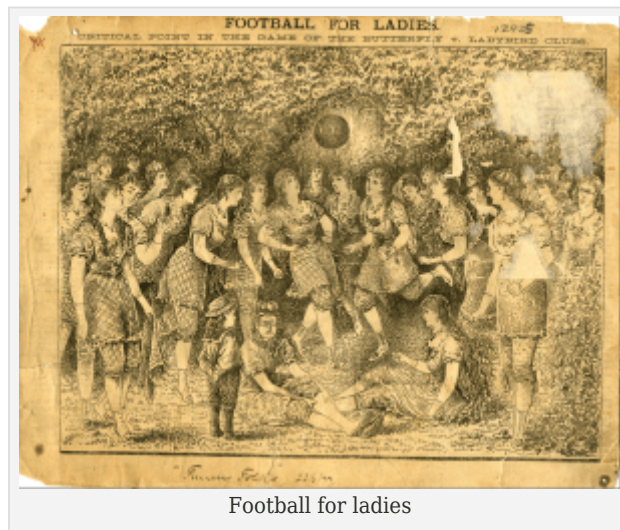


Women's football

This Sunday the England Women's football team take on Spain in the World Cup Final over in Australia. Throughout the history of organised football in Britain, women have struggled for acceptance from certain sectors of society. Our football collection of 1000 objects was assembled between the 1950s and 1970s and once had only one object with a relation to women in football. A cartoon from 1877 titled 'Football for Ladies' mocking the very idea of women's football. Despite such mockery the first high profile women's match took place in 1895, drawing a crowd of over 10,000.



For a short time, during and after the First World War, women's football overtook the men's game in popularity. As male footballers and football fans from up and down the country were called to war, professional football ground to a screeching halt. Women who had taken up positions in factories and other places of work, in aid of the war effort, stepped in to fill the void on the pitch. Teams such as Dick Kerr Ladies emerged from Dick, Kerr & Co of Preston. This famous team of female wartime munitions workers played matches against other newly formed women's teams to crowds of tens of thousands.

In one of British football's most controversial moments the Football Association ended the flourishing women's game with the stroke of a pen. On 5 December 1921, they declared that "the game of football is quite unsuitable for females and ought not to be encouraged". In a cruel move, which many believe was made to protect the financial interests of those involved in the men's game, the FA banned any affiliated team from hosting a women's match inside its stadium. This meant that teams who had been achieving roaring crowds of tens of thousands suddenly had nowhere to play but parks and fields. The ban stood for fifty years and still persists in the minds of some people who believe that football is 'just' 'a man's game'.

The recovery of womens football has gained momentum in the last two decades. Last year our museum collected some representative shirts and trophies from the Hitchin Belles, a team formed in 1999 which has grown into one of the largest women and girl's teams in the

country. A perfect representative of the growth of the women's grassroots game on our very doorstep!

Despite the absolutely monumental fifty year set back "football for ladies" has risen from the ashes to a place where tens of thousands will cheer once again.



Hitchin Belles shirt from our collection

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