

Leicester Fosse endeavoured to induce goalkeeper Godfrey Beardsley and other players for that matter to play for them. Beardsley, having either a real grievance or an imaginary one with the Luffs committee was persuaded to leave and join the Fossils. Discussions took place in a number of public houses in Loughborough between Beardsley and Fosse Committee members. Not surprisingly Loughborough felt somewhat aggrieved and when the Fosse asked for Beardsley's transfer it was refused, and a price was put upon the head of the amateur. Later Beardsley formally requested to leave, but again it was turned down. The Luffs made a formal complaint of "poaching" against the Fosse to the Football League. The hearing was due to be held on 14 October 1898, but the Football League received a wire withdrawing the charge. It was therefore deemed that Beardsley should be eligible forthwith for the Fosse, and that Loughborough were required to provide an explanation why the charge was withdrawn. Mr Henry T. Dunn, Loughborough Club secretary was prepared to produce evidence in support of the poaching charge. However, when he received the wire notifying of the date of the Management Committee hearing he was on the Isle of Wight, having been recommended by his medical advisor to take a holiday for the benefit of his health. Mr Dunn immediately wired in reply stating that he would return home. He arrived the day before the meeting, but found that Mr Clarke, the Fosse secretary had been to Loughborough with the view of arranging an amicable settlement and getting the charge withdrawn. An appointment was made at Leicester and just twenty-four hours before the hearing was due to commence Messrs. Vickers and Dormer, chairman and ex-chairman of the Loughborough Committee had a conference with the Fosse Committee. The matter was discussed, and it was agreed that the issue could be settled by Fosse giving Loughborough a cheque for £50 and guarantee match of £25 on 27 December [Football League game] and half the gate over £50. The Fosse also had pay to Loughborough's expenses. Mr Dunn stated that it was intention to produce evidence to substantiate the charge of poaching and that he had no hand in the settlement of the matter with the Fosse, and was not therefore, personally answerable to the League for the course adopted. The arrangement was intended by the Fosse to be of a private and confidential matter. After much discussion and deliberation, the Football League Management Committee were thoroughly satisfied that the case of "poaching" had been established, and the Fosse were told that if it had been proved that the directors were aware of what had been done by their secretary, Mr William Clarke, then the club would have been suspended. Mr Clarke did not put in an appearance and was suspended from all connection with League football with immediate effect. The decision of the committee in no way affected the transfer of Beardsley, and Fosse were compelled to abide by the arrangement already entered into. Having had his authority challenged Mr Dunn, felt he had no objection but to resign as the Luffs secretary.

The Beardsley affair cost the Fosse a pretty penny - £50 transfer, £50 fine, and the various costs and expenses incurred. To give an indication of the severity of the fine, Fosse were still applying for more time to pay in November. If Fosse had approached Loughborough in a business-like manner, it seems likely that they would have acquired the services of Beardsley for a much less sum, indeed it would have paid them to of given the Luffs £100 for his services. Loughborough came out of the affair with almost a clean sheet, a small sum of £5 5 shillings and displaying a much "better spirit towards the Fosse than the Fosse shown towards Loughborough. However, as we shall see the affair in the longer term had a huge detrimental impact on the club.

Controversy was never too far away; Fosse's signing of William "Billy" Rowley who was engaged as a substitute for Beardsley bought the club into conflict yet again with the football authorities.



Billy Rowley

The former England goalkeeper was Stoke City's charismatic wheeler-dealer secretary when transferred himself in August 1898 and even negotiated a signing on fee, prior to making his one and only appearance for the Fosse, at home against Lincoln City. Having retired, Rowley had to seek reinstatement as an amateur before he could be appointed Stoke City's secretary. To pay an amateur was a capital offence as far as the Football Association was concerned. Rowley's signing caused an uproar. All parties concerned felt the force of the FA's wrath. The Fosse were fined £10, and Billy Rowley and William D Clark, Fosse's secretary/manager were each suspended for 12 months for unethical practice.

The fallout of the Beardsley and Rowley affairs rocked both clubs to their very foundations. Leicester's Chairman Samuel Hudson resigned in January 1899 and director Arthur Staines was suspended for 8 months from April when Clark's first appeal against his sentence was unsuccessful. The Beardsley affair also had a huge impact on Loughborough. Not only did they lose one of their best players, but also of their highly respected club secretary Mr Harry Dunn. Although not immediately apparent, the loss of the latter, even as it turned out not for long, was more damaging to the club than anyone could have imagined.