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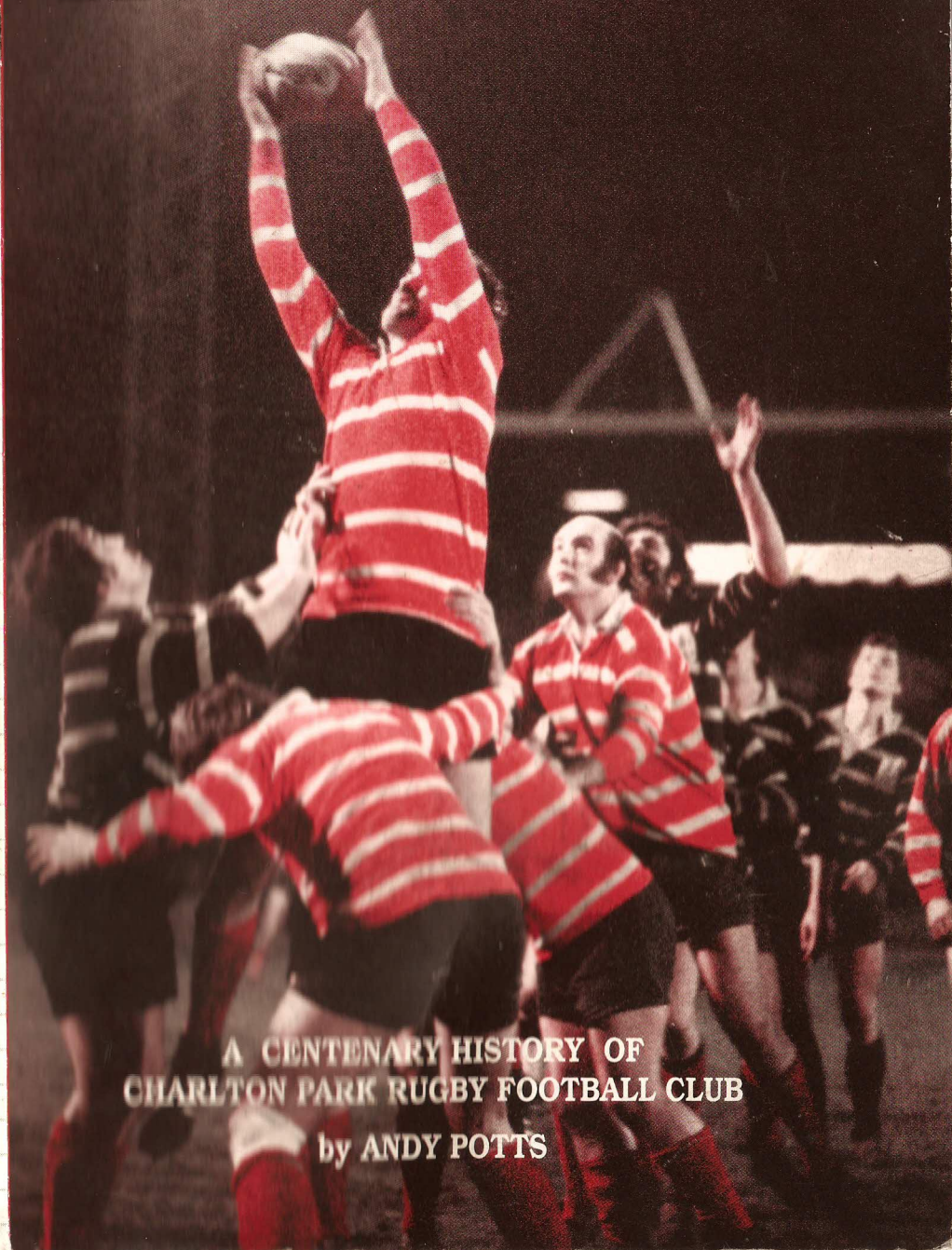


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"Half Truths"



A CENTENARY HISTORY OF
CHARLTON PARK RUGBY FOOTBALL CLUB

by ANDY POTTS

SHEPHERDS BEERS & MINERALS

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*Serving you
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*Wishing Charlton Park
every success for their centenary*

*"There are no whole truths;
all truths are half truths"*

A N WHITEHEAD 1861 - 1947

A Centenary History of CHARLTON PARK RUGBY FOOTBALL CLUB 1893 - 1993

by **ANDY POTTS**

*"Events in the past may be roughly divided
into those which probably never happened
and those which do not matter"*

W R INGE 1860 - 1954

FIRST EDITION

*I should like to thank everyone who has contributed their memories and memorabilia to this story;
in particular - Peter Budd, Barry Pritchard, Bryan Robjohns, Terry Pritchard and Phil Thompson,
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those whose written works I have lifted - Stuart Sharp, Jack Rose, John Beresford, Malcolm Darbyshire;
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Past Officers of the Club

Records of Club Officials

	CAPTAIN	PRESIDENT	SECRETARY		CAPTAIN	PRESIDENT	SECRETARY
1893-6	Not known	Sir S Maryon-Wilson	H Hobson	1950	K Oliver	W G Black	C A Robinson
1897	J Addison	Sir S Maryon-Wilson	H Rowe	1951	K Oliver	W G Black	C A Robinson
1898	R J D Browne	Sir S Maryon-Wilson	H Rowe	1952	J Oliver	W G Black	C A Robinson
1899	R J D Browne	Sir S Maryon-Wilson	H Rowe	1953-6	Not known		
1900	F C Heaton	Sir S Maryon-Wilson	H Rowe	1957	R Hodgson	W G Black	C A Robinson
1901	F C Heaton	Sir S Maryon-Wilson	R H Bailey	1958	R Hodgson	W G Black	C A Robinson
1902	C T Turpin	Sir S Maryon-Wilson	G W Bumpus	1959	R Hodgson	W G Black	C A Robinson
1903	C T Turpin	Sir S Maryon-Wilson	G W Bumpus	1960	B Robjohns	W G Black	C A Robinson
1904	C T Turpin	Sir S Maryon-Wilson	A J Falkner	1961	D Allsopp	W G Black	C A Robinson
1905	C T Turpin	Sir S Maryon-Wilson	A J Falkner	1962	D Allsopp	W G Black	J E Pain
1906	J W Brodie	Sir S Maryon-Wilson	A J Falkner	1963	T Pritchard	W G Black	J E Pain
1907	J W Brodie	Sir S Maryon-Wilson	A J Falkner	1964	B Pritchard	W G Black	G Laws
1908	J W Brodie	Sir S Maryon-Wilson	A J Falkner	1965	B Pritchard	W G Black	G Laws
1909	H C Cross	Sir S Maryon-Wilson	E C Fox	1966	A G Burr	W G Black	G Laws
1910	G B Roberts	Sir S Maryon-Wilson	E C Fox	1967	D Robjohns	P Budd	H Robjohns
1911	FR Roberts	Sir S Maryon-Wilson	E C Fox	1968	D Robjohns	P Budd	H Robjohns
1912	FR Roberts	Sir S Maryon-Wilson	E C Fox	1969	D Robjohns	P Budd	H Robjohns
1913	FR Roberts	Sir S Maryon-Wilson	E C Fox	1970	D Attwood	P Budd	D Robjohns
1914-1918	Club Closed			1971	D Attwood	P Budd	R Farmer
1919	FR Roberts	Sir S Maryon-Wilson	G M Fox	1972	M Darbyshire	P Budd	R Farmer
1920	FR Roberts	Sir S Maryon-Wilson	G M Fox	1973	M Uglow	P Budd	A Allen
1921	H C Cunis	Sir S Maryon-Wilson	G M Fox	1974	M Uglow	P Budd	A Allen
1922	H A Ogilvy	Sir S Maryon-Wilson	W C Smither	1975	D Springate	P Budd	A Allen
1923	H A Ogilvy	Sir S Maryon-Wilson	J Poole	1976	D Springate	P Budd	C Turner
1924	W G Black	Sir S Maryon-Wilson	H F Berdinner	1977	P Apperley	P Budd	C Turner
1925	R Usherwood	Sir S Maryon-Wilson	H F Berdinner	1978	D Harsey	P Budd	C Turner
1926	H D Anderson	Sir S Maryon-Wilson	H F Berdinner	1979	C Smith	P Budd	A Allen
1927	G L Ogilvy	Sir S Maryon-Wilson	H F Berdinner	1980	D Collen	P Budd	A Allen
1928	G L Ogilvy	Sir S Maryon-Wilson	H F Berdinner	1981	D Beere	P Budd	A Allen
1929	C E Stewart	H Hollis	L Mansell	1982	D Attwood	P Budd	A Allen
1930	C E Stewart	H Hollis	L Mansell	1983	R Vavrecka	P Budd	D Attwood
1931	C E Stewart	H Hollis	L Mansell	1984	D Beere	P Budd	D Attwood
1932-3		F Hoar	L Mansell	1985	A Miller	P Budd	D Attwood
1934	J Oliver	F Hoar	L Mansell	1986	A Penfold	P Budd	D Attwood
1935	J Oliver	F Hoar	L Mansell	1987	A Penfold	P Budd	D Attwood
1936	J Oliver	F Hoar	L Mansell	1988	A Penfold	P Budd	D Attwood
1937		F Hoar	L Mansell	1989	M Haines	P Budd	D Attwood
1938	S L Stevenson	W G Black	L Mansell	1990	M Haines	P Budd	D Attwood
1939-1947	Club closed			1991	K Purchase	D Attwood	A Jackson
1948	J Oliver	W G Black	C A Robinson	1992	A Miller	D Attwood	A Jackson
1949	J Oliver	W G Black	C A Robinson	1993	J Okeleke	D Attwood	A Jackson

Some Recollections of Charlton Park from The President

When asked to write an introduction to this centenary history of the club, I was at once delighted and overawed. My first contact with Charlton Park was in the 1968/69 season when I was a student at Avery Hill College. Park arrived at Charterhouse, our ground in Avery Hill Road, clad in a not-very-smart but still recognisable set of our present colours. The college won the game because, not only did we have some very talented players, but we had experienced a modicum of coaching. At that time this was a departure in that the RFU still frowned on official coaches- they smacked of "Broken Time" and, horror of horrors, a "professional approach". When questioned later in the bar a relatively young prop called Barry Pritchard said that we definitely would not have won if we had not cheated by lifting the jumper at the front of the line. I was that front jumper, Barry is still spouting absolute nonsense after the game, and he has been one of the club's most loyal and colourful characters throughout my association with the club.

There are stories told of the great characters and influences within the club. These are detailed elsewhere within this book, but I would like to mention the Irish contingent. At one stage we had several Irish dentists in the club. John O'Sullivan, Dave Murray, Mick Quinlivan, Tom Boland and Gerry Murray consolidated our existing repertoire of Irish songs, corrected our phony accents, sewed up our cut eyebrows in the clubhouse with the anaesthetic of large measures of alcohol. They did the drinking, rather than the patient, "to steady me nerves, boy!" and poured their money into the club at a rate even the Getty family would think twice about. I remember coming home after a game, with a detour to a gambling club in Lower Sloane Street called 'The Village'. The tables had been kind to the Irish and we were, it has to be admitted, quite drunk. The mood was buoyant as we were bowling along St Mildreds Road on a clear but very frosty night when Gerry Murray suddenly seemed to lose control of the car, only to regain it after a few hair-raising moments. When asked what had happened he replied,

I looked to the front of me and it was clear. I looked to the back of me and it was clear. So, I was having a swerve!!"

We changed drivers and managed to complete the homeward trip without further incident.

There was also incredible generosity from so many people. First among them must be my predecessor in the role of President and our present Patron- Peter Budd. I will not chronicle his many contributions over the years but suffice it to say he was an inspiration and we owe him a great deal. The recent history of the club is one of success and consolidation. Our playing record under several great captains and the coaching efforts of first Andy Potts and for some considerable time now, Dave Collen, has earned us league promotions and the respect of the rugby community. This can only be a source of considerable pleasure to us all.

For me the club does have an allure all its own, a friendliness and character that demands my attention. The ability of Charlton Park to absorb the influences of a transient lifeblood, namely its members, retain the best of those influences and develop, gives it dynamism. No organisation can remain static. It is, however, the ability of the club to retain an essential spirit of its own and of those aspects of rugby we all hold dear that makes Charlton Park so special and something I value so much.

Dennis Attwood

Editorial Meanderings

The Kentish Mercury of the 10th August, 1894 featured a small, insignificant announcement;

'A meeting will be held at The White Hart, Blackheath village, on Wednesday next to complete the arrangements for the formation of a new rugby club. Intending members are asked to attend at eight promptly. Mr J Walker of 83 Delafield Road Charlton is the secretary pro tem.'

This is what I believe to be the beginning of the Old Charltonians, for twenty-six years the forerunner of Charlton Park Rugby Football Club. There is no record of how the meeting went, so, in order to demonstrate the high empirical standards upon which this history is based, I will leave you to guess, because the story of Charlton Park is dominated by the exaggerations and half-truths of personal reminiscence, rather than the rigour of objective statistics. This is a good thing for me. Firstly, stories are much more interesting, and secondly, our statistics are not very impressive.

We often see our weaknesses as inherited. Through researching this book I have come to realise what our wives have always known; that there is a characteristic of Charltonparkishness; or 'Pritchard's Syndrome' which, far from being a recent phenomenon, seems to have gripped all those who have been fortunate enough to pull on the red-and-white shirt throughout the ages.

A prominent team of micro-biologists, led by Professor Tom Adrian of the University of Yale (CPRFC 1970-80 approx.), claims to have identified a microscopic bug which infiltrates the body, worming its way into the genes and changing the personality forever. It is recognisable in anyone who has been a member for more than a month, and is reinforced subconsciously by the murmurings of the ghosts of Messrs Bumpus, Jennings, Bertram, Upfold and Robinson. Charltonparkishness changes the character, forming a new set of values whereby seemingly irrational behaviour becomes the norm. Almost invariably the sufferer experiences a lowering in mental age and finds coherent thought more difficult. He (and on rare occasions, she) exhibits these behaviour patterns most commonly when on tour or at an Annual General Meeting. Once settled in the bloodstream the syndrome takes several years of cold turkey in a darkened room, or at a senior club, to shake off.

There appears to be another, more serious thread running through this tale; one that we would do well to heed at the moment. Just when we always thought things were going to get better they got worse. Our life is a cartoon tragi-comedy of struggling to our feet only to be flattened again, a roller-coaster ride of crests and troughs, of near-success and hopes dashed, of hanging on by our fingernails as we slide down the wall into the abyss, and scrabbling back up again. Such a life creates a feeling of togetherness, of indomitability and a dogged and bloody-minded refusal

to let the bureaucrats and the comfortable world of the 'Old Boys' and the 'establishment' put us in our place. We have kept a sort of vigorous sociability, a respect for the 'old values' of rugby where the game itself is paramount- not only the result but staying afterwards, mixing with opponents and referees, and beer.

On 12th April 1987, a game was held between the club and an invitation XV to celebrate Peter Budd's 50 years with the club. For over half our existence Peter has been involved - as young player taken under the wing of Charlie Robinson, as committee member & driving force in the difficult years after the war, and then as president leading us to the purchase of the ground and looking on as we began to see some success. A charming gentleman with a deep generosity, he now lives in a beautiful house in Shoreham. When I went to visit him and to record his reminiscences, we naturally ended up in the village pub for a swift lunchtime half. Needless to say we left at about 5 o'clock, and I was not entirely sure how many I had had!

I would like to express my gratitude to Peter and all the others who have through their unreliable reminiscences enabled me to write this collection of stories about what is, to us, a very special rugby club.

II Beginnings

The origins of the Old Charltonians: Heathfield and Fairfield: possible amalgamations

It is not easy to discover our actual beginnings. Significant things, other than babies and the universe that is, tend to start with a whimper rather than a bang. The first match appears not to have taken place until until the 23rd November, against Lewisham, and the Old Charltonians won by 'one drop goal to one try'. A certain Mr Dawson slotted over the drop goal, which was in those days worth four points. So although the club's origins are officially in 1893, presumably because that was when they had the idea, no game was played until nearly 1895. Or so it appears from the newspapers of the time. Never mind, as I have said, facts are the last of our worries.

It would be nice to imagine that significant kick soaring over the posts from at least 40 yards, encouraged on its way by the cheers of a large crowd and an assortment of rather dignified and aloof Victorian gentlemen, proud in their sparkling new red and white hooped shirts, We were on our way.

There was no further game until January 18th 1895, against Upper Clapton 3rd. The Kentish Mercury reported; '*At Charlton, a fast and hotly contested game ending in a win for the latter (them) by one penalty goal and two tries to one goal. Try for Old Charltonians by S. Kent. Good for S.Kent! Dawson may have a kick like a mule but it's tries we like to see!*' Thereafter the following games against Sidecup 2nds and Dulwich College were cancelled because of frost. The Kentish Mercury of February 15th describes the Thames as covered in ice from shore to shore, an occurrence last remembered fifty years previously, and our first season becomes frozen out.

I still like to believe, however, that there is more to this history business than meets the eye. There are secrets to be uncovered, and I have spent many hours in the local archives hoping to unearth the missing link. Research carried out in the 1950s led us to believe that we were among the first rugby clubs in the world. Histories of rugby football and Blackheath Club refer to two schools in the area where rugby was particularly strong. One was High House Academy, Charlton Road, where there is evidence to suggest that the game was introduced to the area in about 1856. The other was the Blackheath Proprietary School, from which the Old Blackheathens (soon to be renamed Blackheath) was formed, probably in 1858. At around this time or a little later ex-pupils living in Charlton formed the Charlton Football Club, who played their matches until 1891 either on Blackheath or at Eastcombe Park. Although a relatively obscure club in comparison with the grand developments going on in Blackheath, it was still represented at the Kent RFU AGM of August 1893, and we have the 1892 Fixture Card.

Just prior to the demise of Charlton Football Club, 'Easthampstead School for

Gentlemen' came into existence and rugby football was part of their sports curriculum. The school subsequently produced an 'Old Boys' team which in 1893 became established as the Old Charltonians Rugby Club. No official link has ever been traced between the two clubs, although both seemed to have existed at some time during 1893. What is certain is that the village of Charlton was in at the very beginning of club rugby football.

Matches by the Old Charltonians continued to be played on the school ground at Heathfield (Little Heath), on the site of the flats opposite the shops in Charlton Road and just next door to the Rectory Field, for two seasons. At the end of the 1894/5 season the Kent Cup Final was played there, The Duke of Wellington's Regiment beating Queens 5-0, but the following season the Fairfield at the east end of the village was made available to the club by its owners, the Maryon-Wilson family, and so began a long association, with Sir Spencer Maryon-Wilson becoming President and the club much later adopting the family crest as its badge.

The new ground is described as benefitting from a larger playing area and less cramped spectator accommodation; obviously some people wanted to watch the Old Charltonians play rugby! It was, however, as the name suggests, the site of the fair at certain times of the year, and was regularly cut up. The headquarters and dressing rooms were in 'The Swan Hotel', Old Charlton. The captain in 1895/6 was WJC Keats, the fly-half, with his partner (and brother?) GW Keats at scrum-half, but he was unfortunately injured playing against Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank and thereafter his namesake also disappears from the team. He resurfaces, however, as Doctor WJC Keats, on the committee of two years hence. Perhaps the injury allowed him time to qualify.

In December 1895 there is the first record of the club putting out two teams, but both played short and both lost. We were never to learn the mathematics of x (when x = the number of available players) divided by 15 = either you play short and lose or someone who has paid his subs does not get a game and reminds everyone at the A.G.M. The club was, however, expanding rapidly. The next season's fixture lists for both the 1st and 'A' XV's appeared in the Kentish Mercury, and the 1sts travelled to Brighton to play Preston Park and lost narrowly despite superior forward play. Travelling arrangements hardly appear conducive to calm pre-match planning; "...meet London Bridge Station, 2pm..." How fast and reliable were Victorian trains, for goodness sake? Perhaps the game was really at home. The 1897/8 season, under the captaincy of J. Addison, was particularly successful for a club only four years old. The record of the two teams reads;

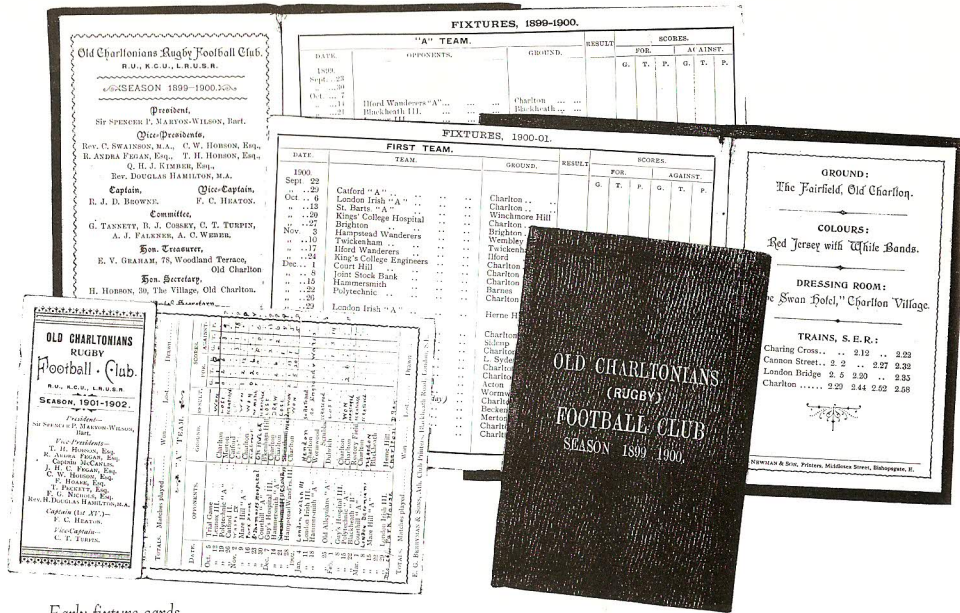
1st XV	P 23	W 14	D 4	L 5	Pts 241-64
A XV	P 15	W 6	D 4	L 5	Pts 102-61

We played the second teams of the major local clubs - Sidcup, Catford Bridge (now Bromley) and of course Park House, a power in the county at the time. There has

always existed a strong but friendly rivalry between our two clubs but in those far-off years we were small fry. Also on the fixture list of the time were recognisable names such as Beckenham and Mitcham along with extinct specimens such as Manorway, from Lee, and Royal School of Mines. One suspects that we were a decorous bunch in those days. Among the four vice-presidents there were two Reverends, and the following occasion differs slightly from present-day functions;

Feb. 18th *"The Old Charltonians will hold their annual concert at the Charlton Assembly Rooms next Monday evening. In addition to the musical items there will be an exhibition of animated photographs."* (What could these be?) Feb. 25th the above "took place under the direction of Mr FG Nicholls, who also presided at the piano. The hall was filled from end to end and the programme was well above average in artistic merit".

Maps and photographs of the time show Charlton as little more than a Kentish village, and the rugby football club would have provided a focus for some of the social life of the community. Reference is made to the preponderance of well-to-do people moving into what was becoming a highly desirable place to live; within easy reach of London while situated on a hill with views over the river. A photograph exists of Fairfield dotted with gentile and over-dressed tennis players and it is hard to imagine some recent members being allowed near the place! A Catford Bridge report of one game there in the depths of winter gives an indication of its status; *"The ground despite the weather was in splendid condition. It must be one of the best in and around London."* Furthermore, a glance at the committee addresses from the fixture card of 1898/9 shows them all living in Old Charlton. We still have many of those old fixture cards, backed in stiff card and adorned with flowery script and as well as the usual information they also contained the times of trains from London to Charlton, including one that arrived at 2.58, presumably to enable the opposition to warm up by jogging up the steep, narrow country lane between the station and the village. There is no indication of which train opponents should take back.



Early fixture cards

III Expansion 1900 - 1914

The Leadership of John Brodie and F R Roberts : three appearances in the Kent Cup Final: the Fairfield.

The first team won only 4 of 17 games in 1901-02, but there was an air of optimism around and in 1902-3 the record read P21 W14 D3 L4 pts 174-54. The corner was turned. Over the next ten years we were to expand steadily, helped by the disbanded Shirley House School OB's and by the success of our players. A new club had just formed in the area, named Westcombe Park RFC, and they were unable to meet the cost of a new ground alone. They invited our 'B' XV to share the facilities (and the cost) and we agreed, although we were to find the expense prohibitive at times. Rumour has it that we provided them with their first set of posts as well. Certainly the similarity in the design of their shirts has been remarked upon as coincidental!

In 1906 J W Brodie was elected as captain and so began an era of success such as we have rarely tasted since, in which the club was blessed with inspiring leadership, and had the players and officials to respond. We had only entered the Kent Cup for the first time two years previously, but in the next six we were to reach the final on three separate occasions, losing, alas, on all three. Both Brodie and his near-successor Roberts led from the front, setting an example both on and off the field. The former, for example, was described in 'The Sportsman' of 13th April 1907, as having "done all that is humanly possible" on the field, and according to the club minutes "in Committee his counsel and tact have marked him as the right man in the right place".

The century ended in fine style for the up-and-coming Old Charltonians, the record for 1899/1900 reading

XV P21 W16 D2 L3 Pts 174-40

In 1900 an Extraordinary General Meeting was held to consider a proposal from Park House that the two clubs should amalgamate. After some discussion it was unanimously agreed that the amalgamation could not be entertained, the advantages to the 'O.C.' not being apparent. It is difficult to see the logic of this act of union, Park House at the time being one of the foremost clubs in the county, but it serves once more to emphasise the tradition of links between the two. Perhaps we appeared to be on hard times. The proximity of the club to Woolwich meant that wars overseas were liable to take a large proportion of our players, and the General Meeting of 1901 was informed that the playing membership had reduced from 44 the previous year to 23 as a result of "removals" and the Boer War. The committee now suggested we should consider amalgamating with another club.

"After much discussion Mr Graham, the treasurer, very generously promised that if it was decided to maintain our existence for another season finance should not be allowed to stand in the way, and he would see that we wound up the season with a balance in hand."

This would not be the last example of the club being indebted to the generosity of an individual. Thus it was passed "that this club remain in existence for another season".

Brodie's first season started slowly. The previous year we had won 6 and lost 12 of 19 matches, although the losses had been by narrow margins, and we had been hampered by injuries to Heaton all season and to the captain CJ Turpin for much of it. He was described as one of the very best captains in the history of the club, and was cheered at the AGM. The captain-elect then took the opportunity to demonstrate that he was ahead of his time by proposing "that one or two nights in the week be chosen on which to practise kicking and running." We might have expected the reaction to such a radical step to have bordered on outrage-tantamount to professionalism or at least an intrusion into the genteel private lives of Edwardian gentlemen- but no. "The idea met with general approval and was left over for the committee." Such little insights sometimes say a great deal. Fortune favours the brave, sometimes. Foresight, innovation, and the ability to choose the moment, supported by a club which welcomes new ideas when the easy reaction would be to retreat into the cosy status quo. Maybe,

"There is a tide in the affairs of men
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune..." (Shakespeare)
Or maybe,
"We just had some good players for a change!" (Potts)

The hoped-for improvement took some time in coming. The first five games were lost or drawn, and we did not win our second match until eight weeks had elapsed. From that time the team won nine of the next thirteen, and six games were cancelled in the meantime through a particularly harsh winter. What caused excitement was that we reached the Kent Cup Final in only our third year in the competition, losing to the powerful Catford Bridge (Bromley) *"playing one of the finest games in the annals of the club."* The match secretary's report continued prophetically; *"I am sure the history of that game will form a golden page in our records, and the committee hope that it will stimulate interest locally in the club and be the indirect means of a much required increase in our membership."*

There were further causes for optimism. The A team won ten of its fifteen matches (ten were scratched due to the weather, including six in succession!) and the season was marked by a number of new members. The honours caps for the first team were won by HJ Turpin, brother of the past captain, and FR Roberts, a future captain, and mention was made of the promise of Hollis. All three were to go on to gain higher recognition while playing for the club.

Brodie's training plans were now taking off, and there was discussion in the club about the nature of the practice night and the obtaining of the Drill Hall. We were also concerned about the supply of hot water on Saturday nights (hints of the present there) and the appointing of new vice presidents, possibly as a source of revenue. The 1907-8 season was one of the most successful in the early history of our club. The first team beat Old Blackheathens, Westcombe Park (twice), Saracens (17-6), Harlequins 'A' (20-8) and Upper Clapton. In the Kent Cup we gained our revenge with a narrow 3-0 victory over Catford Bridge, and then defeated the mighty Park House 13-8 in the semi-final.

The match was played at Fairfield, and Old Charltonians were described as gaining a *"thoroughly deserved"* win although Park House had several men *"on the crooked list"*. Playing against the wind in the first half we were soon 8-0 down but after the interval we appeared to gain the upper hand. The report from the Kentish Mercury says;

"...Walker, following up a kick, scored a converted try for the home side. This was shortly followed by another; Lindow, who followed up well, running in in good style. The Charlton forwards, splendidly led by Brodie, were now all over Park House, a miskick by one of the latter leading to their third try just before time. The home forwards were the better lot, especially in the tight, their halves being really clever lever, thus giving the visiting threes few chances of showing their attacking powers. Russell was the safer full back, Crook the more brilliant. The game, though hotly contested, was too scrambling to admit of much science."

Unfortunately we lost the final to the Royal Naval College 18-8 at the Rectory Field. That match, on March 21st, was our first defeat in 1908, and the season's

record shows 18 wins and 4 defeats, scoring 291 points against 107. Lindow scored 14 tries, and CJ Turpin, 10. Brayshay and Horn won honours caps, and once again tribute was paid to *"the energetic and able leadership of Brodie."* The A team won thirteen out of twenty-two and the B six out of twelve. The following season was almost as good.

The firsts won 13 of their first 15 games, including the inaugural Boxing Day home fixture against Westcombe Park. This was to become a tradition throughout the inter-war period, but was followed on this first occasion by a home game for the 'A's against a certain 'Mr Ross's Team'. I am unable to discover the significance or status of this gentleman, but his selection handed the 2nds by far the heaviest of their only three defeats in the 1908/9 season, 36-0. I cannot imagine how Old Charltonians, with an uncertain three Saturday sides, can have hoped to get two fifteens out on a Boxing Day. It must have seemed a good idea at the time it was arranged but less so at 2.45 that cold afternoon. Let us picture a motley collection of unwilling recruits, bloated and heavy-headed from the exertions of the traditional Christmas, many pressed into their second game of the day, grumbling their way through a hammering from Mr Ross's fit young show-offs. Sounds like Charlton Park all over!

A resolution was carried at the General Meeting on the 7th April 1909 expressing the grateful thanks of the club to a Mr JJ Pettey, a vice president, for his gift of ropes which he had put up down one side of the Fairfield. They were necessary as well because we were taking gate money for our more popular fixtures, such as that with the Royal Naval College! Indeed, during our cup run in 1911-12 we took gate receipts of £2.10s.9d and £2.6s.3d respectively for our two home games. At an estimated entrance fee of 3d, that gives 'gates' of 203 and 185! Unfortunately Brodie moved to Bristol at the end of the 1908-9 season, and HC Cross took over the captaincy. Before leaving he had put forward a resolution to change the name of the club, but he withdrew it having moved. The man was nothing if not innovative, and we are left to wonder what he might have had in mind.

The playing records are not available for 1909-10, but the General Meeting on 19th April seems to have been a lively affair, and totally within the traditions of the club. Firstly, a Mr Bumpus rose to ask for an explanation as to why a non-member of the club had played in a match and had appeared in the club photograph. To this the Hon. Treasurer (why the treasurer?), G M Fox, replied that being short of men at the time, there being hardly enough to raise two teams owing to so many members being crooked, and slackness on the part of others, it was decided by the committee to play an outsider so that the A team should not have to turn out short. This would seem a perfectly reasonable reply to any lower team captain faced with the difficulties of getting fifteen players out each week, but this was a General Meeting, and we recognise it as one of those occasions when 'Pritchard's Syndrome' takes over.

A Mr Marsden climbed onto the soapbox, observing that he considered the Hon Treas. had made out a very weak case, and he thought a vote of censure should be passed against the committee. The Chairman, Mr AJ Falkner, stepped in. Although he did not want to discourage discussion at the General Meeting, he thought that this was not such a serious case as to warrant a vote of censure. He would wouldn't he? The club being so short of men at the time and having the offer of the services of a good man, they could not very well offer him a place in the A team, and further, you could not expect a man who was offering his services to the club, and having played in first class football, to play in the A team. Surprisingly, Mr Bumpus accepted this.



Date unknown, but probably about 1912. 2nd from right in the middle row is a young Harold Hollis and the gentleman in profile and suit on the left is Mr Bumpus of AGM fame.

Mr Lawson now rose to ask why the Bedford match had been scratched! Apparently due to the Easter holidays we had been unable to raise a team, but Mr Lawson hoped that a full explanation had been given to the Bedford club, as this being such a good fixture, it would be a great pity to lose it, which he thought very likely if a very good explanation had not been given. The reply was that the match had been scratched in plenty of time to enable them to find another fixture. That was the last time we had Bedford on our card!

The captaincy changed again the following season when HC Cross left the neighbourhood, GB Roberts taking over for a year. The first team won ten and lost fourteen, but the real losers were the B XV, who lost eight and drew one of their nine games, often apparently having to play short as a result of others in higher teams dropping out at the last moment. Such people obviously existed even in those halcyon days.



Captain GB Roberts holds the ball. His brother Freddie (soon to play for Kent and London) sits cross-legged on the left of the front row.

At this time we were still playing B team games at Kidbrook and sharing the ground with Westcombe Park, a situation which was proving debilitating both to the club coffers and to the team's results. In September 1911 we managed to obtain a "fairly level" pitch at Park Farm, Cemetery Lane. The proximity of this to the Fairfield, not to mention 'The Swan', seems to have had a galvanising effect on recruitment, and two years later we were running four teams. Success was not yet completely a thing of the past either. In that same season of 1911/12 we again reached the final of the Kent Cup!

FR Roberts had taken over the captaincy, and he was to remain in that position until after the war. The first team played 25, won 14 and lost 11, scoring 231 against 257, and both the 'A' and 'B' also had winning records. We overcame Old Dunstonians 12-8, thanks to a drop goal in extra time, in the first round, and then had to play Catford Bridge. Earlier in the year we had been well beaten, although "for the home side Roberts was great, the way he went down on the Catford rushes

being very fine". In the cup game, however, in front of a large crowd at their ground in Bellingham, the Old Charltonians were inspired again by their half back to a shock win, 5-0, mention being made of the club's "more nippy outsiders".

We went on to defeat Westcombe Park 6-0, but came a cropper in the final on a heavy ground at the Rectory Field, losing sadly 25-0 to the Royal Engineers. There was a slippery ball and the conditions were, presumably, more in favour of the powerful sappers than our 'nippy outsiders'. Judging by the dour scores this was not so much a cup run as a crawl, but appearances in the final are so few and far between in our history that we could perhaps do with some more crawling.

That we were becoming a powerful side was given greater credence by the report that in that year FR Roberts and HJ Turpin played for Kent, while Roberts had also represented London in the London v Paris match. 1912-13 saw an astonishing increase in the size of the playing membership, attracted perhaps by the successes in the Kent Cup, or the individual 'stars' or the new B team pitch. Forty new members joined, causing problems we know only too well of how to juggle the B and new C teams so that the lower side managed occasionally to play at home. Roberts had been injured and had missed half the season, but the results were still heartening considering the increasing strength of the fixtures. We played 22, won 13 and lost 9, and similar records were achieved by the other three sides.

The 1913-14 pre-season meeting re-elected Roberts as captain, and buoyancy and optimism reigned. The secretary urged members to bring in new men, and a Mr Clifton asked if something could not be done to have the field cleared at Cemetery Lane, as very often it was in a dirty condition. This was left for the committee to look into. The meeting closed with a vote of thanks to the Chairman. The minutes were signed and dated 22/4/14, but the world was changing, and the minute book goes blank.

IV The Roaring Twenties 1918-1932

The change of name and ground:

the patroncy of Sir Spencer Maryon Wilson: five teams, Harold Hollis.

Remarkably, F.R. Roberts was again captaining the side when we restarted, with difficulty, in October 1919, down to two teams and without a ground. Fairfield was being sold to the Greenwich Borough Council for housing, and Old Charltonians became a wandering club, with a little help from its friends, particularly Blackheath. After losing the first three games, however, the season became something of a success and we beat many of our local rivals, including Westcombe Park on Boxing Day at Sidcup, and Catford Bridge in the Kent Cup 9-5, before inevitable defeat at the hands of the Royal Naval College again.

In 1920, for the second time in its history, the club was helped out by the Maryon-Wilson family. This time Sir Spencer 11th Bt., a keen follower in the earlier years and hearing of the club's plight, offered a pitch at Charlton Park on a peppercorn rent. Not surprisingly the offer was accepted with glee. The proposal to rename the club Charlton Park was unanimous, and for several years we played on one of the most pleasant private grounds in south-east London, sharing with the cricket club of the same name. It is fairly certain that the offer of the ground was the deciding factor in the change of name rather than the explanation given in some later fixture cards of the preponderance of local old boys' clubs.

Once again we began the haul back. Two teams became three, then the 1921/22 fixtures were extended to include first four and then five teams. The first team record was p25,w10 d1 115 pts236-328 and the end of season report in the Mercury described it as "on the whole satisfactory" considering long injuries to AY Jones, HC Cunis the new captain, HL Hollis and GT Gabe, "all outsiders". It went on; "The most pleasing feature is the steady improvement of the junior teams. For the first time the club have run five teams and the outlook is decidedly promising".

February 18th saw our first 'grand slam' :

"Charlton Park, who are having a very successful season, established a new record for the club on Saturday. Five teams were put into the field, and each proved victorious, the total points being 125 for, 19 against."

Results	1st v National Provincial & Union Bank	30-6
	'A' v National Provincial & Union Bank	47-0
	'B' v Siemens 'A'	3-0
	Extra 'B' v Old Dunstonians 'C'	18-10
	'C' v Old Dunstonians	27-3

The following year, under the captaincy of H. A. Ogilvy, we went on our first tour, beating Lowestoft 11-5 and Norwich 21-0, a certain FR Hunt scoring five tries in all.

It was at about this time, furthermore, that Harold Hollis was selected for Kent, a fact borne out by this report of the 1923 Westcombe Park match; *"The usual match was played at Charlton Park on Boxing Day morning. For the first 15 minutes play was very even, but onwards the Charlton Park forwards obtained superiority, and from a forward rush H D Anderson secured possession and scored under the posts.....H L Hollis, the old Kent player, tricked one player after another and scored a brilliant try."* A final try from R Usherwood sealed a 9-0 win. Hollis was part of the 1923 Kent team that won the county championship, and there is a photograph of him in 'A History of Kent Rugby' with the team but still dressed in civvies, rather suggesting that he was by that time no longer in the side. Some years later, on March 28th 1928, Hollis brought a 'Kent XV' which included J C Gibbs, the international, and J T Kemp of Blackheath, to play us and they were defeated 9-8.

The 1923/24 season was summarised in the short-lived Rugby Wisden. *'An injury sustained in November kept H A Ogilvy, the captain, out of the team for the greater part of the season, and Charlton Park were thus materially weakened. The play of the outsides did not reach a high standard, while the forwards, though good in scrummaging, were weak at the line-out, and there was a marked tendency to high tackling. The season was marked by some excellent place kicking by H F Berdinner, the full back, who, together with H D Anderson, W G Black and L A Scantlebury (forwards) and R Usherwood at stand-off half, showed the best form.'* Such formal prose, with its severely critical and objective style, is typical of the reports of the time. It may have come from the pen of the following year's Hon. Sec., who just happened to be that excellent place kicker, H F Berdinner. Connoisseurs of writing style would perhaps like to make the comparison with the rather more racy, tabloid style of our present-day hack, Gerry Redman.

That year we only managed to win 6 games, with the same number drawn and 12 lost. In 1924/25 we were back in the black, just, winning 11 and losing 10 of 22 matches. The Wisden report was much more positive. *'Charlton Park did well in winning seven out of the first eight games. The forwards, though light and rather small, and showing a weakness at the line-out, scrummaged well, while the backs kicked neatly. The most prominent players were R Usherwood, T V Ottey, L A Scantlebury, H D Anderson, and W G Black, the captain. The club were represented by five teams in the field every Saturday and the junior sides put up some excellent performances.'* On February 13th 1925 we had three more players included in a Kent XV to play Combined Banks; - Anderson, Black and B G James.

Rugby in those days was still a mystifying tradition for those of us used to the competitive eighties and nineties. At the end of the 25-26 season, for example, the final game of the season against Westcombe Park took the form of a match between fifteens composed of their respective committee. CPRFC lost 19-5, and I personally hope we never get any more daft ideas like that. A first-hand account of our games with 'Combe comes from Dick Mellish, a long-standing member of that club. *'When I*



A rare team photograph from the 1920's, found recently. The pavilion is presumably in Charlton Park.

joined Westcombe Park RFC in season 1926/27, one of the few clubs we played twice was Charlton Park. We had the usual Saturday afternoon fixture, one year at home, the next year away, but the additional fixture was on Boxing Day mornings, always at Charlton Park. In those days they played in Charlton Park, whilst Westcombe Park played at Shooters Hill, not very far from their birthplace, which was a Sunday School in Westcombe Park Road, Greenwich. After the match we would have a few beers in an adjoining hostelry (The Swan?) and then go on to the Rectory Field to see Blackheath play against the Racing Club de France.'

The 'Roaring Twenties' were a good time for Charlton Park. In those days we held the annual dinner at the Bridge House Hotel, London Bridge, on a Saturday night in February; after a game! Reports of those occasions took up several column inches in the local papers and were studded with the names of the glitterati of Kent rugby. Guest of honour was the President of Blackheath, Lieut-Col W S D Craven DSO, and he would be accompanied by representatives of the county and our rival clubs, particularly Park House, Westcombe Park and Tonbridge. Dinners were attended by 80 or more members, and would be followed by up to ten speeches, responses and toasts before the presentation of honours caps. The evening would end with a number of 'musical items', all doubtless in exceedingly good taste. It was tradition in most rugby clubs for the captain to deliver a musical rendition.

The dinner of 1927, for example, is worth describing in greater detail. Lieut-Col Craven proposed the club. *"...he reminded the company that Charlton Park had been founded in 1893 and were at present putting no less than five teams into the field. He hoped they would eventually play even more than five teams. He was proud to have played for Charlton Park, as he had on several occasions - (hear, hear)- and if he were not 46 years of age he would come and play for the fifth team (hear, hear)...He added that the Public Schools XV was anxious to meet Charlton Park again next year."*

The captain, R. Usherwood (who was a stalwart centre, tryscorer and goalkicker for the club for many years) then gave a resume of the season so far, mentioning that we were especially proud that we had beaten Westcombe Park twice that season, and that we had, on the authority of a London evening newspaper, the oldest member playing rugby football in the London district- George Bertram, who would be fifty in August (applause). *“Responding to demands for a speech, Mr Bertram (who plays half-back for the ‘C’ team, and frequently gets tries said he considered no man was old until he gave up rugby.”* George went on to captain the 5ths for a year, serve on the committee and be appointed a vice-president.

Another vice-president, Mr Jennings, then proposed “the Rugby Union”, but he appeared to suffer a sudden attack of ‘Pritchard’s Syndrome’.

“Among the things they wanted were cheaper seats at Twickenham and increased facilities for clubs which were needing grounds, and they should have a more representative International Board on which all countries who played rugby football should be equally and fully represented.”

There are no reports of any “hear, hear” to these farsighted opinions- more likely the audience sat in embarrassed silence, aghast at the affrontery of anyone who dared to criticise the Gods in such dare-devil fashion. The response, from Mr A J Taylor of the R.U. committee, gave the suggestions short shrift, and the support he received showed that the members of CPRFC in those days knew which side their bread was buttered.

Mr Usherwood’s 26-27 side won 9 and lost 10, but the success of that season was the ‘B’ team, captained by H Chandler, who achieved a record of P.25 W.20 D.2 L.3. Throughout the following few years we continued to win as many as we lost. At the time there existed a Kent Junior Cup, for second teams and junior clubs, where we reached the semi-final in February 1930 before losing to Old Colfeians to a last minute drop goal. In the same month the 1st team beat Park House to take away their two year unbeaten home record. That year the end-of season report was realistic but hopeful.

“Although five more games have been lost than won the matches have been bright and interesting throughout the season. The team was badly handicapped in losing the services of G L Ogilvy at the beginning through injury, and owing to frequent changes the outsides never really settled down. The forwards, under the leadership of Mr C E Stewart have shown good form and the hooking of R H Plummer has been an outstanding feature. R Usherwood proved a most successful place kicker.” The club was in safe hands. Nothing could go wrong. We had our own ground, room for at least three home teams, a membership approaching 100, and were respected throughout the rugby fraternity of the south-east. Unfortunately, things did go very wrong, and we were not to regain that status until the 1970s, over forty years later.

V The Crash of the Thirties 1932 - 1939

Losing the Ground in Charlton Park: Moving to Kidbrooke: Down to two teams: Jack Rose and Peter Budd: Stories of Jack Upfold

Looking back at the calamitous happenings of the thirties we seek reasons that could be used to advise and inform the administrators of today. Certainly the mistakes made at that time would have caused many clubs to fold, and our success nowadays must always be tempered with a recognition of the dogged refusal of a limited few to let Charlton Park die, particularly in the years immediately after the Second World War.

The seeds of the demise were sown several years previously. In 1925 the Greenwich Borough Council purchased Charlton House, Park and estates from the Maryon-Wilsons. The park was subsequently sold to the LCC. This turn of events caused some concern, but fortunately the family, in selling the park, stipulated that a portion suitable in size for two pitches should remain on winter lease for five years to the club. With this sword of Damocles hanging over our heads we set about finding somewhere else to call home and during the 1928 close season we obtained a five year lease on a ‘superior’ ground at Kidbrooke Park Road, the intention being to migrate there. The first two teams, in fact, started to play their matches there, and the Charlton Park site was relegated to the lower teams.

Without a doubt it was the ambition of the club’s officers to raise our status. We were stable and relatively successful, but we had neither the playing strength nor the financial clout to make such a radical step, particularly without our own pitches. Indeed, we were already having trouble putting out our five sides. It is at such a time that rhetoric begins to take over from reason, as it was in other areas of Europe.

The AGM of 1932 took place in the “Earl of Chatham”, Woolwich, with Harold Hollis presiding. The Hon Secretary, L Mansell reported how difficult it had been for officers of the club to maintain the club’s playing strength and that there had been twenty players injured or ill. He announced that we had given up the ground at Charlton Park and that in future all games would be on the Kidbrooke ground. He encouraged everyone to bring in more members, assuring the club that we could pay our way assuming every player payed his subs. He also suggested that we should try to use the ground during the summer. How familiar those pleas sound now!

A vice-president, Mr Stork, reported that he had been informed that a pavilion could be erected, and to this end he called for volunteers to present themselves on the ground on Monday evening. One wonders whether anyone turned up. Mr Stork remained on the committee for the next year and reappeared after the war as Colonel S.E.Stork, a similar rank to Harold Hollis.

Bad luck, a council unconcerned with the sanctity of rugby grounds, a committee too accustomed to the featherbed patronage of the Maryon-Wilsons, and a membership firstly naive but then disloyal, collaborated to bring about a crash which mirrored the stock markets of the time. Without a doubt we were imbued with a smugness brought about by our good fortune. We had never had to do anything for ourselves. When the going got tough we failed to get going. That summer the membership left the sinking ship. At this point I need to call a halt to this string of mixed metaphors.

We had lost the privileged playing area at Charlton Park, where we should have fought to be regarded as sitting tenants, and where we could have lived a comfortable life in our rightful home, and, what is more, to compound the failure, had failed to negotiate a renewal lease on the Kidbrooke ground. We were forced to hire LCC pitches at, of all places, Charlton Park, for the first XV, although the 'A' carried on at Kidbrooke. Small wonder, then, that so many members could not bear the humiliation. The new season opened with us down to two teams. There must have been many local rugby sages making gloomy prognostications about our imminent demise.

That 1932-33 season could not have been very enjoyable for the die-hards who stayed on. There is virtually no mention of the first half, after, that is, a 70 points to 6 defeat at the hands of Barclays Bank. Scores of such a magnitude were almost unheard of in those days, when teams were less sophisticated in scoring manoeuvres, kickers less consistent and balls heavier. I did not manage to find any CPRFC score in 1933 apart from a 4-6 defeat by University Vandals. (Remember that those four points would have come from a drop goal, so I do not think we scored a try during the second half of that season!)

It was during the season of 1932-33 that Jack Rose joined.

'My brother, Frank, who had been playing for the Park for a year or two, introduced me. We then had two teams, first and 'A', members of the junior team counting themselves fortunate if 15 players turned up on any Saturday afternoon. I played for the 'A' team for a couple of seasons before graduating to the first team. Robbie (Charlie Robinson) was the 'A' team captain. Another regular, of about Robbie's mature vintage but built on a much less generous scale, was Freddie Virgo. I wondered at the time how two such elderly gents could still move around the field.'

Jack also remembers the playing conditions at the time.

'For my first season or two we played when at home at Kidbrooke before moving to Charlton Park. The pitch was rented from a farmer who used it for normal farming purposes on the other six days of the week. One Saturday we arrived to find the pitch well plastered with fresh cow pats. The grazing must have been particularly lush, as my memory tells me that the pats were the size of dartboards and there were

hundreds of them. When our opponents, Southend, turned up, they proved to be surprisingly fastidious, and refused to play among the cow pats. We were obliged to borrow shovels from the farm and spent about half an hour shifting the cow pats until our opponents were satisfied and consented to play us. I have no recollection of the result.'

In three years between 1932 and 1935 we lost all the status gained in the previous forty years, and we spent the same time regaining it. The following clubs disappeared from our first team fixture list;- Old Elthamians, Beckenham, Saracens, Barclays Bank, Met. Police, Tonbridge, Hastings, Old Haberdashers, Maidstone, Upper Clapton, and, hardest cut of all, the traditional home Boxing Day fixture with Westcombe Park. Several of these have reappeared during the past ten years, encouraged by the introduction of leagues and our relative success. One notable, ever-present, name on the list is that of our longest running opponents, Park House, and it is to be hoped that these close links will always be remembered, particularly at moments when the rivalry is intense.

It is at this time that we begin to recognise some of the names appearing on the fixture card and into the match reports. Jack Oliver took over the captaincy, with Ken Oliver, Jack Rose and Charlie Robinson in support, and it is to these initially, and others following that we can thank for the existence of our club today. The combination of weaker opposition and determined leadership meant that the results were by no means disastrous. In 33/34, in the last Barclays match, we halved the margin of defeat, going down 35-8, and the record shows p.29 w.12 d.1 l.16 pts 201-277.

This was described as "*an outstanding improvement on last year*", which of course it had to be! Reference is made in match reports to the play of Jack Rose, the "fine hooking of Eaglen", and three tries from Howells in the match against Cosmo.

The following year we won 16, drew 4, and lost 8, with a points difference of 241-153, and in 1935/36 we won 10 and lost 10, scoring 194 against 170. Results are harder to find at the end of the thirties, but there are no grounds for imagining things got any worse. Peter Budd joined in January, 1937, and recalls that although our playing strength was small we had a very good first XV. Bert Wallace, who played for us at the time, actually had a trial for Scotland and went on to join London Scottish.

Unsurprisingly, we still seemed to enjoy ourselves. The following stories lend credence to my thesis that a rugby club acts on instinct, and that our sometimes outrageous behaviour can be put down to a form of genetic tradition. There can be no more respectable, upstanding gentlemen than Messrs Budd and Rose- the latter, in fact, would be decorated as a fighter pilot during the war, and then went on to be Governor of the Cayman Islands, but they upheld club traditions honourably. They had been to a London night club; the Kitkat or the Bag of Nails, they think. When

they were turfed out at about four a.m. on the Sunday morning they had about two hours or so to kill before catching the first train from Charing Cross to Blackheath. They whiled away the time drinking coffee in a Lyons Corner House, finding extreme difficulty in staying awake. Eventually they caught the train for the 20 minute journey. Two or three hours later they woke together at Blackheath, but the train was entering the station from the Dartford direction. After sleeping through to the end of the line, and then possibly in some quiet siding somewhere, some inner voice must have warned them both that they had reached Blackheath for the second time. As readers will know, this sort of escapade is now common, and among recent exponents of the art have been Tony Penfold, Roger Foxon, and Kevin Walsh, who, in catching the last train to Woolwich Arsenal, had woken up at Westgate on Sea at two in the morning. An interesting variation of this occurred to Chris Seldon quite recently when, also heading for Woolwich, he fell asleep just outside Charing Cross and woke up with a jolt in a station which he had just time to see began with a 'W'. He leapt out, the train departed, and he discovered he was at Waterloo East.

Peter Budd tells a story about George Upfold, an enormous man for the time, with 'hands like hams' and a singular lack of subtlety, who went on to become a Palestine policeman in the years immediately after the war. After one game they were standing on Redhill station awaiting the train to London when the team was joined by the referee, who informed them he was going the same way, but who had not impressed George with his decision-making during the match. A train drew in and George opened the door and courteously ushered him on. The whistle went, George closed the door, and the referee disappeared towards Brighton whilst Charlton Park scuttled with glee over the bridge for the London train.

Jack Rose also remembers him well.

"We were returning through London after playing somewhere out to the west. Half a dozen or so of us decided to have a bite to eat and a few pints of beer before travelling home by train. At one stage George Upfold and I were some way ahead of the others, who included John and Ken Oliver, when we slipped into a pub which I did not know and which I never saw again. It was called 'The Running Horse'. I ordered two pints of beer just before the others arrived. A couple of large men in raincoats came over and advised us to leave before we became settled in. We gathered that they were policemen, took the hint, drank up and left. A week later the 'News of the World' carried a detailed description of a police raid on this pub in which it was recorded that the raiding party found "a lot of effeminate young men dancing together and telling rude knock knock stories!" If George Upfold had been swept up in this raid it would have set the gay liberation cause back by a couple of generations."

Jack also recalls George dealing summarily with two strangers to whom they had offered a lift but who had then become aggressive, claiming they were special constables and demanding to go a particular way. He stopped the car and asked the

strangers to get out. Jack felt sure of what was coming, and took off his coat in readiness, but George looked surprisingly relaxed, and said something to the effect that he was not looking for any trouble. Before the words were out of his mouth, however, the men were lined up in front of him and each was hit flush on the jaw by George, who was, as I have indicated, a very powerful man. He picked up the two crumpled heaps by the seats of their trousers and dropped them in the roadside ditch. Despite this 'Desperate Dan' exterior George was a highly skilled carpenter, capable of the most intricate detail. His brother, Jack Upfold, was a leading light in the Old Shootershillians at the time and actually lived in the house in Footscray Road that was their clubhouse until recently. Several of the new players we gained at the end of the thirties, who really saved our bacon, were Old Shoots, and the friction this caused between our two clubs is still remembered by older members today.

In the late 1930s the first North Kent Sevens were held at the Old Dartfordians. Our team consisted of Frank and Jack Rose, St John Briggs, Bert Wallace, Dai Howells, Thomas, a slender but flying wing threequarter, and Henry Parker. Much to the team's consternation, we reached the final, where we lost narrowly to Nore Command, who happened to have a few R.N. players temporarily attached. It was customary for our sevens teams then to have a few snifters before the tournament to inspire them, and playing five successive games must have been challenging.

The Annual Dinner was always held at this time at the 'Cheshire Cheese', in Fleet Street, on Boat Race night. We had played in the afternoon, but the reasoning was clear. London that night was full of the cream of society, all as pissed as puddings, and of course the police would turn a blind eye to the odd misdemeanour, so afterwards the club would go on somewhere. Honours caps were presented. These started as the proper ornate article, but as we became poorer we would present cricket caps with a club badge sewn on.

A third team reappears on the fixture list of 1936-37, and we were clearly well on the route to recovery again when another World War got in the way, taking the lives of Bert Wallace and over twenty other club members.

VI Starting Again...Again 1946 - 1961 The Charlie Robinson Years

*Hornfair: The Bleak Early Fifties: Looking for a Home:
Hughie Davis, Robin Hodgson, Bryan Robjohns
and Duncan Allsopp: The good season of 1960-61:*

On Wednesday, May 1st 1946 there was a meeting called at 'The Chandos' to discuss the reforming of the club. The Germans had secured a direct hit on the pavilion and changing rooms in Charlton Park, a military success unlikely to set Goebbels' pulse racing, but placing us in the not unfamiliar situation of once more requiring lebensraum.(!) The newspaper carried a simple and absurdly optimistic reassurance.

"Arrangements are being made to secure a ground for next season. Contact C A Robinson."

For the first two seasons we had no team and no ground. Peter Budd played those two years for Park House, but it was agreed that if the few old members did not try to get us restarted then we would fold. John Oliver was elected captain, Charlie Robinson secretary, Freddie Obourne treasurer, with Ken Oliver and Peter Budd as committee members. This was almost half our playing strength, so it must have been quite a blow to the self-esteem not to be elected to the committee. We were playing some games with the old L.C.C. and fortunately several of their members decided to join us. Charlton Park survived, but it was the end of the L.C.C. club.

We found a temporary pitch at Hornfair Park, and the first reported game, on October 24th, 1947, resulted in a loss, 8-14, to the PLA. Tries were scored by a name from the past, Ogilvy, and a name for the future, Budd, and the conversion came from the captain, Oliver. Apparently "the outsides played a poor game, buying the dummy too often". Other reports from that season show typical bravura despite all available evidence, considering that we rarely scored at all, let alone won! Names kept cropping up as an encouragement, reports were always in positive terms, and the impression was left of a club going forward.

"Centres Booth and Lippiatt were unlucky not to score, and Waddington was a class full back..." "Thomas was outstanding among the forwards....Cavell was sound in the centre"

At the annual general meeting of the 1948-49 season John Oliver was elected captain again and it was decided to hold a club supper after the past and present game on October 23rd. Results, however, were on the up, starting with an 11-9 victory over Old Erithians. With a quarter of an hour remaining we were 9-0 down but Ken Oliver managed to pull the pack together. K Morgan went over on the left, and then George Upfold scored and Griffiths' conversion made it 9-8 before the best move of the match had Griffiths tearing over for the winning try.

Later in the month we beat Dorking and the week after, Gordon Burr, another stalwart of the fifties and sixties, was reported as playing well on his debut. He was a more than useful fly-half or centre who went on to be a captain of the club in 1966/67. Another member of the family, who joined at about the same time, was Sid Burr. Sid had, like George Upfold, been operating in Palestine, although Sid's profession required some technical expertise in elementary maths and technology, along with a steady hand, Sid Burr was the Palestine hangman, and surprisingly enough he was not a man not to be trifled with. We had not been able to remain at Hornfair, had been using pitches in Beckenham Place Park, and were beginning to despair of ever finding a home of our own. The problem went back to 1927. Previous to that date we had benefited from the patronage of Sir Maryon Wilson, who had owned the ground in Charlton Park. When he sold it to the LCC he expressed the wish that we should be allowed to carry on as we had done previously. Charlie Robinson, the club secretary, fought vehemently for what appeared to be our right of access, but the LCC's reply indicated that they took little notice of tradition.

"...I would say that it is true that there was a rugby pitch at that park on which the club played before the war but in 1927 the Parks Committee decided the club could not be allowed the exclusive use of it. In actual practice, however, owing to lack of competition from other clubs for the use of the pitch, the Charlton Park club in fact enjoyed most of the use of the pitch before the war. In 1946 the club applied for the use of the pitch again but, owing to the alienation of ground at Charlton Park for other purposes (possibly this refers to the building of prefabs) and to the general shortage of playing pitches, they were told that there is no prospect of a rugby football pitch being made available at this place. The demand for rugby pitches in the Council's parks and open spaces is insignificant compared with that for Association pitches. Although Association clubs on the Council's register only receive eight permits a season at the present time it is quite impossible to meet the demand and many new applications have to be refused each year."

Once again hindsight tells us that we missed the boat by not fighting our cause strongly enough in 1927. The letter ended with a promise to remember the request when conditions improved, and as a result we were reoffered the LCC ground at Hornfair, and we moved back there at the beginning of the 1950-51 season. If I may be permitted to return to my theme for a few moments, there is an interesting description by Daniel Defoe, written in 1722, suggesting perhaps that metaphysical forces had lured us there.

'On the other side of the heath, north, is Charleton, a village famous, or rather infamous for the yearly collected rabble of mad-people, at Horn-Fair; the rudeness of which I cannot but think, is such as ought to be suppressed, and indeed in a civilized well governed nation, it may well be said to be insufferable.'

Many present-day members will have vivid memories of the changing facilities by the Lido, particularly the draughts, the large pitches and the frequent remains left

by canine visitors. The Mercury reported under the byline "The Park's return to Charlton".

'After an absence of ten years from the home district Charlton Park RFC are playing on a ground at Hornfair Park, in Shooters Hill Road, and now, with their home pitch, first class dressing accommodation and a full fixture list the Park are anticipating one of their most successful seasons. Ken Oliver skips the club and officers include Messrs. P Budd (hon team secretary), F Obourne (treasurer), C A Robinson (hon secretary), H Parker (hon publicity secretary), and K Ryle (fixture secretary). "After long and protracted negotiations the club have been successful in acquiring the use of their former ground", writes secretary Robinson.'

The job description for the council employee responsible for the Lido must have made reference to the need for high levels of pomposity, pig-headedness, and rudeness referred to by Defoe, because that was the sort of man we used to collide with. There would be a notice by the door stating the exact time that the water would be turned off. If the game had started late, as it habitually did, you would be standing in the showers, all lathered up, when the water would suddenly stop. Often only physical intimidation would encourage the power-crazed custodian of the key to turn them back on.

We realised, however, that Hornfair had its advantages, and several local clubs coveted the second pitch, so it was that a new rugby club, unknown to the archives at Twickenham, came into being during the sixties. Maze Hill RFC, 'the club that did not exist', had its own headed notepaper and committee, and, surprisingly enough, played in colours very similar to Charlton Park. What is more, they rented the second pitch at Hornfair for many years.

Despite the hard work of the committee, and the publicity secretary's zeal, we continued to struggle. Our 50th anniversary fell in 1943, so on March 10th 1951 we made up for it by holding our 50th Annual Dinner at the Mitre Hotel, Greenwich.(any old excuse for a piss-up!) Honours caps were presented to Ray Martin, scrum half and to Ron Miller, threequarter, of the 'A' team. Item 4 on the toasts read 'Park House RFC', proposed by Charlie Robinson and replied to by a Mr Carr-Hill of that club!

It was after that occasion that Peter Budd was arrested. They were making their way past a hole in the road when he found a red lamp thrust into his hand. Being drunk he took no notice (you wouldn't, would you?) until he found himself being whisked off his feet and dumped in a police car. At the station the police obviously decided that arrest was a little excessive for stealing a road lamp, and Peter was given a severe warning, and then taken home by police car. The story should end there, but the police driver just happened to be Welsh and a rugby player. Peter invited him in for a drink, and they finished a bottle of gin, neat, between them. Then the policeman drove back to the station to continue his shift.

The 1950/51 season brought only 3 wins in 19 games, in 12 of which we failed to score, but what are results? Certainly nobody could accuse the club of giving in. A circular from Charlie Robinson to members on 15th January 1951 informed them that it had been decided by their committee (in other words, him) to field two XV's every Saturday as from January 20th- five days hence from the date on the letter! It expected "the fullest co-operation from playing members" and a questionnaire started with the following request; "Are you willing to play two games every Saturday?"

The playing membership at the time had reached 22. For Peter Budd, as team secretary, this was little short of a nightmare. Waiting on the touchline during the first game, Charlie would organise the team for the match to follow, and it was just too bad if a player felt injured or tired after a hard game- no excuses were accepted.

Charlie (Robbie) Robinson was a scrap metal dealer in Greenwich and he was a fixer. He would announce that he had "fixed transport" for an away game and the team would find themselves rattling off into the wilds of Kent on the back of his ancient open-topped lorry, driven by one of his equally unconventional cronies. Jack Rose recalls one such Odyssey to a game with R.A.F. Eastchurch, on the Isle of Sheppey.

'We arrived at Eastchurch in good time to find that most of the RAF side had flown off somewhere or other at short notice. In the absence of an opposing side, we changed, ran around for an hour or so, had a bath and tea and set off for home. A mile or so into our return journey the lorry broke down. It was dark and wet, the countryside featureless and there were several miles to the bridge linking Sheppey to the Kentish mainland and the prospect of some help. Robbie, who decided to direct operations from the passenger seat in the driver's cab, persuaded us that as we hadn't had a game that day it would do us much good and would be excellent practice to push the lorry across the Isle of Sheppey. I thought the night would never end.'

Charlie Robinson was also a very wealthy man, and he sent his daughter to a finishing school in Switzerland, but he did not behave as if he was. One evening he and young Budd had decided to attend the AGM of the RFU at the Mayfair Hotel. He turned up wearing old corduroy trousers covered with iron rust and a flannelette shirt minus its collar, with the remark that it was fortunate he had been able to get home and change. On arrival at the meeting they were told that there was only one representative per club, but Charlie's demand to the doorman, "Don't you know who I am?" got them both in. The place was full of Harlequin-types and Charlie stuck out like a sore thumb, but this did not stop him announcing in his great booming voice at the close of proceedings, "Come on boy- we're not going to drink in this place. It's too fucking expensive"

Charlie liked a bottle of wine and was something of an expert. He appears to have taken the young Peter Budd under his wing. Once, when Peter was ill with the 'flu he arrived at the door with a dozen bottles and the message to "give the boy this. It'll

do him more good than a bunch of bloody grapes." Later they both went to a wine tasting dinner at some august establishment in the City. Visitors were invited to stand and voice their opinions on the various vintages. Charlie rose to his feet while Peter shrank into his seat, preparing himself for the embarrassment he felt sure was coming "Mr Chairman," said Robbie. "On the first course. I thought the soup was superb, but the wine- it was cat's piss!"

The following year, 1951/52, was hardly an improvement for the firsts, knowing, presumably that they had to play again, immediately, as the seconds! The 53-0 defeat by Park House (we provided "very weak and sadly depleted opposition" according to the report) proved so difficult to take that further desperate measures were necessary. There would be, from the following week, training sessions on a Friday (meet assembly rooms, 7.30)! I suppose this is marginally preferable to a skinful of beer, and plans for the Saturday game may be fresh in the mind, but the reactions from muscles, wives and girlfriends would have been less positive! The firsts won five games, we continued with our successful and not unpleasant policy of drinking to keep the fixture, and the 51st Annual Dinner programme ended with the following little ditty;

*"Treat her who vowed to love and obey you
Out at night, me in a fright,
Staggering home as its just getting light.
You intoxicated brute, you insensible block,
Look at the clock,
DO LOOK AT THE CLOCK"*

This was another of Charlie's little foibles- lacing the menus with what he considered to be 'bons mots'.

Throughout these years, association with the Maryon Wilson family continued, despite the loss of the ground in Charlton Park, and on April 3, 1954 players and officials attended a Service of Thanksgiving and Dedication, having been granted permission to incorporate the coat of arms of our patron- since 1948- the Reverend Sir Percy M Wilson 12th Bart, into the design of our badge. We recently received a suitably self-conscious letter from the Charlton Conservative Association asking if we minded them also taking up the badge.

The fifties were a bleak time for the club, when a lot of hard work and optimism went sadly unrewarded on the field, and there is disappointingly little evidence of what went on. In 1957 there were 32 members, of whom 16 had paid their subs, but the treasurer, Freddie Obourne, reported his pleasure at the 50% increase in membership! "We could not, however, rely on vice presidents and others to continue to finance the club as they had in the past."

We received a rather pompous letter from Blackheath informing us that they had half a dozen or so players that they couldn't fit in and they thought we ought to be

able to give them a game, but the sting in the tail was that if any of them proved they could play would we please let them have them back. Two of them were, apparently, quite useful, but forgotten. One of them, however, was the legendary Hughie Davis.

One of the delights of rugby is that it can provide pleasure for everyone from the superstars to the incompetents. Michael Green made his name detailing the fortunes of the 'extra B', but when you only run one and a half teams these characters assume a far greater significance. Hughie was very slight and very slow, and he played on the wing. When the pitch was a sea of glutinous mud, as it always seemed to be in those days, and every other player left the field looking like Fran Cotton in the famous photograph, twenty-nine featureless creatures from the black lagoon, Hughie stood out like a beacon in his spotless, ironed kit. Even the referee was muddier. We were left to marvel at how someone you could blow over could survive such games.

There was a famous committee meeting at around this time, held in 'The Red Lion', Shooters Hill. We possessed one old, motheaten ball, almost round in shape, and we were into the tricky area of whether we should push the boat out and buy another.

Freddie Obourne declared with an air of finality,
"We can't afford a new ball"

Charlie Robinson enquired as to the state of the funds.
"£4 14s 6d, of which we owe you £3 9s 4d."

Robbie solved the matter.
"Well, stuff the £3 9s 4d up your arse and go and buy a new ball!"

A year or two later we reported a yearly profit of £23 8s 10d and a balance in hand of £175 12s 11d. Players' subscriptions had, furthermore, been paid up in full!

The first team in 1958-59 mirrored that improvement, winning 15, drawing 3 and losing 8 and scoring 377 points against 207. There were regular training sessions on Sunday mornings inaugurated by the new captain, Robin Hodgson and, thanks to the hard work of Peter Budd, three teams.

Aspirations must have been rising because there was long discussion at the end of the meeting about the possibility of acquiring a ground and a pavilion somewhere in the neighbourhood, as it was felt that the lack of headquarters did not encourage increased membership. During the early sixties a finance special committee was set up and run by Barry Pritchard in order to raise funds for a new clubhouse. At the 1963 AGM it reported revenue of £200 11s 4d, a not inconsiderable sum in today's inflated times, and negotiations were taking place with AEI for their ground further along Charlton Park Lane, opposite the park. This would have made an ideal home, and would have kept us in our home area. We harboured hopes of playing there for

many years, but there was always something put in our way, even though, during the early seventies, we would drive past on our way to Hornfair to see the pavilion boarded up and the field overgrown. It is a gentle irony that, after we had moved to Eltham, the Meridian Sports Ground included among its tenants Lewisham Rugby Club. Later into the sixties we made overtures to the London Borough of Greenwich and to Blackheath in the vain hope that we might be able to live in a corner of the Rectory Field, where an application to build housing had been refused. The borough seemed willing to consider the idea, but Blackheath, surprise surprise, were not.

Robin Hodgson remained captain for the 1959/60 season, when new fixtures were arranged with Central YMCA, Met. Police, and Imperial College, and the improvement continued. We played 28, winning 19, drawing 2 and losing 7, with a points differential of 283-134. At the end of the season, on April 10th, we came as close as we could to winning something important when we were runners-up in the Kentish Times Sevens, held at Sidcup. Our conquerors in the final were our local rivals, Old Shootershillians. The result that enabled us to really progress through the draw was our defeat of Westcombe Park, who were at the time a very strong club.

Before the game, while seated in the changing room, our team had been told by a pundit with a loud, braying voice that "Combe" would be much too strong for us, but fortunately our naive young chaps hadn't got a clue who he was talking about. During the game Duncan Allsop pulled off a famous tackle, when, showing a characteristic refusal to give in, he chased a lost cause unseen by the ball-carrier and caught him just as he was about to touch down. Duncan grabbed him by the shirt and deposited him, ball and all, over the dead ball line.

Then, in 1960/61, we reached another mini-summit in our switchback progress, when the captain was Bryan Robjohns. Most of us will have some recollection of Bryan's commitment to the club, both on and off the field, and he was still playing for the Craven 'A's in 1992 with the same enthusiasm. Who has not played away at Ashford and had Bryan point out with pride the picture on their clubhouse wall of him in the Kent team that opened their clubhouse- not the present one, or indeed the previous, but the clubhouse before last? Bryan was a fast and strong centre or fly-half in his younger days, somewhat headstrong and unpredictable, with a reputation for irritating the less athletic forwards with sudden rushes of blood inside his own twenty-five. At some time in his long and auspicious career at our club he must have played in every position for the first team, and I particularly remember him as a strong but desperately underweight prop when our backs were carrying all before them in the early seventies, and we needed forwards to scabble for the scraps and then run.

That season of 1960/61 we had the following record:-

P.28 W.22 D.1 L.5 Points F. 324 A. 185

Having beaten Wasps Extra 'A' early in the season we then showed our improvement by beating their 'A' team 16-0. *Wasps started well but Park kept them out and eventually D Lewis, having cut in, passed inside to the forwards and T Pritchard sold a dummy and crossed under the posts, B Pritchard converting.* In the 9-8 victory over Woolwich Poly, tries were scored by Whitehead, Peter Coster and Duncan Allsop, and at the end of the season we joined forces with London House to field a combined side against Club Sportif Municipal de Puteaux on the morning of the international, winning 8-5.

Once again, unfortunately but seemingly inevitably, something went wrong. That was Bryan's only year of captaincy in his long career as a one-club man and Duncan Allsop took over. He was a hard running winger with a crushing hand-off which could leave less than forthright tacklers lying in his wake. He could also play scrum-half when required and was a highly capable cricketer who was invited to play county cricket but who turned the opportunity down on the advice of his father, who considered there was no money in it. Duncan was an urbane gentleman with refined tastes quite out of line with the club norm, who liked cigars and large brandies, took up Real Tennis and went into the antiquarian books business. Of course, most of this refinement was acquired after he left the club. There are memories among the players of that time of tearing down Shooters Hill in the back of his Messerschmitt bubble-car, knowing Duncan had enjoyed a few beers and expecting to come to a halt upside down and buried with books in the car park of the police station.

We took to meeting before games at the "Railway Tavern" in Blackheath, and that coupled with our inability to put out our best team regularly, led to a complete turn-around in fortunes. The fixture list looked considerably stronger, however, and we actually improved on some results of the previous year, beating Rochester, for example. At the end of season AGM Charlie Robinson announced his retirement 'for personal reasons' from the post of Hon. Secretary, although, typically and unselfishly, he continued to do the job for a further year when a suitable replacement could not be found. Sadly Charlie died four years later. I hope I have done justice to Charlie Robinson in the eyes of anyone who knew him. He was larger than life, generous and outspoken, and he led from the front. What he said had to be done, and he would occasionally make life very difficult for the others involved in running the club, but he was Charlton Park. Bryan Robjohns remembers having to attend a disciplinary hearing at the Old Millhillians Club in Northumberland Avenue, a very plush establishment indeed. Charlie wanted him to show the club in a good light, so Bryan arrived in Charlie's Bentley, complete with chauffeur.

VII Happy Days 1960-1970

The Pritchards and Robjohns: Stuart Sharp's first game: The colts: The 75th Anniversary Game: The Move to the Plume

In 1961/62 we only won 5 out of 25. A letter to club members dated August 2nd 1962 referred to the "state of affairs in which the club found itself at the end of last season" and announced, rather forbiddingly, that "it is intended that the club will be run to the rules from now on". There were other resignations, and the committee was pared down to five.

The captain retained his position throughout this bloodletting, and was able to point to a slight improvement. The season started well with a 41-0 win over Centymca, but after a defeat by Tonbridge 1sts the previous year we lost 11-14 to their 2nds. The Park House match was lost 10-0, and almost all the second half of the season was lost to the appalling winter. This led to a particularly embarrassing occasion, even for a club with a history of embarrassing occasions.

We had invited Peter Yarranton to be our guest speaker at the Club Dinner. Peter was, at the time, playing for one of the Wasps' lower sides after a distinguished international career, and he seemed to enjoy playing against us, if only for the post-match 'hospitality'. Peter is blamed for teaching some of the more destructive drinking games to our impressionable youngsters, but he later rose above that to become RFU President in 1991, receiving a knighthood in the Queen's birthday honours list of 1992.

Unfortunately the bad weather in the weeks prior to the dinner prevented us not only from playing, but also from contacting members. On the night we had booked for 60 to 70 members and their guests. The top table had three sprigs to accommodate the large numbers. Peter arrived resplendent in DJ but only 16 or so male and female diners appeared, and they were spread around to try and conceal the missing hundreds. Peter was not fooled by this clever ruse, but he was very polite and did not hold a grudge against the club, turning out for the President's XV in our 75th Anniversary game five years later.

Of the 19 games played in that curtailed season we won 8, but under Terry Pritchard in season 1963/64 we only scored 108 points in 25 matches, of which 7 were won. Terry is, as most will know, Barry's brother, and he played wing-forward. Understandably for anyone unlucky enough to spend his formative years in the company of Barry, Terry was a quiet man who gave up the game when he took over 'The Bull' in St Paul's Cray, but who regularly returned to watch us play, and who sponsored a league game each season until he moved to Florida.

At the end of the season we went on tour to Cornwall, losing 6-11 to Liskeard-Looe, and then, amazingly, winning the last two matches against Newquay Hornets and

Wadebridge Camels. There is a film of that tour, now available on video for coaching purposes. The games appeared to take place in farm meadows, and although the camera rarely caught up with the ball, games were played in gentle slow motion, characterised by chaotic line-outs and hopeful punts upfield. Out of their red and white jerseys players seemed to dress in another uniform of grey trousers, nylon shirts and raincoats, wear square glasses and grin a lot.

At the beginning of the next season the club was joined by a disillusioned prop from Sidcup, one Dave Bagwell. As the fickle finger of fate would have had it, the first game was against Sidcup Extra 1st, and Dave needed to beat them. He had a plan, and meetings were held where he pinpointed their weaknesses and hatched diabolical schemes to exploit them. We lost, nay, were hammered, 43-5!

The team for that game read; Pritchard B; Kirker; Bagwell; Driver; Riley; Buttery; Pritchard T; Lovering; Paige; Burr G; Allsop; Shilson; Pitthouse; Haime; Green; but there were seven changes for the next match, bringing in Henry Robjohns as hooker, Peter Budd at wing forward (a progressive step this!), Brian Robjohns at centre and Dave Robjohns on the wing! Far be it from me to decry the selection of so many years ago, but I do not see David as a sleek racehorse, even in his youth. The venue was away at Old Williamsonians, in Rochester, however, and the criteria for selection were somewhat different from today. The greatest need was to choose four cars, which were in short supply, so Terry Pritchard, who owned a Wolseley which could accommodate eight at a push, was guaranteed a first team place.

For the next five years Charlton Park survived some up-and-down times. One of the regular try scorers was Peter Coster, a talented fly-half who disappeared off to South Africa where he was rumoured to have played at a high standard. He was rediscovered quite by chance recently by Brian Robjohns in a palatial penthouse office in Manhattan, with a breathtaking view down Avenue of the Americas and a picture of a Charlton Park team at Hornfair on the wall. On the wing in the team was Taffy Lewis, who had such a sparkling sidestep that once he had beaten his man he liked to go back and have another go. Club secretary was George Laws, a throwback to the officer ranks in the war, who sported a Jimmy Edwards handlebar moustache and who later emigrated to Australia. The club archives are full of his letters to embassies, colleges, barracks and police stations trying to encourage people to join.

Terry was succeeded as captain for the next two years by his brother, Barry, and there must be no-one who has been acquainted with the club who does not see Barry as the living embodiment of Charlton Park. He joined, along with Terry and Duncan Allsop, when they were at Christ's College Blackheath, and he played at either extreme - prop or full back - depending on the aforesaid selection criteria being fulfilled. He was also an excellent exponent of the drop kick, or so he tells us, and often took kicks at goal.



Charlton Park 1964 at Hornfair

He was mine host, overseen by his mother, the redoubtable Olive, of the George, Bexley village, and would often run the bar for club functions. On one occasion, a dance at Greenwich Town Hall, all the 'take' was stolen and he was in a foul mood and anxious to exact revenge on someone. The opponents the following day were Twickenham, and needless to say he was sent off, the referee having some difficulty in persuading him to leave the field. The following year when Barry was captain, and sporting a beard, the Twickenham fixture came round. They asked whether we still had "*that dirty bastard*", but were informed that he had, of course, been thrown out of the club.

That was certainly not the only occasion Barry was sent off. Once he had set his mind on something it would take a Henry Kissinger to persuade him that he might just possibly be wrong. I have less-than-fond memories of him arguing with a referee's decision to give a penalty against us when camped on the Old Anchorians line and being marched back so many times that they ended up with a simple tap over from under our posts. Once on tour against Old Modernians in Yorkshire he had been persuaded to play for the second team in the last game when all he wanted was to watch the firsts and have a few beers. We had just kicked off when Barry appeared on the side, having been sent off for arguing.

All the years of propping and lifting barrels eventually took their toll of Barry's back, and he reverted to fullback and captain of the thirds, renamed the 'Comets', exhorting "forwards across" from a near stationary position in the middle of what had then become the 22. Now he just supports the club, still moaning at referees and forwards reluctant to run, propping up the bar and revelling in the victories we now achieve over clubs who would not deign to play us in the sixties, but mainly greeting visitors as long lost friends and winding up anyone foolish enough to take themselves too seriously.

After Barry's two years Gordon Burr took over in 1966/67, but when he had finished he got upset about selection policy and left for Blackheath, to be followed by the second team captain, Peter Isgar, a successful but rather too persistent insurance salesman who, within a year, was running their tour to Uganda. Such peccadillos failed to distract Charlton Park from enjoying our singular lack of success. We would train on Blackheath, using car headlights, and later we would use Greenwich Park, running up the steep hill and startling the Japanese tourists outside the observatory by suddenly appearing over the brow like some charging army, and collapsing on the ground gasping our last breaths and throwing up at their feet. Afterwards we would shower in the cellar of the Plume, one at a time, clothes draped over the barrels. The following account by Stuart Sharp of his first game for the club on March 7th, 1965, demonstrates the rugby atmosphere of the sixties perfectly. All who know the club will detect the unmistakable whiff of Charlton Park.'

The Saturday that I first came to Charlton Park, both the first and second fifteens were due to play at Hornfair, and Peter Haine was fairly confident that I could get a game for the second XV (Stuart was at the time still at school- Ed). The scene at Hornfair can best be described as chaotic. Two people from the Charlton Park first XV had failed to arrive; therefore the second XV lost two of its eleven available players. But, as luck would have it, the opposition for the second XV didn't turn up because, we learned later, the fixtures secretary or whoever had been responsible, had failed to send them travelling instructions. So my first Saturday with Charlton Park was spent practising goal kicking using an ordinary football- the second team's rugby ball was still languishing in a back-garden adjacent to Hornfair, because the old lady who lived in the house refused to let anybody retrieve it, and the club did not then possess a spare rugby-ball.

I was, however, promised a game the following Saturday if the club could: a) get a fixture b) get a fixtures secretary c) get a referee d) get the ball back. The following Saturday I arrived at Hornfair on my motor scooter, looking like a snowman on wheels. Yes, it snowed on the day of my debut. I asked to see the second team captain and was told that he hadn't yet arrived. I changed with the others, though still not sure that I had a game, but eventually a guy called Geoff Fitt arrived and evidently he was the captain. I went up to him and introduced myself: "Oh!" he said.

"Look, do me a favour and cut these oranges up". I cut the oranges up while he was changing, and later, on the way out to the pitches he said, "Where do you play?" "At school, normally," I said. "No, no. I mean what position do you play?" "Oh, second row or number eight," said I. "Well," he pondered, "we're a bit short in the backs this week. Do you think you you could play at full-back?- there's a good chap." With that he trotted off, leaving me slightly bewildered and very apprehensive.

Geoff Fitt, for the benefit of those members who never knew him, was a man whose surname belied his actual physical condition. He inspired eloquently from behind- 50 yards behind, and the words he always used, as many will remember, were;- "Come on chaps, cough-cough- wheeze-splutter-fart, bags of fire."

The pitches, when I reached them, looked like everybody's idea of the Antarctic, with the odd set of rugby posts standing phallically erect against the grey sky. The pitches consisted of solid earth and brittle, frozen grass, covered by a thin layer of rutted ice and then a further layer of powdery snow. Fortunately, it had stopped snowing and reasonable visibility had returned. The lines were swept clear and the match started.

It was the opposition's kick-off (and they had a full side against our twelve men), and the ball came immediately to me. I fumbled it. My hands were already frozen, and as the ball had been used for a 'kick around' before the game it was wet, soggy, and perhaps half-frozen too. Anyway, suffice it to say that I received the first of my many poundings that afternoon. I don't remember much else about the game itself. I know we lost by forty-odd points, only to discover that due to an administrative 'cock-up' we had played a team that should have played our first team. The irony was that our firsts played the team we should have played, and lost as well!

Oh, those were halcyon days! When I got back to the dressing rooms, I was too numb to feel the cuts and abrasions that I had all over my legs which had been caused by the rutted ice. The real agony came in the showers, which, due to a fault in the boiler, were scalding hot. In those days Charlton Park used to drink after the match at 'The Crown' in Blackheath Village- a splendid hostelry with a good line in hot soup and thin sandwiches. Unfortunately, I couldn't spend much time at 'The Crown' that day because I was due to go to a dance in Southend. That evening I set off on my scooter from 'The Crown' and when I reached Southend my cut legs, together with the hot showers, followed by a 45 mile drive on a motor scooter in sub-zero temperatures forced me to walk like Groucho Marx that evening. Not only that. I suffered from dreadful chilblains for about a fortnight.

The climax of the whole affair was that on the following morning, on the front page of the 'Sunday Mirror' (or was it the 'Sunday Pictorial' then?) there was a photograph of the smouldering ruins of 'The Crown'. The following weekend Charlton Park R.F.C., found a new home at the 'Plume of Feathers', and a new era had begun.

Stuart's memory lets him down. There was in fact quite a lengthy period of time between our stays at the Crown and the Plume. Since losing the ground in Charlton Park we had had a variety of homes. We used 'The Swan' in the village for some time, but were then forced to hire rooms from anyone who would have us. Dinners, and important functions took place at some varied venues. One year, after a dinner at the 'Spanish Galleon' in Greenwich, when we had finished eating we were asked to move downstairs so the room could be transformed into a Chinese restaurant. They would not, however, let us move the beer, which we had provided. On another occasion, after a dinner in a pub somewhere next to Fenchurch Street station the assembled members just happened to find themselves in command of the little luggage 'trains' on the platforms.

After the game we also had brief sojourns at the 'Bugle Horn' in Charlton village, The 'Kings Arms' Woolwich, where we held a very downmarket club dinner sitting on benches at trestle tables, and the 'Fox Under The Hill'. We could never exhibit enough decorum to stay for long before someone perpetrated an act of unsociable behaviour and we were searching for somewhere else. Needless to say, this was a cause of constant worry to those running the club, whose responsibility it was to produce another innocent landlord out of the hat. Until the fire we were beginning to make ourselves comfortable in 'The Crown', and we had negotiated with Jim Cockburn, the landlord, to erect a club noticeboard in the corner of the bar- definite signs of getting our feet under the table! The manager, Paul Kennedy, also played for us. He used to drink extraordinary quantities of whisky before the game and would be devastating for the first twenty minutes but would finish in a sorry state complaining of suffering from concussion. For some months we nurtured hopes of getting back. Ideas were afoot that we should move into a 'barn' at the rear of the pub, but once again these were scotched. A letter from Jim Cockburn on 12th February 1966 explained that, with trade beginning to pick up, the small kitchen, and the needs of the locals, he was afraid we must 'count him out'.

For a year we went to the Swiss Cottage, in Forest Hill, but the journey time from Hornfair was over half an hour, and this used to mystify opponents, who would frequently lose contact with the convoy weaving through the back streets of south-east London. We also found out that the landlord had led us to believe that we were not wanted at the Plume, but that was because he was after our custom himself. So we moved full-time to the 'Plume', in Park Vista, Greenwich, which is the first base that I can remember.

The landlord was Ken Possnicker, still renowned as the instigator of 'The Man Most Likely To' award at the Dinner and Dance and the infamous Dwile Flonking Tournament. There were times when we almost came to blows, and it was hardly surprising. The pub was small, and we liked to gather by the door, to the right as one entered, blocking the route for all clientele wishing to get to the room at the back as well as to the toilets. Furthermore, although we obviously provided him with

considerable custom, several of his regulars from Saturday nights moved on. Ken showed his commitment to us by making one of the largest contributions to our debenture scheme for the new clubhouse.

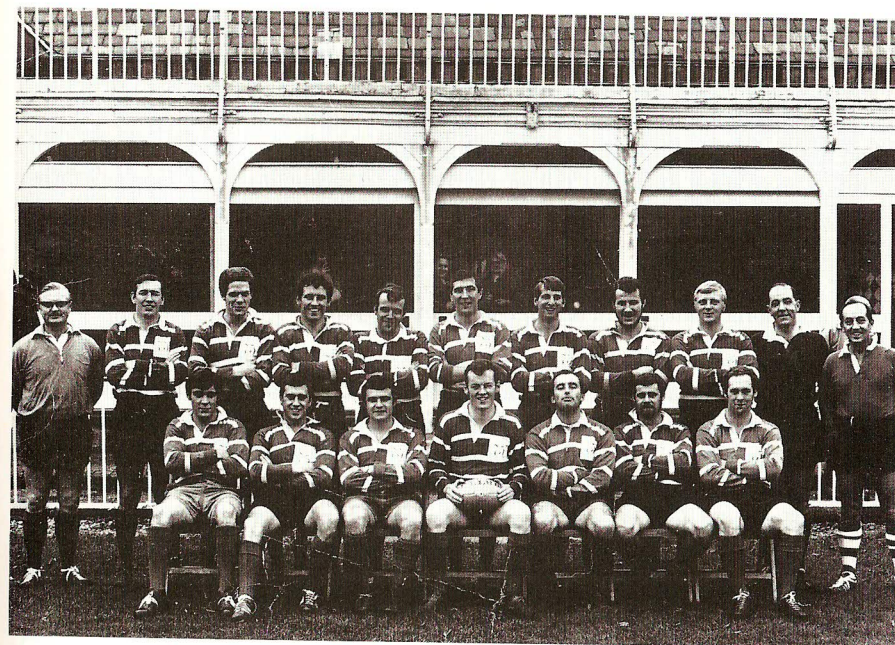
In many ways the pub days were the best. We had no worries, and only had to pay for food and balls. By the end, in 1974, we were running four teams from one of the smallest pubs in the area. We had to stay to look after the opposition, but there were fewer alternative attractions in the evenings and we were often still there at closing time. Often the opposition stayed as well. Many remember Wanstead, in the early seventies, being helped out of the door at closing time one Saturday night and reappearing at Sunday lunchtime having 'found somewhere to stay' round the corner. Phil Thompson remembers that he used to live at the top of Denmark Hill, and before he had a car he would have to catch a bus to Camberwell, then another to Lewisham, and a third to Greenwich, a trip of about 45 minutes, but this would not prevent him making the journey three times a week. Whether it was the lure of training or of the Watney's Red Barrel we do not know.

Phil joined the club while he was still at school, lured by his friends and by what was a very strong colts team. It was run by a dedicated teacher called John Allerway and it beat everyone for three to four years. Unfortunately this very success created a tug of war between John and the club, who wanted the players to play for us, while he steadfastly refused. Bearing in mind that players like Henry Robjohns were playing for the senior teams at the age of fifteen, and that we were struggling to put out more than one team, it seemed ridiculous that skilled players older than him were representing Charlton Park for the colts. The whole farce was badly handled and many of that team never played for us. Among those who did, however, were Phil, Colin Riley, Norman Larkin, George Ottley, Graham Pithouse and the evergreen Terry Hunt, still hooking and still threatening the first team nearly thirty years later.

I have already referred to the uncertainty over the origins of the club. Age is inextricably linked with status in the minds of the ever-traditionalist club official, and there are considerable differences of opinion over the dates of the oldest rugby clubs. This is not surprising. Our date has always been 1893, because there it is on some of our earliest fixture cards, but hard evidence is more difficult to come by.

During the fifties and sixties we had spotted that there appeared to be evidence of rugby in Charlton before 1893, and as late as the AGM of 1963, on 18th April, we were making plans to stage a centenary match and dinner dance on the 9th April of the following year, believing, or rather, hoping, to claim our origins in 1864. On the 10th July 1963 a committee meeting was informed that there was no proof of foundation in 1864, so plans for the centenary had to be shelved.

Our 25th and 50th anniversary years had both coincided with world wars (1918 and 1943) but the 75th took place and was celebrated by a match at the Rectory



The 75th Anniversary match. 1968 Dave Robjohns is captain, with future captain Mike Uglow five from the left in the back row.

Field against an Invitation XV made up of representatives of teams we played in the 1890s. I was at Avery Hill College at the time, but because we had played against Charlton Park earlier in the season, several of the team, including Dennis Attwood and myself, went along to watch.

Playing that day for the club were two recently departed college players, Andy Richardson, a big, blunt, blond fly-half who originated from Yorkshire and whose idea of open rugby was to kick towards the open field rather than to touch, and Kenny Baker, he of the small stature, nautical mien and the best line out thrower of all time- bar none. They, along with Mike Lovering, an art lecturer who was the instigator of the whole thing, were the vanguard of the link with the club which began to transform the club's fortunes.

Several other names from the Park team will be recognised by today's members. Phil Thompson played centre for the first team for many years. He was the possessor of a flamboyant dummy, which was often the object of mild hilarity, but could time a pass and had a rock-solid defence. Phil also has an inexhaustible fund of old songs and stories and was a regular on the club tours of the sixties and seventies. Terry Hunt, of course, is still playing. Never one to overstate his case, Terry would always be found right in the thick of the action. He was often hurt but as no-one can remember him missing games through injury and no-one sees any deterioration in his appetite for the game, we can only assume he will go on for ever.

Others from that game 25 years ago have disappeared. Norman Larkin, for example, was a barrel-shaped scrum-half with a permanent blue stubble and an infectious high giggle. He would run through a brick wall, but his passes were often an afterthought, and apprehensive fly-halves were inclined to want to claim a mark when under pressure. George Ottley was a full-back, a quiet, small man who could be relied on to catch anything, fall on anything and tackle anything. George's father was a regular supporter of the bar once we had moved to our own ground, as long as we remembered to buy Teachers Whisky, and his photograph stands in his favourite corner. Gordon Shave and Graham Pithouse were wingers- Graham would run round and Gordon would run through opposing players.

The Invitation XV, unsurprisingly, won 20-11. Their team was too strong all-round for us, captained as it was by the Blackheath captain, David Webster, and including the ex-England international, Middlesex Sevens Announcer and forgiving after-dinner speaker, Peter Yarranton in the second row. We were 3-6 down at half-time, a penalty by Mike Hammond to a try by Cliff Holder and a penalty from John Bird. Tries by Hunt and Jenkins with a conversion from Bird extended the lead, but Park came storming back and Shave and Richardson scored, Hammond's conversion bringing us back to 11-14. Hopes of a club win were dashed, however, by two more tries for the invitees, from the wingers Holden and Gill. It was undoubtedly a successful day, attended by a large crowd, many of whom were old CPRFC members, and we were indebted to the generosity of our neighbours at Blackheath, president Peter Piper and referee John Williamson.

We welcomed two interesting touring teams to Hornfair during the sixties. One was a French club and they reacted with typical Gallic impetuosity to the club's winning try. The dead ball areas were the full 25 yard length, and when we kicked ahead in the last minutes of the match and the ball crossed the goal line still travelling at some speed the French stopped chasing. A Charlton player sped past to dive on the ball just inside the dead ball line and be awarded the try. An international incident loomed. Fortunately diplomacy came to the fore, although afterwards we apparently presented them with flowers- a seemingly controversial choice for rugby players, saying volumes about the English view of 'continentals'.

The second experience of foreign opposition was rather more painful. We picked up Oregon State University on the fixture exchange and when the players arrived at Hornfair from a couple of pre-match drinks in 'The Fox under the Hill' they found massage beds set out along the length of the Lido changing rooms and frighteningly enormous linebackers being taped up and massaged. While coaches supervised stretching and psychologists rehearsed the coming strategies Charlton Park sat pushing newspapers down their socks and cursing the fixtures secretary, who was nowhere to be seen. We lost 50 points to 3, and after the game everyone adjourned to The Plume where it turned out that their previous match had been against Wasps. Nevertheless it was the last game of the tour, they found the ambience of the Plume

much to their liking and stayed all night, and as they went we were presented with their first aid kit and much of the tour memorabilia in an enormous trunk.

Captain of the club for the three years from 1967 to 1969 was Dave Robjohns, who with his brother Henry usually made up the second row. Henry was the shortest and lightest lock you are likely to meet, and off the field he was a quiet, unassuming gentleman, but he had the Robjohns fervour when playing and would simply keep battering away until things started happening. Henry could get so worked up during the game that anything he tried to say at half-time came out as an incoherent spray. David, on the other hand, had been away to university, studied maths, and was calm and objective- most of the time. He continued to serve on the committee for some years, and became a master at presenting the accounts to an AGM, giving the impression that we were financially stable when we all knew we weren't. Dave's first season as skipper was a legacy of the sixties; we only won 7 out of 24; whereas his last in 1968/69 was a harbinger of the seventies; we won 21 and lost 7, scoring 445 against 223. Dennis Attwood, Bernie Taylor and Dave Brock had arrived from Avery Hill, along with John Beresford from Plymouth and Malcolm Darbyshire. Once again, for the umpteenth time, we had ridden the storm and were at another new dawn.

VIII A Home of our Own 1970-1978

John Beresford and Tours: Ian St Clair:

*Andy Allen, Doug Springate, Barry Sykes, singing contests
and the purchase of Pippen Hall: The Clubhouse*

There is, out there in the world beyond the rugby club, a finite number of good players, and it is often that through the intricate networks of friendships, vague acquaintances and one-off meetings in pubs we chance upon the makings of a successful team. This serendipity factor certainly played a part in Charlton Park's sudden rise in fortunes at the beginning of the seventies, but it was fuelled by the people involved. Malcolm Darbyshire explained how he was lured in one of the old copies of 'Nom de Plume'.

"Chris Lewis and I, having just moved into Blackheath, were on our way to the Crown one Saturday lunchtime in October (1969, I think) when we were accosted by one John Rankin, an old accomplice of CL, and persuaded to play for the thirds. That was my first mistake, not having moved at more than walking pace for six months.

Early in the game I found myself in my own '25' with no-one in front of me. What was more important, there was no-one behind either to whom I could give the ball, but as I was keen to make a good impression I set off at a lumbering canter in the general direction of the try line (the opposition's!). That was the second mistake, because the rest of the team, all twelve of them, stood bellowing "Go on, it's not far!", instead of taking the ball off me. After what seemed hours I collapsed over the line and then had to be carried from the field where I was promptly very sick."

Malcolm played his first game for the first team at the beginning of the 1970/71 season on the wing, scoring two tries against Standard-Kolster, in the same game as I scored four tries on the other wing on my debut, but it is there that the similarity between us ends, and I promise not to say any more about my playing career. Malcolm moved to fly-half and became captain two years later.

Captain for the first two years was Dennis Attwood, another name that has become synonymous with the club. It was Mike Lovering, art lecturer at Avery Hill College, who quietly influenced several of what had been a very successful college team to come and join Charlton Park. Dennis was sharing a flat with Bernie Taylor and Kenny Baker, who also already played for us, and it is a sign of the esteem in which he was held that a group of far-seeing individuals cornered him and persuaded him to stand as captain for the 1970/71 season when other clubs were beckoning.

Dennis did his first few years of teaching at Crown Woods School, and there he came across a very good school team containing Kevin Walsh, Steve Foxon, Micky Page and Richard Freeman, and they had a friend called Dave Beere. From the college came Malcolm Gill, a back-row with a very slow side step and a devastating

line in meaningless talk, Dave Brock, a scrum-half from Devon who later moved to New Zealand, and, for a while Billy Bushell, who later went on to Sidcup, Harlequins and an England cap against Argentina. Billy played for the second team when we beat Bexley by 100 points. Towards the end of the game he caught a kick behind our own posts and was bet a considerable sum on the spot that he could not score a try from there without being touched. Needless to say, he did, simply running in a wide arc around the opposition.

Full back at the time was John Beresford, who like Dave Brock, hailed from Plymouth, but which he preferred to call 'God's Own Country'. He was an old school full back, modelling himself on Don Clarke. If the ball was kicked in the air he caught it; if he entered the threequarter line to make the extra man he slowed it down. He was a prodigious kicker, lining the ball up at an obtuse angle while peering down its seam like a gunner setting the sights on the distant posts, then measuring his run up like a slow march in reverse, pausing, feet together to bow his head and take a deep lungful of air, then, with purposeful steps, firing the ball away via a seigegun right toe-cap which ended with an exaggerated follow-through. Only Kevin Walsh tries to kick like that nowadays.

In 1970 and '71 the club toured to Plymouth, playing Jesters, the club John played for before and after his CPRFC days, along with others such as the 'Totnes monsters'. The rugby was not particularly demanding, the Jesters' second row having a combined age of over 100, one of whom, Harold Biddle, would have to seek permission to leave the game midway through the second half in order to light the old boiler for the bathwater. The journey down was threatened by a rail union go-slow, and the party, having bought enough beer to allow for a delay of anything up to seven hours, were forced to drink it all in three and a half when they heard the train was on time.



After a game on tour at Jesters 1970. Waiting for Harold's boiler ?

We stayed at a selubrious establishment known as the Hotel Akabo (known as the Ackerboo) which would helpfully provide scaffolding to enable drunken returnees to find their sixth floor rooms without disturbing the owners. Micky Page and Steve Foxon discovered that Barry's bed consisted of twenty-six separate parts, and that if they spread these at random all over the hotel, Barry would be very annoyed.

Other drinking took place in the Wellington public house, where the landlord played double or quits on every round, and the Lopes Arms, where we met Old Merchant Taylors, who also recognised an easy tour. Phil Thompson recalls walking through the back streets of Milan one evening in the eighties (goodness knows what he could have been looking for) when a complete stranger accosted him with the words "Lopes Arms, Charlton Park, Merchant Taylors, fancy a drink?" Such is rugby.



Plymouth 1971 - and the arrival of some younger faces ! An example of Phil Thompson's innovative photography

The 1970-71 season ended with us winning the Standard Telephones Sevens, beating Old Erithians 10-8 in the final with a team of Darbyshire, Downes, Uglow, Attwood, Foxon, and Robjohns(2). This was, to my knowledge, the first thing the club ever won, and provided a step up the ladder to the next year, when the first team were unbeaten at home, and in all played 33, winning 22, drawing 3 and losing 8. The points differential read For 654 Against 290. The seconds were even better, winning 21 of 27 games, and scoring 677 against 219. For the 1sts John Beresford

scored 209 points and one Andy Potts 23 tries. Other notables were Steve Foxon (13 tries), Kevin Walsh(10) and Phil Thompson (8). Scrum-half was a Kiwi, Terry O'Meara, who had joined the club through a complicated 'friend of a friend' process.(for details see ed)

The flavour is once again best tasted through the pen of the afore-mentioned full-back and vice-captain in excerpts from his report.

'On one memorable Sunday last November the selection committee picked four teams and still had 19 players left over....The club have fielded well over 100 players this season- 47 have played for the first team alone- and usually we have been able to put out four teams every Saturday. Finally I would like to thank Stuart Sharp's (2nd team captain) brother (Paul) for answering the phone, John Tame's mum for the same, and Dave Munday's mates in the office for telling me "He's not in yet" at 10 a.m. every Friday.

The real coup of the season was a couple of paragraphs in March's issue of 'Rugby World'. Big boys now! The tour was a great success in all but the financial aspect- the club lost ú60 because of the committee's decision to finance travel expenses. The hotel was excellent and the hospitality, particularly at York RI, overwhelming. 24 players took the field: we beat York 16-7 on Good Friday, Pontefract 9-0 on Easter Sunday, and we lost 0-24 to York RI on the Monday morning.'

A memorable feature of that tour, organised by John Beresford, was his unfortunate attempt to sing 'Twice Nightly' while standing on a table in the middle of a bar, surrounded by club members who had had time during the song's interminable verses to hatch the plot that was to drown him and the flock wallpaper in Tetley's immediately as he reached the climactic final chord. John returned to Plymouth at the end of the 1971/72 season, only to reappear later, and he was forever writing memories....

'John Carter's rendition of 'These Foolish Things' last year, the epic trip with a cursing Gordon Love to Plymouth, and of course this year's tour- the night the club stood me 18 pints, and the following night when they stood me 4-star accommodation. I shall miss the interlectual (sic) chit-chat over tactics with Barry in the 'Plume' after every game; I shall miss seeing Phil's dummy fail again; I shall miss Dennis's reverse pass, as did most of the outside halves with whom he played last season; I shall miss the cheers when the occasional kick goes over. I hope I leave a few memories myself'

John played through the three years when we changed irrevocably into a club to be reckoned with.

"Three seasons ago Barry and Brian had both barely turned thirty, Loxon and Treeback (guess who) were both in the 5th form at Crown Woods, Dennis and I had hair. My first game in the 1st team was against Blackheath Brigands at Hornfair

and we lost 16-0. Only about five of that side took the field against Park House a few weeks ago. Three years ago we were pushed to field an occasional 3rd side; this year we could have put out an occasional 5th"

In the close season another New Zealander by the name of Ian St Clair joined the club to take over at scrum half from his compatriot. Ian was certainly among the three or four most gifted rugby players ever to play for the club, and his speed, confidence and rocket of a spin pass forced the forwards to deliver quick ball and the backs to run with it. We had no other option. Another newcomer was John Collins, a shortsighted winger with the mentality of a flanker who took great delight in sacking the opposition scrum half after sneaking round the front of a line out.

All came to fruition on a memorable October Sunday afternoon in one of the early rounds of the Kent Cup when we beat Sevenoaks, who were then several degrees higher than us in status, 35-9. The beauty was that Ian St Clair did what he wanted, often exhausting the rest of us who had to rise to the standards he was setting. For the next few years we operated as labourers for his genius, throwing ourselves on to the ball, or breaking our backs in a vastly underweight scrum to get possession for him, then straining to keep up as he made another quicksilver break round the blindside and left some poor fool with another clear run to a far-distant line. Ian was soon courted by Sidcup and then Blackheath, and he played for Kent several times, but he was trapped, as so many are, by Charltonparkishness. Several national newspapers contained articles on this star of the county and the bizarre, unknown club he appeared to enjoy playing for.

We were also starting to get restless, restricted as we were by the sheer waste of our money going over the cramped bar of the Plume and a council that would not let us play Sunday Kent Cup games at Hornfair; our home ties usually took place at Old Dartfordians. The committee was taking the cue. After many years of searching for our own ground we were at last getting warm.

The chief movers among many were Peter Budd, club president, and Andy Allen, secretary. Fortunately they presented an urbane and responsible face to the outside world, perfect English gentlemen, well-spoken, one with his own business, one something in the city. 'Endear Elln' hailed from Manchester, but you would never know it from the rounded vowels and clipped consonants of his Donald Sinden accent. He was another of our 5ft 10in second rows, but Andy played strictly in the 4ths, preferring to demonstrate his innate superiority by drinking twice as much as everybody else.

They started by investigating the possibility of building a clubhouse on Hornfair, and the proposal was being viewed with some sympathy because we at last had some support from the Greenwich Director of Recreational Services, Chris Field. Then, however, in the autumn of 1973, it became apparent that the Algemene Bank ground in Eltham was available and that Greenwich would support our application

to take over the lease. The owners were the Crown Estate Commissioners, represented by Cluttons, and remarkably, the deal was virtually completed by the following March. Thus, after 80 years, Charlton Park was to have its own clubhouse and ground for the first time. The person most responsible was Andy Allen, who, through a knowledge of the business and dogged hounding of Cluttons refused to let the chance slip away like so many others. He, without doubt, wins a place in our Hall of Fame. So does Peter Budd, again, this time through his status on the Greenwich Sports Council and the support of Chris Field.

The potentially most troublesome aspect of the purchase promised to be the granting of the licence, because the wooden buildings which stood on the ground were decidedly rustic. New to the club was Barry Sykes, a car mechanic with more than a passing acquaintance with the dodgier aspects of life in south-east London and a happy ability to play the role of the honest, hard-working geezer. When Barry Pritchard and Peter arrived with the inspector we had not completed all the work we had undertaken to do, but there was a workman who looked not unlike B.Sykes toiling back and forth with a wheelbarrow.



Pippen Hall - autumn 1973 - just before our arrival

The main obstacle appeared to be that the path that led to the Elsan toilets had not been painted white. The workman was called over and asked why the path had not been painted when he knew clearly it had to be done as a matter of urgency. Yes, the workman agreed that we had made it clear it was absolutely essential to paint it but he was sorry guv but they'd left him there all on his own and he was doing his best. "This is ridiculous! You have probably cost this club a licence!" came the outraged response from the club officials. "Believe me, I will stand here until midnight if necessary to make sure it's done!" The workman, now thoroughly put in his place, trundled off with his barrow, watched by an admiring inspector. We got the licence.

We started at Pippen Hall with a home game against Gravesend on a scorching early September day in 1974. The grass was like newly mown hay, the lines, which we had marked out, snaked across the stubble, and the posts splayed out like huge divining rods. We had worked throughout the summer painting, plumbing and hook fixing and we changed in the first hut and then ducked our heads through the door into the clubhouse, a wooden veranda-ed hut which would not have looked out of place in "The High Chapparal". Beer was served through a hatch on the left which was somewhat ambitiously referred to as the 'bar'. There was a choice of pumps, Trophy (21p) or Tankard (23p), but the pipes fed into the same barrel.

Toilet facilities were spartan. The Elsans needed emptying, and only a hardy few attempted it. One day after a barbeque it was full to the brim and Phil was trying to empty it when some sixth sense told him that the handle was breaking. By the time it hit the ground Phil was a hundred yards away. One night after a game with Chipstead a member of the opposition who was just off in his best suit to a dinner party fell in, and Steve Foxon once disappeared down the hole where it used to be emptied (before the plastic sess pit was installed, I must emphasise).

The 'ladies', for some time, was in a brick building that later became the generator room, and night visits were best made in groups for safety, lit by a flickering torch or candle. Small wonder then that Charlton Park RFC lost its allure for wives and girlfriends, leaving us free to give vent to our unfettered emotions. We had always been a sociable club, but in those first few years of our own ground there were some outrageous nights.

Behind the bar was a small back room where competitions took place over who could buy the biggest round, after which the price would be painted on the wall and the glasses thrown at it. The worst night of all happened on 20th October 1976, two weeks before we moved out. Unfortunately Barry Pritchard had arranged to meet the Whitbread rep the following morning about a new loan. He was woken from his hangover by a phone call from the police telling him that our 'hut' had been broken into. When they arrived the scene was indescribable- broken glasses, cement dust, sandwiches, the remains of a fire containing burnt clothes, and a door swinging on half a hinge greeted them. "Er- we had a bit of a night," explained Barry. "I've got to say, you lads do enjoy yourselves," came the rep's reply. That night Brian Morphew set out for home but slept in the ditch by the lane. The following Saturday I was married; it had also been my stag night.

Minutes of meetings still show a lack of volunteers for work but great support for the club teams, particularly at Kent Cup matches. We had developed close links with Old Dartfordians, who were at the time just as mad as we were, and we would hold discos at their club, as well as competition evenings (pickled egg eating was the in sport) and Sunday matches. There were also old tyme music halls, folk nights and stag nights at the Charlton Athletic Social Club. We entered the Old Westcliffians

Rugby Club singing competition, taking a coachload of choir and supporters, and became renowned for writing our own voluntary numbers. The year we won it the club team contained Norman Pace (of Hale and Pace), who played fly-half for the thirds and was a particularly strong goal kicker. Two sets of lyrics from our voluntaries need including here. The first, from the first year's entry, was simply the curses of our spectators put to the tune of 'Shenandoah'.

*'Oh referee, we're disenchanted,
Won't you please change your decision.
The offence for which you penalised us,
Was beyond your line of vision,
Was beyond your line of vi—sion.'*

The second little extract comes from the year we won, and was part of a long lament for the cause of English rugby, blighted by the over-successful and gloating Welsh and by the unfathomable choices of the selectors, particularly their over-confident faith in a particular fly-half.

(tune; 'Don't take Lulu')
*'You can pick Old, if it's not too cold
But don't pick Martin.
You can pick Neil (Bennett) or spin the wheel
But don't pick Martin.
Martin always wants to do
What a fly-half shouldn't do
Cause selectors tell him to
Not his fault; a low I.Q.
Pick Wedgie Benn for number ten
But don't pick Martin.
Pick Cyril Smith, or Edward Heath,
They may not be too grand,
But if you pick old Martin,
There ain't much point in startin'
Sooper dooper Martin Cooper
Leave him in the stand'*

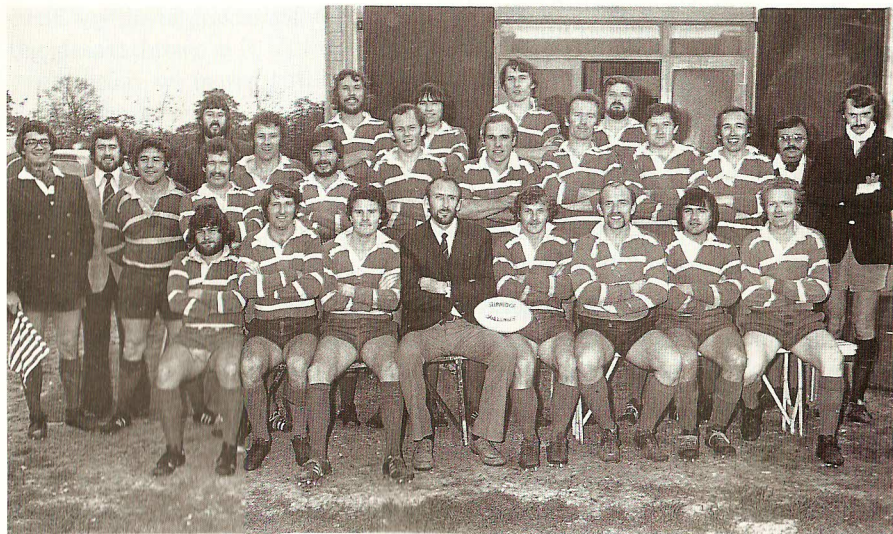
Social secretary was Doug Springate, a beanpole of a second row who had played basketball and was another ex-Avery Hill student. He had a particular ability to get people to volunteer for things, and went on to captain the first team in 1975 and '76 and then to become club chairman. His slightly unlikely friendship with Barry Sykes galvanised the committee and the club into action, so that by 1976 we had our own clubhouse.

Barry Sykes was elected to take charge of the clubhouse at a committee meeting in early 1975 and received carte blanche to draw up plans and estimates with the help

of a sub-committee. Despite not having the wherewithal to pay for it, it was decided to go ahead and instruct Banbury to put up the shell of the building. Such haste was almost forced upon the club because it had become clear that we would not get a renewal of the licence while still in the old hut. The shell was completed during the close season, and handed over to the club officially on 14th January 1976. It was used for the first committee meeting of the new year.



Clubhouse opening November 6th 1976. Presidents XV.



Club Captain's XV (or rather XX)

The total bill came to £7,965.81, of which £2,319 was still owed, and in addition the club had debts of £10,700. At a committee meeting on 5th August 1975 it had been proposed that a fund be started financed by 'short term' loans from members in order to achieve the extra £4,500 required. 'A Allen and P Budd were to be in charge of the fund which was to be administered separately from club accounts. They were to approach members individually and with this in mind an unofficial general meeting was to be held on the 3th August after training to inform the club of this fund, proposals for the clubhouse, the amount of work done and the generous support given by only a few of the club members so far.' It is not known to me whether anyone in fact claimed reimbursement of these 'short term' loans, but there was also a system of 'debentures', most of which the club still owes.



President, Peter Budd and Chairman Doug Springate at the clubhouse opening with distinguished old members; Sid Burr, Bob Eaglen, George Upfold, Jack Rose, John Oliver, Harry Robjohns & F. Shepherd.

The extreme generosity of the people involved, many of whom are still associated with the club, coupled with the drive generated by Barry Sykes, Terry Thompson, Doug Springate, and many more, enabled us to complete the clubhouse by the beginning of the following season, and it was opened by a game between the Club Captain's XV and the President's XV on Sunday 31st October 1976. Rugby had had to take second place while all concentration went on the ground and we spent the middle years of the seventies marking time, winning and losing roughly the same number of games. New players were still appearing, however. The Irish dentists- John O'Sullivan, Gerry Murray, Dave Murray, Mick Quinliven, Tom Boland et al,

added a further dimension to our sociability, as if we needed it, and contributed hugely to the clubhouse funds. We would play Sunday games against 'An Irish Dentists XV' which included players of international calibre, as well as partaking in sprees to Cheltenham etc. These gentlemen are now all upstanding pillars of the Irish establishment, but then they lived on the edge. God help any poor patient who had the first appointment with Dave Murray's breath on a Monday morning.

Our contacts at Eltham Green School had unearthed a new member of staff, straight out of university with very little experience of rugby, who had a passing resemblance to a block of flats. Doug Hursey was his name. When he joined in 1974/75 he played for the thirds in all sorts of positions, but by the end of the season he was installed in the second row for the firsts. Doug took some time getting used to the peculiar issues associated with being a marked man every time he played, and many referees left him to get on with it. Even when we knew he was capable of playing at a higher level we were continually told that he was "too soft". When Doug eventually played for Kent, Blackheath signed him and a year later he was their captain. Unfortunately, if he had been taken on just a few years earlier Doug could have made it to the very top. As it was, he represented London against Paris (following FR Roberts seventy years earlier) and Kent in the County Championship Final (alongside later Charlton Park players Laurie Cokell, Bobby Howe and John Field).

Another new and memorable character was Norman Naisby, the mole (so called because his calling was to manipulate the ball out of any maul, no matter how outnumbered we appeared to be). He was a Scottish tax collector, but likeable for all that, with a particular line in very large, scruffy shorts. "Smart but casual". He also introduced us to the song "Its been lonesome in the saddle since my horse died".

Mike Uglow, one of the aforementioned Eltham Green teachers, followed Malcolm Darbyshire as captain, and Doug Springate took over for 1975-77. In his second year the 1st XV record was played 30, won 17, during which we won our own 15-a-side tournament, played against local clubs such as Old Colfeians, Shoots etc. The club was coached formally for the first time by Griff Roberts, an experienced number 8 from North Wales, and that year we went on tour there, winning all three games against Rhyl, Delyn and Llandudno. Ian St Clair had returned for a season, and this may have helped! We stayed in Rhyl, in a large, draughty hotel on the front which became draughtier after the first night. The doors were replaced, and Terry Hunt completed the feat of going through the entire Easter weekend without going to bed.

For the beginning of the next season Dave Wallace was designated 'club trainer', under the captaincy of Pete Apperley. Dave was a tall, thin policeman who played full back. He had decided views about everything, particularly fitness, and there were complaints minuted at committee before the end of the year concerning the lack of understanding he showed towards those who viewed training as a social

evening out. We won two Kent Cup games but lost against the first good team we met- Snowdown Colliery, and this was symptomatic of a season in which there was a great deal of enthusiasm towards playing (a 6th team played 10 games and won 7 of them), but, despite the best efforts of the captain and coach, where the attitude to both training and supporting the committee could best be described as apathetic. The top try scorer was Frank Kirwan on the wing, with 11, and Chris Turner topscored with 117 points. Chris was for a short time club secretary, and he and his wife Claire worked hard for the club during those difficult first years in the new clubhouse.

This was, however, the golden age of club tours. We went twice to Harrogate, staying in a delightful hotel well above the usual rating for rugby players, but the management and the club relaxed their standards accordingly. The piano did not respond to Roger Paine's unobtrusive promptings one evening and was bought a drink, and one player (I think it was Martin Jenrick) laughed so much he rocked backwards off his stool and disappeared through a plate glass window into the street. Otherwise all was sweetness and light- in the hotel.

Outside, in the town, other rules prevailed. In the evening Commander Paine would deliver a full de-briefing. The key feature was the horn, which could be heard from miles away. Two toots required everyone to dive to the floor and imitate a dead ant, wherever he was. The ideal place for the carrier of the horn was in an upstairs room which had a clear view down the High Street. A large group could be seen approaching and a well timed toot could bring the town to a standstill. There were harsh penalties for anyone who flouted this or any other of the exhaustive list of tour rules, which were handed out on departure and had to be memorised.

The emphasis in the club at this time was placed, quite rightly, on the development of the building and ground, and the playing style became over-cautious. We were capable of rising to an occasion but seemed unable to decide on a style of play which suited our temperament and abilities and upon which we could fall back when we were feeling less than inspired. We were also experiencing difficulty mastering the newly necessary expertise of book- balancing. The bar was not turning over enough money during the season to make up for the 'dry' summer, so in July 1977 Tom Adrian organised the first summer barbeque, which turned out to be a roaring success both socially and financially, and this has become a traditional occasion ever since. Another of Tom's little schemes was the blood-let. He was a research doctor at Greenwich Hospital at the time and he needed blood, so the clubhouse was turned into a surgery and the club received pounds per pint. The clubhouse was also suffering from break-ins and there was concern over the staffing of the bar, cleaning and locking up. What's new?

IX Ups and Downs 1978-1985

Floodlit Rugby: International Tournaments: Neil Flanagan: The Colts: Roger Vavrecka and the Cup Semi-Final: The Generator

Doug Hursey was elected captain for the 1978/79 season, and, as seemed to happen, numbers at training were high at the beginning but tailed off as the nights became darker and colder and the make-up of the teams more clear-cut. We were also having to train by the light of the silvery moon enhanced by one floodlight on a post in front of the clubhouse. One evening when the posts had been vandalised training consisted of the forwards running down to Old Brockleians to borrow a wooden post they had already rejected and then returning up Eltham High Street with it.

This is redolent of a later escapade when an ideal lighting pole was found on a building site 'somewhere in London' and brought home by two enterprising members on the train in a routine that deserved to have been filmed as a follow-up to 'The Plank'. It was fed in through the door at one end of the carriage at London Bridge and manoeuvred into position down the middle of the aisle over the heads of the anxious passengers. On arrival at Eltham Well Hall station our heroes then carried it up the High Street, negotiating the corners gingerly while threatening to poleaxe whole bus queues of pensioners.

A further innovation at this time was the floodlit tournament at Crystal Palace, organised by Old Beccehamians, which, even though it was played in front of echoing stands, still gave the players a touch of glamour. Better still was the Courage Floodlit tournament which took place at Gravesend on Tuesday nights, and gave us a platform to show off our improving performances.

The 1979/80 captain, Chris Smith, was another big, aggressive second row who had had experience with Saracens. By applying tighter rules on selection and forcing a more responsible, if sometimes safety-first approach to play, he was able to halt the gentle decline in our playing standards. Chris Smith was only able to captain for one year because of work commitments, and he was followed in 1980 by Dave Collen. Both Dave and his two immediate successors Dave Beere and Dennis Attwood, saw over the gradual resurgence of the club's playing performance. It was helped by the arrival of Neil Flanagan from Loughborough College to teach at Eaglesfield. Neil was really a flanker, but that was one of the few areas where we had plenty of cover, so he was converted to centre, where his speed, fitness and strength in the tackle had more effect. We used him on tap penalty moves and expected him to retrieve every lost cause - in effect he replaced Ian St Clair as the man to follow. He played several games for Kent Clubs, and it was a loss when Neil moved over the river. He sadly contracted a debilitating illness soon after which prevented him from playing rugby.

In addition to Flanagan, another notable recruit was Dave Sutton, an Irish teacher who possessed a crushing tackle and surprising elusiveness for one seemingly so unfit. One evening at Gravesend these two in combination in the centre, supported by some typically fast and furious stuff from the other thirteen, came very close to inflicting an ignominious defeat on a strong Blackheathens team.

We won the first seven games of the '81/82 season under Dave Beere, starting by beating a strong Gravesend team away by 15-9 with the following: Walsh; Vavrecka, Flanagan, Beere, Atkins; Davis, Costi; Collen, Woods, Penfold; Hursey, Stump; Foxon S, Attwood, Burcombe. Dave Sutton came into the side later and his twelve tries made him leading scorer, but injuries ruined the good start and we ended up with a record of P30 W17 L13 386-309. At the end of the season we played in the first Thames International Tournament, hosting Neuchatel of Switzerland and Terenure College from Dublin, who refined our interest in Guinness and Irish songs. A year later some of the club played a return in Dublin on the morning of an international. There was a second Thames Tournament, organised by Thames Poly, two years later and the club were hosts to Benfica, a team from Sweden, and Nova Scotia.

The improvement was helped by the emergence of a highly successful colts team. Credit for its organisation must go to John Hughes, a regular in the club's lower echelons but someone who was always willing to play a part in the running of the club, and to Mick Kutner, another in a long line of Charlton Park fixers, who ran what he euphemistically and optimistically termed an 'antiques business'. John taught at Thomas Tallis School and he built the team around a nucleus of boys from there, but including representatives of many of the other local schools. John's integrity and gentle persuasion allied with Mick's ability to overcome any hurdle was a perfect combination.

In 1981/82 that colts team, having played together for a couple of years, went through a season unbeaten, including among their scalps the colts of London Welsh, London Scottish, and Saracens (all away). They rounded it off in style by drawing with Westcombe Park to share the county cup and then winning the county colts sevens. Many of that team and the almost as successful one that followed two years later are now integral members of the first team, but one or two of them went straight into the side for the following year, when our run in the Kent Cup led to a semi-final meeting with Sidcup.

The captain was Roger Vavrecka, a centre from St Lukes College Exeter. Roger had played off and on for the first team for several years without really being committed, but he was an immensely strong and fiery character who would run through a brick wall when he thought it mattered, but who could be maddeningly lackadaisical at other times. There was some scepticism amongst club rank and file as to whether he would manage to break out of the latter mode.



Club captains. A motley collection from the last 30 years.

Roger set his standards out from the beginning. He expected loyalty and character. It would not have worked with the Charlton Park of five years previous, but the steady work of all the captains and club management since then, encouraged by Doug Springate in the newly created post of club chairman, had prepared us to want success. We also realised that what really got Roger going was the impression that he was being patronised, and his team talks before and during games against Old Boys sides whom he considered privileged became a cold personal assessment of the iniquities of the British social system and where he considered we stood in it. Thus the cup run was set off by a famous thirty point win over Old Colfeians when Roger delivered an oration worthy of Agincourt and everything we planned came off.

For the quarter-final we had to play Betteshanger Colliery at home. They were at the time one of the strongest teams in the county, with a particularly powerful set of backs, and we planned to try to shut down their options outside and to persuade them to kick to our forward strengths. With Doug Hursey now at his best alongside a young newcomer, Paul Lambert-Williams, in the second row, we could be confident of line-out ball, and we picked the club's hardest tackler, Nick Plank, at inside centre. Once again the plans came off and the game was won by a stroke of genius from Simeon Eagleton at fly-half, who having kicked all day, waved the ball in front of his boot and sent the cover defence heading in the wrong direction before putting Ian Collison in for the winning try.

The semi-final, played at Old Dartfordians, turned into a personal tragedy for young Simeon. After Sidcup had developed an early lead our forwards got on top in the second half and we were awarded a series of kickable penalties, downwind, all of which Simeon missed narrowly.

The final score was 19-12. That just also happened to be the year we had last appeared in the final! The team was; Hulse, Sykes, Foxon S; Hursey, Lambert-Williams; Attwood, Miller, Collison; Knight, Eagleton; Whelan, Vavrecka, Beere, Clayton; Walsh.

Even though Roger Vavrecka then moved back to the West Country we should have gone on from there to more success. A major factor in why we did not stand in a small brick hut to the side of the clubhouse:- the generator- known affectionately as 'the Jenny'. Strictly speaking there had been several over the years, but the singular female name indicated how it dominated our lives.

The first was 'obtained' in true club spirit. Barry Sykes tells how he received a phone call one evening from Terry Thompson informing him that he knew of a generator that was available and instructing Barry to meet him with his Morris Thousand van. Barry expressed concern about the weight but was assured that it was fairly light and anyway they didn't have far to go.

So they set off into the Kentish lanes seeking a remote and, as it turned out, distant farmhouse. The generator, when they found it, may have been fairly light for a generator, but it was still far too heavy for a Morris Thousand. As it sank into the back the suspension sank down to the frozen ground and the headlights elevated into the night sky. They groped their way back in pitch darkness while the lights picked out the owls in the trees and the cloud formations.

A later Jenny was liberated from the third floor of an office block somewhere in the City with the aid of a block and tackle and, this time, a large lorry. Those who went to get it were told to go straight in and take it because we were doing the company a favour, but they got the distinct impression that no-one there knew what was going on so they bluffed it out and left as quickly as possible. One of that team happened to be a member of the constabulary.

We had never been connected to mains electricity, so we relied on the Jenny to such an extent that it was able to toy with us, to lead us on merry dances and to have more say in the success of the club than any committee member. The first thing to do before any other mundane task such as getting changed could be even thought about, was to get the Jenny started. This task involved cranking a handle with a kick on it that could break your arm, and the responsibility nearly always fell on the shoulders of the captain or his delegate. There were many occasions when the first team, changed, awaited their skipper to deliver the team talk because he was swearing and cursing in the generator room, standing in several inches of oil, in near

darkness. Once going it was liable to let out clouds of foul-smelling smoke across the pitches, particularly when play was at that end, and it also perfected the trick of running out of diesel in the middle of a crowded disco. The club would then be plunged into darkness until the candle could be found and Chris Smith, Phil Thompson or his brother Terry set off into the night with a flickering torch to bleed and restart it. Many present-day ten year-olds could trace their conceptions to those sudden black-outs.

Something had to be done, but unfortunately it led to a deep schism in the club and divided the very people who had got us to this successful position. One faction proposed the building of a large new clubhouse and borrowing money. The others preferred a more cautious approach which simply involved us getting mains electricity and building changing rooms on to the end of the club. The latter group won, but this led to a great deal of hard feeling and Doug Springate, the chairman and past captain, resigned and left the club, along with Barry Sykes. I was not a member of the committee of the time and I do not wish to make any further comments on what took place, but it was a tragedy that we were unable to settle the issue amicably. Planning permission had been gained for the new building, with the help of Micky Oliver, but there is little doubt that we would have been saddling ourselves with enormous debts which could well have prevented our subsequent purchase of the ground. So the Jenny went and we experienced the luxury of being able to flick a switch if we wanted light.

Soon afterwards we built the changing rooms with the help of the Docklands Development and Dapple Builders. They cost us somewhere between one and two thousand pounds in all! We still leased the ground from the Crown Commission but Dennis Attwood, almost alone, negotiated to buy it from them for the ridiculous price of £27,500, after we had been told that our original offer of £25,000 was not enough. So we owned our ground and had extended the clubhouse, but two captains, Dave Beere and Andy Miller had passed during the upheaval. Success on the field was sadly hard to find, and we only managed to win five games in the 1984-85 season. Once again the playing had been disturbed by the politics.

X The Leagues 1986-1993

Dennis Attwood & Kent:

*Tony Penfold and Winning Kent League One:
New Players: Winning London South-East Three:
Neville Whitter: Dave Collen and Colin Wooster*

Throughout the past fifteen years or so, as the fortunes of the club waxed and waned, so our various fixtures secretaries have wrestled with the problem of providing us with a fixture list which would balance our playing standard. This became particularly difficult when we were beating everyone and we tried to forge relationships with clubs who had hitherto considered themselves of a higher standard. All too often the response was a polite but lofty, "I'm sorry, we'd like to, but our fixtures are arranged years in advance and we can't fit you in."

At the time this reaction was liable to cause irritation. We felt that we were being prevented from breaking through into the big-time by the establishment cartel. Never mind that they in turn were also trying to forge new fixtures with those above them, and being similarly thwarted. This log-jam of self-interest was not only harming the fortunes of Charlton Park, it was having a detrimental effect on the success of the England team. Just as in the junior clubs, there was nothing to fight for in senior club rugby. A bad season did not mean your club would suffer- the fixtures were set out in stone.

The RFU is often characterised as a deeply reactionary organisation, but in 1986 they committed the act that was to change the face of English club rugby, giving it in one go a vitality and excitement it had been steadily losing. At the same time players were forced to fight for their status. It was at this moment that English rugby stepped out of the doldrums. We were led to believe initially that Charlton Park would go into Kent Division 2, because the leagues would be organised on the basis of an average of the club's results in the five years of the Kent Merit tables. That we just sneaked into the First Division was largely due once again to Dennis Attwood.

Dennis had been a member of the club for seventeen years, almost all of them in a position of status, and it is no coincidence that we have expanded and gained credibility throughout that time. He has led from the front, whether on the field, in a meeting or in the bar. Teams under him were motivated by Dennis's positive, realistic approach, and his refusal to give ground to anyone on the field of play. Work was carried out because people knew that he was in charge. Songs were sung because he started them.

Dennis's rugby ability was well known to us, but it took some time to be noticed by the county. Once he had been picked, however, he soon became captain of Kent Clubs, and he led them from the front through some of their most successful years

ever. When he retired he immediately found a place on the Kent Committee open for him, so that he was in position to see where we should be.

Tony Penfold had already been captain for one year, but he was willing to buck the club trend and stand again, now that the captain no longer had to start the generator. This turned out to be an advantageous move because Tony's competitive instincts responded well to the pressures of league rugby, and he was supported by a coach in Dave Collen who had had three years to get used to the peculiar demands of an unpredictable bunch of players such as those at Charlton Park. At the beginning of that first season we would have been happy to have held our place in what we saw as a difficult league. We were helped considerably by the arrival of another school teacher at Thomas Tallis, Martin Haines, who was the fly-half we had been saying we needed since the departure of Malcolm Darbyshire. The other factor in the season was the electric speed of Neville Whitter on the wing. He had joined the club as a footballer who liked the look of rugby, and despite people who should have known better making observations about his naivety and inexperience, Neville went on to break the try scoring record every season.

At the same time, however, Doug Hursey had been lost to Blackheath. After winning five of our first six games and scraping a draw with our old rivals Park House, we found ourselves a point behind Erith at Christmas with the game between us due at the beginning of January. Tony and Dave enforced training sessions in that period when rugby players traditionally overindulge, and the 27-12 win put us in pole position. We won the Kent League Division 1 by one point and a superior points difference over Erith, scoring 266 against 57.

Another member of that side was Bright Sodje on the wing. His talent was never fully used while he was with us and he left for Blackheath, where his speed and strength brought him instant success on the end of their skilful backs. A few years later he signed for Hull-Kingston Rovers, where he continued to make the news.

Tony Penfold stayed on as captain for a third year as we more than held our own in London South-East Division 3, and then was succeeded by Martin Haines for two years. Now we began to reap the benefits of success on the field, as good class players came to join us. Notable among these were Bobby Howe, Jobber and Ian Johns, Kenny Purchase and Dave Hazleton. The club went on tour to the Algarve, where we won the tournament by beating Gibraltar in the final, the details of which are outlined in the massive tome by Kevin Williams entitled "The Battle of Loule". After two years of steady improvement under Martin Haines, Kenny Purchase led the club to the championship of London SE3 by a huge margin in 1991/92.

Our 99th season saw the club with its strongest ever set of fixtures, but we have more than coped. We have managed to restrain our social ambitions just enough to concentrate on playing, and high-class players such as Laurie Cokell and John Field have been sucked in, much to the mystification of those who believe we must have

acquired some hidden benefactor. At the end of our 99th season we finally broke through on the sevens circuit, winning tournaments at Dover and Canterbury, with vastly different teams.

Park power to promotion



Charlton Park 72 Crawley 6

CHARLTON Park clinched promotion to London League Two in the most emphatic way last Saturday. Luckless Crawley were steamrollered by the Charlton backs as they ran up the biggest score in the league this season. But the visitors pack played well and matched the home forwards. It was in the backs that the game

became a total mismatch with the home side playing some superb running rugby.

With scrum-half George Costi giving excellent service and the brothers Slater, Dave and John, orchestrating magnificent moves which Laurie Cokell, Neville Whitter and skipper Kenny Purchase supported by the marvellous Marcus Evans turned into tries to give Charlton a 22-0 half-time lead.

In the second half, the avalanche of points continued and it wasn't until Crawley were 60 points down that they hit back with a good try by

Lee McDonough, who scored in the right corner. Mervyn Hickey kicked the conversion from the touchline.

The Charlton team that rounded off a memorable day was: Evans (one try and six conversions), Whitter (four tries), Cokell (one try), John Slater, Dave Slater (one try, two conversions), Purchase (one try), Costi (two tries), Taylor, Johns (one try), Okeke, Withers, Hursey, Hazleton (two tries), White and Acott. Substitutes were Andy Jackson and Paul Lambert-Williams. Coach was Dave Collen.

Winners of London South East Three 1992

Charlton Park reaches its centenary in the strongest state it has ever been. We can be justifiably proud of all we have achieved, but we should look back with fondness and pride on those who led the club through the past. I hope that many of them are able to take part in our centenary celebrations.

What of the future? We must learn from the past. Our success has come through our virtues; hospitality, sociability, team-spirit. It has come through coaching, being willing to take responsibility for our own development both on the field and off it. Dave Collen has been the club coach for the past ten years and he epitomises those qualities. Self-effacing, gregarious, thoughtful and supportive, Dave has seen us through our most successful years. Most of our players learnt all their rugby at Charlton Park- some like Gary Withers and Neville Whitter had never played the game when they came to us and now they have represented the county.

Things have gone wrong when our heads have been turned by delusions of grandeur, when we have lost sight of ourselves as rugby players. I know it is commonly observed that the club is bigger than the individual, but Charlton Park is people. We are fortunate in those who have led but most of all we are fortunate in those we have all met, played, drunk and sung with. We are also fortunate that there have always been people behind the scenes who were never the stars on the field who have taken on the really important tasks which ensure the club is still viable and solvent, such as Colin Wooster, and they have always been as much a part of Charlton Park as any player.

I have made play of the threads that appear to tie our history together. Traditions do get passed on, like our unique songs, but we have earned what we have. Not for Charlton Park a ready supply of coached players straight out of our school, nor a rich benefactor to attract the stars. Members have joined us because they have wanted to. New registration rules introduced to control the poaching of players in the higher leagues, if applied to clubs like us, will destroy that very character and self-sufficiency built up over a hundred years.

In coming to the end of this history I am very conscious of the fact that I have scarcely mentioned many people who have played a vital part in the success of the club; tea ladies, committee members, the lower teams, referees and countless others. I have also made the deliberate decision not to say too much about the last five years in the hope you will still be my friends when you have read this book. We have arrived at our centenary in good health.

Let's drink to the next hundred!