

Merstham FC: History of the Club

In the early years, Merstham FC began life playing on a pitch at the old Merstham Lime Works which was accessed via Jolliffe Road. In 1897 the club were founder members of the Redhill & District League and playing in Division Two along with our old friends Whyteleafe. In the early 1920s the club moved to its present location in Albury Road. The club's first major success was winning the league in 1927. In 1930, the East Surrey Junior Cup was added to the trophy cabinet. In 1935 and 1936, Merstham won the Redhill League Premier Division in consecutive years, a record later repeated in 1950 and 1951. In 1951, the club applied for intermediate status and accepted into the Eastern Section of the Surrey Intermediate League for the 1952/53 season. The move to the new league could hardly have got off to a better start, as the club claimed the title at their first attempt.

There was progress off the field too. In 1960, the changing room and tea-room were built, and training lights erected. Merstham continued to play in the Surrey Intermediate League until they gained senior status in 1964 and joined the Surrey Senior League. In fourteen years in the Surrey Senior League, Merstham managed to win the title just once in 1971/72. In 1974 a small stand was built with a modest capacity of 90. In 1978 the club joined the London Spartan League and finished a creditable third in their first two seasons. Those two seasons proved to be amongst the club's best as they also claimed the Surrey Senior Charity Cup and the London Spartan League Challenge Cup in the first season, adding the East Surrey Charities Cup the following year.

By the 1984/85 season Merstham had decided that the travelling involved in the Spartan League was too much and they joined the Combined Counties League. That season also saw the completion of the new clubhouse. Merstham were runners-up in the Combined Counties League in the 1987/88 season and the following year reached the 4th round of the FA Vase before losing to Billericay Town at home 2-3 after throwing away a 2-0 lead. They also won the Dan Air Class Elite Cup beating local rivals Chipstead 2-1 aet. This came as some consolation as Chipstead had piped Merstham to the league title by a point.

The 1990/91 season saw the erection of floodlights and an official 'Floodlight Opener' against Crystal Palace, whose side included future England Manager, Gareth Southgate. Merstham's defence of the League Cup saw them again reach the final, but Frimley Green defeated a tired Merstham side 1-0, after extra time, in a replay. The next few seasons saw Merstham generally settle for mid-table anonymity. The 1995/96 season brought some success to Merstham, finishing fourth in the League, but it was the reserves that won silverware by beating Godalming in the Reserve League Challenge Cup. The FA Cup of 1996/97 saw Merstham's biggest home defeat when they crashed out in the First Qualifying Round, 1-8 to Aldershot Town.

The 2000/01 season was Merstham's most successful for nearly a decade. They reached the Second Qualifying Round of the FA Cup and finished eighth in the league after being in the top six for most of the season. The 2002/03 season brought AFC Wimbledon into the league and their visit to Merstham attracted 1,582 fans, then the club's record attendance. Unfortunately, the visitors won 2-0. A successful application to the FA Stadia Fund enabled the club to build the new changing rooms and a perimeter fence. Silverware returned to Merstham in the 2004/05 season when they beat AFC Guildford 3-0 in the final of the Premier Challenge Cup and won the East Surrey Hospitals Charity Cup (ESHCC) with a victory over local rivals Redhill. 2005/06 was an excellent season, but with nothing to show for it; beaten finalists in the Premier Challenge Cup and ESHCC and runners up in the Combined Counties Premier Division. More disappointment followed when the club was denied promotion to the Isthmian League because their stand was delivered two weeks late. For the 2006/07 season manager, Mick Sullivan, along with assistants Micky Stratford and Rhys Williams built a team which surpassed expectations as the club enjoyed their best season for 20 years, finishing second in the league and winning the Premier Challenge Cup by beating North Greenford Utd 4-1 in a hard-fought final. In the league they notched up a fantastic 100 goals, nearly a quarter of which were scored by striker Kwabena Agyei. The Southern Combination Cup was shared between Merstham and Staines Lammas when a fixture date for the final could not be agreed. The final of the ESHCC against Redhill was delayed until the start of the 2007/08 season when Merstham won 3-2. Many thought Merstham had peaked, but the 2007/08 season, Mick Sullivan's seventh year in charge, brought the Club into a new era with a treble winning side, a fantastic run in the FA Vase and promotion to the Isthmian League South Division as they finally finished top of the league after two seasons as runners up. After losing on the opening day of the season at Cove, Merstham went undefeated in the league for the rest of the season winning 35 times, gaining 111 points and scoring 114 goals

with Kevin Lock and Kwabena Agyei scoring 53 between them. The dream of a Wembley final in the FA Vase vanished in the Quarter Final when they lost at home to Needham Market 2-3 in extra time in front of a crowd of 841. Merstham successfully defended the Premier Challenge Cup beating Bedfont Green 4-2 in the final. In the Surrey Senior Cup final against Isthmian League side Whyteleafe, the Moatsiders won 3-2 in extra time after twice being behind. With promotion to the Isthmian League South officially confirmed in May 2008, Merstham left behind them many friends after 24 seasons in the Combined Counties League.

The 2008/09 was Merstham's first season in the Isthmian South and many thought that the team would struggle at that level. Happy to disappoint the pessimists, Merstham had a good season finishing eighth, narrowly missing out the play-offs. Their defence of their Surrey Senior Cup title was ended by Woking in the semi-final. Merstham Ladies also had a great season winning their League and League Cup and finishing runners up in the La Senza Ladies Cup. However, in May manager Mick Sullivan announced that, after eight seasons at the helm, he was leaving the club for local rivals Leatherhead. Former Banstead boss Graeme Banyard was appointed as the new manager.

Merstham's second season in the Isthmian League went the way of many promoted sides who had found it far more difficult than their first. Banyard found himself in a difficult situation as a number of the previous season's team had joined Sullivan at Leatherhead. Only skipper Craig Vernon, winger David Smith and veteran goalkeeper Ian Chatfield stayed at the Moatside. Many new players came and went as Merstham's form took a turn for the worse, though the team eventually finished in a comfortable mid-table position. The 2010/11 season will be remembered for the resignation of Graeme Banyard. Andy Martin took over as Caretaker Manager as Merstham slid towards the relegation zone. Martin managed to keep the side up and was duly appointed manager for the 2011/12 season. But after just twenty games in charge, Martin left and Antony Williams and Rob Smith took over as caretaker managers. In January 2012, the Board announced that former Bromley manager Hayden Bird would take up the post with immediate effect. Bird rang the changes, bringing in several new players and Merstham finished a creditable ninth.

The 2012/13 was Bird's first full season in charge and it didn't quite live up to expectations with Merstham finishing 12th and without a noticeable run in any cup completion. Bird again rang the changes for the 2013/14 season bringing in more experienced players and Merstham attained their highest place in the club's history, finishing seventh with their highest tally of points and goals since gaining promotion to the Isthmian League. It was a proverbial season of two halves for the Moatsiders. At Christmas Merstham were languishing in 18th place with just 25 points from 21 games, however, with the return of Fabio Saraiva, Merstham went on an unbeaten run, just missing out on the play-offs. Tommy Hutchings deservedly won the Players and Supporters 'Player of the Season' awards.

The 2014/15 season was to be the best in the club's history to date, gaining promotion to the Isthmian Premier Division by winning the play-offs in style and finishing runners up in the Surrey Senior Cup. Merstham's fourth place finish with 93 points and 107 goals put them into the play-offs. The play off semi-final went to penalties, which Merstham won 5-4 thanks to keeper Brannon Daly making a match-winning save. In front of a crowd of 1465, Merstham gained promotion at Folkestone beating the home side 3-0 with goals from Taurean Roberts, Tutu Henriques and skipper Fabio Saraiva. Just four days later, a tired-looking Merstham lost 2-0 in the final of the Surrey Senior Cup to Met Police. The 2015/16 season was to be yet another record-breaking season for Merstham attaining their highest position in the 'Football Pyramid' finishing a very creditable tenth in their first season in The Isthmian Premier League. This was in part due to 20 goals from Charlie Penny and 14 from Fabio Saraiva who were both signed by Woking after dumping the National League side out in the semis of the Surrey Senior Cup. The final was very one-sided, as Godalming Town were thumped 4-1.

In Merstham's second season in the Isthmian Premier, the Moatsiders reached the First Round Proper of the FA Cup for the first time in their history. They achieved this with some of the finest football ever seen at the Moatside; They beat East Preston (4-1), Colliers Wood Utd (2-1 in a replay), Thamesmead Town (5-1) and Ebbsfleet Utd (2-1) on the way to a meeting with League One side Oxford United. The loss of skipper Fabio Saraiva and Charlie Penny in the close season to Woking was a blow, but Hayden Bird was determined to build on the success of the previous season. Penny did return to the Moatside after not getting regular football at Woking and scored twice in his first game back. However, an injury during the FA Cup game against Ebbsfleet United kept him out for the rest of the season. The obvious highlight of the season was the Oxford United

game which saw a record-breaking crowd of 1,920 at the Moatside. Although Merstham lost 5-0, the scoreline somewhat flattered the League One side. After the euphoria of the cup run, Merstham's season spiralled downward and the club narrowly avoiding relegation on the last day of the season, which was not helped by the loss of three points for fielding an ineligible player.

During the close season Bird made wholesale changes to his squad. Assistant Manager Mick Sullivan, who left the club, was replaced by Merstham player/coach Tutu Henriques. The 2017/18 saw the club celebrate its 125th anniversary, finish 12th in the league and for the second time in four years, win the Surrey Senior Cup, beating Leatherhead 3-1. The 2018/19 was Merstham's best-ever season in the topflight. At Christmas, the side were flirting with relegation, but a superb run saw the Moatsiders put themselves in the hunt for the play offs. They finished the season needing to win away to Worthing to get into the play offs. Amazingly the visitors went 3-0 up inside the first ten minutes and held on for a 4-2 win. In the play-off semi-final, another tough away game at Carshalton saw the Moatsiders shock the Robins with a 2-1 win, which set up a play-off final away to Tonbridge Angels in front of a crowd of 2,400. It turned out to be a physical and rather dour encounter marred by a double sending off just before the interval with Merstham's Ollie Cook given his marching orders. Tonbridge scored on 34' and the Moatsiders rarely looked like getting back on terms. A penalty in added time was largely irrelevant as the Angels clinched the play-off spot with a 2-0 win. Shortly after the play-off final, Manager Hayden Bird decided that he had taken the club as far as he could and left to join Kingstonian, taking the entire first-team squad with him. Former Tooting and Mitcham boss Frank Wilson was appointed in June 2019 and had to build a brand-new squad from scratch, bringing in former Moatsiders Omar Folkes and Peter Wedgeworth.

No one could have predicted the impact of Covid-19 as the pandemic swept the world just as the 2019/20 season neared its conclusion. Wilson had endured a real baptism of fire as his new team struggled to maintain their Premier League status. As the pandemic surged throughout the UK, football was no longer a priority and when the season was finally curtailed, with all records being expunged, Merstham were fighting relegation and sat in 21st place, although with home games against relegation rivals to play, most were confident that the drop could be avoided. The 20/21 season lasted just 11 games before the surge in Covid cases brought the new season to an inevitable halt.

When football finally returned at the start of the 2021/22 season, the Moatsiders made a decent start in the league and progressed through two rounds of the FA Cup before losing at home to Hereford United. In the FA Trophy, Welwyn Garden City came to the Moatside and caused something of an upset by winning comfortably 3-0. In November, the team went through a purple patch of form with the front two of Korrey Henry and John Ufuah forming a lethal combination and the team playing some superb football. In the home game against Haringey, Merstham were 5-0 up at the interval! However, other clubs had taken note and Ufuah departed for the Welsh Premiership and Henry to Carshalton. Without their front two, the Moatsiders struggled to score goals and combined with a horrendous run of injuries that reduced the squad to the bare bones, Merstham began to slide down the table. The team lost their final 13 league games and relegation was confirmed on the final day of the season. Wilson departed and he was replaced for the 2022/23 season by former Carshalton boss and ex-Merstham midfielder Peter Adeniyi.

Merstham were one of the favourites for promotion from the Isthmian South Central in 2022/3. However, Adeniyi's young, new team failed to fire and after ten games, the team were bottom of the table and remained there for much of the season. A bad habit of drawing games that they should have won didn't help and the team eventually ended up with 17 draws from 38 games. That combined with a quite appalling record from the penalty spot meant that all too often the side managed to snatch defeat (or a draw) from the jaws of victory. A prime example was away to Southall when the Moatsiders were 3-1 up in added time but ended up drawing 3-3! The team seemed to have turned a corner around the New Year and had a number of good results, including an unbeaten run of 6 games, but only one of those was a win. As the season drew to a close, Merstham had their fate in their own hands with games against others around them in the relegation zone. But a damaging defeat at Sutton Common Rovers and a disappointing home draw with Bedford Sports followed by a 6-0 thumping at Walton & Hersham put them in deep trouble near the bottom. A fighting performance and 90th minute winner at Chertsey meant it was all to play for in the final league game of the season at home to Westfield. After 45 minutes the Moatsiders were 2-0 down and staring relegation in the face. However, a stirring second half display earned them a point with a 2-2 draw, but they could have won it.

It condemned Merstham to a relegation play off against an in-form Egham Town. In front of over 650 spectators, Merstham conceded first and were lucky not to be two down. But on the stroke of half time, Aaron Goode powered home a header to make it 1-1. After the break it was all Merstham and two goals by Adam Adam on 64' and 81' guaranteed the Moatsiders survival.

First Team Honours

Redhill & District League: Division Two Champions 1927
East Surrey Junior Cup: Winners 1930
Redhill & District League: Premier Division Champions 1934-35, 1935-36, 1949-50, 1950-51
Surrey Intermediate League: Champions 1952-53
Surrey Senior Charity Cup: Winners 1976-77
London Spartan Challenge Cup: Winners 1979-80
East Surrey Charities Cup: Winners 1980-81, 1998-99, 2004-05, 2006-07
Dan Air Class Elite Cup: Winners 1989-90
Surrey Veterans County Cup: Winners 1995-96
Premier Challenge Cup: Winners 2004-05, 2006-07, 2007-08 Runners-Up 2005-06
Combined Counties Premier Division Champions 2007-08
FA Vase: Quarter Finalists 2007-08
Surrey Senior Cup: Winners 2007-08, 2015-16, 2017-18
Ryman League Division One South Fair Play Award: Winners 2010-11
Ryman League South Play-Off Winners 2014-15

Ryman Premier League Play-Off Runners Up 2018-19