

When  
FOOTBALL Was  
FOOTBALL  
RIVALS

**ASTON VILLA**  
VS  
**BIRMINGHAM**  
**CITY**

*Classic*  
**MIDLAND**  
Derby Games

**Ralph Ellis**

They say love of sport is a shared passion – but twice a year, in any city with two top clubs, football turns friends into enemies, starts bitter arguments, and can even divide families, as the passion of local derby games boils high.

Nowhere is that more true than in England's second city. The first time Aston Villa played Birmingham City, then called Small Heath Alliance, back in 1879, the game was settled by a disputed goal. Ever since there has been controversy and anger as well as excitement, joy and disappointment provided by tense and ferociously contested football games. Packed with fascinating statistics, facts, trivia and unforgettable quotes, this book tells the compelling tale of the second city derby.

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# Introduction

There's a thin line between love and hate, according to the old song. Those words are never truer than when it comes to football.

In every big city in Europe which boasts more than one top club there is bitter rivalry between the two teams and their supporters. Be it Celtic and Rangers in Glasgow, Real and Atlético in Madrid, or Inter and AC Milan; the one fixture that gets everybody excited is when they clash.

In England the city of Birmingham is no different. Aston Villa were formed in 1874, Birmingham City a year later, and the two have been at odds ever since. In fact the very first time they played each other there was argument. The exact details of the controversy are lost in the mists of time, but history records the first fixture in September 1879 as having been won by Birmingham "by a goal and a disputed goal to nil".

Supporters of both clubs pour scorn on those from just down the road, but can't wait for the next time they play each other. At different times in history Villa fans have cheered when Blues were relegated, and the terraces at St Andrew's have rejoiced in hearing that Aston Villa have gone down. But in the seasons when they have not faced each other, there is always something missing.

Going through the 120 competitive meetings brings repeated themes: conflict between players and supporters; tough tackles and referees trying to keep control; goalkeeping mistakes, from a Cyril Spiers own goal in the 1920s, to England star Harry Hibbs unexpectedly dropping shots over his line in the 1930s, and on to Peter Enckelman's bizarre own goal in 2002.

These are the stories of two great football clubs who can't live together, but can't thrive without each other either . . .

Honours:

## **Aston Villa:**

Premier League winners: 0

Premier League runners-up: 1 (1992–93)

First Division winners: 7

(1893–94, 1895–96, 1896–97, 1898–99, 1899–1900, 1909–10, 1980–81)

First Division runners-up: 9

(1888–89, 1902–03, 1907–08, 1910–11, 1912–13, 1913–14, 1930–31, 1932–33, 1989–90)

Second Division winners: 2

(1937–38, 1959–60)

Second Division runners-up: 2

(1974–75, 1987–88)

Third Division winners: 1

(1971–72)

FA Cup winners: 7

(1887, 1895, 1897, 1905, 1913, 1920, 1957)

FA Cup runners-up: 3

(1892, 1924, 2000)

Football League Cup winners: 5

(1961, 1975, 1977, 1994, 1996)

Football League Cup runners-up: 3

(1963, 1971, 2010)

European Cup winners: 1

(1981–82)

UEFA Cup winners: 0

European Super Cup winners: 1

(1982–83)

Fairs Cup winners: 0

## **Birmingham:**

Premier League winners: 0

Premier League runners-up: 0

Football League first tier winners: 0

Football League first tier runners-up: 0

Football League second tier winners: 4  
 (1892–93, 1920–21, 1947–48, 1954–55)  
 Football League second tier runners-up: 5  
 (1893–94, 1900–01, 1902–03, 1971–72, 1984–85)  
 Football League third tier winners: 1  
 (1994–95)  
 Football League third tier runners-up: 1  
 (1991–92)  
 FA Cup winners: 0  
 FA Cup runners-up: 2  
 (1931, 1956)  
 Football League Cup winners: 2  
 (1963, 2011)  
 Football League Cup runners-up: 1  
 (2001)  
 European Cup winners: 0  
 UEFA Cup winners: 0  
 European Super Cup winners: 0  
 Fairs Cup winners: 0  
 Fairs Cup runners-up: 2  
 (1958–60, 1960–61)

#### Head to Head:

<b>League</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>W</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>L</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>A</b>
<b>Aston Villa:</b>	110	44	29	37	172	151
<b>Birmingham:</b>	110	37	29	44	151	172

#### **FA Cup**

<b>Aston Villa:</b>	3	2	1	0	5	0
<b>Birmingham:</b>	3	0	1	2	0	5

#### **League Cup**

<b>Aston Villa:</b>	7	4	1	2	11	5
<b>Birmingham:</b>	7	2	1	4	5	11

#### **Totals**

<b>Aston Villa:</b>	120	50	31	39	188	156
<b>Birmingham:</b>	120	39	31	50	156	188

#### Derby Stars:

<b>Player</b>	<b>Club</b>	<b>Years</b>	<b>Appearances</b>
Joe Bradford	Birmingham	1920–1935	23
Billy Walker	Aston Villa	1919–1934	22
Tommy Mort	Aston Villa	1921–1935	19
Dicky York	Aston Villa	1919–1931	18
Stan Lynn	Aston Villa (7)	1950–1961	
	Birmingham (10)	1961–1966	17
Arthur Dorrell	Aston Villa	1919–1930	17
Charlie Aitken	Aston Villa	1960–1976	16
Harry Hibbs	Birmingham	1924–1940	15
Dennis Mortimer	Aston Villa	1975–1985	14
Eric Houghton	Aston Villa	1929–1947	14
Dan Tremelling	Birmingham	1919–1932	14
Ron Wylie	Aston Villa (10)	1958–1965	
	Birmingham (4)	1965–1970	14
Gordon Cowans	Aston Villa	1975–1985	
		1988–1992	
		1993–1994	14
Nat Robinson	Birmingham	1898–1910	13
Malcolm Beard	Birmingham	1957–1971	13
Allan Evans	Aston Villa	1977–1989	13
Des Bremner	Aston Villa (8)	1979–1985	
	Birmingham (5)	1985–1989	13
Billy George	Aston Villa	1897–1911	12
Gil Merrick	Birmingham	1946–1960	11
Billy Garraty	Aston Villa	1897–1908	11

# Chapter One

## The 19<sup>th</sup> Century

The beginnings were simple – two groups of lads who went to the same church and decided to form a football team. None of them could have imagined how it would turn out.

In Aston Villa's case it was the members of Villa Cross Wesleyan Chapel, who in 1874 felt it would be a good idea to create some form of organized recreation to keep healthy minds in healthy bodies. Across town the congregation of Holy Church in Bordesley Green already ran a cricket club with the same objective. In September 1875, as the long shadows of a coming autumn brought their season to a close, they agreed to start a football team with the aim of staying fit during the winter.

Nearly a century and a half later it's hard to equate such humble beginnings with the two giant clubs which dominate the sporting landscape in the modern city of Birmingham. What started as a friendly rivalry – Blues' first match was against supporters of Aston Villa – has grown into a tense, passionate, exciting but sometimes bitter contest for the upper hand.

It was Aston Villa who were quickest to establish themselves as one of the major clubs at a time when English football was in its infancy. By chance a Scotsman, George Ramsay, happened upon a group of their players practising in Aston Park and when he joined in they were so struck by his skills that they insisted he should join their team as captain – and it was he who laid down the style of the club's play to be short, quick passing.

In 1876 the club established its first proper home in Perry Barr, where up to 27,000 people could pay to watch games that were growing rapidly in popularity – and three years later they were

ready for their next big step – entering the FA Cup for the first time. Remarkably, after reaching the third round and being drawn against three-times finalists and 1874 winners Oxford University, they scratched from the competition. Nobody knows why – although the guess is that they chose to concentrate on winning the Birmingham Senior Cup with a 3-1 win over Saltley College in the final at Aston Lower Grounds.

Over the next few years Villa's status grew rapidly and in 1887 Archie Hunter became the first club captain to lift the FA Cup, scoring one of the goals as the team beat West Bromwich Albion 2-0 at Kennington Oval. But if that seemed like a significant moment, then it was nothing compared to the contribution that was about to be made to football history.

William McGregor, a Scotsman who had moved from Perth to open a drapery business in Birmingham, had become involved with the club three years after it had been created. Inspired by the club's connection to a Wesleyan chapel, he began by helping to officiate in matches and eventually was invited to become a director and take responsibility for organizing the team.

Frustrated by the difficulty of arranging friendly matches, he wrote to other clubs suggesting they form a competition which would guarantee home and away fixtures. A meeting was held where his idea was enthusiastically adopted, and so in 1888 the Football League was born. The season had actually started before it was decided to award two points for a win and one for a draw as a way of settling who was best. By the end of the campaign Preston North End had been crowned the inaugural champions of the 12 clubs who took part, with Aston Villa placed second.

McGregor was appointed as the first chairman of the League, but had to wait until 1894 to see his beloved Aston Villa side win the competition for the first time. By now expanded to 16 clubs, Villa won 19 of their games and centre-forward Will Devey scored 20 goals.

It proved the start of a glorious era for Villa. By the turn of the century they had won four more titles and the FA Cup three times – including doing "the Double" in 1897, and from humble

beginnings were established as one of England's leading football clubs. Encouraged by their success, and with the number of people wanting to watch their games growing rapidly, McGregor oversaw the development of part of Aston Lower Grounds, in the estate of Jacobean stately home Aston Hall, into a modern new arena with the football pitch surrounded by a 20ft-wide cycling track.

Meanwhile the club we now know as Birmingham City had actually begun life under the name Small Heath Alliance. Their first match was against a group of Aston Villa supporters, on a strip of waste ground in Bordesley Green. By the summer of 1876 they moved to a fenced-off field in Sparkbrook. The public were charged an entry fee, and the entertainment proved so popular that within a year it was necessary to find a larger home. An annual rent of £5 was agreed to move in 1877 to a rented field in Muntz Street.

It was there that the seeds of the fierce rivalry between Birmingham and Aston Villa were sown. The two clubs faced each other for the first time in September 1879. Small Heath won "by a goal and a disputed goal to nil", and afterwards Villa's players – as well as some of the home ones – complained about the state of the pitch.

In 1890 they began playing competitive football in the Football Alliance, and after finishing third in only their second season they were voted into the Football League. Almost inevitably their first match was against Aston Villa, with 20,000 people in attendance to see them beaten 2-1.

The club was growing in wealth, and set a precedent in 1888 by becoming the first football club to register as a limited company. They were run by a committee which also picked the team, but it was decided a different approach was needed and Alf Jones was appointed in the summer of 1892 as the club's first secretary-manager. Under his guidance, Small Heath became the first League club to score 100 goals in a season (there were just 28 matches played at that time).

As the 19<sup>th</sup> century drew to a close, football was gradually taking over from cricket as England's most popular national game and the

players were becoming celebrities. After two brief seasons in the top division of the Football League, Small Heath had been relegated back to the second tier. Nevertheless, goalscorers such as Frank Mobley and Walter Abbott, who still holds the club record of 42 goals in a season, were local heroes who did much to sow the seeds for the future of the club.

## Record in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century

### Aston Villa:

Season	League	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts	Position
1888–89	Div 1	22	12	5	5	61	43	29	2
1889–90	Div 1	22	7	5	10	43	51	19	8
1890–91	Div 1	22	7	4	11	45	58	18	9
1891–92	Div 1	26	15	0	11	89	56	30	4
1892–93	Div 1	30	16	3	11	73	62	35	4
1893–94	Div 1	30	19	6	5	84	42	44	1
1894–95	Div 1	30	17	5	8	82	43	39	3
1895–96	Div 1	30	20	5	5	78	45	45	1
1896–97	Div 1	30	21	5	4	73	38	47	1
1897–98	Div 1	30	14	5	11	61	51	33	6
1898–99	Div 1	34	19	7	8	76	40	45	1
1899–1900	Div 1	34	22	6	6	77	35	50	1

### FA Cup

1879–80	Withdrew after reaching third round
1880–81	2-3 v Stafford Road Works (fourth round)
1881–82	2-4 v Wednesbury Old Athletic (fourth round)
1882–83	3-4 v Notts County (fifth round)
1883–84	1-6 v Queen's Park (Glasgow) (fifth round)
1884–85	0-0, 0-3 v West Bromwich Albion (third round)
1885–86	0-2 v Derby County (second round)
1886–87	2-0 v West Bromwich Albion (final at Kennington Oval)
1887–88	1-3 v Preston North End (fifth round)
1888–89	1-8 v Blackburn Rovers (third round)

1889–90 1-4 v Notts County (second round)  
 1890–91 0-3 v Stoke (second round)  
 1891–92 0-3 v West Bromwich Albion (final at Kennington Oval)  
 1892–93 4-5 v Darwen (first round)  
 1893–94 2-3 v Sheffield Wednesday (third round)  
 1894–95 1-0 v West Bromwich Albion (final at Crystal Palace)  
 1895–96 2-4 v Derby County (first round)  
 1896–97 3-2 v Everton (final at Crystal Palace)  
 1897–98 0-1 v Derby County (first round)  
 1898–99 1-2 v Nottingham Forest (first round)  
 1899–1900 1-1, 0-0, 1-2 v Millwall (third round)

### **Birmingham:**

<i>Season</i>	<i>League</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>L</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>Pts</i>	<i>Position</i>
1889–90	FA	22	6	5	11	44	67	17	10
1890–91	FA	22	7	2	13	58	66	16	10
1891–92	FA	22	12	5	5	53	36	29	3
1892–93	FA	22	17	2	3	90	35	36	1
1893–94	Div 2	28	21	0	7	103	44	42	2
1894–95	Div 1	30	9	7	14	50	74	25	12
1895–96	Div 1	30	8	4	18	39	79	20	15
1896–97	Div 2	30	16	5	9	69	47	37	4
1897–98	Div 2	30	16	4	10	58	50	36	6
1898–99	Div 2	34	17	7	10	85	50	41	8
1899–1900	Div 2	34	20	6	8	78	38	46	3

FA = Football Alliance

### **FA Cup**

1881–82 0-6 v Wednesbury Old Athletic (second round)  
 1882–83 3-3, 2-6 v Stafford Road Works (second round)  
 1883–84 1-1, 2-3 v Birmingham Excelsior (first round)  
 1884–85 0-2 v Birmingham Excelsior (first round)  
 1885–86 0-4 v West Bromwich Albion (semi-final)  
 1886–87 1-3 v Mitchell's St George (first round)  
 1887–88 0-4 v Aston Villa (second round)

1888–89 2-3 v West Bromwich Albion (first round)  
 1889–90 1-2 v Wolverhampton Wanderers (second round)  
 1890–91 Disqualified for fielding unregistered player in qualifying rounds  
 1891–92 0-2 v Sheffield Wednesday (second round)  
 1892–93 0-2 v Burnley (first round)  
 1893–94 3-4 v Bolton (first round)  
 1894–95 1-2 v West Bromwich Albion (first round)  
 1895–96 1-4 v Bury (first round)  
 1896–97 1-2 v Notts County (first round)  
 1897–98 1-2 v Burslem Port Vale (qualifying round)  
 1898–99 2-2, 1-2 v Stoke (second round)  
 1899–1900 0-0, 0-2 v Walsall (second round)

Birmingham were formed as Small Heath Alliance, before changing their name in 1905 to Birmingham, and then adding the word City in 1945. For simplicity they will be referred to as just "Birmingham" in statistical sections.