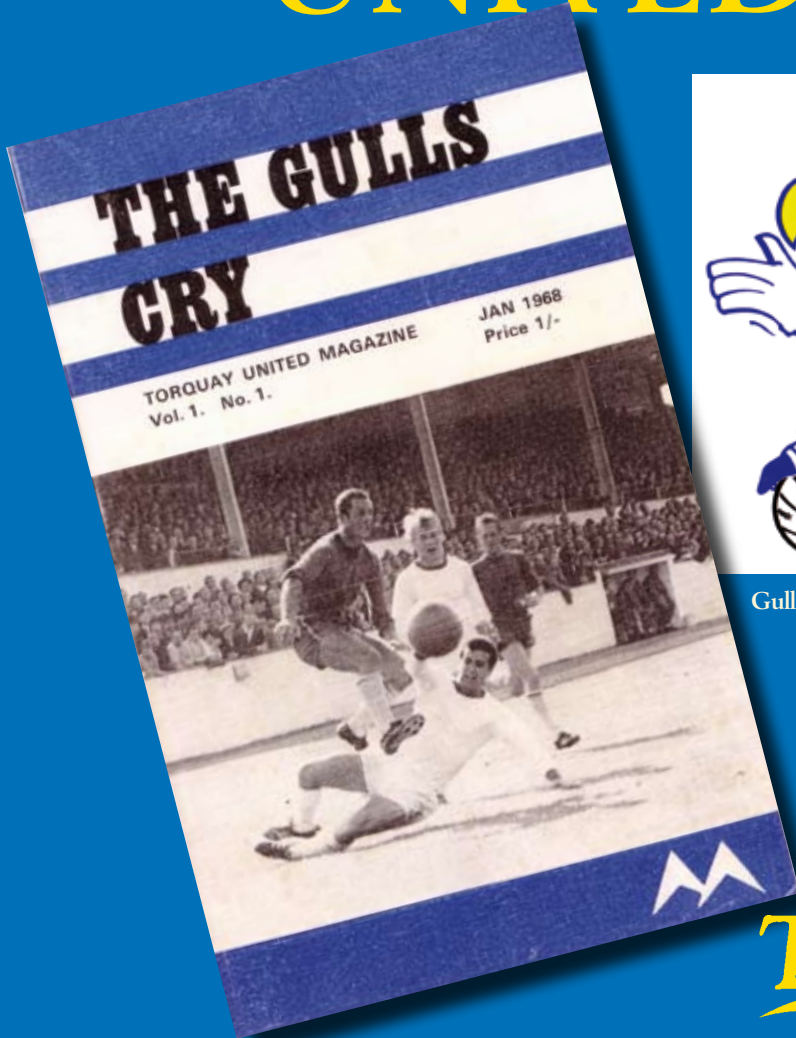


# TORQUAY UNITED



Gulliver Gull renamed Gilbert  
and a souvenir from 1968



LIBRARY SERVICES

# TORQUAY UNITED

## The History of Torquay United

On May Day 1899, a group of former pupils from Torquay Public College met at the Tor Abbey Hotel in Belgrave Road and formed Torquay United Association Football Club. In 1910, they merged with Ellacombe FC then, renamed Torquay Town, made their permanent home at Plainmoor. In their first season the team succeeded in becoming the first South Devon club to win the Devon Senior Cup. When Plymouth Argyle and Exeter City were admitted to the newly formed Third Division of the Football League in 1921, Torquay Town decided to follow their example. Joining forces with local rivals Babbacombe FC, they turned professional and once more became Torquay 'United'. Immediately after winning the championship of the Southern League (Western Section), the club achieved their ambition and were elected to the Football League in 1927. Unable to attract the huge attendances of the big money clubs, United struggled for survival in the lower divisions for eighty years before eventually losing their league status in 2007.



The first Torquay United Team to take part in League Football  
East Devon League 1901-02

Left to Right (Standing) : A. T. PALMER, H. LUSH, F. KEELING, H. TOMNEY,  
F. GANE, C. CARROLL  
(Sitting) : F. DICKENSON, T. ARNOLD, C. PEERMAN, F. LEACH, D. GARSIDE  
H. CLARKE-PITTS (Capt.)

Celebrating fifty years as a league club in 1977, Gulliver the Gull (later renamed Gilbert) was chosen as a fitting mascot for a club in a top holiday resort. Back in 1927, some chairmen of the club's opponents admitted that they had no idea of the whereabouts of Torquay. Football quickly helped to put the town on the map as the team's fluctuating fortunes provided valuable publicity for the town. From 1922-1954, the team played in a black and white strip and were nicknamed the 'Magpies'. The change to the now familiar yellow and navy kit began when United's longest-serving manager Eric Webber (1951-65) chose

gold and blue shirts to represent the golden sands and blue sea and sky of the English Riviera which, in the late 1960s led to the team becoming known as 'The Gulls'.

## Glorious Gulls

### Greatest players:

In 1998 the Herald Express conducted a 'Local Hero' poll on behalf of the Football League in which 1950's midfield general Don Mills (84 goals in 367 appearances) was voted the club's greatest ever player. Recognised as one of the most talented players outside the top flight, he was selected for an early televised match representing Division 3 South against Division 3 North in 1955. A runner-up in the contest was charismatic striker Robin Stubbs (133 goals in 263 appearances) who was the club's leading scorer five times in six seasons during the 1960s.

### Greatest goal scorers:

From 1948-58, Sam Collins scored 219 goals in 379 appearances and for seven consecutive seasons was the club's leading scorer. In 1955-56 he notched 42 goals in 49 League and FA Cup games overtaking the 25 year-old club record of Jimmy Trotter who scored 28 goals in 42 matches during season 1930-31. In 1965-66, a late season injury halted the challenge of Robin Stubbs when he missed the last five matches and finished with 39 goals in 44 appearances. Tommy Northcott (150) and Ron Shaw (106) are the only other players to have scored a century of goals for United.



Robin Stubbs

### Greatest servants:

The following players have made the most Football League appearances for Torquay United: 442 Dennis Lewis (1947-59); 410 Tommy Northcott (2 spells 1948-52 & 1957-66); 404 Kevin Hill (1997-2007); 400 Ian Twitchin (1969-80); 384 Ron Shaw (1946-58).



Sammy Collins

### Greatest discoveries:

Babbacombe's Sidney Cann won an England schoolboy cap and made his debut for United aged 16. In 1933, he became the first local player to appear in an FA Cup final when playing at fullback in the Manchester City side which lost to Everton. Discovered playing for Dartmouth United, winger Ralph Birkett made over 100 appearances for United, before helping Arsenal take the League Championship (forerunner of the Premiership) in 1933-34, then became the first Torquay-produced player to become a full England international while playing for Middlesbrough in 1936. Midfield player Don Welsh played three times for England and captained Charlton to their 1947 FA Cup Final victory after starting his career at centre-half with United in 1932. Winger Lee Sharp made his league debut for United in 1986. The 16 year-old was snapped up by Manchester United where he appeared in European Cup Winners, FA Cup and Football League finals, won two Premier League championship medals and was awarded eight England caps.

# HIGHS AND LOWS

## 1927-2007

- 1927-28: The Magpies first campaign in the Football League ends in disappointment when they finish bottom of Division 3 South. With no automatic relegation, they beat a host of non-league challengers to be re-elected by the votes of league club representatives.
- 1954-55: Managed by Eric Webber, United perform their greatest FA Cup 'giant-killing' act by defeating Leeds United 4-0 in a 3rd Round replay after drawing 2-2 at Elland Road. In the next round they narrowly lose 0-1 at home to Huddersfield Town from Division 1 (now equivalent to the Premier League) watched by a record crowd of 21,908.
- 1956-57: With only one club promoted each season from Division 3 South to Division 2 (now called the Championship), United finish level on points with Ipswich Town who go up with a superior goal average.
- 1959-60: Two years after the north and south regions of Division 3 are scrapped, United finish third and secure promotion from the newly formed Division 4.
- 1961-62: United are relegated from Division 3 to Division 4 (now League Two).
- 1964-65: Tottenham Hotspur are cruising to an away victory when two late goals give United a thrilling 3-3 draw in an FA Cup-tie. Spurs recover to win the replay 5-1.

- 1965-66: Manager Frank O'Farrell leads United to third place and back up to Division 3.
- 1971-72: The Gulls drop back into Division 4.
- 1984-85: Finishing bottom of Division 4 United are re-elected to the Football League.



Torquay's greatest player Don Mills (left) skippered the giant-killing side against Leeds United captained by Welsh international John Charles (right) in 1955.

- 1985-86: The Gulls are again re-elected after propping up the Football League.
- 1986-87: Automatic relegation from the Football League is introduced to allow annual entry of a non-league club. United narrowly avoid being replaced by gaining a point at home in the last match of the season.
- 1988-89: Manager Cyril Knowles leads United to Wembley for the first time where they are beaten 4-1 by Bolton Wanderers in the final of the Associate Members Cup.
- 1990-91: With John Impey in charge of the team, the Gulls reach the Wembley



play-off final and beat Blackpool in the sudden-death phase of a penalty shoot-out with 'keeper Gareth Howells scoring the winner.

- 1991-92: United are immediately relegated from Division 3 to Division 4.
- 1995-96: The 'Big Drop' is only avoided when the sub-standard ground of non-league champions Stevenage prevents them from taking the place of bottom club Torquay.
- 1997-98: United make their third trip to Wembley and miss promotion by virtue of a controversial penalty, losing 0-1 to Colchester in the play-off final.
- 2000-01: The Gulls pull off the 'Great Escape' and avoid relegation when they win the last game of the season

3-2 condemning their away opponents Barnet to non-league oblivion.

- 2003-04: Head coach Leroy Rosenior steers the Gulls to automatic promotion to Division 2 which, is then renamed League One.
- 2004-05: After only one season United are relegated back to the basement league.
- 2005-06: A late-season rally and a home draw in the last game averts the 'Big Drop'.
- 2006-07: Flowers are laid on the pitch by distraught fans as a memorial to the loss of the club's precarious 80-year tenure in the Football League.

Wembley winners open top bus parade in 1991.



## IT'S A FUNNY OLD GAME!

A team from the crew of the German battleship Schlesien gave the Nazi salute before playing a testimonial for United fullback Lew Tapp at Plainmoor in April 1937. A year later, when former United player Don Welsh made his international debut against Germany in Berlin, there was a diplomatic incident when the England team were compelled to give the salute during the playing of the host's national anthem. In 1939, the Schlesien bombarded Poland during the invasion which started the Second World War.

On Christmas Day 1956, United played a goalless draw at Brentford. On the return journey, the team coach got stuck in a snowdrift on Salisbury Plain. Reaching Torquay at 5am on Boxing Day, the players snatched a few hours sleep before taking to the field for the return match at 2.30pm - beating the Bees 2-0.

Defender Pat Kruse, pictured above, won the Player of the Year award in 1976 and entered the record books the following season when he scored the fastest own goal in history. It occurred eight seconds after the kick-off in a home match against Cambridge United in January 1977.

With United facing league extinction, Bryn the police dog encroached on the pitch and bit United skipper Jim McNichol near the end of the crucial last game of the season at Plainmoor in May 1987. The Alsatian turned from villain to hero when, in time added on for the injury,

Pat Kruse.



Paul Dobson scored a last gasp equaliser against Crewe. The 'Big Drop' had been avoided by the skin of Bryn's teeth!

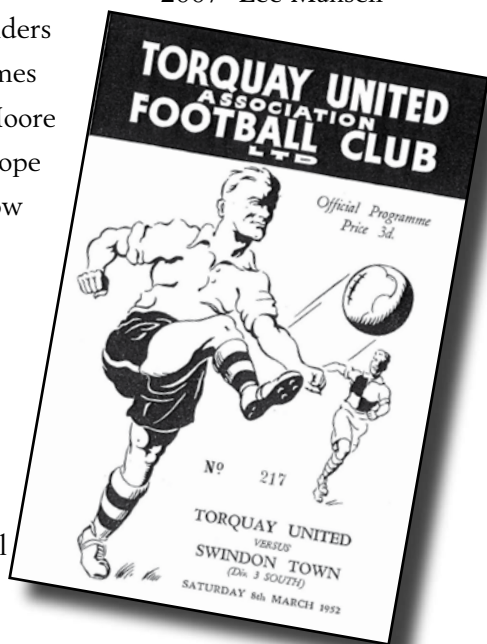
On May Day 1999, the Gulls celebrated their centenary with an away game at Hull and the teams observed one minute's silence in tribute to the passing of Sir Alf Ramsey - forty-two years to the day after he had gained his first managerial success at the expense of United. His team Ipswich Town finished level on points with Torquay and were elevated to Division 2 with a superior goal average in season 1956-57. Following further promotion to Division 1, the club won the League Championship (now the Premiership) in 1962 and Ramsey was immediately appointed manager of England, then knighted after steering the national side to the World Cup triumph of 1966.

## TORQUAY UNITED PLAYERS OF THE YEAR

1969 Andy Donnelly  
1970 Alan Welsh  
1971 Dick Edwards  
1972 Dick Edwards  
1973 Mike Mahoney  
1974 Mike Mahoney  
1975 Dave Stocks  
1976 Pat Kruse  
1977 Clint Boulton  
1978 Ian Twitchin  
1979 John Turner  
1980 Steve Cooper  
1981 Peter Coffill  
1982 Brian Wilson  
1983 Colin Anderson  
1984 Colin Anderson

1985 Kenny Allen  
1986 Derek Dawkins  
1987 Tom Kelly  
1988 Jim McNichol  
1989 Ken Veysey  
1990 Phil Lloyd  
1991 Wes Saunders  
1992 Paul Holmes  
1993 Darren Moore  
1994 Paul Trollope  
1995 Lee Barrow  
1996 Charlie Oatway  
1997 Alex Watson  
1998 Jon Gittens  
1999 Neville Southall  
2000 Kevin Hill  
2001 Jimmy Aggrey

2002 Kevin Dearden  
2003 David Graham  
2004 David Graham  
2005 Bayo Afinfenwa  
2006 Kevin Hill  
2007 Lee Mansell



A programme from  
United's 9-1 club record  
victory in 1952.

## TORQUAY UNITED CLUB HONOURS 1927-2007

Champions of the Southern League (Western Division) 1927

Runners-up Division Three (South) 1957

Promoted from Division Four to Division Three 1960

Promoted from Division Four to Division Three 1966

Finalists in Associate Members Cup 1989

Promoted from Division Four to Division Three 1991

Finalists in Division Four play-off final 1998

Promoted from Division Three to Division Two 2004

Text by Mike Holgate

Sources:

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*Gulls Mad* @ [www.torquayunited-mad.co.uk](http://www.torquayunited-mad.co.uk)

*History of Torquay United by Laura Joint* @ [www.bbc.co.uk/devon](http://www.bbc.co.uk/devon)

*Historical team strips* @ [www.historicalkits.co.uk/Torquay\\_United](http://www.historicalkits.co.uk/Torquay_United)

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## FURTHER INFORMATION

For more about the history of Torbay visit the Local History Collection at Torquay Library or visit the following websites:

Caught in the Web - bytes of Torquay's Past @ [www.torbytes.com](http://www.torbytes.com)

Footprints in the Sand - The Development of South West Seaside Towns @ [www.swgfl.org.uk/seaside](http://www.swgfl.org.uk/seaside)

Torbay Council @ [www.torbay.gov.uk/index/leisure/heritage.htm](http://www.torbay.gov.uk/index/leisure/heritage.htm)

The above site also contains opening times, news of forthcoming events and general information about the following historic buildings and museums:

**Torre Abbey Historic House & Gallery, King's Drive, Torquay.** Tel: 01803 293593

**Torquay Museum, 529 Babbacombe Road, Torquay.** Tel: 01803 293975

**Oldway Mansion, Paignton.** Tel: 01803 201201

**Brixham Heritage Museum, Bolton Cross, Brixham.** Tel: 01803 856267