

Old ground passes into soccer history

Sports Editor Nick Goodman examines the history of Loakes Park

LOAKES Park has carved its own special place in the hearts of Wycombe Wanderers' loyal supporters.

It was with heavy hearts, therefore, that they paid homage to a ground which possesses a rich 95-year history.

It is a distinguished history, which makes fascinating reading, and will never recede in the memory of Wycombe fans.

Loakes Park, a name synonymous with all that is good in non-league football, a name revered in South Bucks, and the name of a ground, which when full, possesses a unique atmosphere.

But Loakes Park is living on borrowed time... Wanderers are to move to pastures new. They take with them an infinite reservoir of happy memories.

The town will be devoid of an historic landmark, like Liverpool without an Anfield.

But the very soul of Loakes Park, engrained in the ground's green edifice and famous sloping pitch, will live forever.

Now a plush, modern stadium awaits the club in Sands. It is called Adams Park and is geared to the club's ultimate aim of League football.

Leaving Loakes Park will be an enormous wrench, but the spirit of that charming little ground will never be vanquished.

Here is the history of Loakes Park in summary form:

- In 1894 the club decided to rent Spring Meadows to get away from the difficult conditions on the Rye.

- Lord Carrington was approached to see if Loakes Park could be rented.

- The first match to be played at Loakes Park was a friendly against Park Grove on September 7, 1895.

- On May 21, 1896, it was announced that Wycombe's applica-

tion to join the Southern League had been accepted.

- The AGM of 1896 heard that receipts in the first season at Loakes Park had been just under £408, compared with £114 at Spring Meadow.

- Following a disturbance during a Southern League fixture against Portsmouth R.A. Loakes Park was closed for one week by FA ruling.

- At the end of the 1898/99 season it was decided to level the pitch.

- In October, 1903, Harry Browning, of the Red Lion Hotel, initiated a scheme to build a stand on the upper side of Loakes Park.

The new stand was ready by January 9, 1904, when Southampton Reserves were the visitors in the Southern League.

- During a Berks & Bucks Senior Cup first round match against Chesham Generals at Loakes Park, Chesham right back, A. Bone, broke his leg, which was later amputated.

The accident happened in November, 1905, and a benefit match was later played.

- Wycombe's application to join the Spartan League was accepted just before the outbreak of the First World War.

- Work started on extensions to either side of the stand in December 1922, the money being raised by loan.

The stand was opened for the visit of St Albans in an Amateur Cup second round match on January 20, 1923.

- New dressing rooms were opened at Loakes Park at the start of the 1923-24 season.

- Wycombe won the Amateur Cup in season 1930/31.

- The bottom stand was opened by R.A. Lunnon, President of the Berks & Bucks FA, on February 13, 1932.

- Before the start of the Second World War Loakes Park was used for gas chamber demonstrations to the general public.

- Frank Adams presented Loakes Park to the club as a gift during the 1946/47 season.

- Loakes Park's record attendance is 15,850, recorded against St

Albans in the fourth round of the FA Amateur Cup, on February 28, 1950.

- Wycombe thrashed the Ugandan touring team 10-1 at Loakes Park in 1956.

- Bishop Auckland beat Wycombe 3-1 before a 90,000 Wembley crowd in the 1957 FA Amateur Cup Final.

- Wycombe through to the second round of the FA Cup for the first time in their history in 1959/60 season.

- Wycombe opened their floodlights in their Isthmian League match against Enfield on September 25, 1963.

- Wycombe reached the third round of the FA Cup for the first time in 1974/75 season. Two classic matches against Jackie Charlton's Middlesbrough.

- Wanderers entered Europe in 1975. The club was invited to represent non-league football in this country against A.C. Monza of Italy in the Anglo-Italian Trophy.

- Wycombe won their seventh Isthmian League title in 1982/83, having led the race for most of the season.

- Centenary season, 1984/85. The club announced its aim was membership of the Alliance Premier League (Gola League).

- Season of mixed fortunes in the Gola League, 1985/86.

- Agreement reached with developers and the Hospital Board to re-develop Loakes Park and for the club to be re-located on a new ground at Sands, subject to planning approval.

- Programme of safety work carried out at Loakes Park, costing some £8,000. A grant of 75 per cent was obtained from the Football Trust.

- The planning application for a new ground at Sands received a planning refusal by Wycombe District Council in 1986/87 season.

- Wanderers finished their Conference season in fourth place in season 1988/89.

- Wanderers will depart from Loakes Park on Monday, May 14.