

NORTHCOTE AND BIRKENHEAD RUGBY UNION, 1929-1985

An inaugural meeting was held on 3rd April 1929 when the names of fifty-five intending players were handed to the meeting. The appropriate teams were entered in the Auckland Rugby Union competitions.

The Club had no headquarters and it was not until 1935 that the final moves were made to establish a "Home". In this year the Club purchased in the name of two trustees a ¼ acre property in Nelson Avenue, Northcote. In 1937 the former training shed of the Ellerslie Rugby Club was acquired and re-erected on our "freehold" property.

Growth was stunted over the next few years due to World War II. It should be recorded that many Club members went overseas and in the case of the third grade who won the Open Championship I 1939 no less than half the team marched into camp in Club Blazers to join the 2nd Echelon and two other members joined the Navy.

The Club functioned throughout the War but with very little expansion. However, in 1946 things started to move and the need for social facilities became apparent.

By 1950 sufficient funds were raised to build a two storey addition on the front of the training shed. Most of the work was done by working bees with qualified tradesmen amongst our members taking a leading part.

In the space of 20 years we were embarrassed by the lack of space and in 1960 the on-yard training shed was pulled down and a new training shed erected. Opportunity was taken at the same time to extend the social area by 50% by going out on the top of the training shed at the 1st floor level. In 1955 the Club was incorporated under the Incorporated Societies Act and was then in a better position to raise the mortgage money necessary to complete this work.

Club Management was well aware by the end of the sixties that plans would have to be made for the future expansion and commenced negotiation with the Birkenhead City Council to lease an area of land and to develop some four grounds. Again after a hectic period fundraising we were able by 1975 to form two fields in Birkenhead Avenue. There now remained the task of building our "headquarters", adjacent to the playing fields. This was undoubtedly the greatest and largest target in the history of the Club, but the spirit which has always been present again, came to the fore and provided the impetus for fundraising negotiation and planning. Our new premises opened early in 1985. It should be noted that the co-operation received from the Birkenhead City Council made this whole project possible.

On the playing fields the Club has made steady if not spectacular progress. It was not until the early forties that Junior Boys grades were introduced and in the first years of the Club only grade teams were catered for. In 1947 our senior team reached senior A status and

held this position for 20 years, where it suffered in the promotions relegation rounds off and on until 1972 when it again entered a period in the A division.

The rapid number of boys playing rugby in the early fifties required special attention and to provide this service a Junior Boys sub-committee was established to control this side of the Clubs activities. From this point onwards Junior Football has been strong in our Club and realising the strain on our resources we prepared to sponsor the Glenfield Club in 1968 when the Club was formed. At this stage 25 teams of Junior Boys were being looked after by our Club, many of the teams including boys from the Glenfield area.

Strength in the grade teams has fluctuated over the years depending in part on the strength of Secondary School rugby in the area which we serve. It should be noted however that all ARU Championships have been won by teams below Senior A level.

A summary of teams fielded in our better years shows:

1967	-	22 teams	-	all grades
1968	-	30 teams	-	5 grade, 25 Junior Boys
1973	-	23 teams	-	7 grade, 16 Junior Boys
1976	-	30 teams	-	9 Senior, 1 grade, 21 Junior Boys
1984	-	27 teams	-	9 Senior, 1 grade, 18 Junior Boys

Overseas trips were made by composite teams to Australia in 1967 and 1971 and a world trip in 1976 while a fourth grade team visited Australia in 1974. In 1983 and 1984 a team from our Club competed in the "Sevens" tournament in Fiji sponsored by Air Pacific.

Sponsorship was another field in which our Club was involved at an early stage. In 1974 an arrangement was made to carry a message on our jerseys and track suits and this soon provided quite a bit of publicity before the NZ Union fixed guide lines.

In 1948 HL "Snow" White joined the Club. Snow has drawn a thread right through the Club since then on the playing field, in the committee room, and as a delegate to the ARU from 1965 to 1980. Snow has coached Club teams, College 1st XV's as assisted with Auckland teams. He was with Harvey Wright the architect for the development of the Birkenhead project and is a Life Member of the Club.

His playing career at first class level began with Auckland in 1949 by which time he played 234 first class matches, 195 being for Auckland. As an All Black he toured Great Britain in 1953 and played in NZ in 1955.



Enthusiastic Northcote supporters.