



**ACADEMY  
RUGBY CLUB**



*50th  
Anniversary*

## *A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT, ACADEMY R.F.C.*

**T**he celebration of the 50th anniversary of any organisation is a momentous occasion in their history. That we at Academy are now celebrating such an event is perhaps more remarkable than normal.

**A**s readers of this brochure will be reminded, the Club came perilously close to going out of existence a few years ago, and it is to the great credit of all concerned that we have pulled back from the brink. A word of caution however - a greater effort will be required in order to maintain the revival and to ensure that the Club progresses further in the ranks of Ulster rugby.

**T**hrough the generations the Club has produced a number of characters who will readily come to mind, i.e. Stanley Nash, the late Walter Sterling, Brian Lutton and his sparring partner 'Arry Hutchman and in later years Willie 'Bunter' Lougheed, Philip 'Cleuso' Trimble and Dr 'Tina' Esler. The Club has also provided the Ulster Branch with a number of administrators in the form of Stanley Nash, Cecil Kennedy who served as President in 1975/76, Robin Reid, Brian Lutton and with more than our fair share of referees.

**A**s you peruse the pages which follow I am sure that many memories, both pleasant and otherwise, will be rekindled and I would commend it to you.

*A special word of thanks to Henry Halliday  
for all the painstaking research necessary for the production of the brochure  
and to my Vice-President, Ivan Wallace, for his considerable efforts  
in persuading individuals and companies to advertise.*

## CHAPTER 1

### Belfast Royal Academy

The oldest school in Belfast was founded in 1785 as the Belfast Academy. At this time the population of Belfast was only about 15,000 and it was intended that the new Academy would also provide higher education so that boys would not have to travel to Dublin or Glasgow to attend University. Belfast Academy was first purely a Presbyterian venture and its first Principal was Dr Crombie, minister of the First Belfast Presbyterian Congregation. The school premises were situated on the edge of the town in Donegall Street beside the remains of the old town ramparts with a good view over the sea and countryside. The area was square-shaped bounded on three sides by Donegall Street, York Street and Academy Street.

Dr Crombie died in 1790 at the age of sixty and was succeeded by Dr William Bruce, a Dubliner who was also a Presbyterian minister. He was considered one of the foremost preachers of his day and even as a young man he became a celebrated figure in both politics and religion. Unlike his modern day counterpart Dr Bruce was a member of the Volunteer Movement and favoured Irish home rule free of English government interference. Many Academy boys had parents or relatives who were in the Volunteer Movement. The following year in 1791 Wolfe Tone who had a younger brother at the school founded the Society of United Irishmen in Belfast.

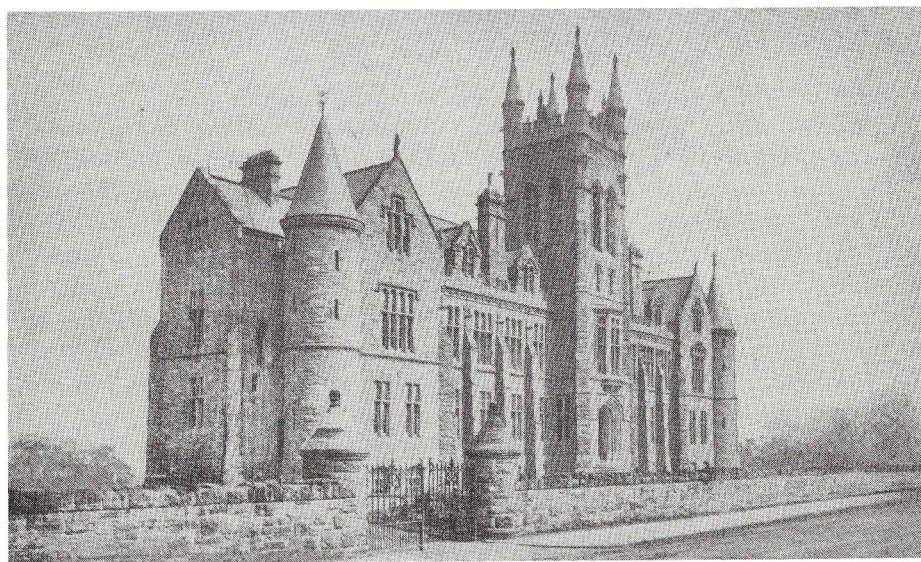
Academy also had some revolutionary happenings; in April 1792 eight boarders and one or two day boys decided to assert their rights by armed rebellion. At 6.30 am. on 12th April they took possession of the mathematics classroom, collected from the pantry 14 large loaves and a quantity of beef and declared war on the Principal and Patrons of the school. They had 5 pistols, a large amount of ammunition and demanded certain privileges. Dr Bruce was furious and sent some workmen to break down the door but they were fired upon by the pupils and fled. Further discussions took place before the boys laid down their arms and surrendered that evening. The incident attracted much publicity at the time, but all the boys who took part in it, left the school immediately afterwards.

Dr Bruce worked with great energy and enthusiasm and made the school famous throughout Ireland. He resigned in 1822 at

the age of 65 and died in 1841. He was succeeded by Dr James Gray who stayed at Academy for only 4 years before leaving to take up a chaplaincy with the East India Company.

The next Principal was also a clergyman, Rev Reuben John Bryce who was a native of Scotland. He had a somewhat chequered career as Principal and during the half century (1826 - 1880) that he was in charge the school passed through great changes of fortune, and at one point almost died of neglect. It is interesting to note that Dr Bryce who was secretary of the Ulster Gaelic Society taught Irish at the school.

The plan of raising the Academy to the standing of a College was dropped as this was to be undertaken by the Belfast Academical Institution which was founded in 1811 to provide the nucleus of a University. Academy's first Preparatory School was founded in 1829 to teach the first elements of reading by a new and improved method. The Academy itself was old and dilapidated and the original school rooms were in part let as stables. In 1878 a site was obtained for a new building outside the town on the Cliftonville Road or as it was then called, the New Lodge Road. The style of architecture for the new school was imitation Scottish Baronial, a style probably better suited for a larger building (Figure 1). Dr Bryce resigned as Principal once the new school building had been completed. He was succeeded by Dr W F Collier who had been the Vice-Principal.



**BELFAST ROYAL ACADEMY**

**(FIGURE 1)**

Dr. Collier was an inspiring teacher and author who played an important part in introducing the game of golf to Ireland. The school grew in size from 150 to over 200 pupils in the early 1880s. However, the absence of adequate playing fields in the planning of the new school cramped the development of school sports for over 50 years and made it harder for the school to grow in size. There was some good news in 1887 when at the time of Queen Victoria's Jubilee the school obtained permission to change its name to Belfast Royal Academy. However, the school declined again and in 1890 several members of staff were permitted to resign including Dr Collier who remained as Head of English.

The new Principal, Mr T W Foster, was a talented mathematician and he worked very hard to save the school from closure. He modernised the Kindergarten department and attempted unsuccessfully to introduce rugby football. Mr Foster's time at Belfast Royal Academy was a period of great academic success producing many entrants to universities. Unfortunately, he died suddenly in 1898 but before that he had managed to save the school. His successor was Mr R T Collier a graduate of the Queen's University of Ireland who had been working at a school in London. In 1901 the Academy was beginning to recover and two laboratories for physics and chemistry were opened. In the same year a girls' school was established by allowing those attending the Kindergarten and Preparatory School to continue classes at the Academy. The girls' and boys' schools were at first completely separate.

From 1918, after the First World War, the school increased in size although it was threatened by the political troubles of the time. The Board of Governors, concerned that the school might be set on fire and looted, gave consideration to a proposal to apply for a gun to arm the school Janitor. The Academy survived unharmed, although on one occasion some ammunition was found under shrubs in the school grounds. Mr Collier resigned in 1923 having raised the school to a strength of numbers and finance not previously known. The number of pupils had increased from 100 to 300 during his 25 years as Principal.

In 1923 Mr A R Foster, a scholar and a well-known sportsman became Principal. He was young and enthusiastic and at once began to bring Academy up to date. School meals were introduced, the teaching of Greek and German was resumed and

physical education was greatly extended. Other innovations included prefects, a Christmas concert, a school magazine, an annual sports day, a swimming club, a Girl Guide troop, school uniform for girls and rugby football. The school became co-educational with the boys' and girls' schools mixed for all academic activities.

In 1926 Wingfield House, opposite the school on the Cliftonville Road, was purchased for additional classroom accommodation. Four classrooms were fashioned and the Kindergarten Department was moved into them. In 1929 a new wing was built at the back of the main school at a cost of over £10,000. The new wing was connected to the older building by an arched gallery and it contained a large gymnasium and three large classrooms one being a music room and one an art room. By 1930 there were 500 pupils at Academy.

In 1933 over 13 acres of land were secured from the estate of the Earl of Shaftesbury at Belfast Castle to be used as a sports ground. This solved the problem of inadequate playing provision which had temporarily been resolved by renting grounds at Bladon Drive and elsewhere. The new playing fields at Castle Grounds became among the finest in the country and their acquisition was due largely to the efforts of the Rt Hon AB Babington, the Attorney General for Northern Ireland and Mr AR Foster, the Headmaster. (In 1934 the designation Principal was replaced by Headmaster).

Thus, rugby football was successfully introduced into Belfast Royal Academy by Mr AR Foster. His namesake Mr TW Foster was unsuccessful in his attempts to introduce the game to the school some 33 years earlier. A great debt is therefore owed to Mr AR Foster for his efforts to promote rugby and to develop pitches at the Castle Grounds. Mr AR Foster or Alec Foster as he was known to many was a more than useful Irish centre threequarter. When he came to Belfast Royal Academy he along with Mr G B Taylor, a teacher of mathematics, set about creating a rugby club. Mr Taylor often refereed matches and Mr Foster, assisted by Mr CC Harte, coached the early teams. Mr Harte was responsible for encouraging many old boys of the school to play for Malone RFC. Indeed, in 1927, in the absence of an Academy Old Boys' RFC, Malone decided to make all pupils at Academy honorary members of their rugby club.

In 1937, just a few years later the school won its way to the School's Cup final. On this occasion Methodist College won by a goal to a try. Before Mr Foster's efforts association football was the main game played at the school.

In 1931, largely through the efforts of Mr Foster and Mr JC Picken, an Old Boys' Association was formed, some 9 years after the Old Girls' Association had been founded. The Old Girls' Hockey Club, the Owls was founded in 1925.

Mr Foster's daughter married Conor Cruise O'Brien who taught for a while at Belfast Royal Academy. In 1942 Mr Foster resigned for health reasons and later took up a part-time position in the the Royal Belfast Academical Institution. He died in 1972. For 1 year Mr JMK Martin was appointed acting Headmaster. In late 1943 Mr J W Darbyshire a strict disciplinarian from Lancashire was appointed Headmaster and he remained until his retirement in 1968. Mr Darbyshire continued to encourage rugby football at Belfast Royal Academy and he was Headmaster at the time of formation of the Former Pupil's Rugby Club. Relations between the School and the Former Pupils' Rugby Club were very good when Mr Darbyshire was headmaster. Later in the 1980s when schools were expected to be run as businesses, relations soured a little and this may have been responsible for the transient decline in the fortunes of the Academy Rugby Club.

### Further Reading

Shearman H (1935). Belfast Royal Academy 1785 - 1935.

## CHAPTER 2

### The Origins of BRA (FP)

Documentary evidence of the foundation of BRA (FP) rugby football club is scanty. On the 8th June 1945 James Picken wrote the following letter to some former pupils of the school to announce a General Meeting on the 22nd June 1945 to select Office-bearers and Committee:

4 Waring Street,  
Belfast

8th June 1945

### **RUGBY FOOTBALL CLUB**

Dear Sir,

*You will be pleased to learn that an Old Boys' Rugby Football Club has been formed, and that the application made for affiliation to the Ulster Branch of the Irish Rugby Football Union has now been granted.*

*The first General Meeting of the Club will be held in the School on Friday, 22nd instant, at 7.30 pm, at which the following business will be transacted:-*

- (a) *To draw up Rules*
- (b) *To elect Office-bearers and Committee*
- (c) *To receive the report of the Athletic Sub-Committee elected at the Extraordinary General Meeting of the Association held on 4th May, 1945.*

*It will be agreed that this new venture should prove itself to be a very decided asset to the Association and will be especially welcomed by those Old Boys now serving with the Forces.*

*Sufficient members have now been enrolled to field two fifteens, but to ensure the complete success of the new club it is essential that it receives the support of every member of the Association.*



*To make provision for this it is proposed that the rules of the Club be so constituted as to permit of all members of the Association being eligible for non-playing membership, if they so desire, at an annual subscription to be determined at this meeting.*

*Your attendance and support will be very much appreciated.*

*Yours faithfully*

*James C Picken*

*Hon. Secretary*

From this letter it would appear that the decision to form a Rugby Club was ratified on the 4th May 1945 at an Extraordinary General Meeting of the Old Boys' Association when an Athletic Sub-Committee was elected. Prior to this a member of the school teaching staff and master in charge of rugby Mr Alan J Stewart, prompted by another teacher Mr Paddy Bradley, had called a meeting with some of the School's First XV players to be held one evening in the School Dining Room. Minutes from this meeting are not in existence but the suggestion to form a former pupils rugby club was said to have been enthusiastically received and a small committee was elected to search for suitable playing fields. Walter Sterling, writing in the BRA (FP) RFC Newsletter in 1965, suggested that this meeting took place in 1944, the year after Mr Darbyshire became headmaster. The Committee elected at that meeting included JA Stewart, JG Gray, JW Kyle, N Flockhart, WR Sterling and the School First XV captain S Nash. Gray and Kyle had left school the previous year and were playing their rugby at Queen's University. Walter also reported that after the Club was formed the Committee meetings were held in the back bar of the Duke of York public house in Commercial Court.

Mr Picken reported that enough members had been enrolled to field two fifteens. This may have been inaccurate as a later report from the Committee of the Rugby Club sent to the Old Boys' Association to be read at the General Meeting on the 21st October, 1949 noted that in 1945-46 we had only one team. This report which was sent to the Board of Governors of the school raised fears of the failure of the Rugby Club because of the lack of ground and changing facilities, a foretaste of future troubles

ahead. This report of October 1949 gives more details of the Club's Foundation and its aims:

## **REPORT TO GOVERNORS AND OLD BOYS ASSOCIATION ON THE BELFAST ROYAL ACADEMY (F.P) RUGBY CLUB**

*The Committee have on behalf of the Rugby Club decided to present to the Governors of the School and the Old Boys Association, the following report. This is a step which we are very reluctant to take but the present condition of the Old Boys Rugby Club is giving great cause for anxiety to all those connected with it.*

*The B.R.A. (F.P.) was founded in 1945 on the instigation of a master, J.A. Stewart, Esq., with the object of becoming a Senior Club in Belfast.*

*A Committee was formed composed of:-*

*Messrs J.W. Kyle N.B. Flockhart  
J.G. Gray V.N.M. Corken  
and W.R. Sterling*

*A ground, after extensive search, was procured at Glengormley and the Rugby Club was registered in the Junior League. The annual rent of this ground was £25 but it has been subsequently raised to £50, whilst no improvements have been made.*

*In 1945 - 46 we had only one team*

*1946 - 47 we had two teams*

*1947 - 48 we had three teams*

*1948 - 49 we had three teams*

*After the Season 1948-49 there has been little or no increase in membership. For a few years the keenness of the members remained at a high level and the club had the following successes:-*

*McCrea Cup winners in Season 1946 - 47*

*McCrea Cup Finalists in Season 1947 - 48*

*McCrea Cup Semi- Finalists in Season 1948 - 49*

*From division IV in the Junior League in 1945 - 46 to Division I in 1948 - 49.*

*Due to our ground and the very limited facilities we have to offer, it is noticeably plain that the keenness of the members has waned and the standard of rugby has fallen, and there is now a complete lack of young members.*

*In the season 1947-48 five of the School 1st XV joined the Club.*

*In the season 1948-49 two of the School 1st XV joined the Club (but have since resigned).*

*In the season 1949-50 none of the School 1st XV joined.*

*The Committee has done all in its limited power to obtain better facilities in keeping with the high standard of the Belfast Royal Academy. Due to the kindness of the Governors and the Headmaster, the Gym has been put at our disposal for training and for a Saturday night Dance, as a result of which the Club have, so far, realised the sum of £400 which we had hoped would go towards a ground and pavilion in the very near future, without which the Club will become extinct.*

*The conclusion, gentlemen, from this report you will gather that there is great danger of the Club being disbanded due to the lack of young members, this being in our opinion due to the facilities we have to offer. Should this state of affairs come about, the stock of the B.R.A. and Old Boys would be greatly devalued in the eyes of the Rugby Circles and public in Ulster.*

*It is our opinion, should the Club become extinct, there would be great difficulty in ever starting again. Due to our close affinity to the School, this would be a state of affairs we would much regret.*

*Given a good ground and facilities in the near future, the club will prosper and obtain Senior Status which is the ultimate aim of all the members, and by this report we look towards the Governors and the School for their immediate help.*

### **THE COMMITTEE OF THE RUGBY CLUB**

Missing from the list of Committee members in this report is Stanley Nash who had succeeded Jack Kyle as Captain of the School First XV in 1944. Jack Kyle who obtained 47 caps for Ireland played his club rugby at Queen's University and North of Ireland rather than BRA (FP). Geoff Gray also played at Queen's and North but Norman Flockhart, Victor Corken and Walter Sterling all played with the new Former Pupils Rugby Club. During the first season (1945-46) only one team

was fielded in the Junior League. For the next season there were two teams and in the 1947-48 and 1948-49 seasons there were three teams. The McCrea Cup was won in the second season, 1946-47, and promotion from Division IV of the Junior League to Division I was achieved within 4 seasons; a remarkable feat for such a new club.

For the first 4 seasons of the Club's existence Mr JC Picken was the President (see Table 1). He must have been the backbone of the non-playing Club membership in spite of being better known as a cricket player and administrator. His donation of £25, a lot of money in 1945, allowed the new Club to start on a sound financial footing. The first honorary secretary was William John Jefferson and the honorary treasurer was Frank Dalzell. The first Club Captain was Brendan Hennessey, an affable Dubliner who later served as Club President in the season 1963-64. Brendan was the Physical Education teacher at the School and was known for his delightful Dublin brogue and his prowess as a hooker. His generosity as a Captain and President was unrivalled. For his year as President (1963-64) he was living and working in Dublin and yet rarely missed a match of the First XV travelling on Saturdays by train. There was always time for him to buy his round after the match before rushing to the Great Northern Railway Station to catch the Enterprise back to Dublin. Tony Clark, a classics teacher at the school was the second captain in 1946-47 and he was followed by Thompson Brown for the seasons of 1947-48 and 1948-49. Thompson is perhaps better known as the owner of Thompson's restaurant in Arthur Street where visiting teams were often entertained. In the season 1949-50 Mr Harold Jefferson became president and VNM Corken one of the Club's founder members became Captain.

The Club's first pitch was a rented sloping field used for summer grazing of cattle. It was unequally divided to form two pitches with the second pitch rather narrow. The area is now developed and the M2 motorway runs through the field. The changing rooms were at the Castle Grounds some three miles away. Often players had to walk between the Castle Grounds and Glengormley to the playing pitches. There were very few cars available to Club members and even a tram ride to Glengormley left a one mile walk out to the ground. On wet winter days the players were sometimes refused the use of the trams because of the state of their togs. After matches washing took place in a

nearby stream said to be icy cold, but with time a hut and a barrel of water was provided. Walter Sterling recalled that this tin hut was grandly called the first Club Pavilion and cost the princely sum of £20.

Relationships with the School were generally very good and the Headmaster, Mr J W Darbyshire, easily persuaded the Board of Governors to place the gymnasium at the disposal of the Club for training and Saturday night dances. The latter raised considerable sums of money which were later used to purchase the grounds at Hydepark.

## SCHOOL DANCES

The now legendary dances were started in the 1948-49 season. They were held in the School Gym and made a considerable profit for the club. £270 in the first year, £1000 in the second and £600 in 1950-51 allowed almost £2000 to be raised towards the purchase of the pitches at Hydepark. The appeal of these dances was phenomenal; on one Saturday night a queue formed from the entrance of the Gym out to the Cliftonville Road.

The dances were not without one or two problems which were addressed in letters between Walter Sterling (Secretary of the Club) and Mr Darbyshire (Headmaster of the School) between 1948 and 1950. Firstly, Mr Darbyshire banned members of the school from attending the dances and this resulted in a fall in receipts. Walter Sterling wrote that many of the boys and girls were attending other dances and that allowing them to attend the dance in the school gymnasium would provide them with more incentive to join the Old Boys' and Old Girls' Associations when they leave school. Mr Darbyshire replied "Please accept my thanks for your letter dated 21st November 1948. If you will be good enough to phone me at school this week, I will gladly try to arrange an interview". This matter was resolved amicably.

In May 1949, Mr Darbyshire complained that the Gym was left dirty after the dances and on one occasion the floor marked by pulling the piano across it. Walter Sterling replied "I regret very much that the Gym was marked by pulling the piano

across the floor, this was an unpardonable "crime" on the part of the persons concerned, and I can also assure you that this will not occur again". The headmaster replied "in my opinion no further action is necessary nor will any bill for repairs etc. be sent to you on this occasion".

Later in April 1950 there was a complaint from a Mr Turner that teenagers who attended the Saturday night dance were guilty of drunkenness and rudeness to his daughter. Walter Sterling replied to these charges with the following letter:

***Belfast Royal Academy (F.P.) Rugby Football Club***

20 Cooldarragh Park  
Cavehill Road  
Belfast

24th April 1950

Dear Mr Darbyshire

*Referring to your letter of the 19th April, 1950, and subsequent conversation in your office, we regret that Mr Turner should have seen fit to send you this letter concerning the behaviour of the teenagers who attend the Saturday Night dance in your Academy. Such charges of drunkenness we consider very unjust and untruthful and a vague and dangerous generalisation.*

*Were anyone ever seen to be making a nuisance of himself or herself at the dance, whether due to inebriation or any other cause, he or she would be immediately requested to leave the hall and steps would be taken to ensure that they would not be readmitted. It would seem to us that these vague charges can be answered in one way only, by a categorical denial of them. If Mr. Turner does not wish to specify further what he means it is our word against his and we trust that the Board has sufficient confidence in the products of the school to make up its mind unhesitatingly.*

*If anyone has been rude to Mr. Turner's daughter we deeply regret it, but private displays of rudeness, however, must be beyond the pale of the Organising Committee. We can truthfully reiterate that no displays of this kind have been witnessed by any of us. The young lady in question is unknown to us.*

*Your correspondent suggests that some responsible person should come to the dance and at the same time call at the Phoenix. We hope that Mr. Turner does not imply that the patrons of the Academy hops and those of the Phoenix are the same. As regard the dances, Mr. Lord has been present on several occasions; he has spoken to members of the Committee and has expressed complete satisfaction of the way in which the dances are conducted. We trust that this fact in itself will more than outweigh Mr. Turner's wild and sweeping accusations.*

*The only trouble we have had from drunkenness was when two young men, whom we did not know, appeared one night in an advanced stage of intoxication; not only did we refuse them admission, but we sent them to the Royal Victoria Hospital as we considered that they required medical attention. We would point out that they were never admitted to the dance.*

*We hope that this letter deals adequately with Mr. Turner's, and if he persists in his accusations we are willing to send a deputation to discuss the matter with him.*

*Yours sincerely*

**p.s.** *On Saturday last we were pointed out Mr Turner's elder son who was at the dance. It would seem strange that if he holds the dances in such low esteem that members of this family should continue to patronize the dances.*



A YOUNG JACK KYLE PLAYING FULLBACK FOR BRA MEDALLION  
SIDE AT CASTLE GROUNDS

# TABLE 1 : PAST PRESIDENTS AND PAST CAPTAINS OF THE CLUB

	PAST PRESIDENTS	PAST CAPTAINS
1945-46	J C Picken	B Hennessey
1946-47	J C Picken	A M Clark
1947-48	J C Picken	W J T Brown
1948-49	J C Picken	W J T Brown
1949-50	H Jefferson	V N M Corken
1950-51	D T Boyd	A N Kinkead
1951-52	D T Boyd	H R C Catherwood
1952-53	J W Darbyshire OBE	S Nash
1953-54	J W Darbyshire OBE	S Nash
1954-55	W J Jefferson	A J Elliott
1955-56	F E Dalzell	M S Smyth
1956-57	I S Pollin	N A Lawther
1957-58	H McGladery	R B Cairns
1958-59	J W Darbyshire OBE	R B Cairns
1959-60	J W Darbyshire OBE	D T Hepworth
1960-61	A J W Chapman	J G Getty
1961-62	D Nash	J G Getty
1962-63	S S Barnett	P H Jackson
1963-64	B Hennessey	J H Best
1964-65	T J Wallace	R H Harrison
1965-66	W R Sterling	J G McGimpsey
1966-67	S Nash	H R Hutchman
1967-68	C F Kennedy	B R Lutton
1968-69	W M Mulholland	H L Halliday
1969-70	W H Goldstone	W D Clarke
1970-71	A M Clark	T A Bellieu
1971-72	M S Smyth	R Connolly
1972-73	N A Lawther	D A Haslett
1973-74	S R Perry	K A Knox
1974-75	J H Best	K A Knox
1975-76	G H A Thompson	M Trimble
1976-77	J G Smyth	S T Knox
1977-78	T G Skilling	H J O'B Morgan
1978-79	F J Buick	J V Corkey
1979-80	R D Reid	D R S Nash
1980-81	R P Tennant	D R S Nash
1981-82	J G McGimpsey	H R McClelland
1982-83	B Lutton	R Huddleston
1983-84	W T Barfoot	W E Loughheed
1984-85	J M Sloan	R Cromie
1985-86	E D Saunders	R Huddleston
1986-87	H R Hutchman	M Reynolds
1987-88	R Buchanan	G Henderson
1988-89	C Sturgess	P Trimble
1989-90	D K Best	D Walsh
1990-91	K A Knox	R Cromie
1991-92	H L Halliday	G Olding
1992-93	B R Lutton	M Lynn
1993-94	L M Luney	N Branagh
1994-95	A Emery	P Gamble



## TABLE 2: VICE PRESIDENTS (1994-95)

A F Allen  
 W H Auld  
 W T Barfoot  
 D K Best  
 J H Best  
 A L Boyd  
 D W Boyd  
 R Buchanan  
 F J Buick  
 G D Bustard  
 H R C Catherwood  
 A J W Chapman  
 A M Clark  
 W D Clarke  
 A M Cole  
 J M H Cooper  
 Rev. C Corkey  
 G W R Drennan  
 A J Elliott  
 D Emery  
 J N Finlay  
 W H Goldstone  
 H L Halliday  
 L L Halliday  
 D A Haslett  
 D T Hepworth  
 N W Hines  
 H R Hutchman  
 J Jamison  
 C F Kennedy  
 Sir R G C Kinahan  
 A N Kinkead  
 J W Kyle  
 N A Lawther

J L Lord  
 L M Luney  
 B R Lutton  
 H E McCombe  
 J C McCoubrey  
 J G McGimpsey  
 H McGladery  
 S Nash  
 R G F Parker  
 S R Perry  
 C J Petrie  
 I S Pollin  
 N Rainey  
 R D Reid  
 W B Roberts  
 H B Rodgers  
 E D Saunders  
 J S Shaw  
 W M Sillery  
 G R Simon  
 T G Skilling  
 J M Sloan  
 J G Smyth  
 M S Smyth  
 V Smyth  
 C Sturgess  
 R P Tennant  
 G H A Thompson  
 A S Treacy  
 V Turney  
 T J Wallace  
 J H White  
 J H S Williamson



**JACK KYLE WON 47 IRISH CAPS**



**KEN HOUSTON WON 6 IRISH CAPS**

## CHAPTER 3

### Consolidation in Junior Rugby & Promotion to Senior Rugby



FIGURE 2 - W. J. JEFFERSON, H.R.C. CATHERWOOD, V.N.M. CORKEN, E.D.W. ROGERS, W.R. STERLING, D.T. SHAW, J.B. McMUR, G.H. WILSON, J.A. BAILIE, A.M. CLARK, W.J.T. BROWN, N.J. WHITE, G.B. WILLIAMS, C.B. PORTEOUS & A.L. BOYD.  
 Insets:- E.J. CORKEN, T.B. SHAW, W.H. LAVERY.

For the first three seasons, the Club wore the colours of the School. The photograph shows the team of 1946-47, captained by Tony Clark, which won the McCrea Cup wearing school jerseys (Fig. 2). The McCrea Cup is open to all Junior Clubs playing in the area around Belfast that are not eligible to play in the Town's Cup. In the 1949-50 season the McCrea Cup was won again, this time the side was captained by VNM Corka and wore new maroon and white jerseys (Fig. 3). Thompson Brown was vice-captain and Stanley Nash an Ulster International.



FIGURE 3 - Mr. A. CHAPMAN, B. HARE, C.F. KENNEDY, H.S. CATHERWOOD, A. ELLIOTT, P. BRUCE, D.W.H. DICKSON, C.D. HULL, Jr. A.M. CLARK, M.A., H.R.C. CATHERWOOD, W.R. STERLING, Mr. J.W. DARBYSHIRE, M.A., V.N.M. CORKEN, J. T. BROWN, N. KINKED S. NASH, A.L. BOYD, & N. WHITE. Inset - C.B. PORTEOUS.

provincial player. Note that three members of the school staff, including the Headmaster, appeared in the team photograph. The early 1950s proved to be very successful period for BRA (FP) with the 1st XV winning the McCrea Cup and Junior League Section 2 in the season 1951-52 under the captaincy of Harry Catherwood (Fig. 4). Billy Goldstone and JB McMurty appear in the photograph wearing suits and a very young looking Stanley Perry made his debut.

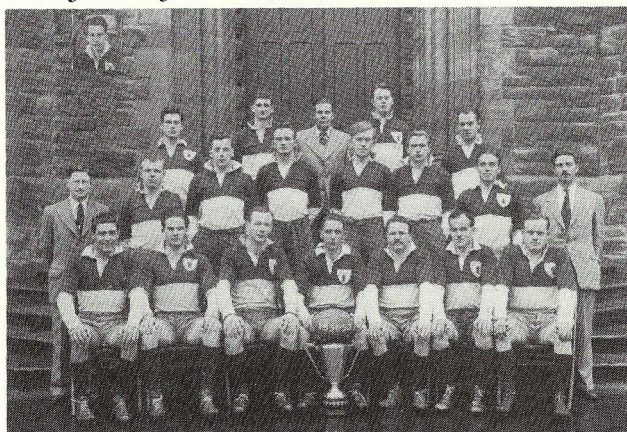


FIGURE 4 - D.R. GRAHAM, J.P. BRUCE, A.J.W. CHAPMAN, G.W. COSGROVE, C.B. PORTEOUS, J.B. McMURTY, S.R. PERRY, S.A. McCONNELL, J.D. ATCHESON, R.B. CAIRNS, W.B. CARSON, H.M.S. CATHERWOOD, W.H. GOLDSTONE, M.B. HARE, A.J. ELLIOTT, S. NASH, H.R.C. CATHERWOOD, W.J.T. BROWNE, A.L. BOYD & W.R. STERLING. Inset: N.J. WHITE

In the season 1952-53 under the captaincy of Stanley Nash the team did not win any trophies (Fig. 5). This photograph shows two teachers at the school Mr J L Lord, later to become Headmaster from 1968-80, and Mr Tony Clark.



FIGURE 5 - Mr. L. LORD, J.G. PARKINSON, W.T. LITTLE, N.A. LAWTHER, J.P. BRUCE, W. COSGROVE, D.D. OWENS, H.M.S. CATHERWOOD, B.CARSON, Mr. A.M. CLARK, M.B. HARE, A.L. BOYD, A.J. ELLIOTT, S. NASH, W.J.T. BROWN, H.R.C. CATHERWOOD, D.T. HEPWORTH, R.B. CAIRNS & J.G. EWING. Inset: S. A. McCONNELL

The following season, 1953-54, saw the McCrea Cup being regained and the Past Player's Cup for overall Junior League Champions being won. Stanley Nash again captained this team which contained Club stalwarts like Noel Lawther, Charlie Hull, Cecil Kennedy and Arthur Thompson who was at that time games master at the school (Fig. 6).



FIGURE 6 - J. McMURTRY, B. CARSON, W.T. LITTLE, J. COLESHILL, D.T. HEPWORTH, N.A. LAWThER, W. COSGROVE, M.S. SMYTH, E.D. GIRVAN, D.R. CHARLTON, B. MAGILL, G.D. HULL, W. McCONNELL, R.B. CAIRNS, W.J.T. BROWN, A.L. BOYD, S. NASH, H.R.C. CATHERWOOD, A.J. ELLIOTT, M.B. HARE, C.F. KENNEDY & B. YELLAND. Inset: A. THOMPSON

During this period only the Junior Cup eluded the Club, although Albert Elliott's team of 1954-55 reached the final at Ravenhill (Fig. 7); to this day we have still not won this trophy.



FIGURE 7 - T. LITTLE, B. GORDON, D. OWENS, N.A. LAWThER, E.D. GIRVAN, B. CARSON, D. HEPWORTH, M.S. SMYTH, M.B. HAIRE, A.J. ELLIOTT, S. NASH, A.L. BOYD, W. COSGROVE, H. BEST & D. CHARLTON. Inset: H.R.C. CATHERWOOD & A.E. WHITE.

However, in 1956-57 the McCrea was regained under the captaincy of Noel Lawther (Fig. 8). New faces in this photograph include Robbie Harrison, Austin Treacy, Alan McFerran

Jim Getty, Ian Simpson and Alan Gordon. In the following season the Club reached the final of the Junior Cup with Brian Cairns at the helm; he is now an important executive with the Boeing Aircraft Company in Seattle. New faces on this successful side in 1957-58 included, Harry Hutchman, Billy Tennant, Alan Lucas and Dennis Wheelhouse a former Head Boy at Belfast Royal Academy.



FIGURE 8 - R.S. KING, R.H. HARRISON, A.S. TREACY, W.B. CARSON, G.W. COSGROVE, D.R. CHARLTON, S.A. McCONNELL  
M.A. McFERRAN, J.G. GETTY, R.B. CAIRNS, D.D. OWENS, N.A. LAWTHOR, S. NASH, D.T. HEPWORTH, M.S. SYMTH,  
A.B. GORDON & T.I. SIMPSON. Inset: E.D. GIRVAN

From 1947-48 the Club fielded three teams with the 3rd XV playing league games against North IV, Ophir III, Cooke III, Instonians IV, Malone IV, CIYMS IV, Civil Service IV, Collegians IV and Bangor Grammar Schools' III. Selection of teams took place initially in the Duke of York but later at the School on the Cliftonville Road. The Selection Committee in the 1950s was obviously held in high esteem as judged by this letter from a 3rd XV player who had failed to turn up for a match:

*Selection Committee  
BRA (FP) Rugby Football Club  
Belfast Royal Academy  
Cliftonville Road  
Belfast*

*10 Glencoe Park  
Antrim Road  
Belfast*

*13th February 1954*

*Dear Sirs,*

*I wish to apologise to yourselves and members of the Club, for abusing the policy laid down by Committee, in not appearing*

to represent the Club 3rd XV against YMCA 3rd XV on February 6th 1954.

*I have already apologised to my Captain and I hope that the Committee will take a lenient view of, and will not be biased towards me as a result of my indiscretions, which I assure you will never happen again, but unfortunately the circumstances were such that I had no control over them.*

*May I appologise once again for any inconvenience caused, and also disrespect shown by me.*

*I am Sirs,*

*Yours Faithfully*

*William Edward Townsley*

Perhaps there is a lesson here for our present day 3rd and 4th XV players. I wonder if the Club President and Captain in 1954 had a bearing on the good discipline shown by Club members. Mr Darbyshire was President and Stanley Nash the 1st XV Captain.

The teams below the first XV were also very successful during the 1950s. As an example the 3rd "A" XV in the 1957-58 season won the 4th Division Challenge Cup (Fig. 9). Note the youthful Robin Reid and Billy Clarke in the days when the latter played either centre three-quarter or full back.



FIGURE 9 - H.F. DORMAN, N.W. HINES, G.L. HALL, R.D. REID, D.E. JENKINS, J.H. DOUGAN, I.E. FORDER, J.S. CROCKETT, G.L. DEAN, J.N. FINLAY, W.B. ROBERTS, W.D. CLARKE, J.L. WILKINSON & D.W. LOVE. Inset: R.J. McCURDY, A.M. WEAIRE & D.R. CROCKETT

## HYDEPARK

At about this time it became necessary to move from the rather unsatisfactory pitches near Glengormley to new grounds at Hydepark. Money raised from the dances at the School, about £2,000, and from a large Bazaar also held at the School which also raised about £2,000 was used to purchase and level a 9 acre field at Hydepark Corner. Progress with new grounds was reported to the Annual General Meeting of the Club in April 1956:

### *Up to date Report on New Club Grounds at Hydepark Corner*

*Since purchasing this nine acre field for £2,000 the ground has now been levelled and partly drained by Messrs. Stewart and Partners at a cost of £3,750. Seed was purchased from Messrs, McErvel for £202. 10. 0 and the ground was re-seeded and cultivated by a local farmer Mr Wilson at a cost of approximately £120.*

*Several catch drains were dug by Messrs D. R. Martin on a time and labour basis.*

*The ground has also been fenced and hedges trimmed and we hope to put sheep on the land next month.*

*Attention is drawn to the generosity of Mr McGladery and Mr Pollin for donating a set of gates. The contract is now in the hands of Messrs. W. H. Laverty; also to Mr H. R. C. Catherwood for donating a set of Rugby Posts which will be erected in September.*

*When finance is available we hope to continue with the drainage where required to erect a Pavilion and bring water to the site.*

*I would point out that the Club assets at the end of the financial year, April, 1956 stands at £6,557. 19. 9.*

*It is the intention of the Club to play one or two games on the lower Rugby Pitch next season in order to see how the sward stands up to play.*

The first matches were indeed played at Hydepark in 1957 and the facilities expanded to comprise in addition to two Rugby pitches, a pavilion, a cricket square, a hockey pitch and a car park. The pavilion initially included one large dressing room for the home teams and two separate changing rooms for the visiting teams (Fig. 10). The car park was surfaced with bituminous macadam and could hold up to 60 cars.

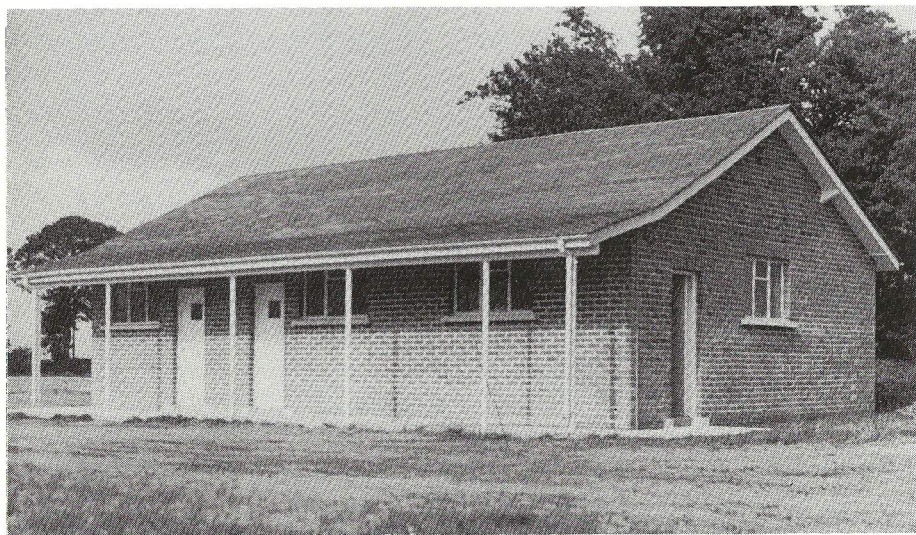


FIGURE 10 - NEW PAVILLION AT HYDEPARK

Following the successful move to Hydepark and considering the excellent playing record of the Club during the 1950s an application to join senior ranks was almost inevitable.

### **Application for Senior Status**

The first application for senior status was made in the season 1958-59 and it was unsuccessful. The voting at the Ulster Branch of the IRFU was very close and the Club was encouraged to apply again in 1959-60, although the first XV was not nearly as successful as in the previous season. Again the application was rejected. No further applications for Senior Status were made until the season 1964-65 when Coleraine RFC also applied.

Both clubs were unsuccessful and subsequent to this the Ulster Branch changed its rules to specify the conditions which a Junior Club would have to satisfy to apply for promotion. In the



1965-66 season five clubs made applications for Senior Status: Armagh, Bangor, Coleraine, Derry, Portadown and ourselves. The so called "Butler Committee" was set up to investigate the claims of these 5 clubs. The members of the Butler Committee were Mr Tony Butler, a past President of the Ulster Branch and Messrs Harry McKibbin, W J (Paddy) Patterson, Ewart Bell (later Sir Ewart Bell), Norman Nesbitt and Jimmy Montgomery.

On Saturday 30th October 1965, Messrs Harry McKibbin and Paddy Patterson visited Hydepark to watch the first XV playing Strabane in the first round of the Junior Cup, a match that the writer of this history remembers well. Both the first XV and the second XV who played Malone Rangers won handsomely, the first XV scoring 4 tries. The members of the Butler Committee seemed to be impressed and this was reinforced following a visit to the Bellevue Arms to discuss events with Walter Sterling, Stanley Nash, Cecil Kennedy and others.

On the 1st January 1966 when the 2nd and 3rd XV's were at home, Messrs Tony Butler, Paddy Patterson and Norman Nesbitt made a visit to Hydepark. The results of the matches were less important than the long discussion that took place afterwards, again in the Bellevue Arms with Messrs Nash, Smyth, Kennedy, Wallace and Sterling. True to his form Mr Mulholland was said to have joined the party later. After this meeting Tony Butler insisted on standing everyone a very fine dinner and everything seemed sweetness and light.

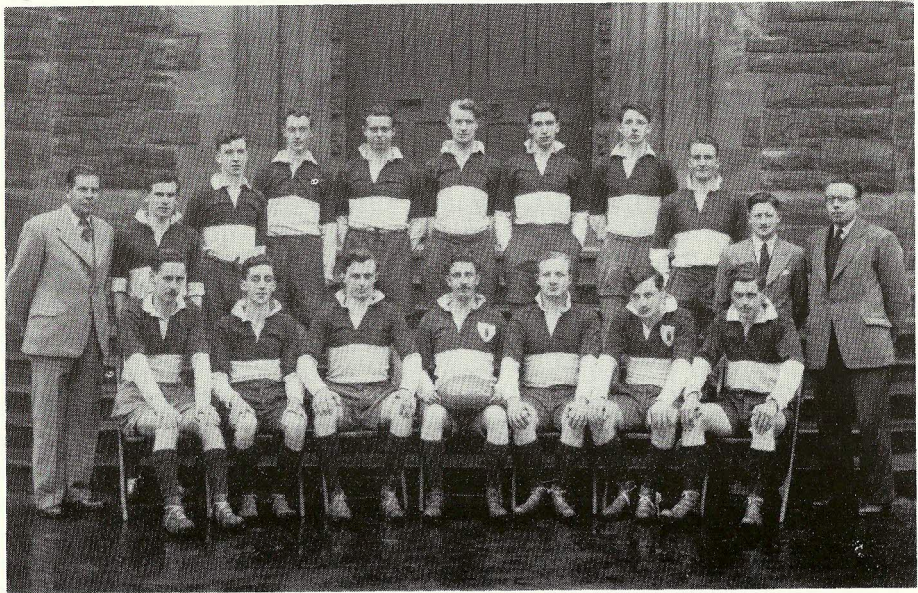
The Butler Report was presented to the Senior Committee of the Ulster Branch on 11th January 1966, before being referred to the Senior Clubs for their opinions. The result of the Butler Committee deliberations was released to the press on Thursday 20th January, 1966 and headlines in the Belfast Telegraph announced "Senior Rugby Comes to Three Clubs: City of Derry, Portadown and BRA (FP) move up". Tony Butler was asked whether he did not feel that there were already sufficient Senior Clubs in the Province. He replied "If a farmer has a herd of dairy cattle which doubles its size, he must expect to produce more cream. We feel the same way about introducing three new Senior Clubs".

For BRA (FP) RFC the cream was not immediately apparent; an invitation to play in the Senior Cup in 1966, away against

Instonians, was to be followed by a season playing senior friendlies before being admitted to the Senior League proper for the season 1967-68.



FIGURE 11 - CECIL'S TEAM



GOLDIE'S TEAM

## CHAPTER 4

### The Early Senior Years

The Club's first fixture in Senior ranks was against Instonians at Shane Park on Wednesday 16th March 1966 in the first round of the Senior Cup. It was not an auspicious start with a 39-3 point drubbing; our only consolation being the penalty goal by Billy McConnell. The team that day was:

W McConnell B Lutton D Tuff R Cardwell M McClelland  
T Bellieu G Simon J Hamilton T Baskett H Hutchman  
H Halliday K Switzer F Stanford M Trimble R McIlhagger

Although the team for the season 1965-66, captained by John McGimpsey, had easily won Section 2 of the Junior League and produced three Junior Inter-provincials (John McGimpsey, Harry Hutchman and Mickey McClelland) (Fig. 12) they were no match for Instonians in an open match on a fine spring evening at Shane Park.



FIGURE 12 - R.D. REID, J. HAMILTON, T. BELLIEU, H. HALLIDAY, K. SWITZER, R. FLACK, M. TRIMBLE, R. McILHAGGER, B. LUTTON, S. NASH, G. SIMON, T. BASKETT, T. SKILLING, W.R. STERLING, J.G. MCGIMPSEY, H. HUTCHMAN, M. MCCLELLAND, J. McWHIRTER, W. McCONNELL, D. TUFF & R. CARDWELL

The next season 1966-67, comprising only Senior friendlies and Senior Cup entry, was under the captaincy of Harry Hutchman (Fig. 13). Stanley Nash was President and the other Club Cap-

tains were 2nd XV Alan McFerran, 3rd XV George Hall, 4th XV Ian Gourley and 5th XV Gary Menaul. A third pitch was acquired at Hydepark, leased from a local farmer Mr Cherry,



FIGURE 13 - M. McCLELLAND, J. COLHOUN, H. HALLIDAY, R. FLACK, W. CLARKE, C. STURGESS, T. CROMEY, S. NASH, W. McCONNELL, B. LUTTON, M. TRIMBLE, H. HUTCHMAN, R.H. HARRISON, J. MARKS, S. ELLIOTT, T. BELLIEU & D. BEST.  
 Insets: J.G. McGIMPSEY, P.R. ESPLY & H.R. HERRON

and proved to be very useful as the other pitches were sometimes unplayable due to wet weather. For this first Senior season new players were attracted to the Club including Nick Jones, Chris Sturgess, George Robinson, Terry Cromey, David Best, John Colhoun and Sidney Elliott, the latter two being teachers at the school. In addition, Philip and Arthur Espley, Randal Herron, Sean Beamish and Ken Houston who were attending University or working outside Belfast played for the Club during holidays. Ken Houston was an Irish International wing threequarter, the first ever produced by our Club, winning three Caps in 1965 and also in 1966. Nick Jones played for Ulster during 1966-67 and Randal Herron was selected for the Irish Universities XV which played the Scottish Universities side containing Arthur Espley.

The season was not too successful although our first win as a Senior Club was registered against the "old enemy" Instonians with the winning try being scored by Brian Lutton (Fig. 14). Another notable success was in the first round of the Senior Cup where in a closely contested battle at Hydepark, Bangor who aspired to attain Senior Status, were beaten by a Tommy



FIGURE 14 - BRIAN LUTTON SCORING ACADEMY'S FIRST TRY IN SENIOR RUGBY DURING A GAME AGAINST INSTONIANS AT HYDEPARK, 1966.

Bellieu penalty goal late in the game. This was the first occasion on which the Club had reached the second round of the Senior Cup. Although well beaten by CIYMS in the next round the forwards played very well. The season finished on a high note with the defeat of Derry, Staines (from Middlesex) and Exeter RFC, the last being one of the leading clubs in the South West of England. This proved to be a most enjoyable fixture and lead to a series of matches with Exeter both home and away (see later). During the season Tom Bellieu scored more than half of the team's 237 points, whilst there were 344 points against.

In the following season 1967-68 Brian Lutton was Captain of the 1s XV and Cecil Kennedy the President. Enthusiasm in the Club was generally increased with 106 players attending training by the end of August and plans were made to field a Wednesday XV on a regular basis.

The season proved to be more successful than anyone had anticipated with eight league points being obtained from ten games. In addition, the side ran Trinity College RFC very close in a match at College Park during October 1967 (Fig. 15). The result was decided by two penalty goals from Irish International Billy McCombe, the former Campbell College out half. A tour to Exeter had been a great success with a 16-12 point win against a team undefeated for 12 matches. Brian Lutton found himself marking Martin Underwood (no relation of Rory or



FIGURE 15 - BRA (FP) XV VERSUS TRINITY COLLEGE, DUBLIN, OCTOBER 1967.

Tony) who had been capped 5 times by England. No wonder that the headlines in the Exeter Express and Echo on February 3rd 1968 read "A Shock Win for Belfast R. A. F. P."

This tour was also a great success off the field with 27 travelling to Exeter, 17 players and 10 alickadoos. As the airfare by British United Airways, direct from Nutts Corner to Exeter, was £15-11-0 return a grant of £9 per player to subsidise this huge outlay was made by the Club. Tommy Skilling as Match Secretary was charged with making the arrangements which were in doubt up until the last minute because of the outbreak of foot and mouth disease in England. Thankfully the Ministry of Agriculture lifted their restrictions on travel late in 1967.



FIGURE 16 - BRA (FP) 7 A SIDE TEAM, WINNERS OF LENAMORE SHIELD, 1968. TEAM: S. BEAMISH, D. TUFF, T. SKILLING, M. McCLELLAND, D. BEST, M. TRIMBLE, T. CROMIE & H. HALLIDAY.

At the end of the season an unlikely seven a side team managed to win the Lenamore Shield at the Jordanstown Sevens Tournament (Fig.16). Off the field the most significant venture had been the acquisition of licensed rented Club Rooms at Salisbury Bowling Club off the Antrim Road.



FIGURE 17: M. NELSON, I. CLEMENTS, B. LUTTON, M. CROMEY, G. SIMON, C. STURGESS, T. BELLIEU, R. HARRISON, A. COLE, H. HUTCHMAN, J. COLHOUN, Mr. M. MULHOLLAND, H. HALLIDAY, W. CLARKE, D. McGIMPSEY, M. MCCLELLAND.  
ALSO PLAYED: M. TRIMBLE, A. ESLEY, J. McGIMPSEY & B. MCCONNELL.

The next season, 1968-69 saw a young medical student, the author of this history, installed as 1st XV Captain and a noted solicitor Mr Matt Mulholland became President (Fig. 17). This photograph shows Tony Cole as a touch judge but he later served the Club faithfully as a Senior League referee. Other referees produced by the Club included Roly Barnett, Stim Smyth, Stan Perry, Dan Boyd, Ian Clements, Alan Bremner, Norman Beggs, David Dalzell, David Bell and more recently Alistair Magowan. The strength of the Club was undoubtedly growing as were its ambitions. With players left out after selecting 5 teams it was decided to field 6 teams in the next season; one in the Senior League, two in the Junior League, one in the Minor League and two in the 4th Division League. Home fixtures against Terenure, Huddersfield and Orrell were arranged for 1969-70, and plans were initiated for a long overseas tour in about five year's time.

On the playing field, however, the record was indifferent with League wins recorded against Queens, Portadown and North. The victory against North away from home was very satisfying as our opponents included a rather self-satisfied captain in the same profession as our own captain and the legendary

Mike Gibson. The result was close but after scoring three tries we enjoyed the after match celebrations in the North Club-house. At Easter, Exeter paid a return visit (Fig. 18) and won a very close encounter by 9-8 points to make the series 2-1 to Academy. The second XV, captained by Jack Harvey had a good season and gained promotions to Section 2 of the Junior League. The 3A and 3B XV's both finished as runners up in their respective Minor Leagues.



FIGURE 18 - MEMBERS OF EXETER XV WITH LORD MAYOR, WILLIAM GEDDES, MARCH 1969.

During the season the Salisbury Club was officially opened by the Lord Mayor and proved to be an outstanding success at least from a financial standpoint. The day to day running of the Clubrooms at Salisbury was something new for Club members who had been used to entertaining teams at the Bellevue Arms on the Antrim Road. The bar was run by a house committee which initially involved people like Billy McCrainor and Harry Eccles, sadly both now deceased. Club members, both playing and non-playing took their turns to go on bar duties. Another important committee was also formed to organise meals for visiting teams, the Catering Committee.

### **The Catering Committee**

In the spring of 1968 a Catering Committee under Arlene Rea was set up with Stan Perry appointed as the Rugby Club contact man. Members of the Committee included Joan McCourt, Valerie Gass, Ina Nash and Betty Kennedy who were later



joined by Joyce Sterling, Beattie Metcalf, Betty Gamble, Gretta Goldstone, Helen McCombe, Pat Catherwood, Diane Neill, Bess Herron, Adeline Marno, Barbara Lawther, Pippa Whitten, May Crawford, Carol Hutchinson, Jean Gray, Beryl Neill, Gladys Espley, Elsie Parker, Margaret McKay, Gillian Anderson, Joan Best, Joy Bellieu, Nancy Cairncross, Barbara Gray, Betty Emery, Marjorie Drennan, Lena Patton, Valerie McKillen, Margaret Trimble, Norah Perry and many others (Fig 19).



FIGURE 19 - Mr MATT MULLHOLLAND GETTING SIGNATURES ON A RUGBY FOOTBALL - Mrs INA NASH, Miss JENNIFER CARNAGHAN, Mrs W M REA, Miss VALERIE GASS AND Mrs PATRICIA CATHERWOOD, OPENING OF SALISBURY 31ST OCTOBER 1968.

So successful was this Committee that it managed to make considerable profits for the Club by supplying Ulster Fries at 5 shillings and sixpence, afternoon tea with sandwiches and biscuits for 2 shillings and a lunch consisting of soup, steak pie, baked beans and a bread roll at 3 shillings and sixpence. Academy RFC, Owls Hockey Club and Belfast Royal Academy (FP) cricket club are all indebted to this band of dedicated, wives, girlfriends, sisters and mothers who catered for them from 1968 to 1974.

The next rugby season 1969-70 marked the 25th anniversary of the founding of the Club. Two Billys were in charge Clarke as Captain and Goldstone as President (Fig. 20) but no special celebrations of our first quarter century took place. On the pitch the highlight was the defeat of Palmerston RFC, the first occasion as a Senior Club that we had defeated a senior side from Dublin. The visit to Exeter on 17th January 1970 resulted



FIGURE 20 - W.H. GOLDSTONE, A.R. FLETCHER, J.C. REID, J. REID, H.L. HALLIDAY, H.R. HUTCHMAN, A. RITCHIE, K. KNOX, J. GOUGH, A.D. TUFF, B. LUTTON, I. CLEMENTS, W.D. CLARKE, T. BELLIEU, C. KEMPSTON & T. ALLEN.

in a narrow defeat at the County Ground, against a side containing 9 County players. This game made history by the substitution of Chris Sturgess who sustained a nasty gash on his forehead in the first minutes, by Rob Fletcher. This illegal move, sanctioned by the Exeter Club and the referee, was widely reported in the national press as the first ever substitution in British rugby. The result of the match left the score between the Clubs at 2-2 and this signalled an end to the fixture which had become an expensive affair as a result of both travel costs and lavish entertainment. In 1968 we had stayed at the venerable George Hotel in central Exeter but in 1970 our accommodation was the less grand Bystock Hotel (Fig. 21) and Billy Goldstone must well remember the road works nearby as he inspected them closely from the inside.

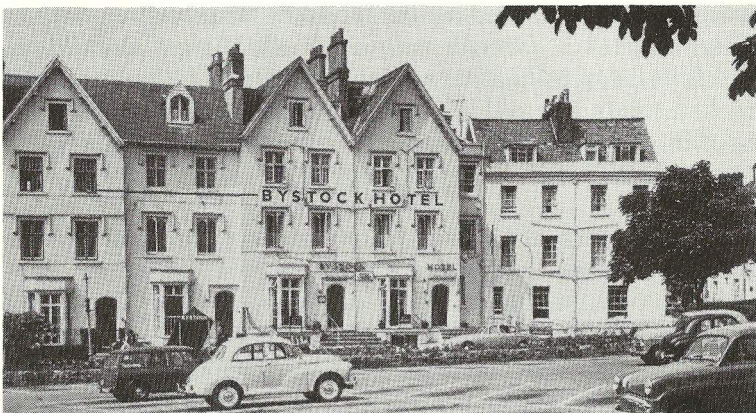


FIGURE 21 - BYSTOCK HOTEL, EXETER.

The sides of the late 1960s, although limited by the physical size of both their forwards and backs, successfully crossed the bridge from Junior into Senior rugby. In the 1970s, with the advent of the "baby boomer generation", our sides became progressively larger and stronger and the Club developed a tactical policy based upon a very strong set scrummage.

## HUDDERSFIELD TOUR OF 1952

FIGURE 22



## **CHAPTER 5**

### **The 1970s and 1980s**

The Club Captains of the early 1970s, Tommy Bellieu, Roy Connolly and Davy Haslett successfully built their sides around a strong pack and skillful place kicking. A number of new players leaving school were recruited in 1970-71, but despite the Club now being in a position to accept applications from non-Academy players none applied to join.

In September 1970 the inaugural fixture with Athlone RFC was held away from home. The match was won by 34 points to 3 but the players and supporters hit it off during the after match celebrations and so a great friendship between the two Clubs was born: An annual fixture takes place between our clubs for the Jim Keane Memorial Cup presented by Academy to Athlone in memory of Dr Jim Keane the President of Athlone from 1951-1970 who tragically died in July 1975 only 11 days after becoming President of the Irish Rugby Football Union. The special relationship between Academy RFC and Athlone RFC was further galvanised when we were invited to play a match in Athlone on the occasion of the official opening of the new extension to their Clubrooms and the dedication of their grounds to the late Dr Jim Keane in 1976, coinciding with the Athlone Club's 25th Anniversary. Friendships were temporarily abandoned during the match when we won by 35 points to nil scoring 6 tries by John Corkey (3), John Spottiswoode, Paul Scoffield and Trevor Sturgess. Belfast Royal Academy (FP) had become Academy RFC after an extraordinary general meeting held on 20th February 1975 to change the Club's constitution.

Other important matches in the 1970-71 season included fixtures with Scottish teams Glasgow University away on the Friday before the International at Murrayfield and Hutcheson's Grammar School (FP) at home during Easter. The first match was remarkable for the injuries sustained to a former President necessitating him to fly home before the International but not before handing on a briefcase containing a bottle of Black Bush to Brian Lutton for safe keeping. The match against Hutcheson's resulted in a win despite rigorous entertaining the evening before.

The league season was shortened because of the withdrawal of Instonians, North and Queen's to play senior friendlies. This proved to be the first step towards developing an all - Ireland

competition but all 3 Clubs rejoined the Ulster Senior League the next season. Our own results over the next two seasons were somewhat disappointing and a great effort was made to recruit new players, especially those from outside the school. Our constitution from 1970, allowed only 20 non-BRA players in the Club. A recruitment secretary, David Martin was appointed but very few outside players could be enticed to join. A lack of structured coaching and an image of playing negative rugby were blamed for this failure to recruit. For the Boxing Day "Exiles" match against the Club 1st XV a strong side of predominantly Queen's and King's Scholars players was selected in a move designed to improve recruitment. It was reported that the Tankards XV, under their captain Howard Beattie made a profit of £22 serving hot whiskies to spectators at the match.

In 1972, Orrell RFC were to have played a fixture at Hyde Park but they decided not to travel because of the civil unrest in Ulster. Instead we sent a weakened 1st XV to Orrell and lost a very close encounter to a side that contained two English Internationals in their pack. In return, we received standard English hospitality of pie and chips in the changing rooms with no such thing as an official speech, for which Paul Dowdie was very thankful.

In January 1972 one of our non-Academy alickadoos Irvine Campbell organised a very successful Club trip to Paris to watch the last international at Stade Colombe. Ireland won the match, the last victory in Paris and the celebrations went on until the early hours on Sunday morning. This trip which included airfares, travel to hotel and two nights bed and breakfast cost the princely sum of £30 per person. The only sad note was that we returned to Belfast on infamous "Bloody Sunday".

In 1972-73 successful tours were completed to Glasgow to play Hutcheson's Grammar School (FP) and to Huddersfield to play the home side and Sandal RFC. The following season 1973-74 Ken Knox was selected for a Senior Ulster trial and Colin Boyd and Joe Morgan for a Junior trial. Colin Boyd was subsequently capped at scrum half for Junior Ulster.

Billy Goldstone had presented a trophy in 1970 to be competed for by all 7 Club XV's. The Goldstone (or Salisbury) Cup was to be awarded to the side with the greatest excess of points for

over points against divided by the number of matches played. In the first season the 3rd A XV under Ivan Wallace won the trophy (Fig. 23). In 1973-74 the 4B XV won with +6.0 and the 1st XV were runners-up with +3.9 (Fig. 24).



FIGURE 23 - A. TREACY, B. McKENNA, D. THOMPSON, J. MORGAN, D. Mcgregor, G. SIMON, R. HYNDMAN, C. SWITZER, J. MARTIN, L. LUNEY, D. CARR, I. WALLACE, G. DEAN, R. CAMPBELL & N. BEGGS.

In the 1974-75 season the 1st XV reached the final of the Boston Cup floodlit tournament in Bangor. Also during the season a good win was recorded over Boroughmuir in Edinburgh on the morning of the International at Murrayfield. Later that season, Roger Davies, a strong scrummaging prop forward was selected for an Ulster B XV to play Ulster Colleges. Cecil Kennedy who had served as Club Senior Representative to the Ulster Branch for many years was elected President of the Ulster Branch of the IRFU for the season 1975-76, a great tribute to him personally and to Academy RFC. Ken Knox proved to be a very able Captain and led the side for two seasons, 1973-74 and 1974-75. Previous Captains to serve in successive seasons were Thompson Brown 1947-48 and 1948-49, Stanley Nash 1952-53 and 1953-54, Brian Cairns 1957-58 and 1958-59 and Jim Getty 1960-61



FIGURE 24 - J. BRIGGS, R. DAVIES, J. MORGAN, E. SHERRARD, J. RAINEY, R. McCLELLAND, D. BEST & R. CONNOLLY J. SPOTTISWOODE, P. SCHOFFIELD, T. NEILL, K. KNOX, D. HASLETT, J. CORKEY, S. KNOX.

and 1961-62. Ken Knox was captain in the seasons 1973-74 and 1974-75. Later David Nash was to emulate his father and captain Academy in the seasons 1979-80 and 1980-81. Ricky Huddleston and Ray Cromie also captained the Club in two seasons separated by 3 and 6 years respectively.

In 1975-76, Arthur Thompson who was now Principal of the Preparatory School, Ben Madigan, became President and Maurice Trimble the Captain. On the field the season got off to a great start with the winning the Collegians XV a side Tournament at Deramore Park. This was the first major trophy acquired since Senior Status was attained almost a decade before. Credit was undoubtedly due to Maurice Trimble and his strong pack, Stuart Knox his vice Captain and Eric Saunders, the newly appointed Club coach. Off the field there was an unusual start to the season; the minutes of the Rugby Committee meeting on 30th September 1975 reported that a ball kicked into the grounds of the Old People's Home had been confiscated by one of the residents and the Reverend Corkey had been unable to retrieve it. The Committee Meeting of 14th October 1975 reported that the ball had not yet been returned and Maurice Trimble was authorised to buy a new one. With the aid of the new ball and some close forward encounters the team performed well in the Senior League and finished the season in a creditable fifth position.

The 1975-76 season ended with a tour to Glasgow to play Hutcheson's Grammar School (FP) where both the 1st and 2nd XVs won easily. After the matches it was said that there was no damage done to the hotel which was in such poor shape that any damage might have been taken as an improvement. At the end of this season Dessie Seymour investigated the possibility of a tour to Eastern Canada during the season 1977-78. Philip Trimble, Maurice's younger brother was capped by Junior Ulster as a second row forward.

The next season 1976-77 saw John Smyth and Stuart Knox appointed as President and 1st XV captain respectively. The Club looked forward to its first overseas tour to Eastern Canada under the management of Stanley Perry. The first of three Newsletters was produced in August 1976 by Chris Sturgess. This contained numerous articles including one from the President, John Smyth reporting the presentation of a gift of cut glass to Mr Alf Chapman on the occasion of his retirement. Eric Saunders remained as senior coach and was assist-

ed by Jimmy Hill, and Irish football international as trainer to the 1st XV. The second Newsletter in December 1976 reported the selection of David Nash as the first Academy player to be capped for Ulster against Connaught. The 1st XV was reported as winning the first league game against Collegians but then lost to Malone and North. This Newsletter also congratulated Tommy Bellieu on passing 100 points for the season for the 3rd A XV, and this before Christmas. The 3rd Newsletter appeared in June 1977, just prior to the 1st XV tour to Canada. The main article featured the proposed move of the Club's headquarters to HydePark with the planning of new clubrooms. This Newsletter, the last in the series, reported a match of the 3rd A XV which because of its humour deserves to be reproduced intact:

### ***The Three "A"s***

*On a cold grey day at HydePark the 3As took the field. Their hands were in their pockets, their hearts in their mouths, and most of their teeth in the pavilion.*

*The opposition kicked off and the ball was quickly side-footed into touch.*

*"A planned move", muttered the Coach. "We like to dominate the line-outs early".*

*At the back of the line-out was a well-known local medical practitioner. Highly regarded by his patients, he was both courteous and competent, a veritable paragon of virtue. However as R.L. Stevenson's Dr Jekyll underwent a metamorphosis into the bestial and murderous Mr. Hyde, so this practitioner underwent a similar change every Saturday. From Monday to Friday a gentle, kindly fellow, on Saturdays he rose to heights of savagery and destruction that made the exploits of Genghis Khan and Attila the Hun seem like lunchtime with Bill and Ben! His awesome presence reduced the other members of the 3As - who were no angels - to quiet smiles and wondering shakes of the head.*

*As the ball arched over the end of the line-out, the snapping of bones and the cries of pain indicated that the good doctor was in invincible form. He tapped the ball down towards the scrum-half, but an elderly prop who always fancied a run during the*



*first three minutes of every match got in the way and knocked it on. (This prop's history is not without interest. After many years of unbroken failure in Irish rugby, he had emigrated to Africa in the hope of finding somebody he could "bend". Sadly, he was caught by the Balubas in the jungle and was never the same again).*

*"Another planned move" smiled the Coach. "We like to demonstrate our superior scrummagery early". After some considerable delay, the ball appeared between the lock's feet and with a mighty heave from the scrum-half was looped slowly to the out-half's feet. Calling a code which seemed to consist mainly of Anglo-Saxon four letter words, he launched a mighty kick at it, but mistimed it and looped it over his own head towards the full-back.*

*The full-back, a callow youth, had been nerving himself to nick his fag and was surprised to see the ball flying towards him. Backing away, he reversed into the goalpost, called "Mark!" and fell unconscious!*

*"Was that another planned move?" I asked the Coach, but he seemed to be busy trying to remind his team of their four-letter code. The full-back, who had fallen on his fag-end, recovered immediately his trousers ignited and disappeared in a cloud of smoke towards a distant river. After a short pause for laughter, the game re-started.*

*Mercifully, a dense fog came down and the observers were only able to follow the game by the sound of thumps and curses, mostly centred around a muddy patch on the far side of the field.*

*Half-time arrived and then the game was re-started with a kick-off by the 3As. The out-half, who many years ago had been known to kick the odd goal, was finding his vision increasingly obscured by his increasingly protruding abdomen, and consequently his place-kicking was less than certain. At the kick-off he totally missed the ball and kicked himself solidly on the left ankle. Despite the attentions of the good doctor, who diagnosed "only a wee break", he insisted on leaving the field. This left the 3As two men short and, led by the good doctor, the forwards in order to even the number, sank to even greater depths.*

*Of the second half, the least said the better. Suffice it to say that the forward exchanges made the Foreman and Frazier fight look like a love-in. Twenty minutes early the ref. blew the final whistle and retired, pale and shaking, to the pavilion.*

*As so to the bar. There the pints flowed and the game was discussed. As the pints went down, the players' self-esteem went up, until an outsider joining the conversation could have been forgiven for thinking he was in the company of the British Lions.*

*"What I like about our team", said the Captain, who was now feeling no pain, "is that we combine the forward power of the All Blacks, the elan of the French, with bags of pace and sheer brilliance behind the scrum". Heads nodded in full agreement. The good doctor turned to me, "what did you think of it?" he inquired. "Gentlemen," I replied, "I can truthfully say I have never seen anything like it".*

*This seemed to go down all right and I decided the time was right to unobtrusively leave this happy band of brothers. As I left, the Coach's voice rose above the din, "What about the planned move then ...?"*

The identity of these players will be revealed after the 30 year confidentiality period has elapsed. The ageing prop was capped by Zambia!

For the 1st XV the season proved to be very successful with 5 league wins out of 10 and a good win against Instonians in the first round of the Senior Cup. The Club set out for its first transatlantic tour on 12th August 1977 in confident mood.

## **Tour to Canada 1977**

The Tour Party included Stan Perry, tour manager, Stuart Knox, captain, Eric Saunders, coach and Ivor Marno, alickadoo. Twenty-three players also travelled: Stuart Knox, David Best, Joe Morgan, Brian Young, Ed Sherrard, John Spottiswoode, Trevor Sturgess, Ricky Huddleston, Trevor Neill, Roy Connolly, David Nash, Ray Smith, Michael Winnington, Martin Blake, Paul Scoffield, John Corkey, David Haslett, Ken Knox, Eddie Nelson, Willie Loughed, Maurice Trimble, Brian Morrow and Philip Trimble (Fig. 25). The tour itinerary was packed with four matches scheduled over 10 days. The first two matches were in Toronto against Balmy Beach RFC on 15th August (the

day before Elvis Presley died), and against Irish Canadians RFC on 17th August.

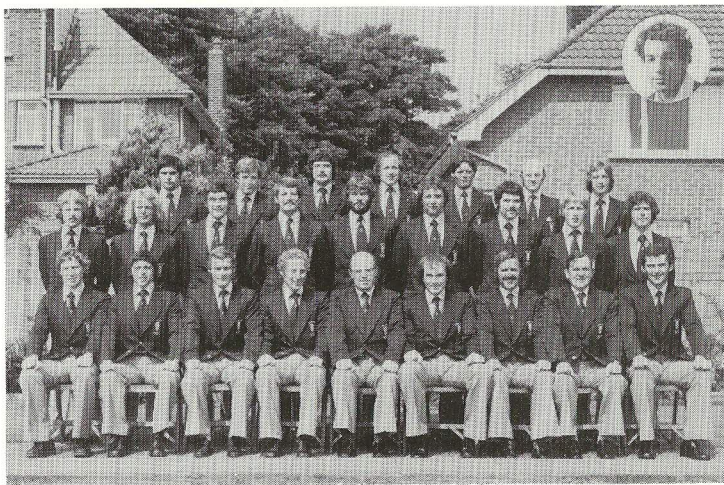


FIGURE 25 - M.I. WINNINGTON, W.E. LOUGHEED, B.G. YOUNG, F.D.K. BEST, E. NELSON, R. CONNOLLY, R. HUDDLESTON, R. SMITH, B.R. MORROW, T.J. STURGESS, M. TRIMBLE, P.A. TRIMBLE, E.R. SHERRARD, D.R.S. NASH, J.V. CORKEY, H.T. NEILL, K.A. KNOX, P.A. SCOFFIELD, J. SPOTTISWOODE, S.K. KNOX, S.R. PERRY, H.J. MORGAN, E.D. SAUNDERS, A.I. MARNO & D.A. HASLETT. Inset: M.L. BLAKE.

The third match was against Montreal Irish RFC in Montreal on 22nd August and the fourth match in the capital Ottawa against Ottawa Irish RFC on 25th August. The Lord Mayor of Belfast, James Stewart, Esq. provided goodwill letters for presentation to the Mayors of Toronto, Montreal and Ottawa.

David Haslett produced a fine tour programme with letters from the Lord Mayor, and the President of the Ulster Branch of the IRFU, Bryce Fleming. Photographs of the tour party and pen pictures of each member were included in this programme.

The tour party returned undefeated and even managed to play an extra match against an Ottawa District side. The hospitality had been excellent and 5 plaques of the host Clubs were presented to Stan Perry to be displayed in our Club Rooms. The Rugby Committee minutes of the 6th September 1977 suggested that the only thing lost on tour was one rugby ball which would have to be replaced.

The 1977-78 season thus got off to a great start. After an indifferent league season the 1st XV managed to defeat Instonians in April to remain in the first division of the Senior League for the season 1978-79. Off the field fundraising events

in 1978 raised considerable sums of money to allow the building of new Club premises at Hydepark. It was necessary to raise £200,000 to build these Club Rooms on the site of the old house at the corner of the cricket field. About £100,000 was anticipated from grants and £60,000 from a bank loan leaving £40,000 to be raised by club members. Already Alan Russell and Kim Silkstone had raised £5,000 by organising a sponsored walk from Portrush to Belfast. A Garden Fete at Hydepark and barbecues were to be used to raise the additional money needed.

The end of the decade, the season 1979-80, saw further action both on and off the field. Fund-raising was continuing apace with £2,500 raised at a successful barbecue at Corr's Corner. Dr Joe Rainey was appointed Recruitment Secretary with the aim of attracting players of Senior quality from Queen's and other clubs. In October 1979 Athlone RFC decided not to stay overnight after their fixture at Hydepark due to fears from civil unrest in Belfast. The 4th XV did stay over in Galway after their end of season tour, having raised funds to cover the cost of the trip the excess was given to the Development Fund for Hydepark. Spike Turney as 4th XV Captain accepted the Goldstone Trophy (Salisbury Cup) with a massive +14 score. Kenny Maine of the 1st XV won a plaque for the highest points scorer at 109 and Barry Pollen scored the most tries, 22 in total playing as a wing forward for the famous fourths.

The Annual General Meeting of 8th May 1980 was given a revised costing of the new Clubrooms at Hydepark; £150,000 with £45,000 raised by events and only £30,000 from grants leaving a shortfall of some £75,000.

Six fifteens were fielded in 1980-81; the captains were as follows: 1st XV David Nash, 2nd XV Brian Darby, 3rd XV Wes Petrie, 4th XV John Martin, 5th XV Robin Armstrong and 6th XV or Tankards Ken Matthews. Bobby Tennant became Club President and he presided over the opening of the new club rooms on 25th April 1981 when an exhibition game against a President's XV which had been planned had to be shelved in favour of playing our league fixture against Ards 1st XV. At the Annual General Meeting on 26th May 1981, the retirement of Stanley Nash from General Committee after 35 year's service was a momentous occasion.

John McGimpsey succeeded Bobby Tennant as President and Ray McClelland became Captain of the 1st XV. Seven XV's were

fielded in 1981-82 including an under 20 side. This young side proved to be a great success and reached the under 20 Cup Final at Ravenhill only to lose 12-3 in a close fought game. They also managed to beat a Greystones under 19 XV by 30-0 in Dublin when their behaviour both on and off the field was so creditable that the Greystones Club immediately asked for a return match in Belfast next season. The season ended rather sadly with the news of former President Matt Mulholland's untimely death in April 1982. This news came as a great shock to all us who knew Matt as an easy-going and kindly solicitor.

Following the building and opening of new Club Rooms at Hydepark the Academy Club's financial situation became critical with substantial repayments from bank loans throwing a considerable strain on resources. This move from Salisbury to Hydepark coincided with a tightening up of the breathlyser laws and growing reluctance of young players and members to drink and drive. Also, rugby football in general became a less popular game both in schools and afterwards and our Club like many others experienced a decline in its playing membership. From 7 teams in the late 1970s and early 80s we dropped to 5 teams by the mid 1980s. One of the remaining teams, the Tankards, managed to grow in strength during the 1980s. This coincided with an influx of ex-senior players, all over 35 years old and still keen to keep fit by regular training and playing on Saturdays.

## **Tankards 1980s**

A Tankard team had long been part of the Academy Club set-up but prior to 1982-83 the team enjoyed Saturday rugby without the rigours of midweek training. In 1982-83 John Spottiswoode became Captain of the Tankards and under his tuition the team won the Goldstone Cup and reached the final of the McCambley Cup only to be narrowly defeated by Grosvenor HS (FP). In 1983-84 under Davy Best the team returned to Ravenhill for the McCambley Cup Final and despite being 0-16 behind at half-time managed to stage a remarkable second half recovery winning by 31-16 against Virginia 1st XV who did not realise what had hit them (Fig. 26). The Goldstone Cup was retained and the following year 1984-85 under Henry Halliday's captaincy the Tankards won



FIGURE 26 - P. KERR, I. CLEMENTS, J. MARTIN, J. BRIGGS, B. CLARKE, A. ROBINSON, P. PALLIN, J. SPOTTISWOODE, G. LYNN, R. MCCLELLAND, V. TURNEY, R. ESLER, K. KNOX, D. BEST, H. HALLIDAY, T. BELLIEU, M. COOPER, A. MCFERRAN, A. ANDREWS, GOLDSTONE CUP, McCAMBLEY CUP, T. REID & P. DOWDIE.

section one of the Minor League and the Ravenhill Cup after a close match against Strabane (Fig. 27). Needless to say the



FIGURE 27 - V. TURNEY, R. ESLER, J. MARTIN, G. MOFFETT, A. ROBINSON, H. ROGERS, M. COOPER, G. LYNN M. TRIMBLE, J. SPOTTISWOODE, J. SLOAN, H. HALLIDAY, K. KNOX, B. CLARKE, T. REID & P. SCOFFIELD.  
Also Played: H. DYER, I. CLEMENTS, P. DOWDIE, T. WINNINGTON & D. BEST.

Goldstone Cup was retained by this side. In the 1985-86 season Ken Knox took over the running of this winning side (Fig. 28) and led them on a very successful tour to western Canada. This Tankards side at one stage could play 6 former first XV Captains and was a formidable scrummaging team. On the tour to Victoria, British Columbia four matches were played in 8 days and three were won. Between December 1983 and May 1986 the Tankards lost only 4 matches. The team to tour Canada was:



FIGURE 28 - H. HALLIDAY, R. McCAREY, J. MARTIN, J. HOUSTON, T. REID, H. DYER, E. SAUNDERS, I. CLEMENTS, A. CRAWFORD, B. DARBY, G. LYNN, A. ROBINSON, D. TORBITT, J. SPOTTISWOODE, B. CLARKE, R. ESLER, K. KNOX, D. BEST, M. COOPER & P. SCOFFIELD.

Ken Knox (Captain), Eric Saunders (President), Denis Templeton (Referee), Brian Darby, Willy Loughheed, Ronnie Esler, Henry Halliday, Billy Clarke, Davy Best, Mark Cooper, Timmy Reid, John Martin, Paul Scoffield, Ian Clements, John Spottiswoode, Harry Dyer, Graham Crothers, Alan Ritchie, Philip Trimble, Maurice Trimble, Norman Beggs and John Houston. Unfortunately John Houston could not travel with the party as his employers refused him the necessary time off work (Fig. 29).



FIGURE 29 - P. TRIMBLE, J. MARTIN, N. BEGGS, B. CLARKE, W. LOUGHEED, G. CROTHERS, D. TEMPLETON, E. SAUNDERS, I. CLEMENTS, T. REID, B. DARBY, H. DYER, A. RITCHIE, M. TRIMBLE, M. COOPER, J. SPOTTISWOODE, R. ESLER, K. KNOX, D. BEST, H. HALLIDAY & P. SCOFFIELD.

## The Late 1980s

During this time financial troubles and reduced playing strength became increasingly important influences on Academy RFC. These culminated in 1987 with the decision to sell our grounds at HydePark to pay off a huge overdraft of over £200,000. For three seasons the Club rented pitches at the School ground at Roughfort. The rising charges requested by the School (some £40,000 over 3 years) meant that the Club's financial situation worsened and the Ulster Branch stepped in to help by offering Ravenhill for 10 of the Club's home matches in 1990-91.

On the playing side, although the number of teams was reduced, much success was achieved. For example on 12th December 1987, the first XV beat City of Derry 12-6 in the Ulster Senior League, the second XV defeated Monaghan 28-4 in the second round of the Junior Cup and the 3rd XV beat Carrick 3rds 16-10 in the Junior League (section 7). The 4th, 5th and Colts XV's did not have matches on this date. In August 1988 and again in 1989 the Club won the Ophir 7 a side tournament (Fig. 30). The winning squad in 1988 was Ray Cromie, Ian Whan, Gordon McCormick, Paul Gamble, Wilson Fawcett, Alan Kirk, Steven Sharkey, Mark Gilbert and Niall Blankley.



FIGURE 30 - OPHIR 7 A SIDE TOURNAMENT, 1988 WINNERS - ACADEMY with runners-up, B.H.S.F.P.

On 10th September 1988 Carrick were defeated 46-0 at Woodlawn which must have created something of a record



against our junior near neighbours and old rivals. In October 1988, the senior squad took a mid-season break from local competition to tour Holland, having started the league season well with two wins against Queens and Derry. The first match in Amsterdam against Bassets RFC was won 37-9. On 21st October 1989, Highfield RFC from Cork were defeated 21-18 at Roughfort. Highfield were reported to be without 7 regulars but nevertheless a fine win was recorded by Academy RFC, one of very few against sides from Dublin or Cork. In February 1990 Academy lost a very close match against De La Salle/Palmerston (DLSP) formerly Palmerston by 20-21, again at Roughfort.

The Club captains during the late 1980s: Mark Reynolds (who later left to join Malone), Gordon Henderson, Philip Trimble, Dominic Walsh and Ray Cromie deserve credit for keeping the playing side together during the troubled times experienced by the Club off the field.

As pressures increased, President Ken Knox at the Club Annual Dinner on 20th April 1991 almost forecast the closure of the Club by talking of "the last supper" during his toast of the Ulster Branch, IRFU and its Junior Vice-President Jim Stevenson. Thankfully this was not to be.



FIGURE 31 - THE IRISH INTERNATIONAL 7 A SIDE TEAM IN 1974!

## **CHAPTER 6: Into the 1990s as a Junior Club**

At the Academy RFC Annual General Meeting on May 29th, 1991 it was decided to keep the Club in existence but to apply for admission to the Junior League. The loss of Senior Status was a serious blow to the Club but this seemed to be almost inevitable if the Academy RFC were to survive. Henry Halliday was elected President and Gary Olding Captain of the 1st XV for the season 1991-92 and charged with the task of keeping rugby alive at Academy. The decision to keep the Rugby Club alive was not taken in isolation as the financial strains affecting the Academy Sports Club had also to be taken into account.

The Academy Sports Club consisted of the Rugby Club, Cricket Club and Ladies Hockey Club (or Owls) and was the administrative and management base at Hydepark responsible for the Club Rooms. During the Spring of 1991 it seemed that the only way that the Sports Club could pay off its debts was by selling off the Club Headquarters at Hydepark. A new and vibrant Management Committee under the Chairmanship of Colin McIlhenny was elected at the Sport's Club AGM in 1991. The 11 strong committee set out in a determined way to reduce our debts and to save the Club Rooms. It was with this new, enthusiastic vigour that the Rugby Club also decided to "give it a go".

The 1991-92 season in Junior League, section 5, was a stern test, particularly as at least 6 potential first XV players left to try their luck with other Senior Clubs. We managed to obtain favourable terms for rental of pitches at the Valley Leisure Centre and this together with pitches at Three Mile Water Park, on the Doagh Road provided the Club with some sort of playing base. The loss of the school grounds at Roughfort because of exorbitant rental charges was a blow and did harm relationships with the school but thankfully now these have been repaired to a large extent. The Club is indebted to Newtownabbey Council and its officials for their help in providing pitches to play on each Saturday and for the use of the all weather floodlit pitches for midweek training.

The first XV did not win section 5 of the Junior League but managed to consolidate their position by turning in some sterling performances. They did come up against a very tight

Shorts XV who showed them how to play Junior Rugby on a rather small pitch in indifferent weather conditions. Praise is due to Gary Olding for keeping things going and helping to build a tremendous Club spirit. There was almost a Dunkirk or 'backs to the wall' feeling within the whole Club. The outgoing Club President was able to present an altogether more optimistic picture to Jim Stevenson now Senior Vice-President of the Ulster Branch and his President Hugh Logan at the 1992 Club Dinner. This was the largest dinner in the Club's history with almost 150 in attendance. Financially too the Club was on a sounder footing with increased bar takings, new non-playing and associate members and sponsorship. Bertie Rodgers of Fortress Doors, a local firm based at Mallusk, presented a trophy for the best under 21 player in the Club which was won in the first year by Michael McRoberts, and in the second year by Johnny Gregg and last year by Mark Cousins.

The 1992-93 season saw Brian Lutton take over as President, a job he had fulfilled very successfully before, in 1982-83. His support of the Club through its transition from Senior to Junior status was instrumental in our survival. Mervyn Lynn took over from Gary Olding as Captain of the 1st XV and again three XVx were fielded: the seconds in Intermediate league 6 and the thirds in Intermediate 8. The Club was heartened by the return of at least a dozen players from other Clubs and 6 of these proved to be first XV squad players. Dominic Walsh, Noel Branagh, Paul Gamble, Ian Whan and two ex-Ulster players Ricky Huddleston and Ally Moles joined or rejoined the Club.

The new spirit in the Club, together with this influx of new players ensured that the side topped their section of the Junior league and won promotion in the re modelled Qualifying League. Drawn against Coleraine in the Junior Cup the team performed very creditably and lost quite narrowly in a high scoring match away from home. The seconds and thirds were also successful but didn't quite secure any silverware. Coach Colin Petrie is also due considerable praise for his endeavours during these transitional years. Always an impressive figure either at training in all weather or on the touchline encouraging his players to even greater heights, Colin was never one to duck a challenge.

During 1993-94, with Noel Branagh as Captain and long-serving Les Luney as President the 1st XV reached the final of the



**FIGURE 32 - C. PETRIE, M. COOPER, G. OLDING, D. WALSH, D. STURGESS, G. GILLILAND, P. TERRINGTON, J. ALLEN, I. WHAN M. COUSINS L. LUNEY, R. CROMIE, M. KERR, P. GAMBLE, N. BRANAGH, R. HUDDLESTON, G.HENDERSON & S. KERR.**

McCrea Cup (Fig. 32). This brought back many happy memories for those who could remember the early days of the Club back in the 1940s and 1950s. The first round had been against near neighbours and old adversaries Belfast High School (FP) at Valley Park which we won convincingly 24-0. Second XV's of Senior Clubs were allowed to enter the McCrea Cup for the first time in 1993-94 and in the final we met a very strong Instonians 2nd XV. Although the Ireland Saturday Night of 19th February 1994 reported in headlines "Academy Bounce Back" the final on 23rd March went Instonians way as their powerful pack and experienced backline proved too strong. Nevertheless it turned out to be a great evening with many of the players who contested McCrea Cup finals in the 1940s and 50s present at the match and later in the Clubrooms for a celebration meal. Those past players included Stanley Nash, Cecil Kennedy, Stan Perry, Walter Cosgrove, Brian Carson, Derwent Hepworth, Noel Lawther, Chuck Charlton, Austin Treacy, John Smyth and Harry Catherwood; and those who couldn't make it sent their apologies in one way or another.

The season 1994-95 marks the beginning of our half century. Drew Emery, newly installed President, decided to organise celebrations of this event. He has worked hard to chase up former members and plan a series of celebratory events. Paul

Gamble took over Captaincy of the 1st XV and has had a very satisfactory start to the season. Some good victories in Section 3 of the Qualifying League and progress in the Junior Cup until we met Ballynahinch, the subsequent winners, marked a good first half to the season. Promotion to Section 2 of the Qualifying League would mean in theory that we would be only two seasons away from All Ireland League rugby. Perhaps not too big a dream for a Club with fighting spirit like Academy RFC.

I am indebted to the following, some deceased, listed in alphabetical order, who provided me with material and memorabilia upon which this history is based:

Thompson Brown Harry Catherwood Tony Clark  
Drew Emery Wilson Fawcett Jim Finlay David Haslett  
John Houston Harry Hutchman Cecil Kennedy  
Ken Knox Les Luney Brian Lutton Graham Lynn  
Henry McCombe Stan Nash Stan Perry Colin Petrie  
Hugh Shearman Walter Sterling Chris Sturgess  
Ivan Wallace Johnny Williamson

Due to constraints of time and space I have been unable to mention everyone who has contributed to the success of Academy RFC. I know of many Club stalwarts who through the years have helped to develop our history. To those who have been omitted I apologise and hope that they will be able to join us during this year of celebration.

I must acknowledge the assistance of my long suffering secretary, Mrs Samantha Jameson who has painstakingly typed and retyped this manuscript, and Mr Ian Murphy for putting it all together.

# TOUR TO WESTERN CANADA - 1977

