



The History of Ilkley Rugby Football Union Club

The earliest references to rugby in Ilkley go back to the early 1870's and in the Ilkley Gazette of March 25th 1875; there is a description of the game we now know as rugby union football.

“The rugby game is most played in this country and the ball is an oval shape. In these rules you may pick it up, wedge it tightly under your arm, put your head down and charge – if you can, right through the ranks of the enemy into the very goal itself. The 15 or 20 players on each side, clad in marvellous jerseys (and generally without caps) are busily occupied in driving this way and that a brown leather sphere filled with an inflated India-rubber bag. The whole then close up and all you can see is a scrum, a densely packed crowd pushing kicking and fighting inch for inch. Presently the closely wedged mass begins to rotate and the dangerous players, the “players out”- the old and experienced hacks –gather nearer round. There is a heave, a stop, a burst and out flies the ball. The first man that catches it is promptly collared and brought down, if possible, head over heels. His victor shares the same fate. The next minute he has rushed with his precious burden under the high cross bar, and in another minute the ball will be brought out and placed down and the goal will triumphantly be kicked.”

The article then continues with a report of a game between the Ilkley club and Bradford Caledonians.

“At the close of the game the score was – Ilkley, three tries and several rouses to Bradford, nil. Owing to the bad weather of late season only 4 games were played, two of which were won, one drawn and one lost and we are glad to be able to state that the Ilkley Football Club is in a flourishing condition and hope it may long continue so, and thus cause the physical strength of young men to be developed in this noble King of Games.”

There is an even earlier reference to rugby in Ilkley in the Gazette of August 21st 1873 and the article headed "Ilkley Football Club" states:

"Gentlemen interested in the above or wishing to join are kindly requested to attend a meeting at the New Inn on Monday next at 8pm to make arrangements for the coming season."

Later that same year on October 2nd 1873 the Gazette reported that:

"Last Saturdays match (being the clubs first of the season) was played at Bradford between fifteen members of the Ilkley club and fifteen gentlemen got together by W H Coulson which ended in victory for the latter by three goals to one. For Ilkley the play of C T Baldwin was exceedingly good whilst on the other side P W Mills of Marlborough College renown and now a member of the English Twenty was magnificent."

To confirm the existence of rugby in Ilkley in the 1870's the Yorkshire County records show that G Baldwin from the Ilkley Club played for Yorkshire against Durham on December 6th 1873.

Further research in the Ilkley Gazette archives and in particular the special supplement to celebrate that eminent newspapers own centenary in 1961 it is stated that:

"Rugby Union Football was played in Ilkley in the early 1870's but the first official club was founded in October 1879 when it was reported that "some capital matches have been arranged" and the field was between Leeds Road and Little Lane. Evidently it had only a short life because in reporting a scratch game between Ilkley and Burley the "Free Press" expressed itself at a loss to explain why a club could not be formed in Ilkley. A club was in existence in 1883 and in 1889 there was reference to the disgraceful conduct of the players in one of the matches. Matches were played on pitches in Springs Lane, Easby Drive, Kings Road, Victoria Avenue and on the West Holmes (opposite the present ground) where in 1907 the Ilkley ground was chosen for its first County match against Cheshire."

However to complicate pinpointing the true centenary date of the club, a 50th anniversary celebration game was held on 10th September 1930 with Ilkley playing Yorkshire and a dinner was held at the Listers Arms. A report of this dinner appears in the Ilkley Gazette and it casts further light on the early years of rugby in Ilkley.

"Many compliments and a good deal of praise was accorded the Ilkley Rugby Club when the jubilee of Rugby Union Football in Ilkley was celebrated at the club's HQ, the Listers Arms last Wednesday. Mr W P Wood presiding said that he had recently asked an old friend if he knew when he (Mr Wood) had started playing rugby. His friend replied that he had an old photograph taken 42 years ago with

him in the centre as captain. At that time said Mr Wood we had three teams in Ilkley just as we have three teams now. Then there was the Ilkley team, a junior team under the name of Ilkley Rovers of which I was captain, and there was also a team, which played at the back of Mr T Pell's shop (now the central car park) and was known as "t" Back o'Pells Rangers. Over 40 Years ago they had played in a field up the Grove where Mr John White's house now stood. Then they played in Kings Road somewhere near where Mr George Smith now lived and afterwards in the Easby Drive enclosure in a cutting made by the railway that had a natural grandstand all round. Later they had played on the Holmes on the opposite side of the road from the present ground."

Replying on behalf of the Yorkshire Union, Mr R F Oakes said that "although this was supposed to be the jubilee of the Ilkley Club, in looking up some old records he found that an Ilkley man named Baldwin played for the County side as long ago as 1873."

Finally, to further confuse dating the foundation of the Club, not content with the 50th Anniversary celebrations in 1930, we again celebrated 50 years of rugby in 1949 when a 68-page brochure was published to commemorate the Club's golden jubilee. It is strange that the 1949 celebrations make no reference to those some 19 years earlier

What to make of it all? Well, we know that rugby was played in Ilkley from the early 1870's and there are several references in the Gazette to games. In addition to those already referred to there are others, for example:

November 19th 1874: "On Saturday last a football match was played in Lister Park, Bradford between the members of the Bradford Caledonian FC and the Ilkley Club. The match resulted in a victory for the Caledonians by ten rouges and two touchdowns to nothing for the Ilkley club."

In the same edition of the Gazette there is a report of a game between Otley and Leeds St Johns. The result was a draw, Otley gaining one rouge against one rouge and a poster for St Johns. This game was "brought to an abrupt conclusion owing to some dispute about a player being offside."

March 4th 1899: The Olicana Rugby Club played Spen Valley Casuals and scored a drop goal to their opponents a try; consequently winning by 4 points to 3.

March 11th 1899: In the preliminary round of the Yorkshire Rugby Union Challenge Cup Ilkley Olicana defeated Guisley by 30 points to nil.

March 18th 1899: Ilkley Olicana met Bottomboat Trinity at Bottomboat in the first round of the Yorkshire Challenge Cup competition and were defeated by 22 points to 9.

It seems, however, that it was not until late 1899 that there was a move to establish a permanent club in the town and on October 7th of that year the Gazette reported that:

“At a meeting held at the Crescent Hotel on Monday evening it was decided to organise a football club under the Rugby Union. Mr H Scarle, Middleton Rd was appointed secretary and a good number of names were entered as possible players including cracks from Leeds and Bradford clubs. A general meeting will be held at the Crescent Hotel on Thursday next at 9 o'clock and all interested players are requested to be present.”

The Gazette of the following week (October 14 1899) reported that:

“At a general meeting held at the Crescent Hotel on Thursday October 12th, all arrangements for commencing the season on November 11th were made. The entrance fee was fixed at 3/6d, which includes entrance to the field at all matches. The choice of a field was left in the hands of the Rev J H Kempson, Mr Shackleton, and Mr Scarle. All interested members are invited to a General Meeting to be held on Thursday next October 19 at 8.30pm in the Crescent Hotel.”

This meeting was duly held and on October 21st it was stated in the Gazette that:

“A meeting of the members of the newly formed club took place at the Crescent Hotel. The committee had secured the field adjoining the new cricket ground and there is already a membership of upwards of 40. A practice match had been arranged for today and it is earnestly desired that all playing members will endeavour to take part.”

The following month on November 4th a Gazette report pointed out that:

“A general meeting was held on Wednesday for the election of captain and vice captain. The voting resulted in the election of Mr Ted Holmes as captain and Mr P Amber as vice captain. The offer of Mr James Pell to select a team to play a match today (Saturday) was accepted.”

Eventually on November 18th 1899 the newly formed club played its first match. The opponents were Batley Casuals and the match was played at Ilkley, probably on land now occupied by the swimming pool. It was described as “a pleasant game” ending in a win for Batley by 1 dropped goal and 2 tries to nil. The second game was also played at Ilkley when Burley were beaten by 2 tries to 1try.

From that date in November 1899 rugby union football has been played every season in Ilkley with the exception of the War years.

Rugby in Ilkley from 1900-1920 is not particularly well recorded. Sadly the recorded minutes of the club have been lost but it appears that the new club thrived despite not occupying a permanent ground. At one time or another matches took place near the Coronation Hospital, Easby Drive, between Kings Road and Westville Avenue and where "The Briery" now stands. It seems that in about 1906 the ground became established on the West Holmes, a small grandstand was built but there was no clubhouse and players probably changed at the Star Inn.

The first County game was held at Ilkley in 1907 when Yorkshire lost to Cheshire. In the early part of the Century County games also took place at Ilkley against Lancashire in 1909 and Durham in 1911 when P C Steintall and F E Steintall became the first Ilkley players to be capped for Yorkshire and play on their own ground. The latter went on to play for England against Wales and France in 1913. It would appear that the only other Ilkley player to receive International honours was P S Dooty who played three times for Scotland in 1928 against Wales, France and New South Wales; at that time caps were awarded for the latter game, perhaps it was the inclusion of the word Wales in the title that caused the phenomenon.

Ilkley's opponents in these early years included Hawbank, Wakefield Balne Lane, Harrogate, Skipton, Bradford Rangers, Castleford, Headingley, Old Rastrickians, and Old Dewsburians. Most games were reported on briefly in the Ilkley Gazette – one of interest which Ilkley lost to Castleford states;

“During the progress of the game one of the Castleford players was ordered off the field by the referee for showing pugilistic tendencies and on leaving the field he was hooted by the spectators to some considerable extent.”

At the outbreak of the First World War all play was suspended with the exception of one scratch match at the end of 1915 between a team raised from the military stationed at Otley and Leeds Training College. The proceeds of this match went towards a fund to provide comfort overseas.

As far as is known, 121 members of the Ilkley Club joined the forces, 27 were killed and 15 received honours. Names and details of the members are recorded in the official handbook published by Yorkshire Rugby Union in 1919 in memory of those who gave their lives.

THE FALLEN

ARMISTEAD, Capt. T. E., M.C

West Yorks.

ATKINSON, Pte. J., West Riding
BARNES, Sgt. E., 18 Hussars
BLAGG, Cpl. J., Canadian F. A
BRADLEY, Lt. W., R.A.F
DACRE, Lt. B., West Riding
DAWSON, Lt. H., R.F.A
DEAN, Lt. R., D.C.M., West Riding
EARNSHAW, Bd. G. H., R.G.A
FISHER, Pte. F., West Riding
GALLAGHER, L.-Cpl. F., West Rdg.
GREEN, Pte. V., A.S.C. (M.T.)
HARDISTY, Pte. R., West Riding
HIGHAM, Pte. A., Canadian Inf.
HOLROYD, Lt. L., East Yorks.
KING, L.-Cpl. J. A., Liverpool Scot.
LEE, Lt. A.H., West Riding
LUND, Pte. J., West Riding
MULLER, Lt. N., West Yorks.
NUNNS, Cpl.-Wheeler A., R.F.A
O'SHEA, Sap. P., R.E.
PHILLIPS, Pte. R., Canadian Inf.
ROBINSON, Sgt. F., R.A.M.C.
SMITH, Sec.-Lt. G.M., M.C., R.F.A.
THIRKILL, Shg.-Smith W., R.F.A.
THWAITES, Pte. E., K.R.R.
WILKINSON, Capt. E., M.C., W.Y.

HONOURS

ARMISTEAD, T. E., M.C.
CLARKSON, W., D.C.M.
DEAN, R., D.C.M.

DENNISON, P. B., M.C.

ENGLISH, S. S., mentioned in
despatches

GAINES, S., M.M.

MAUFE, F. W. B., M.C. and bar,
mentioned in despatches

PETRIE, P. C., D.S.O., M.C.
mentioned in despatches (2)

RABAGLIATI, E., M.C., mentioned
in despatches

RHODES, J.R., D.C.M.

SHARP, R., mentioned in despatches

SMITH, G M., M.C.

WALKER, P. H. C., M.C. and bar
mentioned in despatches

WILKINSON, E., M.C. and bar
mentioned in despatches

Interestingly Thomas Harold Broadbent Maufe who certainly played for the club in the immediate post war years receives no mention in the Yorkshire RUFC publication and it may be that he did not join Ilkley Rugby Club until after the war.

However T H B Maufe who was serving as a Second Lieutenant in the 124th Siege Battery, Royal Garrison Artillery in Feuchy, France was awarded the Victoria Cross in June 1917. According to his citation, his battery came under intense fire which cut a telephone cable between the forward and rear positions. On his own, Lt Maufe braved the shellfire to repair the cable. Less than two weeks later he again risked his life to put out a fire in an ammunition dump despite the risk of high explosives and damaged gas shells. A few weeks later he was awarded the Victoria Cross by King George V.

Born in Ilkley in 1898, H.B Maufe went on to become a director of the family store in Bradford Brown, Muff and Co. but sadly whilst serving in the Home Guard in 1942 he was killed in a trench mortar explosion on Blubberhouse Moor. He is buried in Ilkley Cemetery.

After the Great War and demobilisation, the ground on West Holmes was almost derelict and because the club was unable to obtain a security of tenure it was decided to search

for a new site. The club continued to play on West Holmes in 1919, but thanks to a generous gesture from the club Life President J.T Jackson the land on East Holmes, on which the present 1st XV pitch now stands, was secured. Mr. Jackson bought the land and leased it to the club at a nominal rent with the option to purchase at any time at the price he paid for it. The existing 1st XV pitch used to be a nursery and orchard owned by Mr G A Hood and over thirty old cherry trees had to be removed before it could be levelled. Although a small 2nd XV pitch was made much of the land now occupied by the second pitch remained as a gravel pit for a number of years.

Although the ground had been secured a public appeal was made for funds to level the pitch, move and repair the grandstand and purchase new fencing and equipment. In addition it was decided to erect a second grandstand on the east side of the ground (opposite the current stand and clubhouse). Estimated expenditure for this work was £684.

Eventually the work was completed, the old grandstand could seat 360 people and the new east stand which was fifty yards long and built in three tiers could accommodate 600 people. Unfortunately there were insufficient funds to roof either stand. The last match on the old ground was played on 31st January 1920 when Ilkley beat Pudsey by twenty-six points to eight.

The new ground was opened on 21st February 1920 when Otley beat Ilkley by six points to nil. The game was kicked off by Sir James Oddy of Ilkley Hall and the Gazette reflected that;

“The gate numbered about 3000 who should not only be favourably impressed with the admirable character of the new ground but also its accommodation for spectators, for a thousand or two more could have seen the game comfortably without any additional grandstand or slope premises.”

In 1921 it was decided to name the ground “Stacks Field” after Edward “Stack” Hastings who was Hon Treasurer for some years after the 1914/18 war and at the same time Hon Treasurer of Yorkshire and a well known county referee. He did most of the work in arranging the move to the new ground and his name is honoured in perpetuity. He emigrated to New Zealand in 1927.

In the 1920's rugby continued to thrive in Ilkley and on Boxing Day 1924, Otley were defeated for the first time at the Cross Green ground. The score was 5pts to 3pts in Ilkley's favour and the match was played before a crowd of 2000.

In 1924 it was decided to replace the grandstand on the west side of the ground and incorporate changing rooms into the new building. The cost was estimated to be £1500 and it was largely funded from the proceeds of a bazaar and a donation of £500 from Mr J T Hemmingway of Heathcote, Ilkley. The new building, designed to hold 700 spectators under cover (300 of whom could be seated) is the grandstand which still exists today. It was opened on September 5th 1925 when Ilkley beat Skipton by 19pts to 13pts and the players changed at the Star Hotel so that spectators could view the new dressing rooms. By this time, also, the gravel pit adjacent to the second pitch was being filled in so the ground could be extended to provide two full size playing surfaces although it was not until 1950, that the lease of an additional piece of land, allowed the second pitch to be brought up to its present size.

It is also interesting to note that the rugby section of Ben Rhyding Sports Club closed down in 1925 as they found it extremely difficult to compete with Ilkley and Otley both of whom reportedly paid expenses to their players.

In 1930 Ilkley had at the time, what was considered " their finest hour " in defeating Otley in the quarter finals of the Yorkshire Cup at Cross Green by 3pts to 0pts despite playing for most of the second half with only 12 men. The game, which was played in driving snow, received huge coverage in the local press and the extract below from the Ilkley Gazette says it all.

" Against all the odds, against all paper records, with 3 men in the doctors hands and with only five forwards to Otleys heavy eight, they had lain the old bogey of the " black and white jersey ", they had held their own for the whole of the second half and won by a try scored by J H Pell at the end of the first half. They had made history. So long as the Rugby Union game is played or remembered in Ilkley, men will tell of the fifteen who made the journey to Otley last Saturday, will tell how three players, E G Rycroft, J P Kay, and D Todd were carried off, two in the first half and

another 5 minutes into the second half and how the remaining twelve under the superb generalship of P T Fawcett achieved the impossible “

The team went on to beat Huddersfield O. B. (21pts to 8pts) in the semi final played at Bradford but in their first appearance in the final were eventually defeated by Halifax, 17pts to 4pts in a match played at Otley on April 12th 1930. Again the Ilkley Gazette reported the occasion.

“The game attracted one of the largest crowds seen at the Otley ground. It numbered over 5000 and the gate receipts at the turnstiles totalled £274.

There was a little human touch before the match began when J P Kay, who broke his leg in the 3rd round at Otley, came on to the field on crutches and took his seat inside the rails. He was received with loud cheers by the Ilkley supporters who admired his plucky fight that day.

After the game a dinner in honour of the Ilkley players was held at the Listers Arms. It was chaired by John Green, the Ilkley president and former England international. Addressing the players, Mr W Greenwood (Skipton), himself a former England international and ex president of Yorkshire said “to roars of laughter”----“If you can keep your young side together (the average age was only 21), do less of motor driving, lawn tennis, and one thing or another they would have a good chance of winning t’owd tin pot next year.”

Such was the interest aroused by the club’s progress in the Cup that the directors of the New Cinema in Ilkley took a film of the final and it was shown in the cinema the following week.

At that time there was intense rivalry between Rugby Union and Rugby League and at the Yorkshire RUFC meeting in 1930 the president dismissed a report in a London newspaper that rugby union was confined to the middle classes. He reminded the meeting that only a few years ago that the Yorkshire rugby union team had been captained by a “coal trimmer”. He also urged the clubs to ensure that no player accepted money for playing the game.

If name alone is anything to go by the president himself did not appear to be a working class lad – Colonel G. E. St. Clair Stockwell.

The club reached the semi-final of the Yorkshire Cup in 1933, their fourth appearance in this stage of the competition but lost to Halifax by 23 – 3.

Three sides were regularly fielded during the 1930s and in 1937 it was proposed to erect a Clubroom on the ground. This proposal was hotly debated at the AGM and Mr H Foulds, a former treasurer, maintained that if the club had any money to spend it should be spent on improving the ground and grandstand. He continued that if there was any idea in the minds of people supporting the hut scheme that intoxicating liquor would be provided then there would be a great uproar in Middleton. The decision was deferred until an Extraordinary General Meeting later that year, when despite protests from the Methodist Church, it was carried by a majority of 1! The new Clubroom, the first on the site, was opened in December 1937 at a cost of £208.

It was in that 1937/38 season that Peter Brumfitt set a new points scoring record for the club, 116 points - 19 penalty goals, 9 tries, 16 goals (conversions).

It was also in 1937 that the club had an unusual influence on the development of International rugby. The Australian Rugby League Touring team arrived in England that year and for their third visit in succession stayed at the Marlborough House Hydro in Ilkley for 3 months. Despite the clear distinction between the two codes the Ilkley Union club were happy to allow the tourists to use their ground for training and the Australian team manager said how this had won reciprocation in Australia. Apparently when the South African Springboks union team toured Australia in 1936 they had difficulties finding suitable training facilities because many grounds, including the Sydney Cricket ground, were leased to the Australian Rugby League. However, Harry Sutherland, the Australian Rugby League manager said:

“ Having in mind the kindness of Ilkley RUFC in allowing us to train on their ground and the courteousness of their officials, I intervened, and the result was that we altered the whole of the League Inter-State programme and allowed the Rugby Union to have the Sydney Cricket ground for the Springbok fixtures. All this goodwill came solely because of the kindness extended to us by Ilkley RUFC, a kindness which I remembered. What a pity they cannot have professionals in rugger as they have in cricket! It would then really become the world game of the Empire.”

The Ilkley Gazette continued to report all games in great detail and their report of one game in 1938 admonished the players for “emitting various shrill noises” as they attempted to charge down a kick at goal.

With the declaration of war in 1939 the club at first tried to continue a limited fixture list but as most of the players were now in the Forces and with petrol rationing severely restricting travel, all matches were eventually suspended in January 1940.

Unfortunately no record appears to exist of those members of the club who joined the Forces in the 1939/44 war nor of those who lost their lives and it was not until September 14, 1946 that the club resumed playing with a victory over Baildon by 5pts to 3pts.

The remainder of that decade was fairly uneventful for Ilkley RUFC although extra land between the pitches and the river was leased from the Council in 1949 so that the ground could be extended. That same year at the AGM lack of enthusiasm from the players was blamed for poor performances (only four first team regulars had been able to play at Skipton on Boxing Day) and some of the older members felt that the players were spoilt and had little interest in the running of the club –some things never change!

1950 was a poor season and it prompted a letter to the Gazette from a Mrs E Marks "urging the rugby clubs selection committee to wake up before we lose all our players. We want a committee interested in the players never mind county matches" and concluded "Wake up Ilkley - we have been in a rut for years." This provoked an immediate response the following week, "Surely after 3 or 4 discouraging seasons the committee is to be admired rather than be swept out, because perhaps one player has been dropped. If Mrs E Marks would refrain from running up and down the touch line waving her umbrella and shouting, the players and committee would not be distracted from their job." This letter was signed "A very distant relative".

Perhaps the one distinguishing aspect of 1950 was that it was the first year of the Schools Sevens tournament (won by Acklam Hall GS), an event that was to grow in prestige until its demise in 1991 when many schools no longer played competitive rugby. A youth tournament which replaced the schools event only survived for 3 years.

By 1951 the performances on the field had begun to improve and the 1st XV won twenty games, a total bettered only once in 1925/26. Harry Melville scored the greatest number of tries (33) in any one season by an Ilkley player.

The 1951/52 season was a record one for the club when the 1st XV, captained by J M Brook, won 30 games, drawing 3, and losing only 3. Total club membership stood at just over 400.

At the AGM in 1953 Mr K P Dove was elected a life member - he had served the club in various capacities for many years and was a regular player between 1919 and 1932. In accepting his life membership he recalled the days when Ilkley's three-quarters lined up for the kick-off wearing tweed caps. These could be purchased for 3p (in today's decimal equivalent) but for 5p it was possible to buy a really posh one which they could wear when they went courting!

Although by 1960 the club regularly fielded 3 teams (and occasionally a 4th team), it was finding it difficult to keep pace with the increasing strength of some of its regular opponents which still included, amongst others, Bradford, Wakefield, Hull & E. R., Otley, Headingley and Roundhay. In the 1960/61 season only 10 games were won and in the succeeding seasons things got worse with only 3 victories in 1961/62 and, what must surely be the worst ever season the following year when only 1 win was recorded. At the AGM in 1963 the poor playing record was lamented as was the death of Geoffrey Brook who had joined Ilkley from Bradford in 1922, having been capped for Yorkshire and had served on the committee in almost every capacity until shortly before he died.

However, on a brighter note the club made its first overseas tour in August 1963 when a party of players went to Holland, and a year earlier the club recognized the sterling work of Syd Hobbs who had become the Bagman to the 1st XV in 1922 and was still going strong.

The club was indirectly in the news in 1965 when 4 players from St. Helens RU Club were charged with stealing wall decorations from the Stoney Lea Hotel after an over excessive celebration following a game against Ilkley. The police intercepted their coach at Skipton and the 4 miscreants were fined £5 each at Otley magistrate's court. Incidentally those same magistrates had to adjudicate on an Ilkley man charged with possession of pornographic material. The Gazette reported that " the two magistrates, both men, retired to a private room with drawn curtains to see the films before committing the man to the Crown Court!"

Also during the 60's secret talks took place with the Cricket Club with a view to a merger, each mistakenly believing that the other was solvent - the talks came to nought.

By 1970 results had improved somewhat and in the 70/71 season the 1st XV won 15 games. A policy was passed at the AGM that if players did not train they would not be selected; there is no record of how many times over the last 100 years similar policies were tried nor how long they were adhered to. Some well known names in the club's history were in office at the time - Bill Mason as President, Dick Newsome as Secretary, Chris Hume as Treasurer, Laurie Hems to captain the 2XV, and Steve Couling retiring as 1st XV captain, although the latter continued to play for the club for another 26 years.

The 70's saw the rise of junior rugby started in Ilkley by Jack Tipping who also looked after the Colts teams, two very successful sides named the Lions and Tigers many of whose members went on to gain County honours.

Unfortunately further development of the clubs facilities was blighted by the prospect of the proposed Ilkley by-pass going through the club grounds and a proposal to build squash courts was shelved, although in truth the club had no money to pay for them. The prospect of this new road had been with the club since it was first mooted in about 1936 and it was not until about 60 years later that we could be reasonably certain that the road would never be built.

Perhaps the highlight of the 1970's was the Clubs first appearance in the final of the Yorkshire Shield in a match played at Pocklington in April 1976 - the opponents were Selby who ran out the winners by 15 pts to 6 pts. The Gazette reported that Ilkley struggled for possession throughout the game and were well beaten in the set pieces. Although Sant put Ilkley ahead after 14 minutes with a penalty and levelled the scores with another penalty in the second half, two tries from Selby eventually won the day.

By the late 1970's Ilkley had to accept that it was no longer amongst the major clubs in Yorkshire. The writing had been on the wall for many years as some of the town's better players moved to stronger clubs and the club were no longer able to sustain fixtures against the likes of Wakefield and Headingley. Nevertheless by the time we entered the 80's Ilkley regularly fielded 4 senior teams and the 4th team known as the Barbarians was a haven for a number of older players who, for the good of their health should probably have retired years ago, but could not resist the urge to rub on the liniment and bandage up their aging limbs - after all what else was their to do on a Saturday afternoon.

Other than Cup games, all fixtures up until 1987 had been "friendlies" (some a lot less friendly than others) with all matches arranged by club fixture secretaries on an "old boy" basis. However in September 1987 all Rugby Union Clubs joined a league system with promotion and relegation the norm. Ilkley were placed in Yorkshire Division 2 and played their first league game against Huddersfield YMCA. The club remained at this level until 1993 when they were promoted to Yorkshire Division 1 with a successful playing record (all games), P33 W25 D1 F830 A294 in the 1992/93 season.

This was the start of a mini purple patch for a club which had not had much to rejoice about for a good many years, for in the following season Ilkley began an exciting run in the Yorkshire Shield beginning with victories over Pocklington, Goole and Beverley. A tight semi-final away at Wheatley Hills saw Ilkley victorious by 6pts to 9pts leading to a final encounter against Doncaster in a match played at Huddersfield on 23rd April 1994. Ilkley had been ravaged by injuries in the weeks leading up to the match and preparations had been overshadowed when player-coach Paul Gray broke his leg in an earlier game and was unavailable for the final.

However, Ilkley, led by skipper Dave Duxbury confounded the experts by deservedly overcoming a Doncaster side which had just been promoted from North East Division 1. The climax to the game could not have been more thrilling with Ilkley losing by 6pts to 3pts with only seconds remaining. Then stand-off Matthew Johnson landed an equalising penalty before dropping a match winning goal four minutes into injury time.

The report of the game in the Yorkshire Post gave "full credit to Ilkley for whom the Bryatt brothers were outstanding forwards, former skipper Christopher Hems tireless, and Nigel Connell exceptional in bottling up Doncaster's laboured attempts at running rugby."

It would, however, be wrong to say that this was anything other than an outstanding team effort which arguably rivalled any other in the history of Ilkley Rugby Club.

Ilkley RUFC was also honoured in the 1997/98 season when Peter Brook was elected President of the English Rugby Union. Peter, a former official of Ilkley and International referee had long connections with the club. His father, Geoffrey played for Ilkley, became President of the club and was instrumental in starting the Schools' Sevens in the 1950s. His brother Mike also captained the club.

At the turn of the century the club continued to play in the Yorkshire Division 1 league until gaining promotion to the North 2 East League in 2008. However, as a completely

amateur club life was difficult at the higher level and after two tough years the club was relegated back to Yorkshire Division 1 at the end of the 2009/10 season.

In 2006 efforts began to raise sufficient money to replace the old grandstand and clubhouse. It took four years of tremendous effort to get the cash together but in September 2010 a contract was signed to build a new clubhouse and changing rooms at an estimated cost of £1.6million. The new facilities opened in August 2011.

September 5th 1925 ~ September 14th 2010



August 2011.....

