

HISTORY OF THE WARRINGTON RUFC

The early years

Warrington R.U.F.C. was formed towards the end of the 1922/23 season and its first full season was 1923/24 when two teams were fielded quite often. The first official Committee consisted of R. M. Swinton, A. Ferguson, W. T. Davenport, C. Hatton, C. E. Radcliffe, J. Baguley, C. Melbourne, J. R. Locker and O. J. Dilworth with L. G. Lythgoe as the Secretary. A temporary ground near to the Baptist Church at the end of Loushers Lane was used and the 'Warrington Guardian' records show that the first game the Club played was on April 21st, 1922, when the Bury Club was the visitor. This match was played at Chester Road and was watched by 1,200 spectators who saw Warrington lose 5-11. At this time the team played in white jerseys with blue shorts and the players were coached by Sergeant/Instructor C. W. Jones, a Welsh International who had won 8 caps. Other players in the first season were Dr. C. W. Healey and V. Francis, both of whom had won their Rugby Colours at Liverpool University, J. Makin, a Manchester University 'Blue', G. N. England, N. Tilling, J. R. Locker and J. Wilkinson, one of the forwards whose qualifications are shown as being the Welter-weight champion of India from 1920-22.

The first Annual Meeting was held on 24th August, 1923 in the Royal Oak Hotel. It is illustrative of the enthusiasm of these pioneers of the Club that on January 4th, 1924 they were able to hold the first Club Annual Ball in the Parr Hall when 260 people attended and danced to Louis Male's Syncopated Orchestra with G. N. England and J. Darbyshire acting as M.C.'s.

Clubs that played in the first season some of who we no longer play included Manchester Y.M.C.A., Stockport (defunct), Eccles, Widnes O.B., Central O.B. (defunct), Metrovicks, Colwyn Bay, Wilmslow, Sale 'A' and Waterloo 'A'.

The earliest record shows that in the 1923-24 season the 1st XV played 31 games, winning 16, losing 12 and drawing 2 while the 'A' XV played 26 games, won 15, lost 8 and drew 3.

Original Club Members and Committee recorded were Messrs. J. R. Locker, who went on to become England RFU President in 1968, G. N. England, Dr. C. W. Healey and W. T. Davenport.

The Club soon moved from their temporary home in Loushers Lane and played at the Warrington Cricket Club for four seasons until 1929 when it moved to the ground in Loushers Lane, where, apart from the War years, the Club played until the season end of 1961.

Of the early teams the 1928/29 team had the best playing record, out of 29 games, won 18, lost 11, scoring 328 points and conceding 202.

1930 to 1949

As can be seen from a detailed list of officials, the Club was extremely fortunate to possess a hardworking Secretary in F. Ewart Bibby who served continuously for 14 years from 1925-1939. His efforts did much towards establishing the Club and he was a most popular personality with the other Club Members and one of the real stalwarts of the Club right until his passing in 1954.

In the 'Thirties' the Club continued to go from strength to strength with a wonderful Club spirit and many dominant personalities came to the fore including T. C. Knowles who went from Warrington to Birkenhead Park, and played for England and Cheshire and J. A. Cooper (Lancashire) 1933, Lance Connor, a very popular and successful Captain, Alan Tennant, Cliff Lunt and Geoff Marshall who was to play such an important role before very long.

When the War came in 1939 it could have broken up all the hard worked for achievements and in accordance with R.F.U. procedure all official fixture lists were discontinued. At Warrington however, thanks to the efforts of J. R. Locker, F. E. Bibby and Geoff. Marshall and others, those playing Members who remained, assisted by players from the now defunct Old Warringtonians R.U.F.C. pooled their resources, and played throughout the War on the Whitecross Ground in Chester Road.

It was mainly thanks to these efforts that the Club was able to make a prompt re-start at the end of the War and during the 1945-46 season, the team played at Sankey School while negotiating the renewal of the Lease at Loushers Lane. The first post-war game was played on September 15th, 1945 when Leyland Motors were defeated 31-7. The premises at Loushers Lane had fallen into a very poor state of repair during the War and much work had to be done before the Club could return. In those austere times, materials were obtained from a wide list of sources and thanks to the efforts of the Members; the Club was able to re-start the 1946-47 season at Loushers Lane. In October, 1946 the Memorial Fund was started and had reached £113 at the end of the season. This fund so ably organised by C. C. C. Burch and E. F. Massey eventually raised over £900 and financed the Club's purchase of the stand and dressing rooms as well as repairs and decorations to the Clubhouse.

In January, 1947 membership was such as to enable a third XV to be raised to play Old Caldeians 'B' and in 1947-48 this team commenced regular fixtures. The seasons from 1946-49 were the best from a playing record aspect the Club has ever known and the Club at this time was in a very happy position. Cecil Burch now more than ever was a tower of strength and a prolific worker. H. Woods was a most energetic and efficient Secretary and Ray Bennett has often been described as the 'model' Captain. Not surprisingly therefore, it was during these years that some of the Players achieved County recognition. These were A. Smith and J. Foden who both played for Lancashire while with the Club, B. Southern who left to join Liverpool and played for Lancashire and S. Plumb who represented the R.A.F. before leaving to join Birkenhead Park and play for Cheshire. The team during the 1948-49 season was virtually the end of a very successful spell.

The 1950's

After such wonderful years it is not surprising to find that the 'Fifties' were years of hard toil and re-building. Many of the older players ended their playing days in a short period and younger inexperienced players had to be brought up. The lack of a local Rugby playing school was severely felt and the records reflect this in no uncertain manner. If the playing ability was somewhat lacking, the interest and enthusiasm was not and in 1954 four teams were being fielded regularly. The Membership grew rapidly and five teams were raised on three occasions during the 1956-57 season. Club spirit was high and with the ebullient Secretaryship of Ken. Miller a Bazaar was held on September 28th, 1957. Months of hard work saw the Club raise £238 in only three hours.

Around this time a revised set of Rules were introduced and are in operation at the present time. This re-organisation however was not achieved without the loss of interest by several very keen Club Members but fortunately for the Club, as is so often the case, others were found and came along to take their places. Alan James took over as Secretary from Ken Miller and with the assistance of Charles Warburton began the Ground Development Society in September, 1959, as a result of which over £1,400 has so far been raised towards the cost of the new ground scheme.

Tastes change as time goes on but the basic structure of the Club is not very much different from that 37 years ago when the pioneers were laying the foundation of the Club and it is hoped that with the opening of the new ground, they will be able to see some rewards for their efforts so long ago.

THE STORY OF A NEW GROUND ---- BRIDGE LANE

In the years following the 1939/45 War, the playing membership of the Warrington Rugby Union Club grew rapidly and in consequence the Committee were faced with either expanding and improving the facilities available at Loushers Lane or eventually moving to a new ground where the future of the club could be established on a permanent basis.

With this problem in mind, two meetings were arranged at different periods with Members of the Warrington Town Council and their advisory Officials, to see if a solution of the problem could be reached and a long term lease granted to the Club. Senior Officials of the Warrington Club on both occasions put forward logical and fair proposals to the Council. Although given sympathetic hearings no practical help was forthcoming, particularly as to the granting of a long term lease, which was eventually rejected.

It was only after this set back that the Committee began to look around for another site which would enable the Club to develop on the lines desired.

Initially the American Hospital site at Appleton was viewed but agreement could not be reached with the owners and the scheme was dropped in 1952. From 1955 to 1957 hopes were held for a site on the old Stockton Heath Cricket ground at Appleton. However this site would have proved to be too costly and the Committee had reluctantly to look elsewhere.

In February 1958, 'feelers' were put out to the Runcorn R.D.C. by the President, Mr. C. C. C. Burch about any land which they might have available. The Council proved to be very helpful and understanding about the needs of the Club and in May 1958 they came forward with the area of land which has now been taken over and developed.

It has taken 3½ years of very hard work, to get the site developed to the present condition as you see it today. One feels that it is appropriate to make mention here of the ready co-operation of the various officials of the Runcorn R.D.C. in the numerous approaches which have been made to them, in particular those of Messrs. R. Patrick Williams the Clerk to the Council, B. G. Preston the Surveyor and M. Yates of his department.

Months of quotation chasing and meetings followed and not a few strings were pulled in efforts to keep the cost of the scheme down as much as possible, but it was only in October 1958 that Ministry approval was obtained.

Approaches were then made to the Rugby Football Union about the possibility of a loan, to enable the Club to go ahead with the Ground scheme. The controlling body, realising the urgency of the request, were most helpful.

At a Committee Meeting on the 8th January 1959, the good news from the Rugby Football Union was announced—'Loan approved'!

In April the draft Lease from the Runcorn R.D.C. was received and studied by the Committee and their legal advisers. A few minor points were cleared up and the Agreement of the Trustees of the Club obtained that they would join in the Lease.

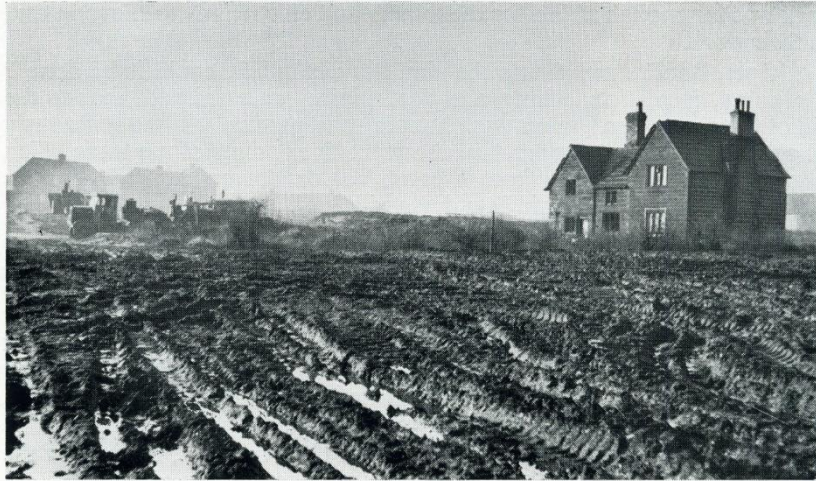
The next hurdle to be overcome was the question of Guarantors to the Rugby Football Union for the Loan they had agreed upon. In addition to the four Trustees six other Members were approached for their help which was very willingly given.

The Club must remain indebted for a long time to the ten very gen-erous Members who so readily agreed to act as Guarantors. On such an occasion as the opening of the new ground tonight, it is fitting that their names be mentioned here, as a token of the Club's appreciation. They are Messrs. R. Baker, C. C. C. Burch, G. N. England, M. Fairclough, J. R. Locker, A. W. Marsden, G. A. Marshall, H. Pitchford, H. Simcock, and A. W. Tennant all of whom have played for the Club in the past and have retained their interest in it for 38 years—a record to be truly proud of.

On the 30th September 1959 an Extraordinary General Meeting of Members was held. Questions were fired from all quarters. How much? How are we going to raise the money? Have we a layout plan of the Pavilion ? and many other questions were raised until at last the Chairman Mr. W. H. Land was able to receive a proposition from Stanley Jones seconded by Jack McIntyre that 'This Meeting give their sanction to the change of ground from Loushers Lane to Bridge Lane, Appleton, Cheshire, to obtaining a Loan of £3,000 from the Rugby Football Union and to various other steps the Committee were negotiating'. The vote was taken and the result announced 34 votes in favour; 0 against with 5 abstentions, and the Committee received the vote of confidence which they required.

'Get moving' the cry had been and so the President and the Secretary met Directors of E. M. Smith & Co. Limited during the week following to discuss the levelling of the site. Could we rely upon them to do a first class job at their quoted price? "Yes" was the reply and accordingly the contract was approved by the General Committee.

In October work commenced but the weather decided to take a hand. Weeks of heavy rain prevented the Bulldozer and Scraper from working on the site but soon after Christmas it was obvious that the contracting equipment was winning and the local Press even sent a photographer to take photographs of the progress.



The above photograph shows levelling work in progress on the new ground in January, 1960. The old Farmhouse since demolished to form the foundation of the new pavilion, is shown in the top right hand corner.

Photograph reproduced by kind permission of the Warrington Guardian

A special Ground Sub-Committee was appointed to go into the various work required. They held their first meeting in January 1960. Every aspect was discussed until a late hour, and the General Committee accepted the recommendations made.

Plans were drawn up and submitted for approval to the Planning Authorities. Weeks elapsed and telephone wires became red hot from incessant chasing of the Authorities. Thursday April 28th saw yet another meeting with the various officials concerned. Then out of the blue it came 'If the Club agree to eight amendments to the submitted plans, then permission would be given.' The President and the Secretary were aghast—By how much would the amendments increase the cost of the scheme? The additional costs were carefully investigated and found reasonable and so the General Committee accepted the various amendments to the plans on the 11th May, 1960, and the road ahead was clear.

Marvellous—all the summer months for work to forge ahead. Mr. William Hankey had kindly harrowed and seeded the pitches. The grass grew well with an exceptionally good take. Messrs. Gartons had fulfilled their promise that the seed would germinate well. During this period the fencing was erected and completely enclosed the ground. June saw the foundations for the pavilion being laid and then—Halt !! Weeks turned into months and progress became 'snail like'. The Secretary's blood pressure was never so high. Then, as if by a miracle, action recommenced. In August the drains were laid and the building shot up. By September the work was far enough ahead for the joiners and electricians to move in and do their work.

'Open Bonfire night' was the aim. Six weeks left, could it be done? The lining, insulation, wiring and partitioning were finished, near to the end of October. Alan Peaker was plumbing and glazing, whilst vociferously enlightening his young apprentice about the finer points of the trade. Ten days to go, the workmen from Messrs. Val de Travers arrived, and the Rock asphalt floor was laid in a day and a half.

Then came one of the biggest lifts the Club had received when Norman Cumings met Bill Baines and Alan James in the Clubhouse one night and offered to help with the decoration and painting. True to his word the job was well and truly done. Sunday October 30th saw a very large work party mustered. Bonfire wood was brought from all the district and all day long Bernard Bretherton and his helpers fetched and carried. Bob Young, ably assisted by a horde of youngsters, stacked and re-stacked the Bonfire. Others laid the drive and finished off other work.

Suddenly panic stations. It was realised that 'the Bar', the hub of the Club's facilities, was still to be installed. Fingers were crossed but as promised, Greenall Whitley & Co. Limited came along and fitted the Bar counter, display shelves etc. Right through Saturday morning work went on until the band of helpers could do no more so at 12-45 p.m. on Bonfire day, those who were due to play at Bury in the afternoon dashed off for a quick snack, change and hectic collecting of their kit.

Triumph all along the line for the 1st team won 12-11 and then a rush back to the ground.

Spectators came in their hundreds to see the gigantic Bonfire and Firework display. Now to relax over a quiet drink in our new home. Some hopes. A struggle through ten rows of friends and visitors to the Bar. Sorry, no glasses left. A hectic chase round and you grabbed the first empty glass and pushed through to the front again, served, you were glad to reach the comparative peace and quiet of the dressing rooms to enjoy the fruits of your efforts.

An extension licence enabled the cash to pour into the till giving the Club a record breaking first night's business.

At 12-30 a.m. the workers gathered in the Clubhouse to survey the chaotic conditions in the Clubroom which rather resembled the debris left behind after flood waters had subsided. Too late to start on the cleaning work we thought so leave it until the morning. Someone thought the fire was a bit on the big side to leave unattended. Stockton Heath Fire Brigade were telephoned, quickly arrived and agreed that if the wind had changed direction the fire might have been dangerous. 400 gallons of water were pumped on to the fire but nevertheless on Tuesday following the big night children from the neighbourhood were still sitting round the smouldering embers.

No time for relaxation yet. There was still plenty of work to be done. Work parties were organised at night time and at week ends with the help of Mr. Michael Stansfield they have carried on throughout the summer months with the results that you see tonight.

What's that you say? It sounds like three years of hectic endeavour. You are right it certainly was both on the administrative and physical side but now at least those who have helped in any way can say that the labour has not been in vain.

The Opening of the New Ground

OUR VISITORS

It is with great pleasure that we welcome our visitors from the Manchester Club for the official opening game on our new ground. It would be very difficult to find a more distinguished club and we are honoured that they so readily agreed to play against us tonight.

Manchester F.C. was founded in 1860 and was the second open club to play Rugby Football in England. Members from the Club have won no less than 200 International 'caps'. Many notable players have played for them since R. R. Osborne won their first cap in 1871 and in recent years these have included A. B. W. Risman, G. D. Parker, H. Scott, G. St. J. L. Goddard, K. Jones, P. Batten, P. T. Baines, M. Phillips, R. V. Thompson, A. Ferguson and J. E. Cooper to mention just a few.

The team for tonight's match includes several outstanding players and it is hoped that these players will be able to turn out. Ken Jones, the captain and left winger has had English trials and Lancashire County caps and full back Harry Scott has played for England and Lancashire. It is hoped that the England, Lancashire and Oxford University centre Malcolm Phillips will be playing to form a very dangerous combination with A. Godson, (Lancashire, Army and Cambridge University) in the centre, Fly half W. M. Thompson has played for Berkshire and is currently in line for the fly half position in the Lancashire County team left vacant by Risman's departure. The forwards are a formidable set with G. St. J. L. Goddard the Lancashire 'prop' forming a successful combination with Cheshire and Cambridge University hooker R. V. Thompson, while in the second row J. E. Cooper is another Lancashire County player.

During their lengthy history, Manchester have earned a reputation for playing fast, open, clean rugby and given favourable conditions, spectators can look forward to a feast of excellent football.

We would like to express a most cordial welcome to all our other guests with us tonight and hope that they will be able to recall with pleasure their visit to Warrington Club for a long time to come, for we at Warrington very seldom have the pleasure of entertaining such an auspicious gathering and are truly indebted to them for having come along.

OPENING GAME, WEDNESDAY, 6th SEPTEMBER, 1961

WARRINGTON v MANCHESTER

THE TEAMS.

WARRINGTON

(Red, white and green)
(Provisional)

Full Back	J. S. Smith
Left Wing	K, Rischmiller/J. Hockenhull
Left Centre	B. Taberham
Right Centre	S. Eaton
Right Wing	J. Roughley
Fly Half	J. B. Long
Scrum Half	J. Skelton/J. A. Tunna
Forwards	C. Warburton (Capt.)
	F. Burrows
	J. C. R. Campbell/ W. S. McIntosh
	A. N. Whitfield/G. Firth
	R. Thorniley
	T. Critchley
	B. M. Byrne
	J. McFarlane

MANCHESTER

(Red and white)

H. Scott*
K. Jones (Capt.)*
D. A. Poole or
M. Phillips*
A. Godson*
P. D. G. Ross
W. T. Thompson*
P. Greenhalgh
G. St. J. L. Goddard*
R. V. Thompson*
W. G. M. Ross
J. E. Cooper*
R. Johnson
D. Crean
J. G. F. Broadhurst
E. A. Wright

Referee: Dr. A. H. Hollings (Manchester and District Society and Lancashire County).

*Denotes International or County players.

KICK-OFF 6-30 p.m.

1st TEAM POST-WAR

PLAYING RECORDS.

	Played Won		Drawn Lost		Points For Against	
1945-46	29	23	1	5	466	223
1946-47	26	22	0	4	454	119
1947-48	32	27	1	4	505	138
1948-49	32	23	2	7	462	240
1949-50	36	19	7	10	365	301
1950-51	36	13	3	20	257	338
1951-52	38	13	6	19	423	327
1952-53	38	11	2	25	423	476
1953-54	34	13	3	18	360	463
1954-55	28	16	1	11	352	229
1955-56	31	12	2	17	306	333
1956-57	36	16	3	17	378	372
1957-58	36	10	3	23	285	456
1958-59	35	18	3	14	331	326
1959-60	36	13	5	18	344	366
1960-61	35	8	2	25	233	548

Lancashire County connections:-

It should be noted that during the period of 39 to 49 **J Bradley** was the first President of Lancashire 1947 to 1949 to come from the Warrington club. Lancashire won the County Championship 47/48/49

Warrington are the only :Junior Club to have most Lancashire Presidents 5 in total the next being **Reg Locker** 1955/56 Lancashire held the Trophy but unfortunately under Reg's stewardship they did not make the final. **Ces Burch** a past treasurer of the county was President 1971/72,, Lancashire won the Championship in 1972, followed by another Treasurer **Bryan England** 1991/92 in 1992 Lancashire beat Cornwall 9-6 and to date in 2005/6 **Mike Cornelia** was elected President and as expected in 2006 Lancashire beat Devon 36-26,

The moral of the story is if you want to win the County Championship appoints a man from Warrington.

The 1960's

Reg Locker

President of The Rugby Football Union 1968



The 1970's

Centenary Celebration Game :- ORRELL v WARRINGTON played on January 26th 1971

In October 1970 Warrington RUFC invited Orrell RUFC to play a game to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the foundation of the R.F.U. This is a record of that game which took place at Orrell RUFC.

Mutton chop whiskers, outrageously long hair, flowing beards, that is the picture most of us have of our rugby playing forefathers of a century ago. Yet what is so different from those pioneers to the so called way-out but sartorially elegant fashions of today's players. The shorts may be a little less baggy, the shirts may have buttons instead of laces, the differences are minor. We like to think too that the ideals of rugby men have changed very little in the past century. This was the sort of image Orrell and Warrington tried to recreate on the evening of Tuesday January 26th 1971, 100 years to the day since the advent of Rugby Union. There were probably no other games of club Rugby Union football played in Great Britain on that day and certainly none under the laws of the game as they were in 1871 as this game was.

The gratitude of both clubs is extended to Rugby School who supplied a copy of Rugby's own original laws

The match itself, amongst others was observed by Mr Clifford Webb of the Wigan observer and here follows his impressions of the event.

The game performed by the light of electric flares, was the scene of noble, manly deeds of skill and bravery which set the many spectators in an uproar.

The Warrington party was captained by worthy gentleman, Mr. Terence Critchley and that of Orrell by Mr. Norman Fairclough.

But, there was no more handsome fellow afield than the Umpire, the well-known gentleman Mr. James Devonald. What a dashing figure he cut, wearing the blazer of his old school and sporting his tasselled honours cap upon his head above his impressively moustachioed and monocled visage.

Each time one of the sides made a "touch down" and a goal was scored the teams changed ends. It was a most stirring sight to see scrummaging so resolutely for ball, even if there was a tendency for players of smaller stature to be hooked out first.

The new-fangled game was indeed thirsty work, for many players had to retire to the line of touch where they were magically revived by copious draughts of ale.

In attendance were an ill dressed physician, who set broken bones and performed amputations on the spot, and the representative of the undertaker's establishment, who measured those fallen heroes beyond aid with unseemly haste.

The match was marred by a number of deplorable "incidents", every time the Umpire rang his bell, play stopped while the two gentlemen captains conferred but there was foul play when the electric flares failed for a moment, alas, when illumination was restored, a dirty deed had been done, and one player had, as common people put it "been done in", the famous detective, Mr. Sherlock Holmes, was called upon to investigate and the culprit was led away with the gyves upon his wrists.

Furthermore, one uncouth fellow had the temerity to play the ball between his legs when he found himself alone for an instant. The result was immediate pandemonium, with the villain being led off in disgrace, while the voice of the electric megaphone accused him* of the strange crime of starting a "Northern Union".

Yet, despite the display of passion and the fearsome deeds committed afield, the gentlemen of Warrington and Orrell are to be congratulated upon the enterprise. The result of the game which commenced at 8-10 pm. and ended at 8-55 pm. is uncertain but is recorded as a draw by captain's agreement for the purposes of rugby history.

The Warrington gentlemen players and their attendants on this historic occasion were as follows.

Players

T.A.CRITCKLEY (Capt.), D.G.WILLIAMS, C.WABURTON, G.KNOWLES, J.SKELETON, B.WILLIAMS, B.SHAW, P.MANNION, R.HOWARTH, B.HODSON, J.NAYLOR, M.OSBORNE, B.WILCOCK, D.TYLDESLEY, J.KELLETT, F.BURROWS, D.EVANS, G.HOWELLS, A.GARDINER, G.PERKS, M.TAYLOR, M.LONDON, I.MILLINGTON, J.MURTLAND, T.HARRINGTON, W.SAVAGE, A.NORTON, E.MULLIGAN, R.HOWLETT, M.J.TAYLOR, K.FLETCHER, D. BROADBENT, R.EGAN, D.SHEPHERD, A.WALSH,

Attendants

P.GANDY, J.DEVONALD, E.MULGREW, C.GRAHAM, G.HILL

From the Warrington Guardian

No Strangling

The 30-a-side charity match to celebrate the centenary of the Rugby Union at Orrell on Tuesday evening when Warrington are the visitors will be previewed on television probably on Monday. The clubs, who will pay in original dress, have also borrowed a copy of the original rules from Rugby School. One of them reads: "Thou shalt not throttle or strangle thy opponent" !

A DRAW – ‘BY AGREEMENT’

Despite the bad weather, a crowd of 1500 saw the match at Orrell RU FC against Warrington on Tuesday to mark the centenary of the Rugby Union.

The match was played 30-a-side and to the original rules. Jennifer Lowe, the former Miss United Kingdom, from Whitley, kicked off. It ended in a 10-10 draw "by mutual agreement.

Hospitals in Warrington, Leigh and Wigan will benefit by a considerable sum from the proceeds."



L to R Geoff Knowles, Alistair Gardiner, Peter Mannion

The 1980's

The 1990's

The Twenty First Century