

The current Chesterfield FC dates from April 1919 and was formed as the Chesterfield Municipal FC. It is the fourth club to carry the town's name, and it is possible to trace a line of ancestry from one to the other through various common players and administrators.

The first mention of a Chesterfield FC can be found in a Derbyshire Times for January 2nd, 1864. It is here:

ceased.
We understand that the Chesterfield and
and Norton football clubs will play a game on
the turnpike en route from Sheffield to Chester-
field.
When This Music Hall Will

No record of the game taking place can be found, nor is there any other reference to a Chesterfield FC for another three years. If it took place at all, this may have been a game between two teams of steeplechasers that were running on the same day between Sheffield and Chesterfield.

Although there is a widely held belief that the first Chesterfield club was formed in 1866, no contemporary documentary evidence has been found to substantiate a claim for formation earlier than October 19th., 1867. This evidence is an advertisement that appeared in two local newspapers on that date, saying that the local cricket club intended opening a football club, and advertising for players. Here is that advertisement:

CHESTERFIELD CRICKET CLUB.

THE Committee have great pleasure in inform-
ing their Friends that, during the winter
months they intend opening, in connexion with
the above,

A FOOTBALL CLUB.

SUBSCRIPTIONS.

To Members of the Chesterfield Cricket Club	1s 0d
To Non-members	2s 6d

Parties wishing to join will please give their
names to either of the undersigned.

**JNO. MARSDEN, } Hon. Secs.
W. WARMSLEY, }**

The club did not play a match against another side until February 1868. A report of the game in the Sheffield Daily Telegraph (20/2/1868) reads thus:

*"Yesterday, teams from the Chesterfield and Garrick (Sheffield) football clubs contested for superiority in the Recreation Ground, Chesterfield, and after some spirited play the Garrick gentlemen were returned the victors. **Considering that the Chesterfield club has only been in existence a few months, they played with remarkable skill and pluck.**"*

The part in bold is unambiguous. The Derbyshire Times report of the match, below, offers one or two clues to the formation question, calling the club a "new" club and saying that the match was a novelty for Chesterfield, although it does go on to say that the game was the first the town had seen for some time - suggesting that there had been others, albeit not in the recent past. Here is the report:

26, at Dore—each day at ten.

FOOT BALL.—A novelty for Chesterfield—a foot ball match—was played in the Recreation Ground on Wednesday afternoon, the first of its class we have known for a considerable time. Some months ago a well organised committee was formed for the purpose of getting together a foot ball club, and we are glad to say, so far, it has been successful. The match on Wednesday was between the Garrick (Sheffield) Club and Chesterfield. After some exciting play the former were declared the victors. This might have been expected at the start, as the Garrick Club has been formed several years, and numbers amongst its members several expert players. Considering that the club at Chesterfield is only in its infancy, the members acquitted themselves very creditably. Such recreation for the young men of the town is well worthy of encouragement, and we trust the club will be liberally supported, and the committee be enabled to secure a prominent site for their operations. At the conclusion of the match, the players and friends adjourned to the Angel Inn, where they sat down to a first-class supper. After the cloth was removed, Jno. Cuth, Esq., was called to the chair, and a pleasant evening was spent.

FISHING.—DERBYSHIRE WYE AND DERWENT—

So, where does "1866" come from? The first reference I have seen to an 1866 formation came in the 1905 Book of Football, in an article which was written by George Oram, a club director, and which contained various factual errors.

Long before desktop publishing came along with its "copy and paste" commands, Oram's work was copied down the years to form the basis of every subsequent article about the club, right up to programme articles in the 1990s. The "Book of Football" article is dealt with [here](#). Could Oram have got it wrong? He was writing forty years after the event, and we can't say if any contemporary evidence - minute books, and the like - survived to help him. Where Charles Alcock's football annuals,

published from 1868, mention Chesterfield, they have 1866 as a formation date, so he may have been influenced by these.

Twenty years after the landmark Anglo-Scottish Cup win over Rangers, I was stopped outside the Rec' by a fan who insisted that I'd got that game's goal scorers wrong in "The Definitive Chesterfield FC." I hadn't, but it shows that memories are sometimes an unreliable basis for the assertion of fact.

This first club folded in 1881, largely through lack of interest in anyone taking charge of its small debt. A knot of its players sought to re-establish the side as "Chesterfield United," and this side may have played on into the 1890s, although mention of it after its inaugural season (1881-2) is very hard to find. The attraction of the more successful Spital club, who operated on a field near Horns Bridge, drew Chesterfield players away, and those who did not pledge allegiance to one side or the other dissolved into a growing pool of local clubs.

The second Chesterfield FC appeared in 1884: there is a story that the Spital club simply changed its name to Chesterfield FC and moved up to occupy the Rec but, since the Spital club continued playing after 1884 this must be discounted, although it is fair to say that several players from Spital formed part of the first playing staff of the new club, with the others being identified mostly as former Chesterfield FC players. This club became known as the Chesterfield Town FC sometime around the late 1880s, but a proper, legal name-change waited until the club became a limited company in 1899. This is the Chesterfield Town club that competed in the Football League between 1899 and 1909.

The Chesterfield Town FC (1899) Ltd was put into voluntary liquidation in 1915, and another Chesterfield Town FC was formed immediately, to play under the peculiar conditions of domestic wartime football. Run as a one-man band by its founder and chairman, a Mr CW Everest, this club became extinct after an FA enquiry banned all its players, management and its chairman in 1917, in the wake of an illegal payments scandal.

This left a vacuum that the Chesterfield Borough Council filled by the formation of the Chesterfield Municipal FC on April 24th, 1919. The game's authorities would not contemplate a municipal framework for football, though, and the club was forced to become independent of the council, which it did in December 1920, and changed its name to Chesterfield FC. That Chesterfield FC is the one that we watch today.

To recap, then, we have four Chesterfield Football Clubs:

Chesterfield FC: 1867 to 1881 (Re-forming as Chesterfield United in 1881.)

Chesterfield FC (later, Chesterfield Town FC): 1884 to 1915.

Chesterfield Town FC: 1915-1917

Chesterfield Municipal FC (later, Chesterfield FC): 1919 to date

Strictly speaking, the 1919 club went into administration in 2001 and was replaced by another company. In keeping with recent form, though (Middlesbrough, Bristol City and many more), this was not regarded as a change of club, as such. Why not consider all the clubs as one, then? In a sense you could, and it is fun to look upon

the whole thing as a big "family tree" of local football, but you'd have to ignore whole seasons that passed without a Chesterfield FC, and clear breaks in administrative continuance to do so.

What should you believe, then, when it comes to the club's formation? Well, that's up to you, really; having studied it, I can't put a lot of faith in Oram's version, although Alcock offers some more contemporary support. For me, the thing is this: while it's nice to be descended from the fourth oldest club in the league (or third oldest, if you listen to those who query Stoke's history,) I think it would be an absolutely cracking boast to say we were the first (and so far, only) municipal club in senior British football. In our rush to be old, we might be overlooking something far more significant!

Stuart Basson, 2026