



MACCLESFIELD TOWN FOOTBALL CLUB RETURN TO THE NON-LEAGUE SCENE

CHAPTER FOUR Season 2015-2016 Win One, Lose One



**BY
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OVERVIEW

A season filled with inconsistency saw the team falling short of their performance during 2014-15 when they played themselves into the play-off positions for much of the time. During the 2015-16 season almost the same number of matches were won as lost with the team in the bottom half of the table until November, but with an improved performance over the following two months, the team worked their way into the top half of the table with a play-off position in reach. However, after the win on 2 January 2016 no further league victories were achieved until 26 March then making it difficult to achieve a play-off place. In the end, a total of 66 points earned the Silkmen 10th position in the Vanarama National League. Additional funding for the playing budget was provided through a generous donation by an anonymous donor, a proportion of which had to be matched by supporter raised funds, which they did successfully.

Attendances for home league matches held up averaging 1598 (1613 season 2015-15) although within this figure the number of home supporters in comparison to the previous season reduced by an average of 103 per match.

Off the field of play the financial position of the club continued to improve helped by additional financial contributions from the Super Silk Lotto, the Silkmen Supporters' Trust and local businessmen although there remains some historic debt.

OFF-FIELD

People

There were several changes in the personnel serving the club:

- **Chris Edge** – replaced Dave Towns as the Stadium Manager who had stepped down from this position.
- **Martin Hardy** – was appointed Safety Officer following the resignation of Howard Jones who had undertaken this role for many years.
- **Martin Ollier** – appointed club physiotherapist on the departure of Ian Liversedge to Accrington Stanley.
- **Stewart Joseph** – was appointed Welfare and Education Officer, responsible for non-football issues with players. In addition, he works closely with the Community Sports Trust staff.
- **Richard Bates** – appointed Commercial manager but left the club in November 2015 to take up a similar role at Lincoln City FC, his home town. In December 2015 local man **Dan Ackerley** was appointed Commercial Manager. Dan was formerly a Detective Inspector in the Police Force and has experience of successfully raising funds at Macclesfield Cricket Club where he remains responsible for the Under-13 players. Also on the commercial side, student **Rob Shotton** spent 12 months on an internship from the University of the West of England successfully assisting the club with the junior supporters' club, the Sportsman's Dinner, the Golf Day, helping to select the kit supplier for the 2016-17 season along with other duties.
- **Katherine Mellor** – was appointed events co-ordinator but left the club in November with Hospitality Manager Helen Bona taking on this responsibility.
- **Robert Stirling** – general manager left the club in January 2016 for other employment.
- **Paul Etchells** – retired from the position of kit man at the end of the season after 17 years with the club. Hard-working and dependable, Paul initially worked for the club in 1999 as a doorman becoming a full-time employee as kit man during the 2003-04 season.
- **Danny Walker (club groundsman)** - left at the end of the season.
- **Efe Sodje (assistant manager)** – a statement on the Club's Official Web Site on the 21 June 2016 stated that Efe Sodje had left his position at the Football Club.

Work Sponsorship Scheme

In partnership with Cheshire East Council Supported Employment and the Shaw Trust the club had two employees placed through the Work Choice scheme. Bill Beresford assisted with ground maintenance and Becky Bower helped the catering team.

Unfortunately each year we have to record the deaths of those who had been connected to the club as officials, players and supporters.

Club official:

- **Doctor Michael Whiteside** – was the much respected club doctor for over 20 years.

The following were former players:

- **Steve Blake** - was only with the club for a short time towards the end of the 1988-89 season.
- **Dennis Fidler** – with the club from 1967 to 1971 and for the 1972-73 season making 220 appearances and scoring 56 goals.
- **Nat McKinstry** – made exactly 100 appearances in goal from 1947 to 1950. After his playing days he was a regular supporter at the Moss Rose.
- **Derek Rogers** – featured for the club's Cheshire League side from 1964 to 1968.
- **Johnny Walker** – had two spells with the club in the Northern Premier League during the 1978-79 season and from 1981 to 1984, making 80 appearances and scoring 34 goals.

Representative of the supporters are:

- **Judy Bexon** – worked tirelessly as a committee member of the former Supporters' Club and was the Social Secretary at the time of the demise of the Supporters' Club.
- **Tony Higgins** – touched the lives of so many people in the village of Gawsworth and was an ardent supporter of the Silkmen from the Star Lane End, often alongside Methodist minister Rev Sheila Bishop.

Season Tickets

An innovatory approach saw the single Early Bird discount applied in previous years split into four phases as follows

	9am 9 March to 23.59 29 March	Midnight 30 March to 23.59 19 April	Midnight 20 April to 23.59 10 May	Midnight 11 May to 23.59 24 May	Midnight 25 May onwards
Discount	25%	20%	15%	10%	Full Price
Seating	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4	
Vice President	£495	£528	£561	£594	£660
Adult	£300	£320	£340	£360	£400
Concessions (65+)	£225	£240	£255	£270	£300
Student	£75	£80	£85	£90	£100
Under 18	£50	£50	£50	£50	£50
Under 12	£30	£30	£30	£30	£30
Standing					
Adult	£225	£240	£255	£270	£300
Concessions (65+)	£150	£160	£170	£180	£200
Student	£75	£80	£85	£90	£100
Under 18	£50	£50	£50	£50	£50
Under 12	£30	£30	£30	£30	£30

There were slight increases in the Phase One prices and around a 10% increase in the full price for Vice Presidents, Adults and concessions (65+) with a 100% increase in the full price for Students.

For several seasons the match day ticket price for Concessions had been set at 65+ with concessionary season tickets remaining at aged 60 and over. All current season ticket holders between the ages of 60 and 65 were sent a letter explaining that from the 2015-16 season concession Season Tickets were to be brought in line with match day prices with concessions starting at 65 years of age. This change brought an adverse reaction from some of the existing season ticket holders to which the club responded by introducing a sliding scale on a one off basis.

The number of season tickets sold totalled 634 in comparison to 618 for the 2014-15 season.

The Patron Scheme continued to be offered (see Chapter Three for full details)

In addition, mini season tickets were available for both the first and the second halves of the season.

The cost of individual match day tickets increase by a £1, but to encourage younger supporters admission prices for Students, Under-18s and Under-12s remained at the same level and pre-match purchases continued to attract a discount.

	Match Advance Purchase	Match Full Price
Seating		
Adult	£17	£19
Concession (65+)	£13	£15
Student	£4	£5
Under 18	£4	£5
Under 12	£2	£3
Standing		
Adult	£13	£15
Concessions (65+)	£9	£10
Student	£4	£5
Under 18	£4	£5
Under 12	£2	£3

The Adult Blues and Junior Blues Membership Schemes introduced for the 2014-15 season were not renewed due to a low take-up (see Chapter Three for details of the scheme).

A scheme to enable supporters to spread the cost of their season tickets was introduced through The Cheshire Neighbours Credit Union (CNCU), a not for profit mutual organisation. Membership was open to anyone who lives, works or has an association with Cheshire. There were two ways of securing credit – firstly, a ‘Season Ticket Loan’ from the start of the season, the supporter paying an initial sum and then a regular amount until the loan is repaid. Secondly, ‘Season Ticket Saver’ when supporters could join at any time, again paying an initial sum and then a regular payment each month. A season ticket is provided at the start of the new season with loan repayments taking priority and any surplus payments held against the next season’s ticket or for a ‘rainy day’.

A pre-match hospitality package was introduced for the home league match from 9 January 2016 – Vice Presidents £120, Season Ticket Holders £160 and Non Season Ticket Holders £320.

Sponsorship

At national level Vanarama continued their league sponsorship, but there was a fourth change of name in as many years to the Vanarama National League, Vanarama North and South Leagues. However, Vanarama provide a much more positive level of sponsorship covering 1.6M fans, 68 Community Clubs over the three divisions. JAKO, a German sportswear company, who provide kits for association football, handball, basketball and hockey teams, entered into a £2.5m deal over 10 years providing match balls and bench wear.

At club level Carbrini continued to be the suppliers of the players' kit with the sponsorship of JD King of Trainers. A new 'Historic' strip was introduced with the usual royal blue for the home shirt and distinctive red colour for the away shirt.

A scheme was launched for the Back Shirt Sponsor by way of a draw. A maximum number of 40 tickets at £400 plus VAT were on offer with the winner to be drawn on 10 July 2015, with the plan that their name would be printed on the back of the players' shirts. The first 15 tickets sold to be given a free match ball sponsorship package. Unfortunately there were no takers for this offer. At the end of August well-known local retailers Arighi Bianchi became one of the club's main sponsors with their logo displayed on the back of both home and away shirts. Arighi Bianchi had sponsored an advertising board in the ground for many years but wanted to take their sponsorship further. They were given the facility of a large box in the McIlroy Lounge for their sole use on match days.

Match day and general sponsorship continued as set out in the Sponsorship brochure.

Players' Budget fundraising

Raheem Sterling

In June 2015 the club hit the headlines by launching a Crowdfunding bid to raise £50,000,000 to help fund a move from Liverpool. The bid made national headlines in newspapers, on Sky Sports News and attracted over 1600 Tweets. Whilst not advised initially, it was stated later that all funds raised would be added to the club's playing budget. Macclesfield raised £580 whilst a similar appeal at Lincoln City and Grimsby Town raised £5,000 and £100,000 respectively.

Anonymous Donor and the 10K Dash

From abroad a Silkmen supporter donated £15,000 to be used solely for the playing budget and promised a further £10,000 if this sum was matched by contributions from Silkmen supporters in general. A group of supporters initiated a Crowdfunding exercise named the '10K dash' with the aim of completing the task over a relatively short time.

In addition to the crowdfunding initiative, two hospitality packages were donated by the club. The first was sold by auction which raised £205, and the second was the subject of a raffle, tickets costing £2 each with a maximum of 160 tickets to be sold. There were bucket collections around the ground and Manchester United match tickets for four different matches (two tickets per match) were on offer with a minimum bid of £100 per match requested.

It was reported that a sum nearer £11,000 than £10,000 was raised and although promised the final total was never disclosed nor was a breakdown of the funds raised available.

The anonymous donor added a further £3,000 in acknowledgement of the efforts of the supporters to make the final total raised in the region of £39,000 which was added to manager John Askey's budget, some of which helped to re-sign players at the turn of the year who had initially been signed on a short term contract.

Danny Whitehead

Local businessmen together with a £3,000 contribution from the Silkmen Supporters' Trust enabled the club to bring in new signing Danny Whitehead at the beginning of the season. Danny proved to be an asset in more than one way when he was sold to Wigan Athletic for an undisclosed sum during the January 2016 transfer window. However, the club continued to benefit from his ability when Wigan loaned him back for the remainder of the season.

Roary's Junior Blues Club

With young fans a vital part of the future of the club, the Junior Blues Club was reintroduced for young fans under the age of 18 to bring in more young fans and make them feel part of the Macclesfield Town family. All current Under 18 season ticket holders were entitled to free Junior Blues membership, with non-season ticket holders welcome at a cost of £10 per person.

The many benefits on offer in joining the club are:

A birthday card

A signed photo of the member's favourite player

A one off discount at the club shop

A vote in Macclesfield Town's Junior Blue Player of the Season

Reduced price for a mascot package

An opportunity to be a flag bearer

A discounted price for booking the McIlroy Suite for birthdays and special events

Access to exclusive events and offers

Of the 91 young people eligible to join the Blues Club only a small number took up the offer.

Season Events

Again there were many events to raise funds for the club together with others which brought people to the club. These events included – Fashion Show, Sportsman's Dinner, Christmas Party Nights, Race Night, Golf Day, Sports Quiz, Bingo Sessions, Silkmen Revival Nights, Pet Idol, Silkmen Sixes and Walking Football.

Bosley United versus an Ex-Professional Team

At 9.10 on the morning of Friday 17 July 2015 a devastating explosion destroyed the Wood Treatment Mill in the village of Bosley injuring many workers. Dorothy Bailey, William Barks, Jason Shingler and Dorothy Bailey all lost their lives. The people of Bosley rallied together to raise funds for those whose lives had been affected through this disaster. As part of the fund raising events a charity football match was held at the Moss Rose on Sunday 6 September 2015 which raised £35,000.

Keith Innes and Darren Broomhead of Bosley organised the match gathering together a scratch team of Bosley lads as Bosley United to play a team of ex-professional footballers brought together by assistant manager Efe Sodje.

On a lovely sunny day the gates were opened at 12.30 with 2351 people passing through. In the McIlroy Lounge there were three very full stalls – a 60-prize raffle (£5 per strip of tickets which raised £3,000), a cake stall and a skin care stall. Around the ground representatives were selling memorabilia including Bosley United football shirts. There was also a silent auction with 20 Lots.

Before the match Silk Brass performed a selection of music on the pitch. At 13.30 Colin Ross, on behalf of the Freemasons of Cheshire, presented a cheque for £10,000 to Clare Thornley and Steph

Jackson for the Bosley Disaster Appeal. Following the presentation Sarah Doggett of Bosley village excellently sang the hymn 'Abide with me' accompanied by the Silk Brass. After a balloon launch there was a one minute silence before kick-off at 14.00. Phil Dowd was the referee in charge.

Bosley United were represented by Anthony Connelly Tweed, Andrew Broomhead, Rob Swindells, Mitchell Revill, Gary Siddebotham, Keith Innes, Danny Holdway, Terry Costello, Mark Shuker, Darren Broomhead, Harry Sidebotham, Jamie Ryan, Lee Millward, Richard Wills, Simon Simpson, Edward Bailey, George Sidebotham, Will Barratt and Richard Shuker.

Ex-professionals (who included several former Silkmen players) were represented by Brian Jenson, David Brightwell, Rae Ingram, Andy Porter, Darren Tinson, Frank Sinclair, John Askey, Trevor Sinclair, Shaun Goater, Phil Power, Mamady Sidibe, Peter Barnes, Martin Foyle, Efe Sodje, Ian Brightwell, Mike Sweeney, Scott Wright, James Gorfin, Tony Naylor, Ian Cox and Paul Dickov.

Understandably this was rather a one sided match as far as the result was concerned with the ex-professionals running out 12-1 winners, although five of these goals came during part of the second half when a friend of Efe Sodje, Jamie Ryan, went in goal for Bosley United having promised to donate £100 for every goal he conceded. Nevertheless, with a good representation from Bosley village and their friends, the Bosley team received tremendous vocal support throughout the match.

The goal scorers for the ex-professionals were – Brightwell I (7), Sinclair T (37, 42, 90), Naylor (47), Sidibe (60), Porter (63), Sodje (77, 78), Askey (80), Power (87, 88)

For Bosley United, Mark Shuker scored their sole goal in the 89th minute.

After the match medals were presented to all the players, the 14 ball boys and girls (who all came from Bosley or had attended Bosley School), the 22 mascots (all having a Bosley village or Mill connection) with a cup presented to the ex-professionals team. In addition, there was an auction by Alan Partridge, professional auctioneer, of numerous shirts and footballs, an overnight stay and a spa day at the Rookery Hall, Nantwich.

This was an extremely well organised and supported event enhanced by an informative match day programme.



BOSLEY UNITED CHARITY MATCH



Raffle Table



Cake Stall



Cup and Medals



Bosley United warming-up



Silk Brass and soloist Sarah Doggett



Balloon Launch



Pre-match 'Respect' handshake



Former Silkman Phil Power (right) in action

ON FIELD

John Askey was again appointed manager with Efe Sodje his assistant during the early part of the season. Steve Watson assisted John during the second half of the season. Steve played football at the highest level and since retiring has been the Development coach at Huddersfield Town and coach at Birmingham City.

A total of 30 players were used during the season with a further seven players drafted in for the Cheshire Senior Cup competition. A full list of players is included at the end of this chapter.

Friendly Matches

Seven matches were played but unfortunately the annual Keith Alexander Memorial Cup match against Buxton could not be accommodated, and whilst it was anticipated that this match might be played during the month of March, it did not take place – the first time since its introduction. Admission prices to a single home match were set at Adults £10, Concessions (65+) £5 and Under 18s £1. A 'bundle' offer was available of £35 for all five matches.

The opening match took place on 11 July at **Kidsgrove Athletic** in which five changes were made to the Macclesfield team at half time. The match finished with neither side registering a strike.

On the following Tuesday the team travelled to **Nantwich Town**. An indifferent display by the Silkmen saw Nantwich scoring two goals in the first half, adding a third in the second half without any reply. There seemed to be difficulty in identifying the names of Silkmen trialists with the wonderful comment in the match report 'great work between trialist and trialist who plays in trialist down the right, his ball is just missed by a trialist'.

The first of five home matches saw a **Rochdale XI** visiting the Moss Rose on Saturday 18 July. League One side Rochdale had to split their squad in order to fulfil a Lancashire Senior Cup match on the same day but still provided stern opposition, Macclesfield earning a solid draw. Neither side could convert their chances the match ending 0-0. In the first half Matty Lund, Callum Camps and Jamie Allen all went close for Rochdale with Macclesfield's only chance coming from Jack Sampson. In the second half Lund sent a powerful shot wide and Macclesfield's Kristian Dennis hit the cross bar with Theo Bailey-Jones thwarted when the Rochdale 'keeper made a tremendous save.

Bury were the next visitors to the Moss Rose on Wednesday 22 July. This was an encouraging performance by the Silkmen against a League One side with Bury admitting after the match that had overcome a tricky test. Bury donned their new home strip minus squad numbers on the back. The only goal came in the 39th minute as a result of a mistake by Tony Diagne when Leon Clarke dispossessed him. With Paul Turnbull (from a free-kick), Kristian Dennis and Danny Whitaker all unable to beat the 'keeper, Bury ran out winners 1-0.

Step Two **Stockport County** were the next opponents on Friday 24 July playing in their bright pink strip. A minute's silence was held before this match in respect of the four workers who had lost their lives in the fire at the Wood Treatment Plant in Bosley a week earlier. Macclesfield looked comfortable in this match. Starting with a 4-5-1 formation, after 19 minutes this was changed to 4-4-2 when Paul Turnbull had to be substituted with trialist striker John Marsden partnering on-loan Kristian Dennis. It was Dennis who was putting in a lively performance and looked more likely to score which he did on the 44th minute when he capitalised on a defensive mistake, rounding the 'keeper to score against his parent club and Macclesfield's first pre-season strike. Four changes at half time for Macclesfield and five for Stockport changed the pattern of the game. However, Chris Holroyd doubled the lead for the Silkmen. Following good work by the team as a whole, Danny

Whitaker made a run down the right, cut the ball back to Holroyd who smashed the ball home. Goalkeeper Richie Branagan made some fine saves but was beaten in the 84th minute when Stockport deservedly pulled a goal back. Macclesfield held on to win 2-1.

The following Wednesday Macclesfield, without Paul Turnbull, George Pilkington and Jack Sampson, faced a strong **Sheffield Wednesday** team who went on to win 4-0. Their first goal came in the 11th minute from a free-kick. The ball went off the head of Macclesfield's Tony Diagne into the goal at pace giving goalkeeper Richie Branagan no chance. Two minutes later Billy Sharp doubled the Blades' score. Macclesfield did well to keep the score at 2-0 at half time. Macclesfield improved their performance in the second half but substitute Che Adams scored the Blades third goal following a speedy move from the back cutting through the Macclesfield defence. After good solo work, Adams scored his second goal and the Blades fourth, with a tremendous ground shot across the goal into the far corner. The vanishing spray used in league matches for set piece made its first appearance at the Moss Rose when referee Toner used it for a Macclesfield free-kick.

The final pre-season match on Saturday 1 August should have seen Stoke City's under 21 side visit the Moss Rose but this match was cancelled by Stoke on 30 July.

Congleton Town stepped into the breach on the Friday. Macclesfield started brightly but were subject to heavy tackling by the Bears from the start resulting in Danny Rowe going down injured early in the match but he recovered to continue. Curtis Hayes-Brown, who had been playing well and making a good impression, was not as fortunate when he had to be substituted in the seventh minute. His injury was so bad that he could not feature for the Silkmen during the season. Kristian Dennis scored the only goal of the first half when his shot was saved by the 'keeper but the ball went straight back to Dennis who made no mistake on his second attempt. The Silkmen showed their supremacy in the second half with goals from Dennis, Whitaker, Poole, Bailey-Jones, Marsden and Whitehead to give them an emphatic 7-1 victory, McGowan scoring Congleton's only goal in the 74th minute. 10% of the gate takings were donated to the Bosley Treatment Mill Appeal Fund.



Manager John Askey

SEASON REVIEW

Cup Competitions

In the fourth qualifying round of the **Emirates FA Cup** a home tie saw **Alfreton Town** visit the Moss Rose. The Silkmen had a dream start scoring two goals in the opening minutes. In the fifth minute Danny Whitaker played an excellent through ball to Kristian Dennis who had plenty of time to strike. Two minutes later Lindon Meikle, on the right, turned his man before curling a cross into the area where Captain Paul Turnbull doubled the lead with a powerful header. Macclesfield continued their superiority against an Alfreton side which was defending badly at this time extending the lead in the 37th minute, Whitaker was the provider again for Kristian Dennis who calmly slotted home from inside the penalty box. However, Alfreton pulled a goal back two minutes later but the score remained at 3-1 at half time. The visitors started the second half in better form and were rewarded with a second goal in the 50th minute. Macclesfield then made it hard work and at times, struggled to keep the visitors at bay but managed to hold on to win 3-2. *Danny Whitaker made his 300th appearance for Macclesfield in this match which was recognised after the match with a presentation. Cards were distributed celebrating this milestone which Danny signed.*

For the first round, Macclesfield travelled to the south coast to face **Portsmouth** who won the FA Cup in 2008 but had not gained a victory in the competition since beating Tottenham Hotspur in the semi-final in 2010 and had been defeated by Non-League Warrington Town the previous season. Unfortunately Macclesfield got off to the worst possible start when Pompey opened up the Silkmen defence allowing Adam McGurk to give the home side the lead in the third minute. Macclesfield were undaunted and equalised through Kristian Dennis in the 15th minute. From a throw in, Portsmouth's Enda Murphy selected to throw the ball back to his 'keeper, Brian Murphy, who did not clear the ball immediately allowing Dennis to charge down the clearance sending the ball into the roof of the net. However, Portsmouth flying high in the Second Division took the lead on the stroke of half time, McGurk scoring his second goal. In the second half Macclesfield tried all they could to gain an equaliser – Danny Whitehead's rasping shot hit the crossbar, substitute Jack Sampson headed wide and Danny Whitaker shot over the bar in the dying minutes leaving Pompey 2-1 winners.

A special subsidised package was made available for Macclesfield fans. Coach travel, a match ticket and a scarf were made available at a cost of £30 for adults, £25 for concessions and £20 for under-17s. Four coaches travelled to Portsmouth.

The **FA Trophy** saw Macclesfield progress to the third round but not without some luck along the way. **Ashton United** were the first round opponents. Continuous rain at the Moss Rose prompted a morning pitch inspection with the referee declaring the pitch fit for play. Before the match the ground staff worked all out with the squeegee and also forked the pitch such that the game kicked-off on schedule at 15.00. It soon became apparent that standing water in several places was not allowing the ball to run with players splashing through the water. Ashton United quickly adapted to the conditions with Martin Pilkington opening the scoring in the fourth minute when the Macclesfield defence was split wide open. Macclesfield tried to play their passing game often losing possession when the ball did not travel. Other than Danny Whitaker, the rest of the Silkmen team just could not cope with the conditions. With Ashton in the ascendency former Silkman Will Haining headed home Jeff King's free-kick from the left to double their lead. With the conditions worsening and no prospect of the rain abating, the referee abandoned the match at half time.

The match was re-arranged for Tuesday 22 December, Macclesfield making no mistake this time in front of a crowd of 610 including 79 Ashton supporters. Performing like a team from a higher league the Silkmen led by 3-0 at half time with goals from Kristian Dennis from the penalty spot, Paul Lewis

and Danny Whitehead. Five minutes after half time midfielder Paul Lewis scored a fourth goal to seal Macclesfield's progression into the second round.

Truro City, who were flying high in the Vanarama National League South, were the opponents in the second round on 16 January 2016. Truro is the furthest that the Silkmen have ever travelled for a competitive match. Played on a heavy pitch, the first half ended 0-0 with Truro just shading the play. The match came alive when Truro took the lead in the 61st minute, Ollie Knowles scored with the help of a big deflection which wrong footed goalkeeper Richie Branagan. The game changed again when manager John Askey made a double substitution in the 65th minute bringing on Danny Rowe and Oldham loanee Rhys Turner for Chris Holroyd and George Pilkington. This inspired change led to a better balanced team, Kristian Dennis equalising three minutes later. By this stage Macclesfield were getting on top and after a strong run into the centre Turner slotted home to give the Silkmen a 2-1 lead in the 78th minute. Macclesfield could not hold on with Truro's Isaac Vassell equalising in the 88th minute to force a replay. *There was an excellent hospitality package on offer of £20 for a three course meal, match ticket and a programme.*

The replay at the Moss Rose took place three days later. Truro gave Macclesfield a scare in the opening minute when they almost scored. Macclesfield sprang into life and dominated the first half, Danny Whitaker scoring a superb goal in the 20th minute to give Macclesfield a 1-0 lead at half time. Truro's manager sent them out early after the interval and they started the brighter of the two sides forcing several corners, but these were well defended by the Silkmen who then took control of the match again. With a well despatched penalty by leading scorer Kristian Dennis Macclesfield booked their progress to the third round. *To save on costs no match programme was produced but a team sheet was available. This was Macclesfield's 100th match in the FA Trophy competition.*

The third round tie at **Torquay United** was due to be played on Saturday 6 February but was postponed due to a waterlogged pitch, the match taking place on the following Tuesday. This was an interesting end-to-end game where the hosts took the lead on two occasions, only for Macclesfield to take the score to 3-2 with 11 minutes to go. The hosts earned themselves a replay by equalising in the 82nd minute. Both teams tried to gain the winning goal without success despite the fourth official indicating that there would be 4000 minutes of additional time! Macclesfield's goals were scored by Jack Sampson (51), Neill Byrne (61) and Kristian Dennis (79).

The replay on Tuesday 16 February took place on a bitterly cold evening with a strong wind blowing down the pitch from the Star Lane End. Unfortunately in the first half Macclesfield failed to take account of the conditions playing with the wind at their backs, over hitting many balls. Whilst goal scoring opportunities were created by the home side they could not convert them, Kristian Dennis creating the best, but scuffed his shot. Torquay were not a particularly good side but they were lively and caused problems from time to time. The Silkmen were undone by a set piece in the 77th minute, Nathan Smith converting a corner to give the Gulls what turned out to be the winning goal and progression to the fourth round against Bognor Regis. Some of the Macclesfield fans vocally expressed their disappointment with Macclesfield's play at the end of the match.

Having won the **Cheshire Senior Cup** for a record 21st time in the 2014-15 season supporters were looking forward to the defence of the title. However, a much weakened side was fielded at **Cammell Laird** in the first round. The starting line-up included four players from the Community Sports Trust youth team with a further two on the substitutes' bench. Only two of the starting line-up featured regularly in the senior team together with two unused substitutes. The home side were victorious by an own goal scored early in the first half in front of just 41 supporters.



Paul Turnbull scoring in the 4th qualifying round of the FA Cup against Alfreton Town



Danny Whitaker celebrates his 300th appearance for Macclesfield Town



Macclesfield goalkeeper Shwan Jalal in action during the first round of the Emirates FA Cup at Portsmouth



Macclesfield fans celebrate Kristian Dennis' goal at Portsmouth



FA Trophy first round against Ashton United on 12 Dec – match abandoned at half time



Paul Lewis scoring in the first round of the FA Trophy against Ashton United

Vanarama National League

AUGUST

The long journey was made to Devon to play **Torquay United** who were the opponents in the last match of the 2014-15 season. During the summer break the Gulls had undergone tremendous change both on and off the field, and included nine players in starting line-up who were making their debut in contrast to Macclesfield who only fielded three new players. Macclesfield played well against an indifferent Torquay side in the first half but could not strike home. Whilst maintaining their momentum at the start of the second half Macclesfield conceded a goal in the 61st minute from a corner which seemed to deflate them. Torquay ran out winners 1-0 thanks to Alex Fisher's goal.

For the first home match of the season **Southport** were the visitors who included Mike Phenix, a member of the Silkmen squad the previous season. This was not a particularly inspiring game but a magnificent penalty save by goalkeeper Shwan Jalal in the first half kept the Silkmen in the match. Shortly after Neill Byrne had his goal bound header cleared off the line by Southport's Matty Challinor. In the second half Macclesfield's Andy Halls continued with his disappointing disciplinary record when he was dismissed for a second bookable offence. In the 78th minute Southport almost secured all three points but Gary Jones' shot hit both posts without crossing the line. Very much a point gained by Macclesfield, but after two matches still had to impress.

In the home match against **Welling United** Paul Turnbull, Jack Sampson and Dan Cowan were introduced replacing Danny Whitehead, Danny Rowe and the suspended Andy Halls. Paul Lewis played in front of the back four with Sampson the sole striker. This was a relatively easy match for the Silkmen who controlled all but the final stages. A mistake by the Welling 'keeper gifted Danny Whitaker the first goal in the 24th minute and the 'keeper should have done better again when Kristian Dennis scored in the 46th minute. The introduction of Sahr Kabba, a small sturdy Welling forward, 11 minutes into the second half caused problems for the Silkmen with his aggressive play and ability to earn free-kicks. With the Silkmen tiring (no substitutions were made) Kabba pulled a goal back for the visitors in stoppage time. Overall the Silkmen deserved their first win of the season. *Before the match a minute's silence was observed following the death of Doctor Michael Whiteside who was the club doctor for over 20 years.*

A disappointing Tuesday night at **Lincoln City** although the Silkmen had taken a two goal lead, through Kristian Dennis in the third minute and Paul Lewis two minutes later. Lincoln then took charge scoring three goals in 16 minutes to lead 3-2 at the interval. Worse was to come for the Silkmen when Matt Rhead extended the score to 4-2 three minutes into the second half. In the 71st minute goalkeeper Shwan Jalal was stretchered off and two minutes later Liam Hearn completed his hat-trick. Kristian Dennis scored his second goal in the 94th minute, the match ending 5-3 in favour of Lincoln.

The following Saturday at **Eastleigh**, Ross Lafayette headed home his first goal for Eastleigh to give the home side a 1-0 victory and stretch their early season unbeaten run to five matches. In this match Macclesfield only managed 43% of the possession and had to rely heavily on the skills of goalkeeper Richie Branagan who produced a Man of the Match performance.

Chester were welcomed to the Moss Rose the following Saturday. *Prior to the start of all Vanarama National League matches on 29 August a minute's silence was held as a remark of respect to all those who lost their lives in the Shoreham Air show tragedy on 24 August, including Matthew Grimshaw and Jacob Schilt who were travelling to play for Worthing United FC on that afternoon.* The first half was not particularly entertaining with neither 'keeper being troubled. All the action in this match came in the second half. In the 52nd minute Danny Whitehead took a pass from Danny

Whitaker, steadied himself, and seeing a gap shot home through a number of players. The turning point came when Chester manager Steve Burr made two substitutions in the 60th minute after which Chester came more into the match often pinning Macclesfield into their own half. In the 90th minute, from a John Rooney free-kick given away by defender Andy Halls in a dangerous position, substitute Tom Peers levelled the scores. Chester continued to attack and with virtually the last kick of the match Craig Hobson scored in the 94th minute to give Chester their first win in four leaving Macclesfield on the losing side for the third consecutive match, and in 21st position in the league with only four points.

Since **Grimsby Town** were relegated from the Football League, there have been rich pickings for the Silkmen at Blundell Park and the match on Bank Holiday Monday was no different. For the previous four matches Jack Sampson had been the sole striker in a 4-5-1 formation with Kristian Dennis playing on the left wing, but with Sampson out of the squad John Askey put his faith in Dennis as the loan striker and it paid dividends. Throughout the match Grimsby applied pressure which the Silkmen soaked up. However, in added time at the end of the first half, following an excellent team move Danny Whitaker's shot was turned in at close range by Dennis. On 68 minutes Dennis smashed the ball home following a flick from left winger Danny Rowe to win the match for the Silkmen.

With this win the Silkmen completed the month in 16th position with seven points.

SEPTEMBER

Woking arrived at the Moss Rose on the back of five wins and a draw but had to field a weakened team with three players out injured. Macclesfield took full advantage running the match for much of the time. In the 14th minute Kristian Dennis took advantage of a goalkeeping error to tap home from close range. In the second half Woking 'keeper Jake Cole initially saved a header from Dennis but the Woking defence failed to clear the ball allowing full-back Neill Byrne to hammer home from close range. Woking did not give up, Joey Jones scoring a well-executed goal in the 86th minute to set up a tense final few minutes, but the Silkmen held firm to win 2-1. *This was manager John Askey's 150th match as manager/caretaker manager.*

Off to **Bromley** the following Saturday. The first meeting between the clubs proved to be a lively end-to-end affair, but Macclesfield were left to rue several goal scoring opportunities although it has to be recorded that the Bromley goalkeeper Alan Julian was in fine form. A triple substitution by Bromley in the 67th minute changed the match with one of the substitutes, Ben May, scoring the only goal of the match to give Bromley victory.

Three days later the Silkmen were on their travels again on this occasion to **Cheltenham Town** managed by the experienced and well respected Gary Johnson who had completely rebuilt the team since their relegation from the Football League at the end of the 2014-15 season. Gary Johnson's managership seemed to be working well as the Silkmen were to find out. Cheltenham took a two goal lead into the interval, both goals coming from set pieces. Macclesfield's performance improved in the second half but they could not find a response to Cheltenham who won the match 2-0.

Forest Green Rovers aiming for promotion yet again came to the Moss Rose having won their first nine matches of the season but had been beaten at Woking the previous Tuesday, nevertheless, they held top place. For some reason John Askey changed the starting line up to a 4-4-2 formation from his favoured 4-5-1 with Jack Sampson and Kristian Dennis as the strike partnership – and it worked with three 'home-grown' players on the score sheet. The situation looked bleak in the second minute following a defensive error by Andy Halls, former Silkmen favourite Jon Parkin opened the scoring for the Rovers. Macclesfield were not fazed and to a man they played brilliantly and fully deserved to draw level in the 15th minute when Dennis capitalised on a goal keeping error.

Just before half time Macclesfield were gifted a goal, Rob Sinclair handled the ball on the line for which he was dismissed and Dennis slotted home the resultant penalty. Often when a team are reduced to 10 men they up their game, but not on this occasion Forest Green Rovers allowing Macclesfield to dominate play. Two second half goals by Paul Lewis and Danny Whitaker gave the Silkmen a 4-1 victory having given one of their best performances of the season. *Paul Lewis' goal was Macclesfield's 800th Conference league goal.*

In the Tuesday evening home match against **Barrow** the first half provided little entertainment although Macclesfield did well to counter the pace of the Barrow team as a whole. The second half was a contrast with Barrow coming out of the starting blocks the fastest pinning the Silkmen in their own half. It was no surprise when Barrow took the lead: an excellent team goal starting with a throw out by their 'keeper, and then players going right through the Macclesfield midfield and defence, culminating with Andy Cook striking home. Their lead only lasted three minutes with Paul Lewis equalising with yet another headed goal. Disaster struck with four minutes to go following a misunderstanding between defender George Pilkington and goalkeeper Shwan Jalal resulting in Jalal diving for the ball bringing down Ashley Grimes, leaving Cook to convert the penalty and win the match for Barrow.

At **Aldershot Town**, Macclesfield enjoyed a relatively easy encounter helped by the dismissal of Jake Gallaher in the second half for a poor tackle on Danny Rowe. Rowe was in fine form scoring two goals. The first in the third minute firing into the roof of the net and the second in the 41st minute having taken a flick from Jack Sampson near the corner flag saw Rowe turn, sneak along the by-line, through two defenders to strike home. Kristian Dennis added a third goal in the second half without any reply from the hosts.

The tally of points increased to 16, but having won three matches this success was offset by losing three matches making no progress in the league to remain in 16th position.

OCTOBER

The home match against **Boreham Wood** was the first occasion that Macclesfield had played the Wood. A disappointing match where Macclesfield had much of the possession, with the visitors looking as though they had come for a point, placing all 10 outfield players behind the ball for set pieces. Danny Whitehead was unlucky when his shot hit the post, Chris Holroyd had a shot cleared off the line and Danny Whitaker went close with a header. Lindon Meikle replaced Fisayo Adarabioyo in the second half performing well with pace and determination. Boreham Wood could have grabbed all three points in the 90th minute, but Macclesfield 'keeper Shwan Jalal, who had had a quiet afternoon, made a save at the feet of Anthony Jeffrey. *Both Tony Diagne and Andy Halls made their 100th appearance for Macclesfield. In addition, this match was Danny Whitaker's 600th career appearance (all clubs, all competitions).*

Another first encounter at **Guisley** in terrible conditions underfoot with rain lashing down for much of the match but Macclesfield looked comfortable from start to finish. The return to the team of Paul Turnbull saw him execute a splendid free-kick to give the Silkmen the lead in the 24th minute. Just before half time Danny Whitehead doubled the score with a long range shot. Two substitutions by Guiseley at the start of the second half saw them come more into the match but it was the Silkmen who scored again, Danny Whitaker striking the ball from the centre of the area to win the match 3-0, the Silkmen securing their third consecutive clean sheet.

The home match on 10 October was televised by BT Sport with a 12.30 kick-off against **Kidderminster Harriers**. *The day had been designated Non-League Day and as a promotion all under 18 supporters were granted free entry. In addition, the charity Prostate Cancer UK was also being*

promoted. Staff from Prostate Cancer UK together with Macclesfield Town fans, walked 10K from the Bulls Head in Kerridge to the ground. There was also a collection at the ground.

Macclesfield took hold of this match, in the first half Tony Diagne and Danny Rowe both scoring from corners. The goal tally could have been higher but for some fine goalkeeping by the Kidderminster's Dean Snedker. Kidderminster's performance improved in the second half when Macclesfield were slow to the ball which the visitors took advantage of pulling a goal back in the 71st minute. Macclesfield held on to win 2-1 leaving Kidderminster firmly rooted to the foot of the table.

The following Tuesday **Gateshead** were the visitors to the Moss Rose. One of the most exciting and entertaining matches seen at the Moss Rose in recent times with Macclesfield playing with pace, determination and accuracy almost matched by their opponents. The Silkmen had a goal disallowed for offside, however, they continued to create the most openings but the score remained 0-0 at half time. The second half continued with pace, Danny Rowe having the game of his life. The deadlock was broken in the 59th minute. Kristian Dennis who had missed the previous three matches picked up Danny Rowe's cross from the edge of the area to slot home. Gateshead strove for the equaliser and Ben Clark had the ball in the back of the net only to be denied by the assistant referee's offside flag. Macclesfield held out to secure their third consecutive victory and climbed up the table to 11th.

Against **Dover Athletic** at Crabble John Askey could only name three substitutes with Theo Bailey-Jones, Neill Byrne, Curtis Hayes-Brown, Chris Holroyd, Paul Lewis and Jack Sampson all unavailable due to injury. Macclesfield started well Danny Whitehead opening the scoring with a tap in but the lead only lasted two minutes, Stephan Payne equalising for the hosts. Macclesfield were again up against a goalkeeper in form, Mitch Walker playing well. In the second half a disputed penalty won the match for the home side when Dan Cowan was adjudged to have pulled back Ricky Miller in the box.

A disappointing end to the month at **Braintree Town** with both teams having few shots on target. The game turned on a mistake by Macclesfield 'keeper Shwan Jalal when he took a back pass from defender Tony Diagne which he failed to clear quickly, had the ball taken off his toe by Sammie Szmodics, on loan from Colchester United and making his debut for the Iron, who slotted home. After the goal John Askey made two substitutions but Macclesfield could not find an equaliser.

With a total of 26 points the league position improved to 13th.

NOVEMBER

With leading Kristian Dennis in fine form, the month of November was to prove to be the team's most successful of the whole campaign, winning all four league matches.

On Tuesday 10 November arch rivals **Altrincham** visited the Moss Rose having beaten Football League side Barnsley 1-0 in the first round of the FA Cup three days earlier in contrast to the Silkmen's defeat at Portsmouth. *Prior to the match, the British Legion Standard was paraded to the centre circle followed by a minute's silence.* The visitors could easily have opened the scoring in the early stages but Macclesfield soon took charge with Kristian Dennis opening the scoring in the 13th minute. A strike by Danny Whitaker doubled the lead in the 40th minute to take a 2-0 lead into the interval. The pace dropped a little in the second half but Macclesfield clinched victory when Chris Holroyd scored his first goal of the season.

At **Woking** the elements had no impact on the Silkmen's performance; playing into the wind and the rain in the first half they dominated play taking a two goal lead into the interval through Danny Whitehead (13 minutes) and Kristian Dennis (26). The lead was extended four minutes into the second half, Neill Byrne back-heeling home in only his second match since returning from injury,

with a fourth added by Dennis in the 61st minute. Woking pulled a goal back in the 74th minute, Dan Holman scoring at his second attempt. Danny Rowe was then introduced for Paul Lewis and in the 80th minute Dennis completed his hat-trick. As if Woking had not endured enough, John Askey introduced two strikers in Reece Styche and Jack Sampson replacing Whitehead and Dennis. Woking scored their second goal in the closing minutes, Joey Jones poking home leaving the Silkmen 5-2 winners.

Bromley were the next team to be put to the sword. At the Moss Rose the first half was a less than entertaining affair but John Askey's half time team talk did the trick Macclesfield looking more alert and attacking the Woking goal from the start. They were rewarded four minutes after the re-start, Paul Lewis tapping home. The Silkmen continued to look the better team and when they were awarded a generous penalty, the ball having hit the hand of Ben Chorley, it looked as though the three points were in the bag but Bromley 'keeper Chris Kettings saved Kristian Dennis' spot-kick. Dennis made amends 10 minutes from time with his 15th league goal of the campaign to give the home side a 2-0 victory. *Paul Turnbull made his 100th appearance for Macclesfield.*

The captain's armbands worn by the captain of all 68 Vanarama clubs for the match after Remembrance Sunday were auctioned off raising a total of £18,000. Macclesfield auctioned theirs off in the McIlroy Lounge raising £105. Ollie's Army had been adopted as the charity partner to the Super Silkmen Lotto with Ollie Carol present for this match. The Community Sports Trust Match Day was also re-established.

At **Wrexham** Macclesfield faced a side including three former Silkmen – goalkeeper Rhys Taylor on loan from Newport County, striker Connor Jennings and former winger and now holding midfielder Adriano Moke. The Racecourse ground was sodden, with continuous rain not helping matters but Macclesfield adapted to the conditions better than the home side. On fire Kristian Dennis gave the Silkmen the lead in the 23rd minute but Connor Jennings, who always seems to score when playing against Macclesfield, equalised in the 32nd minute. The score remained 1-1 at the interval. Three minutes into the second half Dennis gave the Silkmen the lead and in the 71st minute the evergreen Danny Whitaker put the Silkmen 3-1 in the lead. Five minutes later James Gray scored Wrexham's second goal setting up a nervous finish to the match which included five minutes of added time which was extended to seven, but the Silkmen held firm to win 3-2.

Helped by the fact that John Askey was able to field an unchanged side for three of the matches this month, the four straight victories increased the number of points to 38 and the Silkmen moved up to 7th position, their highest place of the campaign to date. *Kristian Dennis was named Vanarama Player of the month having scored in every match.*

DECEMBER

The match scheduled for the first Saturday in December was a home tie against Eastleigh but they were involved in a second round FA Cup match. Southport were to have played Forest Green Rovers but as Rovers were also involved in an FA Cup match, the away match against Southport scheduled for 23 February was brought forward.

Since Macclesfield were relegated from the Football League, **Southport** has become a bogey side especially at Haigh Avenue and this match was no different. Played in driving rain and a strong wind Macclesfield were the better team but could not turn their chances into goals and missed the services of injured leading goal scorer Kristian Dennis. Macclesfield were not helped by the hosts doing all they could to stop the Silkmen playing football by using spoiling tactics. Both Southport's Andy Bishop and Macclesfield's Neill Byrne were dismissed in the 20th minute for an altercation at the corner post resulting in the withdrawal of speedy Danny Rowe for centre back George Pilkington. Chris Holroyd moved from the right wing to partner Jack Sampson in the forward line in a 4-3-2 formation. Louis Almond opened the scoring for Southport in the 27th minute but on the stroke of

half time Danny Whitaker equalised from the penalty spot. Macclesfield made a strong start to the second half but it was the Sandgrounders who took the lead though an Almond penalty, and the hosts secured all three points when Josh Thompson scored their third goal in the 77th minute.

Three days later at the Moss Rose Macclesfield matched **Eastleigh** throughout the first half. However, the visitors had taken the lead in the sixth minute when centre-forward James Constable flew through the Macclesfield defence to slot home. The lead only lasted two minutes, Tony Diagne meeting a Paul Turnbull corner with a fierce header which went in off the post. The second half was a different kettle of fish with much of the play in Macclesfield's half, Eastleigh pressuring with a succession of corners and free-kicks. Constable scored his second goal in the 61st minute to secure all three points for Eastleigh and their season double over the Silkmen.

Kristian Dennis returned for the away match at **Welling United** scoring in the sixth minute. Welling dominated much of this match but were frustrated by Macclesfield's excellent defence. The hosts almost snatched a point towards the end of the match when George Porter sent a fierce header onto the post. The 1-0 victory gave the Silkmen a season double over Welling.

Tranmere Rovers visited the Moss Rose on Boxing Day having been relegated from the Football League the previous season. The highest crowd of the season 3037, including 934 Tranmere supporters, witnessed a match which clearly showed that Tranmere had done their homework and used tactics to stop Macclesfield playing their usual passing game. The visitors took the lead in the fifth minute, on-loan defender Steve McNulty heading home from an Adam Mekki corner to score his first goal for Tranmere. Throughout the match Macclesfield could not match the size and strength of Tranmere but still managed to draw level on the stroke of half-time when goal machine Kristian Dennis headed the ball into the roof of the net from a perfect cross by Chris Holroyd. Shwan Jalal was the busiest 'keeper by far. In the 77th minute Tranmere took the lead, again from a corner, Michael Ihiekwe converting Mekki's excellently taken set piece. Macclesfield were then reduced to 10 men when Paul Lewis received a second caution. The Silkmen could not find an equaliser, Tranmere taking all three points back to the Wirral and ending a five-game winless run.

The match at **Chester** on Bank Holiday Monday was won in the first half through an own goal and yet another goal by Kristian Dennis, on this occasion from the penalty spot following a shirt tugging incident.

With 41 points Macclesfield were perhaps fortunate to be in sixth position at the end of the year with teams below having games in hand. However, all was going according to plan to achieve a play-off place at the end of the season helped by the goals scored by Kristian Dennis; 20 in the league and 24 in all competitions which put him in a position with the possibility of achieving or exceeding Steve Burr's Conference record of 35 goals set in the 1987-88 season.



Danny Whitehead goal against Chester on 29 August



Match action - Forest Green Rovers 19 September



Paul Lewis celebrating with Kristian Dennis after scoring against Bromley 21 November



Captain Paul Turnbull congratulates Kristian Dennis at Chester 28 December

JANUARY

Macclesfield turned the tables on **Tranmere Rovers** following their victory at the Moss Rose on Boxing Day. Overcoming first half injuries to goalkeeper Shwan Jalal and midfielder Paul Lewis together with the physical approach by the home side, a goal in the 31st minute by Jack Sampson ensured that the three points were taken back to East Cheshire. In fine form Kristian Dennis had continued to claim the sole striker's role with Jack Sampson filling the wide left midfield berth for this match, however, Sampson was on the goal line when Chris Holroyd sent in a low weighted cross which he turned in past the 'keeper. Substitute 'keeper Richie Branagan had a good match making several excellent saves to keep his side in the match. Towards the end of the match Tranmere had the ball in the net but their effort was ruled off-side.

There was joy all round as this victory took Macclesfield into fifth, a play-off position. What no one could have forecast at this stage of the season was that this win would be the last until 23 March. In addition, that leading scorer Kristian Dennis would lose form and by the end of the season was not even a first choice in the starting line-up.

In the next match played at the Moss Rose against **FC Halifax Town**, Macclesfield started in explosive style attacking the visitor's goal and almost scored in the first minute, but that was as good as it got. Halifax, under their third manager of the season, the experienced Jim Harvey, were a strong and well organised team. With striker Jack Sampson on the left wing again, Kristian Dennis marked throughout the match and the team collectively playing below form often easily losing possession in greasy conditions, the Silkmen never looked like winning the match. In the first half Halifax had a goal disallowed but their sole strike by Shaun Tuton in the 77th minute gave them victory continuing their resurgence.

Not a good day at the office for the Silkmen when they entertained **Aldershot Town**. As a unit they failed to find form, seemed to lack ideas and whilst they had shots at goal, they were all directed right at the 'keeper. On loan from Millwall, 20-year-old Alfie Pavey headed home Dan Walker's cross to give the visitors the lead in the 19th minute. At the start of the second half Chris Holroyd replaced defender Tony Diagne and six minutes later Chris Sutherland replaced Paul Turnbull bringing pace to the right side and with a change of formation from 4-5-1 to 4-4-2, Holroyd partnered Dennis at the front but it was the visitors who extended their lead in the 65th minute. Damon Lathrope struck a free-kick from 40 yards leaving 'keeper Branagan scrambling back in an attempt to save the ball which sailed over his head. With this 2-0 defeat Macclesfield continued their poor home form having last won a league match at the Moss Rose on 21 November.

Designated as Armed Forces Day, around 100 present and former servicemen were given free entry to this match. The family of murdered soldier Lee Rigby attended. Fusilier Rigby, 25, was off duty when he was attacked and killed on 22 May 2013 in Woolwich, London. Lee's widow Rebecca and their son Jack, five, and Lee's dad together with other family members were present. There was a collection for Scotty's Little Soldiers which raised £573.27. Jack was the match mascot and as Lee's family walked round to their seats there was a spontaneous applause from the spectators.

At the New Lawn **Forest Green Rovers** started and finished the day in top position. Macclesfield put in a much improved performance to their last league match with the first half ending without either side scoring, but the Silkmen had lost the injured Paul Lewis who was replaced by Paul Turnbull. Yet another injury early in the second half forced Danny Whitehead to retire, the recently signed striker Reece Styche taking his place. Macclesfield took the lead in the 69th minute when Keiffer Moore's poorly weighted back-pass to his 'keeper was intercepted by Jack Sampson who slotted home. The lead only lasted eight minutes, former Silkman James Jennings hitting home following a free-kick. The home side took all three points, Charlie Clough scrambling the ball over the line in the 93rd minute to break the Silkmen hearts.

With just one win and three defeats the team completed January in eighth position.

FEBRUARY

Surprisingly top-scorer Kristian Dennis and speedy winger Danny Rowe were relegated to the bench for the away match against **Kidderminster Harriers** who were fighting a relegation battle although they had won their last two league outings. The home side were three goals to the good by the 23rd minute without any reply from the Silkmen. Set pieces had become the Silkmen's Achilles heel this season and it was from a corner which was poorly defended allowing Keith Lowe to bundle the ball over the line. Their second goal by Harry White came from a tamely hit shot which bobbed along with 'keeper Shwan Jalal failing to collect, the ball creeping over the line. Former Silkmen Arthur Gnahoua slotted home from 12 yards converting Whitfield's squared pass. Four minutes later manager John Askey brought on Dennis and Rowe for Reece Styche and Rhys Turner after which, on his own admission, the team's performance improved. By then the game looked to be over but it might have changed if referee Rushton had not waived away a claim for what looked to be certain penalty for the Silkmen at the beginning of the second half. Dennis scored a consolation goal in the 90th minute from a sweetly taken free-kick, but Macclesfield crashed to their fourth straight defeat sliding down the table to 12th position.

A waterlogged pitch coupled with a forecast of further heavy rain led to the postponement of the home match against Dover Athletic on 20 February.

The following Saturday Macclesfield welcomed **Wrexham** who brought 1089 supporters helping to boost the gate to 2406. On a dry but very cold Saturday afternoon the Silkmen battled hard and matched a Wrexham side in fourth position. Jack Sampson was moved up front as the sole striker, Kristian Dennis started on the left wing with the centre midfield strengthened following the return of Danny Whitehead from injury. Chances were created by both sides but it was in the 93rd minute when Macclesfield rode their luck, with Jalal beaten, Man of the Match George Pilkington, cleared off the line ensuring the match finished with honours even at 0-0, Macclesfield picking up their first point since 2 January. *One minute's silence was held in respect of former player Derek Rogers who had died in January.*

With just one point earned in the month the Silkmen found themselves in 12th position with 48 points.

MARCH

On Tuesday 1 March **Torquay United** visited the Moss Rose to fulfil the fixture originally scheduled for 6 February but was postponed due to the FA Trophy match with Torquay. Although there was some rain in the first half, during the second half heavy rain was blowing across the pitch towards the main stand. Yet another changed team with Neill Byrne out injured and Chris Holroyd and Jack Sampson dropped, replaced by Paul Lewis, Tony Diagne and Jimmy Phillips. This was another disappointing performance with a lack of co-ordination, failure to keep their shape and a below par performance overall. The visitor's first goal by Nathan Blissett (whose uncle is Luther Blissett) came when goalkeeper Shwan Jalal was on the edge of the box and the Macclesfield defence were static, neither clearing the ball allowing Blissett to nip in and place the ball into an empty net. A good strike by Kristian Dennis just before half time ensured that the teams went into the interval on equal terms. In the second half, the Silkmen again succumbed to their set-piece Achilles heel, Blissett heading home from a corner.

The following Saturday a scoreless draw was played out at Moss Lane, **Altrincham**. An uninspiring match summed by the Non-League Paper's headline 'Moss dross ensures it's a stalemate in Cheshire'. Macclesfield's best chance in the first half saw Paul Turnbull's free-kick hit the crossbar,

with Kristian Dennis having a shot turned round the post. The Silkmen had to play with 10 men for several minutes when David Fitzpatrick left the field for medical attention. For Altrincham Michael Rankine had a shot well saved by Shwan Jalal. Kristian Dennis could have won the match for Macclesfield near the end after good work by substitute Chris Holroyd, but he could only produce a weak left-footed shot. *George Pilkington made his 100th appearance for Macclesfield.*

Lincoln City came to the Moss Rose in fine form and initially looked as though they wanted to win the contest more than the home side. Again Macclesfield conceded a goal from a set-piece in the 16th minute, Jamie McCombe, brother of Macclesfield's John, met Terry Hawridge's free-kick to head home. Later in the half Macclesfield laid siege to the Lincoln goal with, in quick succession, Chris Holroyd, Danny Whitaker and Kristian Dennis all having shots saved by good defending and unbelievable goalkeeping. The Silkmen started the second half with more pace and application deservedly equalised through Danny Whitehead in the 50th minute. The second half proved to be an exciting affair with both sides trying to score the winning goal but they cancelled out each other. With the point gained Macclesfield reach the 'magical' 50 points. *This was the first time that two brothers (John and Jamie McCombe) have faced each other in a competitive match involving Macclesfield since Neil Howarth, Macclesfield, and Lee Howarth, Barnet, did so at Underhill in December 1997.*

Another draw followed at **Boreham Wood**. An unchanged side saw out the stalemate with Chris Holroyd, Kristian Dennis and substitute Reece Styche producing the Silkmen's three shots on target. In contrast the home side failed to muster a single shot on target.

The match at **Gateshead** was scheduled for Saturday 25 March but was brought forward a day at very short notice to Good Friday. This match belonged to Reece Styche. A hat-trick, with goals in the 7th 23rd and 87th minutes, gave Macclesfield their first victory since 2 January and a season double over Gateshead who had recently claimed some high-flying scalps in the National League.

Next a brilliant win against **Grimsby Town** at the Moss Rose who remained in third position despite this defeat. A sudden upturn in form by the Silkmen had come after manager John Askey had gone public to say that if some of the players did not improve their performances then they would not be offered contracts for the 2016-17 season! Macclesfield were on top in the first half, although the visitors had their moments, with Jack Sampson tapping the ball home in the 26th minute to give the Silkmen the lead. Grimsby came out at the beginning of the second half meaning business, going all out to score which they did, John Nolan equalising in the 58th minute with a clinical strike across the goal. Ten minutes later, with almost all the Grimsby players attacking in the Macclesfield half, Reece Styche latched onto a long ball from Chris Holroyd, beat the off-side trap, rounded both former Silkmen defender Aristote Nsiala and the 'keeper to roll the ball into the net and score what turned out to be the winning goal. Grimsby kept up the pressure with three shots going just wide of the post. Late on Danny Whitaker was unlucky to hit the post. *This victory, Macclesfield's first home league win since 21 November 2015, was achieved without the services of four key players, Kristian Dennis, Neill Byrne, Paul Lewis and Paul Turnbull. The season double over Grimsby was also the first time that the Silkmen had beaten Grimsby at home in four seasons.*

An improving position ensured that the Silkmen completed the month in 10th position with 57 points although it was looking increasingly difficult that a play-off position could be achieved.

APRIL

In the first match of the final month of the campaign **Braintree Town** were the guests and they made the better start challenging the Macclesfield goal in the first 15 minutes. The Silkmen, unchanged from the previous match, slowly came into the match and after Danny Whitaker's

penalty conversion in the 25th minute it rarely looked as though Macclesfield would lose this match. A superb goal by Danny Rowe two minutes after the interval gave the Silkmen a 2-0 lead. From a Braintree corner, Reece Styche broke out of the box taking the ball well up field before passing to Danny Rowe on the right who sprinted towards goal coolly lifting the ball into the net from 12 yards. John McCombe converted Danny Whitaker's corner to score his first goal for the Silkmen and extend the lead to 3-0. Braintree changed both their forwards after which they looked a more dangerous, but it was Simeon Akinola, a handful throughout the match, who pulled a goal back for Braintree in the 76th, the match finishing 3-1 in favour of the Silkmen. *This was Shwan Jalal's last match for the Silkmen (see below). Designated as Ladies' Day in the Mclroy Lounge, there was a glass of Prosecco wine, goody bag for each lady diner and free nail bar facility was available. The wine was sponsored by Co-op, London Road with the goody bags and the nail bar sponsored by the Tytherington Club.*

Just one change for the trip to **Barrow**, goalkeeper Richie Branagan replacing Shwan Jalal who had sustained a training ground injury. Macclesfield dominated the first half: Reece Styche had a shot deflected for a corner and defender John McCombe hooked a shot against the angle before Danny Whitehead blasted the ball home in the 24th minute. A second goal almost came from Danny Whitaker but his shot went just wide, whilst at the other end a free-kick from Andy Hawarth hit the post. Barrow equalised just before the break when Styche was adjudged to have felled Jason Walker in the area, Walker converting the resultant penalty. Neither side could find a winning goal in the second half although former Silkman Ben Tomlinson almost scored in stoppage time but his shot went inches wide of the post.

On the following Tuesday the re-arranged match from 20 February saw the Silkmen entertain **Dover Athletic** who were in third place and completing their one match-in-hand against a Macclesfield side who had gone seven matches unbeaten. There was the worst possible start for the home side when the referee adjudged that goalkeeper Richie Branagan had brought down Dover's Ricky Modeste just outside the area. With first choice 'keeper Shwan Jalal still injured it fell to striker Jack Sampson to don the gloves. Despite claiming that he had never fulfilled the role of goalkeeper before, he performed well throughout keeping a clean sheet and earned the Man of the Match award. The match was played at a fast pace throughout. Following an altercation with Reece Styche, Dover's Richard Orlu was dismissed towards the end of the first half. In the second half Macclesfield were unfortunate not to score having several shots blocked by Dover. Neither side could break the deadlock with the score remaining 0-0 at full time. *Following an appeal by the club, Richard Branagan's red card was rescinded by the Football Association two days later.*

A second home match, on this occasion against **Guiseley**, was a rather disappointing affair after the pace and application against Dover Athletic but this typified the Silkmen's inconsistent play throughout the season. A single goal in the 76th minute by Paul Lewis, returning to the side having recovered from injury, heading home a well-delivered corner by the speedy Danny Rowe gave the Silkmen victory and season double against Guiseley. During additional time Guiseley almost scored in a goalmouth scramble but 'keeper Richie Branagan eventually managed to grab the ball on the ground. *Macclesfield's 600th Conference league match.*

Cheltenham Town came to the Moss Rose having been crowned Vanarama National League champions the previous week and ended Macclesfield's run of nine consecutive matches undefeated. The visitors were the better side being well organised and strong. Macclesfield created several goal scoring opportunities but just could not make them count and relied far too much on the long ball often losing possession resulting in Cheltenham having the majority of the possession. The champions won the match with a first half goal by Dan Holman who went unchallenged, was given far too much space and time to control the ball, striking home from 25 yards. *As this was the*

last home match for kit man Paul Etchells before his retirement, all the players and ball boys/girls formed a guard of honour before kick-off.

The Richard Butcher Memorial Trust was set up after his untimely death. Having raised £39,000 and unable to fulfil their ambition of a project in Nottingham, the Trust committee decided that the funds should be split between Macclesfield Town FC and Kettering Town FC (Richard's first club). A cheque for £20,000 was presented to the club on the pitch before the match. Macclesfield will use the funds firstly to provide a social area for fans on match day by renovating the 'Corner Flag' Bar and renaming it 'Butch's Bar'. Secondly, to bring junior and youth football back to the club by way of 'Project 21', Richard's squad number at Macclesfield was 21. Facilities will be established for all children and young adults in the 6-16 age group in the area with the objective of helping them to become both better footballers and people.

The curtain came down on the season at **FC Halifax Town** who, at the start of the match, were one place above the relegation zone and only had to match the result of Guiseley one place below them, to retain their National League status. Macclesfield started the brighter forcing two corners in the opening minutes and despite efforts by Kristian Dennis, Danny Rowe and Jack Sampson the Silkmen could not find an opening goal. The Shaymen were also on the attack with attempts by Josh MacDonald and Jordan Burrow, but it was McManus for Halifax who gave them the lead in the second minute of added time in the first half. Neill Byrne went close for the Silkmen early in the second half but the home side then stepped up the pressure with chances coming thick and fast but, against the run of play, Danny Rowe beat the defence to equalise in the 60th minute. This goal changed the match with Macclesfield then applying the pressure with efforts by Dennis, Rowe and Danny Whitaker. However, it was the Shaymen who almost snatched victory right at the end of the match when they hit the post. With Guiseley winning their match, FC Halifax Town were relegated.

Macclesfield completed the season in 10th position with 66 points, 14 points adrift of a play-off place.

Player of the Year Awards

George Pilkington

Supporters' Player of the Year

Players' Player of the Year

Wraggs to Riches Player of the Year

Kristian Dennis

Andy Mellor Shield

Danny Rowe

Supporters' vote for 'Best Goal of the Season'

Braintree (home) 2 April 2016



Captain Paul Turnbull with Jack, son of the late Fusilier Lee Rigby



Jack Sampson scoring at Forest Green Rovers - 30 January



Chris Holroyd in action against Wrexham - 27 February



Reece Styche completing his hat-trick at Gateshead - 26 March



John McCombe's first goal for the club against Braintree Town - 2 April



Striker Jack Samson on goalkeeping duties - Dover Athletic 12 April



Kit man Paul Etchells given a Guard of Honour at his last home match before retirement.




Richard Butcher Memorial Trust - presentation of cheque by Mrs Butcher to club chairman Mark Blower



Goalscorer Danny Rowe - AFC Halifax Town 30 April

To compliment this written account, details relating to match teams, scorers, attendances, player statistics, general information and player profiles can all be found within this web site, www.silkmenarchives.org.uk

Grateful thanks are extended to the club's official photographer Peter Hilton for providing photographs included in this chapter. Six of the photographs for the Bosley Charity match were provided by the author.




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**MACCLESFIELD TOWN FOOTBALL CLUB
PLAYERS 2015-16 SEASON**


PLAYER	EXISITING PLAYER/SIGNED	LEFT CLUB
Fisayo Adarabioyo	Summer 2015 from Crystal Palace Non-contract forms	November 2015
Theo Bailey-Jones	MTFC player 2014-15	Summer 2016
Connor Bass	Community Sports Trust Academy	
Cory Bentley-Knight	Community Sports Trust Academy	
Richie Branagan	MTFC player 2014-15	
Neill Byrne	Summer 2015 from AFC Telford Utd	
Chris Churchman	October 2015 from Stockport County	February 2016
Dan Cowan	MTFC player 2014-15	
Nathan Dangana	Community Sports Trust Academy	
Kristian Dennis	Summer 2015 from Stockport County season-long loan	Summer 2016
Tony Diagne	Summer 2015 from Lincoln City Six months loan extended to end of season	Summer 2016
David Fitzpatrick	Summer 2015 from Southport	
Andy Halls	MTFC player 2014-15	
Damani Holness	Summer 2015 free agent Non contract forms	Summer 2016
Chris Holroyd	MTFC player 2014-15	
Shwan Jalal	Summer 2015 from Northampton T	Summer 2016 to Wrexham
Byron Jenkins	MTFC Coach	
Paul Lewis	MTFC player 2014-15	
John McCombe	March 2016 free agent (previous club York City)	
Eddie Maieco	Community Sports Trust Academy	
John Marsden	Summer 2015 from Southport Non contract forms	September 2015 to Colwyn Bay
Omar Mbowe	December 2015 from Maine Road FC Non contract forms	Summer 2016
Lindon Meikle	Summer 2015 from York City Non contract forms	December 2015 to Alfreton Town
Jimmy Phillips	February 2016 on loan from Gateshead	March 2016
George Pilkington	MTFC player 2014-15	
Louis Robles	January 2016 from Wigan Athletic on loan (Youth contract)	January 2016
Danny Rowe	MTFC player 2014-15	
Jack Sampson	Summer 2015 from Morecambe	
Joel Senior	Community Sports Trust Academy	
Reece Styche	October 2015 Kidderminster Harriers on loan January 2016 signed from Kidderminster Harriers	Summer 2016 to Gateshead
Chris Sutherland	December 2015 free agent (previous club Ashton United)	

Matty Templeton	March 2016 from Barnsley on loan	Returned to Barnsley at end of loan
Paul Turnbull	MTFC player 2014-15	Summer 2016 to Barrow
Liam Turner	Community Sports Trust Academy	
Rhys Turner	January 2016 from Oldham Athletic on loan	Returned to Oldham Athletic March 2016
Danny Whitaker	MTFC player 2014-15	
Danny Whitehead	Summer 2015 from Accrington Stanley January 2016 Wigan Athletic on loan	January 2016 to Wigan Athletic Summer 2016 to Wigan Athletic

The following players were also registered to play for Macclesfield Town Football Club at various times during the season but did not make any appearances:

Adam Anson, William Boyle, Chris Chantler and Curtis Hayes-Brown.





Matchday Dining at The Moss Rose

Get the VIP treatment you deserve
at The Moss Rose

**MACCLESFIELD TOWN FOOTBALL CLUB
OFFICIAL TEAM PHOTOGRAPH
SEASON 2015-16**



Back Row

Paul Lewis, Jack Sampson, Tony Diagne, Neill Byrne

Middle Row

Paul Etchells (Kit man), Bill Gorton (Goalkeeping coach), Theo Bailey-Jones, Kristian Dennis, Dan Cowan, Richie Branagan, Andy Halls, Curtis Hayes-Brown, Danny Rowe, Martin Ollier (Physio), Rae Ingram (Masseur)

Front Row

Chris Holroyd, Paul Turnbull, John Askey (Manager), Efe Sodje (Assistant Manager), Danny Whitaker, George Pilkington