

A History of Rugby in the Milton Keynes Area

Introduction

This exhibition is just part of a larger project looking at the history of Rugby in the Milton Keynes area. In the year that the Rugby World Cup came to Milton Keynes, Living Archive MK began the process of researching archives, collecting stories from fans, enthusiasts and players and building a wealth of material for a book, a series of short films and a website.

We hope that you will be intrigued and surprised by the people and their stories that have enhanced rugby in our area for over 140 years, from its beginnings at **Wolverton** and **Olney** – and concurrently at **Stony Stratford** and **Newport Pagnell** – through the evolution of the **Bletchley** and **Milton Keynes** clubs (and some of the local teams in between) to the amazing **Rugby World Cup** held in the Stadium MK in 2015.

Visit the website to see more: www.rugbyheritagemk.org.uk



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1800s



1871 The Rugby Football Union is formed.

1875 Rugby football reportedly begins in Wolverton and Olney and there are accounts of matches in Stony Stratford and Newport Pagnell.

1877 The Olney Rugby Football Club has its first recorded game, its headquarters in The Two Brewers Inn.



Olney Rugby Football Club – Season 1877. **Back:** G Dix, J Ellard, Joe Kitchener, Wm Stratton, John Nicholls, **Middle:** JC Hipwell (Captain) George Clarke, Jim Ruff, Alfred Clarke, George Freeman, S Goldsmith, 'Pinkie' Booth **Seated:** C Brandon, J Crouch, George Field (Vice-Captain) (Olney Rugby Football Club Archive)

1888



The Olney RFC Team of 1888 (Olney Rugby Football Club Archive)

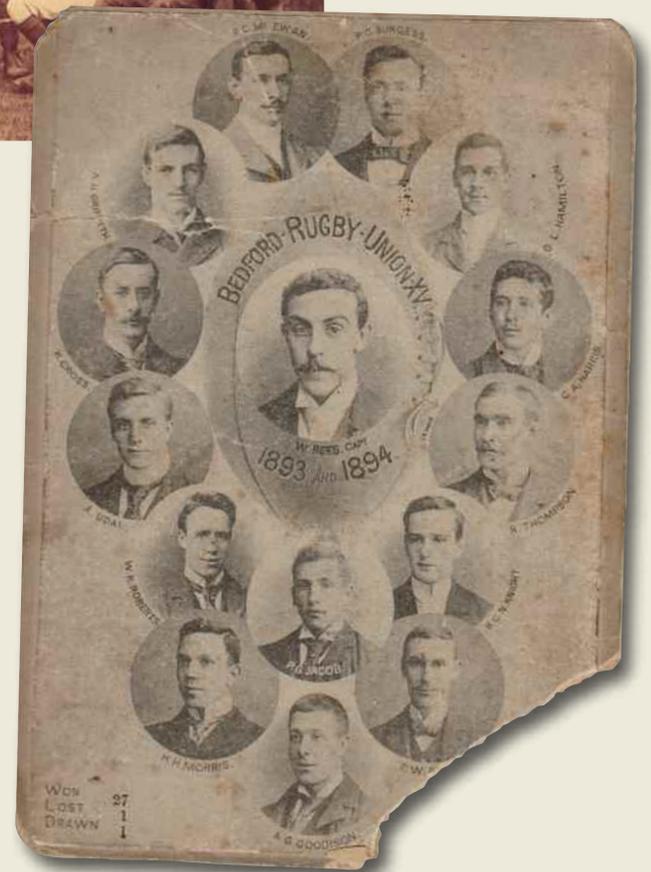
NORTHAMPTON ROVERS' FOOTBALL CLUB
PRESIDENT - J. COLLIER.

FIXTURES FOR THE SEASON, 1881-2.

DATE	OPPOSITE	RESULT
Oct. 22	Wolverton	Wolverton
" 29		
Nov. 5	Wanderers	Northamptn
" 12	Kettering Alberts	Northamptn
" 19	Olney	Olney
" 26		
Dec. 3	Rugby Rovers	Rugby
" 10	Kettering Town	Northamptn
" 17	Leicester United	Leicester
" 24		
" 31	Rugby Rovers	Northamptn
Jan. 7		
" 14	Wellingborough	Northamptn
" 21		
" 28	Leicester United	Northamptn
Feb. 4		
" 11	Kettering Town	Kettering
" 18		
" 25	Olney	Northamptn
Mar. 4	Wolverton	Northamptn
" 11	Kettering Alberts	Kettering
" 18	Wellingborough	Wellingboro
" 25		

The Ground is at Melbourn Gardens, two minutes' walk from the Trains.

1894 The victorious players (right) of the 1894 Bedford Rugby Union XV dominate locally and inspire other teams in the early years – especially Olney RFC. The club was amalgamated in 1886 from Bedford Rovers, formed in 1876 and Bedford Swifts, 1882. (Edgar Dix Collection, Living Archive MK)



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1900s

The First World War

1914
to
1919

Regardless of this record of players in 1914 (below), the start of the war leaves Wolverton Rugby Club in limbo from which it doesn't recover until after the 2nd World War.



An early Wolverton (North Bucks) R.U.F.C. team (in white) c. 1914

(Image from the Chris Gleadell Collection, Living Archive MK)



'Winners of the Rugby Match October 31st 1914 – England 24pts Wales 0.' Former Olney player Edgar Mobbs holds the ball, centre back (Image courtesy Cowper & Newton Museum)

'Over 400 volunteers serve in 'Mobbs Army' of which only 85 survive the war.

(Image courtesy Cowper & Newton Museum)



Now promoted, Lieutenant-Colonel Mobbs himself is wounded twice and awarded the DSO for his work as Commander; but he is killed whilst leading a charge at Passchendaele in 1917.

He is commemorated on the Menin Gate Memorial – along with 54,000 other men whose names are recorded, but whose remains are never found.

(Image of LT Col Mobbs courtesy of the Olney & District Historical Society)



During the First World War, the former Olney player Blair Swannell (above) who was subsequently capped for England and Australia, joins the Australian Imperial Force and is appointed with the rank of Major, serving with the 1st Battalion. He is killed on 25th April 1915 while taking part in the landing at Anzac Cove, during the first day of the Gallipoli Campaign.

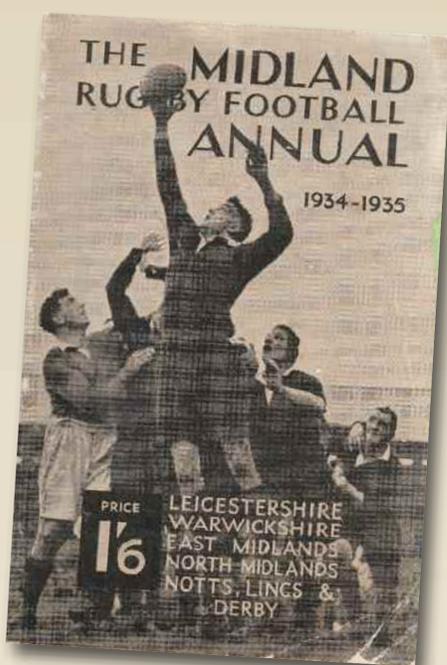
"The First World War took a sad toll of Olney players. Sixteen playing members lost their lives..."

(Jack Brimley)

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1923 Olney RFC recovers somewhat from its dearth of players after the First World War with a creditable 1923-4 season: 'Played 24; Won 17; Lost 5. Against opponents: 150 pts'



(1923-24 team from the Olney Rugby Football Club Archive)

1934 By the 1930s, Olney RFC has a highly successful junior team.

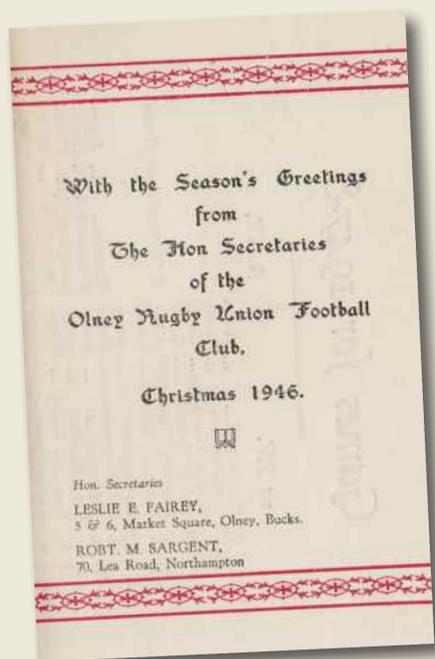


'Olney Juniors 1934' (Edgar Dix Collection, Living Archive MK)

1947 A playing area is found for Bletchley RFC at Meadow Field, Manor Farm off the A5 opposite the Old Kings Head pub (now Pink Punters); and changing and refreshment facilities are arranged with the Swan Hotel at Fenny Stratford.



The Swan Hotel c1940s (Living Archive MK)

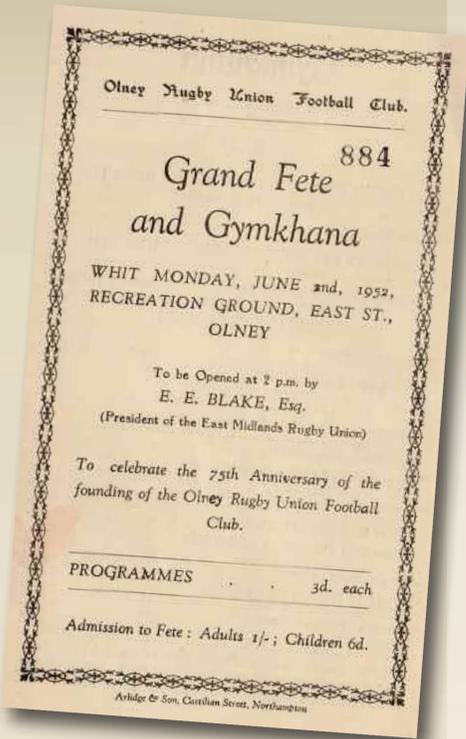


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1900s

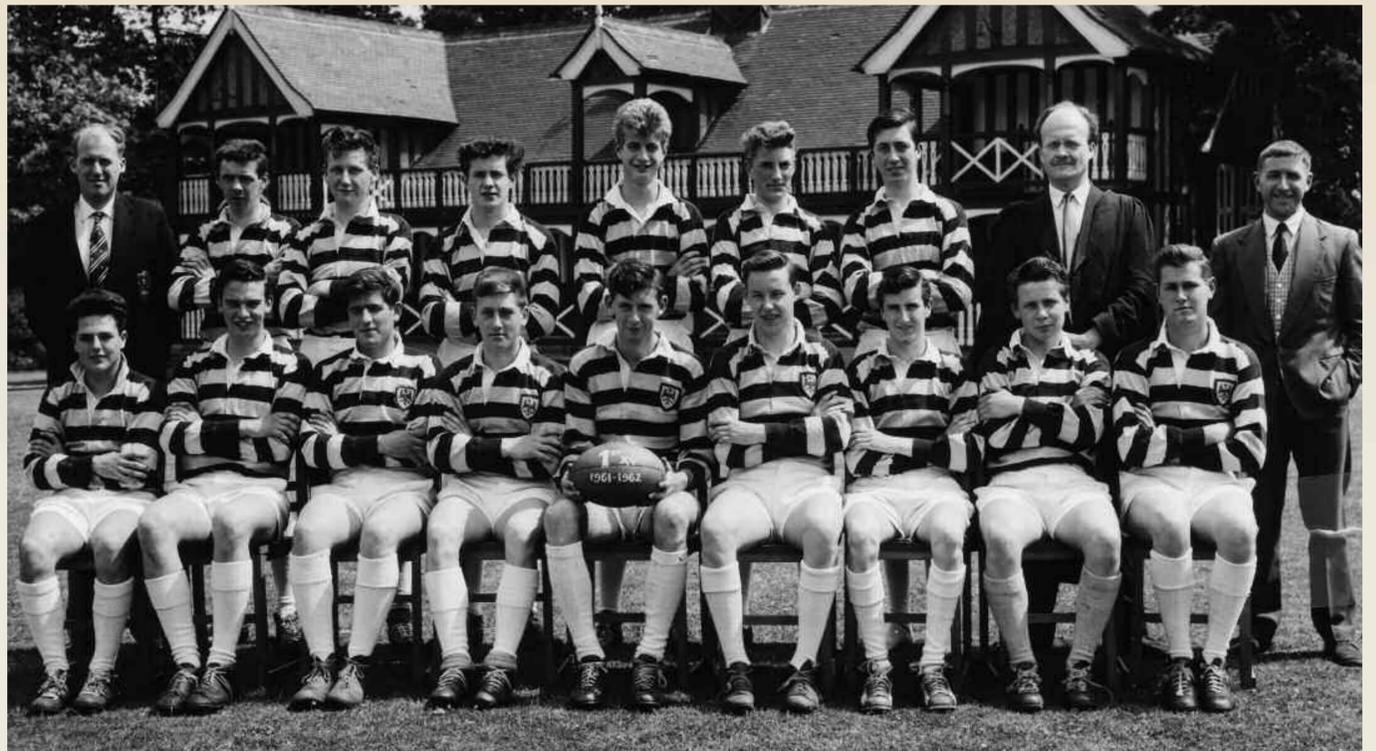
1952

1952 is a momentous year for both Olney and Bletchley rugby clubs: Not only is it Olney's 75th anniversary, it is also the year that Bletchley's new sporting complex at Manor Fields is opened by the Duke of Edinburgh.



(Bletchley Gazette, 18th October 1952. Gazette Archive, Living Archive MK)

1961



Bletchley Grammar School 1st XV 1961-2 including Master-in-charge Phil Pilcher (far right)
(Duncan MacFarlane Collection, Living Archive MK)

1971



Bletchley RUFC 1st XV with Robin Bowen-Williams (right) 1971-2 (Duncan MacFarlane Collection, Living Archive MK)

WATER RUGGER

Bletchley 0

Vauxhall Motors 14 pts.

Amid large pools of water and squalls of rain Bletchley were defeated in a gruelling game at Manor Fields on Saturday.

Safe handling was impossible and the game soon developed into a forwards' battle.

Bletchley held Vauxhall to three points at half-time, but later Vauxhall crossed the line three times.

Wettest and muddiest man on the field was Ray Hankins who had a whale of a time at full-back for Bletchley. Lawrence White at scrum-half played a very promising game, and was well partnered at stand-off by his namesake Geoffrey.

Of the forwards young Keith Tarbox gave an excellent account of himself.

Next Saturday's fixture with Buckingham has been cancelled owing to Buckingham being unable to raise a team.

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1900s



Olney's new Clubhouse is opened by two revered former Captains of the club:
F (Chick) Millward (1931-33)
PN (Pat) Sowman (1933-36)



1976 Olney RFC has now grown to four senior XV's (120 players), a Junior Colts XV, and their Mini section (80 players). Playing areas are in full use on Saturdays, with Under 19 XV and Under16 XV being played on Sundays. The club also wins the 1976 Lewis Shield for the first time.



(Olney Rugby Football Club Collection, Living Archive MK)

1983



The MK Youth Team at Greenleys, lining up with trainer Gerard Copp, far right.

(Anne Silk Collection, Living Archive MK)

1994 This year sees public affirmation of the massive local revolutions in rugby union football: in the programme for a special Rugby Festival there are matches not only between 'The Open University Representative XV v The England Rugby Classics' and for Veterans but also for Women's and Mini Rugby Matches.

Paul Hull – formerly at Milton Keynes RFC, Bristol and RAF – wins four England caps:

"There were some unbelievably brutal games in South Africa but I loved it. They were hard grounds, good to run on, and because South Africans like to kick the ball a lot, I was always in the game. The other big thing, of course, was that Nelson Mandela had just been elected as president and we were due to meet him at the first Test in Pretoria."



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2000s

2000 Olney Juniors at the start of the decade. (Citizen archive, Living Archive MK)



2003 Milton Keynes Rugby Club plays the Rugby 7s Hemingway Memorial match at Field Lane, Greenleys in Wolverton, 23rd May 2003.



MKRFC Rugby 7s Team (Anne Silk Collection, Living Archive MK)

2007 Bletchley RFC celebrates its 60th anniversary. And Olney RFC celebrates winning the Lewis Shield yet again.



BLETCHLEY RUGBY UNION FOOTBALL CLUB
 Affiliated to
 The Buckinghamshire Rugby Football Union
 The East Midlands Referees' Society

Clubhouse and Grounds
 MANOR FIELDS, BLETCHLEY
 MILTON KEYNES, BUCKS.
 Tel: M.K. (01908) 372298
www.bletchleyrugby.com

Club Colours
 Shirts - Blue with small Maroon & White hoops
 Shorts - Navy Blue / Socks - Maroon & White

Honours
 BB & O League 1 Winners 2004-05
 BB & O League 1 Winners 2003-04
 BB & O League 2 Winners 2002-03
 Bucks County Shield Winners 2002-03
 Buckinghamshire County Cup Winners 1983-84, 1984-85

North Bucks Shield Winners
 1972-73, 1974-75, 1976-77, 1977-78, 1978-79, 1979-80, 1982-83, 1985-86, 1986-87, 1987-88, 1988-89.
 (Competition suspended 1983-84)

KIT LIST AND EXTRAS
 In addition to their own luggage, everyone going on tour must bring with them

1. A teddy - Please see Alec for this
2. A dummy - any colour
3. A bulb of garlic

A heavy fine will be imposed on those who do not bring the above with them!

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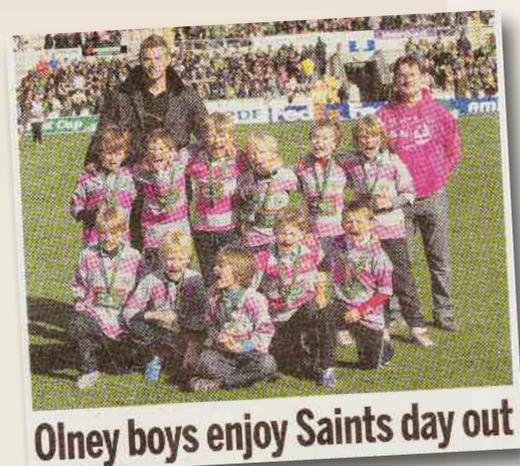
2000s

2008 *"Bletchley Ladies: Founded in 2008, some of the original players are still with the team which only had a handful of players with usually only 6/7 available for games. In the early days they were supported by Leighton Buzzard RUFC who lent them players and played trial matches as an introduction and creation of a Ladies Club. This is now (2015) reversed – Leighton Buzzard is in decline and Bletchley does their best to support them through rough times."*

(Verity Robinson, 2015 Captain, to Living Archive MK)



2010



Milton Keynes RUFC memorial game, 2010: John Silk, Club President, is seated in the front row on a player's back. (Anne Silk Collection, Living Archive MK)

2012 On 30 December 2012, Premiership Saracens host Northampton Saints for a regular season match at Stadium MK, while their new stadium at Barnet Copthall was still being built. Final score: Saracens 17-16 Northampton. (Photo MK Dons, courtesy leescriven.com)



A History of Rugby in the Milton Keynes Area

2015

The Rugby World Cup

2015 The 'World in Union' comes to Milton Keynes!



(Photo courtesy leescriven.com)



(All photos courtesy leescriven.com)

MILTON KEYNES' RUGBY WORLD CUP IN NUMBERS...

1 Royal Prince and one country's President came to Stadium MK – Prince Harry saw France beat Canada 41 - 18; and Epeli Nailatikau watched his Fijian team beat Uruguay 47 – 15.

2 teams, Samoa and Fiji, used Milton Keynes' own facilities as team bases for their Rugby World Cup preparations during the tournament: Woughton on the Green was used for on-field training, with Bletchley Leisure Centre for gym and pool work, away from the pitch.

3 years is how long it took to plan the Rugby World Cup in Milton Keynes.

3 Rugby World Cup pool matches – was the number for which Milton Keynes was the **Host City**.

5 major organisations in Milton Keynes collaborated to produce a complex and highly successful world cup: Milton Keynes Council; MK Dons and Stadium MK; The Parks Trust; The Stables and the International Festival; and the Thames Valley Police.

100s of volunteers worked as part of The Pack or working at the **Fanzone** – including the Mayor of Milton Keynes, Cllr Keith McLean working on all three match days – in spectator services, helping direct people around the city and get them in the mood to watch rugby...

5,868 cups of tea were bought at Stadium MK during the three matches.

7,863 pies were bought at Stadium MK during the three matches.

8,532 hotdogs were bought at Stadium MK during the three matches.

12,000 people experienced the 'world class spectacular' **Clash of Drums**, produced by The Stables and IF – the Milton Keynes International Festival – as it processed through the streets of Milton Keynes, culminating with an explosive finale on stage at The Point.

23,583 alcoholic bottles were sold at Stadium MK.

30,048 spectators were in Stadium MK at the final match, Fiji v Uruguay – the third record during the World Cup that was broken for the stadium.

36,000 visitors came to the official Rugby World Cup **Fanzone**, in Campbell Park, Milton Keynes, organised by the Parks Trust, throughout 11 days from 1st October.

50,000 shuttle bus trips were taken in Milton Keynes for the matches.

87,356 was the **total number of spectators** attending the three matches in Stadium MK.

25 million people from all over the world tuned in to watch Japan beat Samoa 26 -5 at Stadium MK – the largest television audience ever recorded for a sporting event.

50 million pounds were estimated to have been injected into Milton Keynes' economy.