

## COLNE

Colne, under its various guises – Colne Engaine, Colne Valley, Hunter Colne Valley and just plain Colne – was one of the league's longest standing and most successful clubs. It was also its most restless, having occupied numerous different premises during its 30-year existence.

It was started and for many years run by Peter Hill, who was also for some time the league's coaching officer, and consistently produced shoals of good junior players. At its height (1981) Colne ran 12 teams, many of them all juniors, but it was also able to attract the top notch players which helped its A team win division one a record 13 times.

The club's first championship-winning side consisted of Hill, Ron Martin and Charles Wrigglesworth who took the title in 1975. They missed out for the next couple of years but in 1978 they began their long run of success when they won the first of four consecutive titles with a team of Terry Dowsett, Kevin Howard, Rob Milne and Rob Hellaby, all past or future men's singles winners.

Others such as Martin Bawden, Ian Graham and John Andrews helped them keep the title in that period until they were beaten to it in 1982 by Witham FC A, the team they had kept in second place the previous four years.

After five years they were back at the top when Andrews, Steve Kerns, Fred Evans and Nick Mills came together and won the title for five years in a row. And after another five-year gap Kerns teamed up with Paul Davison and Graham Farmer and sundry other occasional players for three more.

Then for the 2000 season the A team moved en bloc to Black Notley and for the first time in its history, Colne did not have a team in division one.

Kerns stayed at Colne far longer than anyone else, playing his first match as a 14-year-old in the 1978-79 season and his last in the spring of 1999.

Colne's success came despite an inability to find a permanent home. No records exist of their first few years and even in the first published league handbook no venue is given. The second handbook, for the 1980 season, lists the Old School Room, St Andrews School, Colchester Road, Halstead (opposite the Woodman) – the bracketed reference being something of an encouragement to visiting teams to make sure they got the match finished early. I can recall at least one earlier venue, a very cold small room in the main road in Earls Colne and I'm pretty sure there were one if not two others before they moved to the Old School Room. The school room was one of its most evocative venues, with water occasionally running down the walls, very dark (black?) walls and the hole in the wall where one of its better known players had thrown his bat in a fit of pique.

They subsequently moved to the Halstead Snooker Centre, the Queens Hall, off Colchester Road, Halstead, the Halstead Football Club, Greenstead

Green Village Hall, the Recreation Club, Earls Colne, the Yellow Dot Club in Sudbury and finally back again to the Recreation Club where they pulled the drawbridge up for the final time after the 2006 season. The premises were then taken over by the Netts club, who were at the time not running teams in the Braintree League. See the separate entry for Netts' history.