

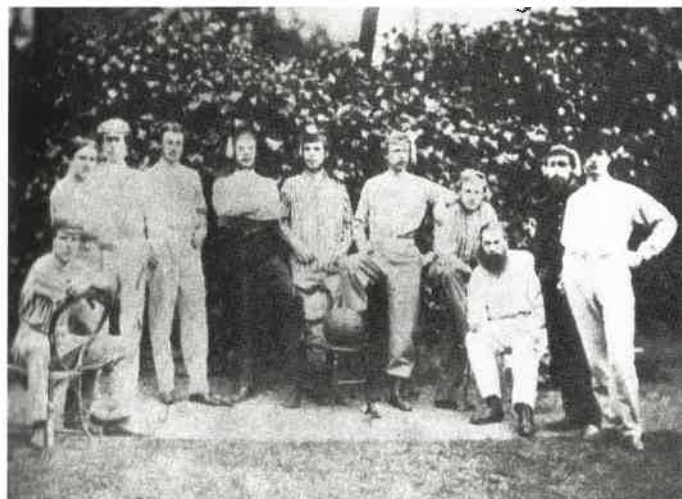
Forest School – a cradle of association football

Forest School and Old Foresters are the only school and old boy partnership to have played in the FA Cup competition, although they never had to face each other. Malcolm Tozer explores this unique footballing achievement.

Forest School opened in 1834 in Walthamstow, a rural area before the coming of the railway. There was no organised sport at first but the 22 boys had the run of the Common in front of the school. As pupil numbers reached 100 in the next decade, football of a kind was adopted with any number of participants and rules known only to the players. The earliest match against another school, Chigwell, was in 1858, Forest winning 5-4.

Men's sides provided stronger opposition. The ready availability of pitches and easy access by coach from London saw the neighbourhood become a nursery for some of England's best players. Forest Club started there in 1857 with play based on minimal handling of the ball. Six years later it became Wanderers, perhaps the most famous of all the early clubs; its members were public-school old boys working in the City. Wanderers beat the school twice that season (2-0 and 4-0) with Charles Alcock, aged 21, scoring in the second game. Alcock, later secretary of the Football Association (FA), saw a touring club like Wanderers as a means to spread a uniformity of play based on the dribbling game.

Alcock was not the only influential player to teach the Forest boys a trick or two. Old Etonian Arthur Kinnaid, later Lord Kinnaid, swapped from



his school's Field Game to the dribbling code during his time at Cambridge; he was an immediate enthusiast. In 1866, aged 19, he brought his own side, including Alcock, to play Forest School in a 13-a-side match. The boys held the all-stars to a 2-2 draw. Kinnaid joined the FA's committee in 1868, became treasurer 9 years later, and president 13 years after that.

All matches at the school were played under Forest Rules. Visitors from Wanderers described them as 'a happy mixture of Rugby, Harrow and Charterhouse rules'. It was essentially a dribbling game on a huge pitch, 200 by 100 yards. Ends were changed whenever a goal was scored but players kept to the same side of the ground and did not cross over. There was neither tape nor crossbar on the goals, and the duration depended on available daylight; one game

against Wanderers lasted 2½ hours.

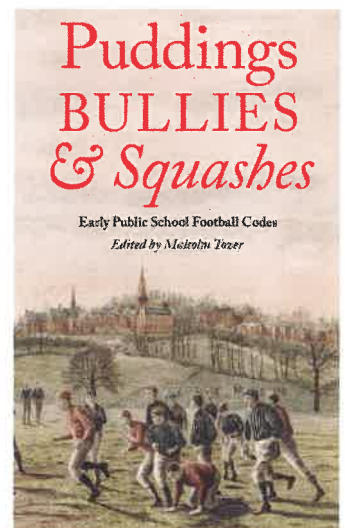
During the autumn of 1863 a series of meetings in London led to the founding of the FA. John Alcock, Charles's brother, represented the Forest Club. After the fourth meeting, discussions were finely balanced on whether the dribbling code favoured by the Alcocks and Old Harrovians should hold sway or the handling version preferred by Blackheath and Old Rugbeians. All was to change at the fifth meeting when Alcock co-opted John Bouch and David Morgan, two boys from Forest School. Their additional votes saw dribbling win the day and led to the separation of the Association and Rugby codes.

In 1871 Charles Alcock took the idea of a knock-out competition from his old school, Harrow, and the FA Cup was born. Fifteen clubs entered that first year;



Wanderers beat Royal Engineers 2-1 in the final before 2,000 paying spectators at Kennington Oval. Forest School was one of 32 teams that entered in 1875, losing to Oxford University in the first round. The following year the boys beat Gresham in the first round but lost 1-0 to Marlow in the second.

A series of outstanding school sides provided an excellent foundation for the Old Foresters when they entered the FA Cup in 1877. For the next two years, school and old boys competed as a unique partnership in the history of the competition. The school never got past the second round but the old boys twice reached the fifth round and once the sixth, or quarter-final, when the entries had grown to 149. School and old boys withdrew from the competition when professional clubs began to dominate, a control they have never relinquished.



The history of 20 nineteenth-century school football codes is told in *Puddings, Bullies and Squashes: Early Public School Football Codes*. It will be published in hardback and paperback editions by Sunnyrest Books in October 2020 and sold worldwide on Amazon. Author Malcolm Tozer taught at Uppingham School before his appointment as headmaster of Northamptonshire Grammar School and then Wellow House School.