**Whitehawk FC history**

Whitehawk are Brighton’s premier non-league club. Founded in 1945, the Hawks have had two periods of unprecedented success as they have risen up the football pyramid from a team playing parks football to be within one game of an FA Cup third round tie at Everton in 2015. Between 1948 and 1952 the Hawks were promoted 4 times to reach senior county level where they remained until 2010, when three further promotions in four seasons took them to just two leagues below the Football League.

The club was founded in 1945 as Whitehawk & Manor Farm Old Boys FC and entered the Brighton Junior Cup league. The club's first match was a 5–3 away win on 13 October 1945 against Hove County Old Boys at Hove Recreation Ground. Whitehawk & MFOB then joined the Brighton, Hove & District Football League, winning four titles and their first major senior trophy, the Sussex Senior Cup by beating Eastbourne Town 1–0 at Woodside Road, Worthing in 1951. The Sussex Senior Cup win completed an unprecedented series of cup wins at junior, intermediate and senior levels in successive seasons, which still stands as a record in non-league football. Just how far the club had come in such a short time was illustrated by the fact that the reserves won the Sussex Junior Cup in 1952, beating Selsey 3-1, so securing a trophy at the same level that the first team had been playing at, just four years earlier.

**Sussex County League 1952-2010**

The club was admitted to the Sussex County League Division 1 in 1952–53 and finished third in their first season. The Hawks' first county league game was a 4-1 win at Crawley on 31 August 1952. The Hawks were Division 1 runners-up for three successive seasons from 1954–55 onwards, as well as Sussex Senior Cup finalists in 1954, losing 1-0 to Horsham at the Goldstone Ground in front of a crowd of 5626. For the 1954–55 season, Brighton Corporation allowed the club to move onto a permanently enclosed pitch at the north end of East Brighton Park, on what is now the home pitch, known as the Enclosed Ground. The first match played there was a Sussex County League Division 1 game against Southwick on 1 September 1954, which the Hawks won 6–2.

The Hawks won the Sussex RUR Cup for the first time in 1955, beating Eastbourne United 1-0 after extra time at the Goldstone. The club were never out of the top five in the County League Division 1 for the rest of the decade and changed their name to Whitehawk FC for the start of the 1958–59 season.

In 1961–62 under manager Billy Thew, Whitehawk won the first of four County League One titles as well as the Sussex Senior Cup, beating Eastbourne United 4–0 at the Goldstone. Billy Ford scored 16 goals in Sussex Senior Cup football that season out of a personal haul of 93 for the season. The publicity generated by a civic reception at the Royal Pavilion led to Brighton Corporation providing a grant of £3,500 for the club to erect a self-build grandstand with standing for 500 spectators. In 1963–64 the Hawks retained the championship by winning their last six matches of the season. After losing the nucleus of the squad to Lewes the team then struggled and under manager Ron Pavey, who later became the Chief Executive of Brighton & Hove Albion, found itself relegated for the first time ever in 1967. They made an immediate return as Division Two champions in 1968.

The next nine years saw The Hawks continue to compete in the top division, during which time they lost 2-1 to Horsham at the Goldstone in the Sussex Senior Cup final in 1972. The Hawks were relegated for a second time in 1977. This time they were to spend four seasons in Division Two, having to apply for re-election in 1979 after finishing second from bottom, their lowest ever senior league placing.

The club gained its first club house in September 1980, using what was originally a prefabricated building that had been a temporary bank in Haywards Heath. A perimeter fence was added to the ground in 1981 and under new manager Sammy Donnelly, the Hawks won promotion from Division 2 as champions. In 1983–84 Whitehawk won County League One for the third time, winning their last 18 games of the season.

1986–87 saw the Hawks finish as runners-up to Arundel. In 1988–89, again under Sammy Donnelly, Whitehawk had what was at the time their best run in the FA Cup, going out 2-0 in a fourth qualifying round replay to Bognor Regis Town. The home attendance record of 2,100 at the Enclosed Ground stood for 27 years. Floodlights were erected in 1988 and were first used in a match organised to mark the occasion against then First Division Luton Town on 21 March 1988. The game finished 2-2.

The Hawks won the Sussex RUR Cup for the third time in 1990–91, beating Peacehaven & Telscombe in the final 2–1, with youth player Darren Freeman, our future most successful ever manager, heading the winner. 1993–94 was another good season for the club, finishing once again as runners-up, this time to Wick. 2002–03 saw the club under manager and former youth player Ian Chapman once again finish in second place, this time to runaway winners Burgess Hill Town.

The club finally achieved the league title success that had previously eluded them, winning County League 1 in 2009–10 under Darren Freeman, to gain promotion to the Isthmian League Division One South for the first time. The Hawks also reached the semi-final of the FA Vase, losing 4-1 on aggregate to Wroxham of the Eastern Counties League Premier Division.

**Isthmian League 2010-2014**

In their first season at the new level Whitehawk were in the title race but eventually had to settle for third place and an end-of-season play-off defeat on penalties to Leatherhead. The Hawks finished as Isthmian League Division One South champions the following season, as well as lifting the Sussex Senior Cup after beating Crawley Down 2–1 at the Amex. The club achieved back to back promotions in the 2012–13 season by winning the Isthmian League Premier Division at the first attempt to earn a place in the Conference South.

**National League South 2014-2018**

The Hawks struggled in their first season in Conference South. After achieving three promotions in four years, Darren Freeman was sacked in January 2014 and replaced by Steve King. The club then enjoyed their most successful season ever in 2014–15, finishing fourth in Conference South and earning a place in the play-off final against Boreham Wood, which was lost 2-1 after extra time. Whitehawk completed the season with a 5–0 victory over Lewes at the Amex to lift the Sussex Senior Cup.

In 2015–16 the Hawks reached the first-round of the FA Cup for the first time winning 5–3 against National League Lincoln City. Lincoln’s next FA Cup defeat the following season came in the sixth round at the Emirates Stadium against Arsenal. In the second round the Hawks drew 1–1 at League Two Dagenham & Redbridge, following a dramatic headed goal in added time by Jordan Rose, which was broadcast live by the BBC during the afternoon sports programme. In front of a record crowd of 2,174 at the Enclosed Ground, the Hawks lost the second-round replay 3-2 after taking the lead through Danny Mills. To force the match into extra time, Whitehawk again equalised dramatically in added time. The whole match was broadcast live by BT Sport. In February 2016, the club parted company with King after picking up just 9 points from the previous 36 available. Under Argentine Pablo Asensio, the Hawks finished the season in style, but lost in in the promotion play offs to Ebbsfleet United.

The next two seasons saw frequent managerial changes and over 100 different players used, culminating in the inevitable relegation for only the third time in the club’s history in 2017-18. Not even the return of Steve King could arrest the club’s fortunes and when he departed at the end of the season, he was replaced by the Hawks successful U18 manager Jude Macdonald. Unfortunately, the Hawks suffered successive relegations to return to step 4 and the Isthmian South-East Division.

A new management team led by ex-Haywards Heath Town boss Shaun Saunders was appointed in April 2022 and led the Hawks to promotion and a respectable 9th place back in the Isthmian Premier League. Shaun resigned in the close season for personal reasons but returned to the hot seat in December 2024 with the Hawks at the bottom of the league table, working his magic to comfortably save the Hawks’ Isthmian Premier status.