

## **WITHAM FC**

The Witham club was where I spent the bulk of my playing career. I was there throughout its existence, from summer 1977 to summer 2002, the only person to stay there the whole time.

The club was formed when Derek Wood decided the costs at Bramston sports centre – where he had led the A team to the league title - were too high and looked round Witham for somewhere to form a club. He found the ideal spot at Witham Football Club, a venue subsequently regarded by many as the best in the league. It had room for two tables – three on practice nights – good lighting in the ceiling, a non-slippery floor, room to move around and a bar. The league used it on many occasions for its finals night.

Wood took four teams' worth of players with him for the 1977-78 season including the whole of the title-winning Bramston A: himself, Mick Borshell, Tom Elder and Ken Jackson. But Colne A were a stronger force the next season and Witham were kept off the top spot for four years.

But by 1982 Robin Lang had matured into a first class player – he had reached the men's singles final at the age of 17 the previous year – and Ian Graham and Martin Bawden had moved from Colne to join Wood and Borshell in an A team strong enough to win the title. They won it the next season with Lang, Andrew Wadling, also ex-Colne, plus Mark Sweeting and his son Neil.

It was the following season when the club reached its height with the unsurpassed achievement of having four teams in the top five. By that time they had taken over Colne's mantle of attracting top players from outside the league and as well as players from Colchester and Chelmsford had a clutch of players willing to drive up from Clacton: Graham, Ian Bell, Lawrence Rutter and Tony Hooper.

Also around this time the club ran a team in the National League.

The A team won the title again in 1986 with Wood, Mike Childs, Dipak Topiwalla and Darren Jones, none of whom spent very long in the league, then again in 1992 and 1993 with Wood, Chris Jacob, Julie Askem and Simon Woods, the last three motoring up from the Southend area.

Until its final season, the club had had only three secretaries, Derek Wood from 1977 to 1984, Geoff Lang from then until 1995 and John Mills up to 2001.

The excellent relationship the club enjoyed with club steward Dick Green evaporated quickly after he left and the final few years were unhappy ones with darts matches taking precedence, often at very short notice, until a massive price hike forced the club to close and relocate to Black Notley.