a result, became the first town or city to have two of its teams in the top flight of English football, coming before the likes of Manchester, Sheffield, Liverpool, Birmingham, and London.

Fuelled by the often bitter rivalry, Nottingham earned a reputation as a thriving football patch. Back in 1883 the *Nottinghamshire Guardian* repeatedly, and undoubtedly with some degree of local bias, pushed the claims of Nottingham as a major footballing centre, noting, 'It would be difficult to find another town in England which at the present time possesses two such strong Association clubs.' This case was only strengthened when Notts, despite losing their First Division status for three years in 1893, secured the FA Cup in 1894 and this was followed by Forest claiming the trophy in 1898. In his book *50 Years of Football 1884–*

1934, the former FA secretary Frederick Wall suggested that at their 'zenith', a Nottingham team consisting of Forest and Notts players would likely have overcome any other town or city combination across the country.

The 1890s brought not only maiden silverware to Nottingham but also a relaxation of hostilities between Notts and Forest, in part aided by their respective triumphs. The *Nottingham Evening Post* toasted the success of the local football scene and suggested that its two major clubs were now on 'excellent terms'. The arrival of Henry Heath as chairman of Notts also cemented ties when he contacted his Forest equivalent, Tom Hancock, and suggested a more harmonious future. 'In the old days the rivalry between the two clubs was carried to absurd limits,' Heath acknowledged. 'The directors of the respective clubs would not speak to each other in the street and the players were almost at loggerheads, but happily that is all now in the past.'

A sign of the improved relationship was each club being represented at the other's FA Cup celebration reception. In 1894 one of the Forest members ceremoniously poured alcohol into the cup to signify their congratulations to their old rivals. In 1898 at the Forest offices in Maypole Yard, Henry Heath repeated this symbolic gesture and received a 'hearty reception'. Heath further expressed his desire that the strong relationship between Notts and Forest would 'long continue'. Other local hostilities were continuing to emerge across English football, but there was no other that had the intricacies and the unique flavour of the Nottingham derby.

The improved relations did not, it should be stressed, eradicate the sharp edges that had defined the fixture on the field since its beginnings in 1866. Nottingham's 'derby day' was still one to savour and with each side being lodged in the First Division as the new

century warmed up, there was still reason to point to this meeting as one of those most anticipated in the country. In 1899, ahead of the final meeting of the 19th century, it was suggested these games 'evoke a flutter of feverish excitement such as no other event in the whole local calendar from January to December is capable of conjuring up'. The fascination with the game across Nottingham was said to be 'probably unequalled anywhere in the football world'. This could be derided as hype from a local newspaper but a couple of years on the Manchester-based *Athletic News* dedicated a considerable part of its front page to a 1901 victory for Notts, and reminded its readers that this was 'the oldest fixture in the calendar', which does help to demonstrate the esteem in which this rivalry was held even outside of Nottingham. This reputation, however, would not last.

Despite strong placings early in the new century with Notts finishing third in the First Division in 1900/01 and Forest only one position further back, other clubs, often much newer organisations, began to reel in the pair. Notts and Forest both struggled to do anything greater than stand still and their league positions eventually began to deteriorate. In 1905 both clubs began the new year in a worrying situation in the table and Forest in particular were beset by financial troubles. Far removed from the intense dislike of the past, word now began to spread of a possible merger between the two in January, possibly linked to the appearance in multiple local newspapers of a letter that claimed an amalgamation was already a much-discussed topic. 'Every season that passes shows the clubs going from bad to worse, and conclusively proves that there is not room for both of them,' the letter said. 'Neither committee, even after the best of seasons, is strong enough financially to procure good men to form a first-class team, simply because support is divided between the two.'

There was some logic in the argument. Crowds at the City Ground during the 1904/05 season averaged under 10,000 and Notts attracted an average of just over 8,000. Elsewhere in the First Division several clubs were surpassing these numbers by some margin; the likes of Newcastle United, Woolwich Arsenal, Aston Villa, and Sunderland were all close to or in excess of 20,000. This provided some incentive to pool resources and support and create one single Nottingham club. Such a notion, however, did not address the respective history of each club and the emotions of supporters who would not take kindly to their club forming together with their city – Nottingham's status had been upgraded in 1897 – rivals.

The response from the *Nottingham Journal* poured scorn on the suggestion of a coming together. They accused any amalgamation as 'cowardly' and balked at the 'monstrous' scenario of only having a football match in Nottingham every other Saturday. 'There is plenty of room for both if they would only get the right class of players and attract rather than smother support,' the editorial concluded. The matter did gather some pace, however, when the *Football News* revealed it had been approached by a 'gentlemen occupying an influential position in the football world in Nottingham' to generate ideas on how to safeguard the clubs. Tellingly, it was raised that there may have been some discussions between Forest and Notts unofficially and readers were then asked, 'How does amalgamation strike them as possible or a possible solution of a difficulty that may arise?'

The story found its way into the national newspapers early the following week but only to confirm that, according to Forest's secretary Harry Hallam, this was a story without 'the slightest foundation'. Hallam's comment ended the speculation on this

occasion, but this was a debate that had had a habit of rearing its head ever since the earliest years of the rivalry. In 1881 a suggestion was made for a united 'Nottingham Borough Football Club' to rise from the two organisations, while this call was repeated a decade later in 1891 with 'an admirer of both clubs' insisting that they should 'dispense with the intense rivalry' and join forces. At one point around this time, the clubs did reach agreement on a coming together, according to the former Forest player Ernest Jardine, but this was dashed at the last moment by Notts.

Another time when a merger came close to occurring was in 1932 when the Notts County chairman, Lord Belper, announced that he was in negotiations with his counterparts on the Forest side about uniting as one club. Belper's statement received national coverage and came after a campaign that saw Nottingham's clubs entrenched in the Second Division having both been out of the top flight for several years. 'Nottingham will never get back to its old position in the football world so long as it maintains two mediocre teams and hundreds of people are driven to Leicester and Derby to see first-class football,' Belper argued. 'People say that the traditions of the two clubs are too great to be sacrificed, but we must consider the future. This cut-throat competition will get us nowhere.'

Belper also advised that the proposed name of the new club would simply be 'Nottingham' and that the current gates of each club at around 11,000 to 12,000 were not sustainable. The 'fusion' discussion bounced around over the summer and was inevitably a major talking point at the Forest AGM held in July. Harry Cobbin, the Forest chairman, noted the amalgamation proposal from the Notts directors and said that the issue would be resurrected at the start of the following year. Acknowledging the numerous dissenters on both sides to the possibility, Cobbin said, 'I would like to say

that the surest way to prevent amalgamation if sure is your desire, is for much better support to be given to both clubs.' A cartoon featured in that summer's *Football Post Guide* reflected the feelings of supporters by depicting the Magpie and Jolly Forester characters looking angered by the news. The intimidating pair were shown carrying weapons with the tag line underneath of, 'Where's the man who said amalgamate?' A terrified man could be seen in the background of the illustration in hiding from the two figures.

To the relief of many the matter failed to gather momentum, and it quietly disappeared from view. A brief comment in the *Nottingham Journal* months later in February 1933 stated that the merger plans 'for the present – and, we think, for all time have been shelved'. The merger talk never fully disappeared, occasionally being raised from time to time, but after the initial years of the rivalry were dominated by the jealous one-upmanship, the 20th century was often more about coexistence. One symbolic example of this came in September 1909 when the Nottingham derby witnessed what is perhaps another unique element of the fixture. In a First Division match at the City Ground the goalkeepers for each side were brothers. James Iremonger was between the posts for Forest and at the other end was Albert Iremonger. Forest's Iremonger, best known as Jim, was not a goalkeeper by trade but was covering the absence of Harry Linacre. Jim conceded one fewer than his brother in a 2-1 victory for Forest. The following year the oldest rivals also became the closest, geographically speaking, when years of temporary homes for Notts ended with them relocating to a new location across the river at Meadow Lane. It was Forest who were the first opponents at the new ground, a First Division fixture that ended 1-1 in front of 27,000 spectators. To this day no two league teams in England have their home stadiums closer

together; only the Dundee clubs can claim to be closer across the British Isles.

In 1912 Meadow Lane was chosen to stage an FA Cup semi-final, a replay between Barnsley and Swindon Town, to become the fourth separate Nottingham venue to host a game at this stage of the competition. In 1899 Nottingham had become the first town or city in the country to host three semi-finals at different venues when the City Ground was selected, following matches at Trent Bridge and Forest's Town Ground previously. To the present day only London and Manchester have provided more individual stadiums than Nottingham to hold FA Cup semi-finals.

Beyond the tribalism and the posturing of the earliest stages, dotted regularly throughout their history are various examples of Forest and Notts being a very different type of rivalry. This has likely been possible due to the relatively sporadic league meetings that have occurred since 1900; not including the wartime regionalised leagues there are only 38 instances of both clubs being in the same division up until 2024, but frequently they have each found support from their neighbours across the River Trent. While there are plenty of instances of a more typical rivalry (Notts centre-half Dave McVay once called Forest 'the evil slime'), both clubs have lent the other assistance in times of need. They have come together numerous times for good causes, such as in 1914 when playing resources were pooled to take on a Football League XI for a testimonial match. 'Whilst people talk of differences of opinion and antagonistic feelings between the two clubs,' Forest's chairman William Hancock said after the game, 'that feeling does not exist except among the more rabid supporters.'

There are numerous further examples of how Nottingham's two clubs created a unique relationship. In 1935 Notts expressed

their gratitude for a hefty donation from the Reds during a period of financial uncertainty and Forest played six games on the other side of the Trent in 1968 after the Main Stand at the City Ground burned down. In 1975 Notts even requested to advertise their home fixtures in the Forest matchday programme. Their reasoning was that each club did not contest with the other due to not playing at home on the same day, but Forest declined, pointing out that they still aimed to attract fans to reserve matches played on a Saturday while the first team was away. Notts secretary Dennis Marshall was disappointed, arguing, 'Forest would not lose a single spectator. We were trying to encourage people from one club to visit the other.'

The suggestion alone of such an initiative is a further example of how the rivalry had evolved into something that occasionally came close to a partnership. There were certainly signs of a friendly relationship during the tenures of Brian Clough and Jimmy Sirrel in the 1980s, one that was commemorated by the unveiling of a mural of the two managers in Nottingham in 2023. When Notts made it to Wembley in 1990, manager Neil Warnock publicly thanked Forest supporters who turned out in support, highlighting how a tradition of fans following both sides had continued through the years. At Meadow Lane in August 1991 the two sides met for a top-flight game, a fixture that the *Nottingham Evening Post* claimed cemented Nottingham's place as a 'super sporting city'. Brian Clough was warmly applauded by the home fans before the game and invited a young Notts supporter to join him in the away dugout. There was still tension and dislike, but there was no rivalry that shared the same values as this one. In the post-millennium era too the various loan transactions have been beneficial to both clubs and a striking moment between the two came in October 2003 in a 'United for Notts' exhibition game that contained several former

players on each side. A healthy crowd from both clubs turned out at Meadow Lane in a bid to help raise funds for Notts, who were facing financial ruin and expulsion from the Football League. Forest striker David Johnson personally donated £500 to the appeal.

It's hard to imagine many other local clubs having such a relationship, even if these instances of cooperation do not prevent a state of rivalry existing between supporters. Varying league positions have dampened the modern version of the rivalry, but feelings of resentment still occasionally surface. There has been some minor disorder at times too, notably following a pre-season friendly in 2007 which Notts chairman Jeff Moore described as an 'absolute disgrace' when supporters fought on the pitch after the game. Yet the fixture is better encapsulated by an encounter between the two sides in August 2011, the first competitive game for over 17 years, when they were drawn together at the City Ground in the League Cup.

The game was in jeopardy due to riots that had unfolded across the country following the death of a man in London which was blamed on the police. There were fears that the local force could not cope with quelling disturbances on the streets and a major sporting event at the same time. The match was eventually given the go-ahead with supporters asked to 'display a united front' by Nottinghamshire Police. Various other games across the country which could have been perceived as lower risk were postponed. On the pitch it was a memorable night with Forest eventually winning on penalties after a very late Wes Morgan equaliser, but the Nottingham derby stood out again for how both sets of supporters understood and respected the demands on the authorities. No officers were present in the ground as would usually be expected and not a single arrest was made related to football that evening.

That same night Nottingham was engulfed by social unrest which saw 91 arrests and included a firebombing of Canning Circus police station, but Superintendent Mark Holland described the 22,000 in attendance as a 'credit to the city of Nottingham and county of Nottinghamshire'.

A football derby that once sizzled with fierce dislike has softened into something very different. The Forest and Notts rivalry, the oldest in the professional game and noted as the starting point of modern football, is a unique institution. While it holds little relevance today inside or outside of Nottinghamshire due to the sporadic meetings between the two, this fixture was the very first of its kind and highlighted the wonderful intensity and drama that local rivalries bring to football. Its early class-divide matter and Shakespearian squabbles sent the two clubs in different directions which added value and development to the sport. Forest, in particular embracing a wider scope of teams regardless of their social status, helped to inspire and placed the game at the feet of the lower classes.

For a time, these two clubs soared, putting Nottingham at the forefront of the game. Their relationship has experienced total separation but also very close cooperation. There is not another rivalry quite like it anywhere and football in a modern sense can trace its rise back to a day in March 1866 when Notts and Forest met for the first time on the Forest Recreation Ground. Given the contribution of Nottingham's clubs it was apt that in 2014 Sport England announced that the city would lead a new campaign to use football to drive community regeneration and wellbeing.

To signify this Nottingham was awarded a new title: the inaugural City of Football.