



Milestones from the 150 Years of History of the Oldest Independent Rugby Club in the World

The First Blackheath Football Club Team, 1862



BLACKHEATH
1858 **RUGBY**

The Jubilee Dinner was held on 24th February 1912 at the Hotel Cecil, on the Embankment (the site now occupied by the Shell Mex building). It was to celebrate 50 years of the Club's name being 'Blackheath F.C'. Alex Sinclair, one of the founders, was present, as were several players from the early years.



A Living Tradition that reaches to the very Heart of the Game

The early history of Blackheath Football Club is so much part of the development of Rugby Football that it is virtually an early history of the sport itself.

It is appropriate that the home of the first of the great independent rugby clubs should be in Blackheath in the south east of England. Its ground, on the Roman road from Dover to London, is part of the ancient borough of Greenwich and lies 8 miles from the centre of England's capital city. Blackheath is steeped in the history of England. It is remarkable that no less than four separate clubs, each the first independent club in the four very different sports of Golf, Hockey, Athletics and Rugby Football, were founded in or near Blackheath. All are still in existence and all are still independent.

Roman Origins

It is believed that the Romans originally played a game resembling football and that this was carried on after they had left Britain. The popularity of the sport grew considerably over the years but remained in forms barely recognisable by modern standards - contests between towns, villages and districts - unruly, passionate encounters without too many rules, let alone standard ones.

William Webb Ellis

In 1823, legend has it, the now famous William Webb Ellis picked up the ball and ran with it "with a fine disregard for the rules" during a football game at Rugby School and, in so doing, effectively founded the "carrying" game of Rugby Football.

Blackheath Proprietary School

In 1831 the Blackheath Proprietary School opened on the corner of Lee Terrace and Blackheath Village. Its purpose was to educate the boys of the emerging middle classes. Today it is the site of Selwyn Court, a block of flats named after one of the school's eminent headmasters. Pupils started playing football to the Rugby School rules in about 1856. By 1858, old boys from the school were playing rugby on the nearby heath with their friends and founded the Blackheath Football Club.



Blackheath Proprietary School circa 1845

The Foundation Year

Although there has been controversy over the actual year of foundation, Blackheath is recognised by the chroniclers as the oldest of all independent rugby football clubs. There is no doubt that in 1858 old boys of the school played rugby on the heath and in 1860 attempted to form an Old Boys' side called Old Blackheathens. Due to lack of numbers, non-Proprietary School players were always required to make up the team, and so in 1862 the old boys changed its name to Blackheath F.C. On February 12th 1912 a dinner was held to celebrate the 50th anniversary of this event (see opposite).

The Founders



William Burnett
The first Captain



Alex Sinclair



John C. Sinclair



R.E. Gower

"Come on the Club"

In the years immediately following the Club's formation, the game was played mainly by teams with closed membership, such as schools, colleges and teaching hospitals. This caused Blackheath F.C. to become known simply as "the Club" to distinguish it from the various institutions against which it played. The practice continues to this day, with supporters still cheering for "the Club" rather than "Blackheath."

Blackheath Football Club and the formation of the Football Association

Until 1863 the game of football had been a single undivided sport. However, there was no standard set of rules and captains had to agree which rules to play before a game could start. A meeting of clubs was called at the Freemasons' Tavern in London. The aim was to "establish a code of rules for the regulation of the game of football." Eleven clubs attended and formed "The Football Association".

Blackheath was represented by Francis Maule Campbell, who was elected Treasurer of the Association. The Club expected The Football Association to adopt Rugby School rules, but when it was proposed to



Francis Maule Campbell 1862

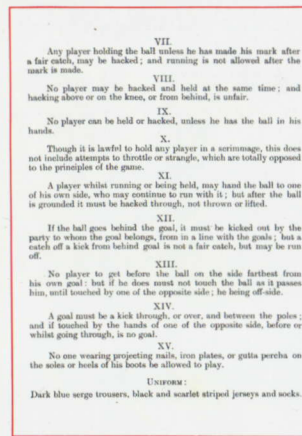
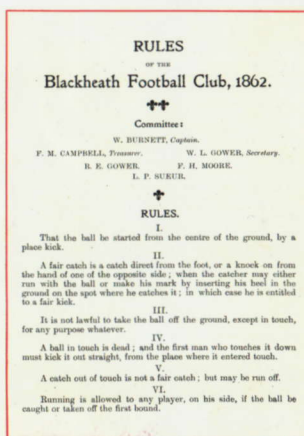
adopt the Cambridge rules, which precluded carrying the ball and "hacking," Campbell objected strongly and withdrew Blackheath from the Association on December 8th 1863.

In this way the great divide between soccer and rugby took place and Blackheath F.C. carried on playing to its own rules, which had been printed in 1862. The soccer clubs developed in their own way and two very different games emerged.

The Club continued to play to its own set of rules based on the Rugby code until the formation of The Rugby Football Union. Although Blackheath retained "hacking" for three years after the founding of The Football Association, it was finally discontinued in December 1866 when a game against Richmond had to be abandoned.



Watercolour by Nixon of the Freemasons Tavern C1800



The Rugby Football Union



By now it was becoming apparent that there was a need to agree a common set of rules for the game of Rugby Football. A letter dated December 24th 1870, signed by B.H. Burns of Blackheath and E.H. Ash of Richmond, was sent to the press which argued for an agreed set of rules. It was no surprise, therefore, to find that Blackheath was one of the twenty one

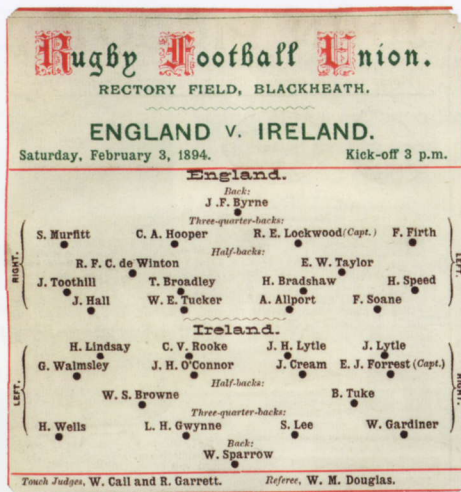
clubs attending the first meeting to form a Rugby Football Union at the Pall Mall Restaurant on January 26th 1871. After the meeting the newly-elected President, A. Rutter, E.C. Holmes and L.J. Maton, a group of lawyers, were sent away to draft the "laws" of the game. Of the twenty one clubs which met on that day, eight were still surviving 100 years later. Those eight held a banquet to celebrate their existence in 1971. Over the years Blackheath have provided 17 Presidents of the R.F.U. Fred and Lennard Stokes of Blackheath are the only brothers to have held this office.

Pioneers of International Rugby



Club members have earned a record number of caps. Some 240 players of Blackheath F.C. have represented their country - more than any other club until the professional rugby era.

International rugby was played at Blackheath well before the establishment of England's national ground at Twickenham in 1910. All the home countries played there, together with Australia and the New Zealand Maoris. Blackheath organised the first international match. The leading Scottish clubs issued a challenge for a 20-a-side game against England under the Rugby School Rules, and it was the Club which accepted the challenge. The game took place in Edinburgh on 27th March 1871 and England lost by the only goal. The captain of this first ever English international side was Frederick Stokes of Blackheath and there were three other Blackheath players in the team. Although international players are now selected from the fully professional "Premiership," the creation of the England Counties XV has allowed players from National Divisions One and Two to achieve international honours and the Rectory Field is again able to host international rugby fixtures.



The England team which played Scotland in 1871



England v Ireland at the Rectory Field
March 15 1890

The Princess of Wales Public House in the 1970s



Blackheath first played their matches on the open heath opposite the Princess of Wales pub, which served as both headquarters and changing rooms. It was often the practice in those days for spectators to invade the pitch and, during a very competitive game against Richmond in 1877, the match had to be abandoned when a number of spectators, as well as players, were injured. Shortly after this the Club moved to a private ground called Richardson's Field. Despite moving grounds, Blackheath continued to use the pub until 1886 even though it meant that players had to walk a mile or so to the ground. After the match they walked back to the pub where a dozen tin basins were provided for washing. The Blackheath v Richmond fixture is the oldest continuing meeting of two rugby clubs in the world. This was first played on January 2nd 1864.

A home of their own - Richardson's Field

Members of the Richardson family are still associated with Blackheath F.C. today. The family had close ties with the Proprietary School and the Club so it was understandable that Mr Richardson should allow his field to be rented for games. The ground was on the north side of the Old Dover Road approximately where the A102 road is today. It was on this pitch that England first met Wales in February 1881. England won by seven goals, one drop goal and six tries to nil. Four Blackheath players were in the side which was captained by Frederick Stokes. Blackheath's first Welsh club fixture against Newport was played in November in 1879, and is the oldest Anglo Welsh fixture. The Oxford v Cambridge Varsity match was also played here and continued to be played on the new ground at the Rectory Field until it moved to the Queen's Club in 1887.

BLACKHEATH FOOTBALL CLUB

ENGLAND INTERNATIONALS
1871-1999

1871 R. BURNS C. CHURTON G. W. SHERRARD F. STOKES	1882 A. L. PORT G. HERRARD W. B. THOMSON	1912 M. MAGUIRE W. N. KENDALL J. A. PYM
1872 T. DARTON	1883 R. F. C. DE WINTON J. C. LOMES H. MARSHALL R. M. DOD	1913 A. E. KITCHEN A. L. KITCHEN H. MARSHALL
1873 H. MARSH M. W. MARSHALL	1884 R. E. TUCKER	1914 R. L. PILLMAN P. L. A. STONE A. V. EYLES J. D. HATTON
1874 E. C. FRASER A. W. PEARSON L. STOKES	1885 E. M. BAKER G. B. BERRY R. H. S. CATELL J. H. C. FEGAN H. H. HUNTER F. MITCHELL	1915 A. E. KITCHEN S. C. LOMES S. D. LOMES S. W. HARRIS F. W. HARRIS F. J. S. WERNHAM
1875 W. H. HUNTER W. H. HUNTER W. H. HUNTER	1886 E. F. FOKES E. F. FOKES E. F. FOKES	1916 A. E. KITCHEN S. C. LOMES S. D. LOMES S. W. HARRIS F. W. HARRIS F. J. S. WERNHAM
1876 H. MARSH M. W. MARSHALL	1887 D. C. ROBINSON	1917 A. E. KITCHEN S. C. LOMES S. D. LOMES S. W. HARRIS F. W. HARRIS F. J. S. WERNHAM
1877 H. MARSH M. W. MARSHALL	1888 D. C. ROBINSON	1918 A. E. KITCHEN S. C. LOMES S. D. LOMES S. W. HARRIS F. W. HARRIS F. J. S. WERNHAM
1878 H. MARSH M. W. MARSHALL	1889 D. C. ROBINSON	1919 A. E. KITCHEN S. C. LOMES S. D. LOMES S. W. HARRIS F. W. HARRIS F. J. S. WERNHAM
1879 H. MARSH M. W. MARSHALL	1890 D. C. ROBINSON	1920 A. E. KITCHEN S. C. LOMES S. D. LOMES S. W. HARRIS F. W. HARRIS F. J. S. WERNHAM
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1931 H. MARSH M. W. MARSHALL	1942 D. C. ROBINSON	1972 A. E. KITCHEN S. C. LOMES S. D. LOMES S. W. HARRIS F. W. HARRIS F. J. S. WERNHAM
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1937 H. MARSH M. W. MARSHALL	1948 D. C. ROBINSON	1978 A. E. KITCHEN S. C. LOMES S. D. LOMES S. W. HARRIS F. W. HARRIS F. J. S. WERNHAM
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1940 H. MARSH M. W. MARSHALL	1951 D. C. ROBINSON	1981 A. E. KITCHEN S. C. LOMES S. D. LOMES S. W. HARRIS F. W. HARRIS F. J. S. WERNHAM
1941 H. MARSH M. W. MARSHALL	1952 D. C. ROBINSON	1982 A. E. KITCHEN S. C. LOMES S. D. LOMES S. W. HARRIS F. W. HARRIS F. J. S. WERNHAM
1942 H. MARSH M. W. MARSHALL	1953 D. C. ROBINSON	1983 A. E. KITCHEN S. C. LOMES S. D. LOMES S. W. HARRIS F. W. HARRIS F. J. S. WERNHAM
1943 H. MARSH M. W. MARSHALL	1954 D. C. ROBINSON	1984 A. E. KITCHEN S. C. LOMES S. D. LOMES S. W. HARRIS F. W. HARRIS F. J. S. WERNHAM
1944 H. MARSH M. W. MARSHALL	1955 D. C. ROBINSON	1985 A. E. KITCHEN S. C. LOMES S. D. LOMES S. W. HARRIS F. W. HARRIS F. J. S. WERNHAM
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1947 H. MARSH M. W. MARSHALL	1958 D. C. ROBINSON	1988 A. E. KITCHEN S. C. LOMES S. D. LOMES S. W. HARRIS F. W. HARRIS F. J. S. WERNHAM
1948 H. MARSH M. W. MARSHALL	1959 D. C. ROBINSON	1989 A. E. KITCHEN S. C. LOMES S. D. LOMES S. W. HARRIS F. W. HARRIS F. J. S. WERNHAM
1949 H. MARSH M. W. MARSHALL	1960 D. C. ROBINSON	1990 A. E. KITCHEN S. C. LOMES S. D. LOMES S. W. HARRIS F. W. HARRIS F. J. S. WERNHAM
1950 H. MARSH M. W. MARSHALL	1961 D. C. ROBINSON	1991 A. E. KITCHEN S. C. LOMES S. D. LOMES S. W. HARRIS F. W. HARRIS F. J. S. WERNHAM
1951 H. MARSH M. W. MARSHALL	1962 D. C. ROBINSON	1992 A. E. KITCHEN S. C. LOMES S. D. LOMES S. W. HARRIS F. W. HARRIS F. J. S. WERNHAM
1952 H. MARSH M. W. MARSHALL	1963 D. C. ROBINSON	1993 A. E. KITCHEN S. C. LOMES S. D. LOMES S. W. HARRIS F. W. HARRIS F. J. S. WERNHAM
1953 H. MARSH M. W. MARSHALL	1964 D. C. ROBINSON	1994 A. E. KITCHEN S. C. LOMES S. D. LOMES S. W. HARRIS F. W. HARRIS F. J. S. WERNHAM
1954 H. MARSH M. W. MARSHALL	1965 D. C. ROBINSON	1995 A. E. KITCHEN S. C. LOMES S. D. LOMES S. W. HARRIS F. W. HARRIS F. J. S. WERNHAM
1955 H. MARSH M. W. MARSHALL	1966 D. C. ROBINSON	1996 A. E. KITCHEN S. C. LOMES S. D. LOMES S. W. HARRIS F. W. HARRIS F. J. S. WERNHAM
1956 H. MARSH M. W. MARSHALL	1967 D. C. ROBINSON	1997 A. E. KITCHEN S. C. LOMES S. D. LOMES S. W. HARRIS F. W. HARRIS F. J. S. WERNHAM
1957 H. MARSH M. W. MARSHALL	1968 D. C. ROBINSON	1998 A. E. KITCHEN S. C. LOMES S. D. LOMES S. W. HARRIS F. W. HARRIS F. J. S. WERNHAM
1958 H. MARSH M. W. MARSHALL	1969 D. C. ROBINSON	1999 A. E. KITCHEN S. C. LOMES S. D. LOMES S. W. HARRIS F. W. HARRIS F. J. S. WERNHAM



The Blackheath team of 1880-81



Since 1883, the Rectory Field in South East London has been the home of Blackheath F.C. The main pavilion was built in 1886 and the ground has seen several changes over the years. The building accommodating the Club offices and Barbarians Bar was erected in 1996. Below is a view of the Rectory Field taken during the summer of 2002.



The Rectory Field

In the winter of 1882/83 Richardson's Field was sold and so the Club had to look for a new ground. Lennard Stokes knew the Rev. Swainson of St. Luke's Church in Charlton and asked him if the Club could play on the field next to the rectory in Charlton Road. The Club's first opponents at the new ground, just as they had been at Richardson's Field, were Guy's Hospital in an opening match played on Wednesday 17th January 1883.

The Blackheath Cricket, Football & Lawn Tennis Company

In 1884 Morden Cricket Club was unable to maintain a wicket on the heath and asked if they could join the Football Club at the Rectory Field. The Maryon-Wilson family, who owned the field rented by the church, offered a 21 year lease on the ground providing a company was formed to maintain the facilities. The Blackheath Cricket, Football and Lawn Tennis Company Ltd. was inaugurated in 1885 to do just that. The Company was able to purchase the ground and the adjacent 'Clarke's Field' in 1921. The stand, which had suffered fire damage, was then replaced with a modern one, seating 6,000, however, damage sustained during the second World War necessitated it being replaced with the present one in the early 1970s. At this time part of the land had to be sold for an extension to the Blackheath Bluecoat School. The company still runs the Rectory Field today.



The stand built in 1970

The Street Family

The Street family looked after the Rectory Field from 1886 until 1959 when Bert Street retired. The photo below was taken in front of the pavilion in 1905 and shows (left) Charlie Street (1887-1965), his son Len (1882-1918), who was killed in WW1, George, the first groundsman (1854-1928), his wife Louisa (b.1854), daughters Nellie (b.1874) and Violet (1896-1984), who is seated at the front.



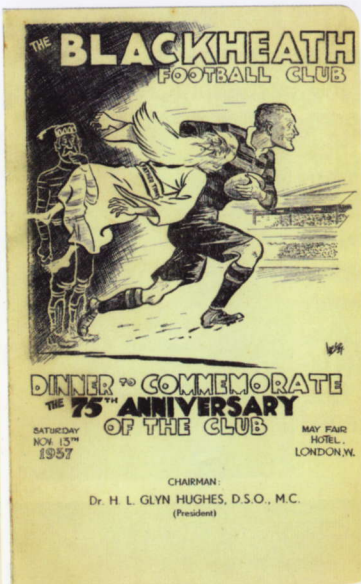
Bert (b.1920), son of Charlie, was the last groundsman in the family line.



Part of the main bar in the clubhouse showing some of the Club's memorabilia.

The Inter-War Years

Club 1st XV 1919-20, captained C.H. Pillman



Two hundred and sixty one people attended this dinner to celebrate 75 years of Blackheath F.C. Mr. J. Magaw, captain of Richmond, proposed a toast to "the Club."



On November 20th 1926, the Club were greatly honoured by the visit to the Rectory Field of H.R.H. the Prince of Wales on the occasion of Blackheath's match against the New Zealand Maoris. Major Begbie, Hon. Sec. of the Club, introduced the players to His Royal Highness. Before the game, the Maoris did their traditional 'haka' and it seemed to bring them success. They won by 9 pts. to 5.

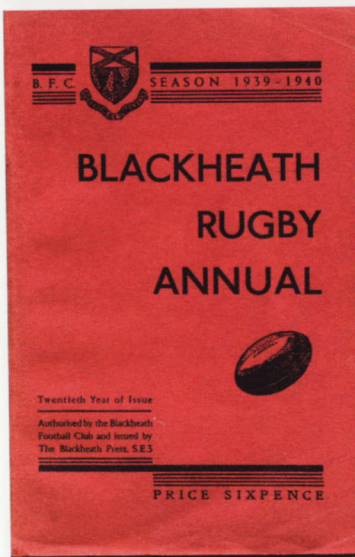
Rugby was one of the sports played in the 1924 Olympic Games. Only three nations took part in the competition; the U.S.A., represented mainly by students from California, along with France and Romania. The event took place between May 11th and 18th at the Stade Colombes in Paris. The American team made a short tour of England prior to the Games where they beat Devonport but lost to Blackheath & Harlequins. At the Olympics they beat Romania 37 - 0 and France 17 - 3 to win the tournament.

Blackheath v American Olympic

Played at Old Merchant Taylors School War Memorial ground Teddington
Wednesday April 23, 1924



Blackheath 13 America Olympic 9
Scorers: For Blackheath - L.C. Payne 2 tries, T. Lawton 1 penalty, 2 conversions. For Olympic - C. Slater 2 tries, N. Slater 1 try.
Back: A.F. Hamilton-Smythe, W. Rogers (AO), J.H.F. Edmiston, N. Slater (AO), R.H. Charsley, J. Patrick (AO)
Standing: S.W. Tackley, A.C. Valentine (AO), C.P. Lungle, A. Williams (AO), R.L. Raymond, N. Cleveland (AO), J.C. Collett, G. Dixon (AO), G.E.B. Abell, L.C. Payne.
Sitting: W. Muldon (AO), R. Hyland (AO), L.W. Haslett, C. Slater (Captain AO), A.B. Blake (Captain), D. de Groot (AO), R.G. Hopkins, P. Cunningham (AO), A.T. Lawton.
Front: A. Shacksnovis, C. Doe (AO), A.P. Guthrie, E. Graff (AO), C. Manili (AO)



These were first introduced by Col. W.S.D. Craven and were published from 1919/20 until 1939/40 when the outbreak of the Second World War curtailed rugby operations.

Post World War Two Rebuilding

After the Second World War, Rugby Football resumed, Blackheath having to combine with old friends and rivals Richmond because the Rectory Field was not available. The ground had been used as an anti-aircraft barrage balloon site, part of the defences of London. It had also suffered bomb damage. The first post-war game, on September 22nd 1945, saw some of Blackheath's players in the unfamiliar Richmond strip, with the opening game against Northampton being played at Richmond.



The cost of refurbishing the ground was so great that there were doubts that it would be possible to continue at the Rectory Field. However, with help from the R.F.U., the Club was able to return to Blackheath with a match against Guy's Hospital on 28th September 1946. The

FIXTURE LIST 1945-46.			TEAMS.	
			Richmond & Blackheath (Colours - Red, Black and Old Gold)	Northampton (Colours - Black, Green and Gold)
1. 1st Sep.	1st	1st	1 P. B. C. MOORE	1 G. ADAMS
2. 1st Sep.	2nd	2nd	2 J. A. MORGAN	2 R. D. PELL
3. 1st Sep.	3rd	3rd	3 R. FISHER	3 L. LONGLAND
4. 1st Sep.	4th	4th	4 A. L. WARR	4 L. CANNELL
5. 1st Sep.	5th	5th	5 G. A. RICHMOND	5 W. T. WEIGHT
6. 1st Sep.	6th	6th	6 D. J. PIPER	6 J. H. PELL
7. 1st Sep.	7th	7th	7 J. PIERSON	7 G. STIMPSON
8. 1st Sep.	8th	8th	8 G. J. RICHARDSON	8 A. P. BELL (Capt.)
9. 1st Sep.	9th	9th	9 G. A. SMITH	9 W. R. HAMP
10. 1st Sep.	10th	10th	10 R. DECHAM-ALLEN	10 D. F. WHITE
11. 1st Sep.	11th	11th	11 C. D. LABOURNE (Capt.)	11 P. JEFFCOTE
12. 1st Sep.	12th	12th	12 J. W. V. JENNENS	12 P. BRADBURY
13. 1st Sep.	13th	13th	13 G. A. PETERS	13 B. J. D. HAZEL
14. 1st Sep.	14th	14th	14 R. A. DETHEL	14 W. J. WILLIAMS
15. 1st Sep.	15th	15th	15 J. W. E. HARE	15 S. KITCHENER
16. 1st Sep.	16th	16th	16 J. W. E. HARE	16 S. KITCHENER
17. 1st Sep.	17th	17th	17 J. W. E. HARE	17 S. KITCHENER
18. 1st Sep.	18th	18th	18 J. W. E. HARE	18 S. KITCHENER
19. 1st Sep.	19th	19th	19 J. W. E. HARE	19 S. KITCHENER
20. 1st Sep.	20th	20th	20 J. W. E. HARE	20 S. KITCHENER
21. 1st Sep.	21st	21st	21 J. W. E. HARE	21 S. KITCHENER
22. 1st Sep.	22nd	22nd	22 J. W. E. HARE	22 S. KITCHENER
23. 1st Sep.	23rd	23rd	23 J. W. E. HARE	23 S. KITCHENER
24. 1st Sep.	24th	24th	24 J. W. E. HARE	24 S. KITCHENER
25. 1st Sep.	25th	25th	25 J. W. E. HARE	25 S. KITCHENER
26. 1st Sep.	26th	26th	26 J. W. E. HARE	26 S. KITCHENER
27. 1st Sep.	27th	27th	27 J. W. E. HARE	27 S. KITCHENER
28. 1st Sep.	28th	28th	28 J. W. E. HARE	28 S. KITCHENER
29. 1st Sep.	29th	29th	29 J. W. E. HARE	29 S. KITCHENER
30. 1st Sep.	30th	30th	30 J. W. E. HARE	30 S. KITCHENER

After the war many heroes returned to the game. The team above included David Bethel who had taken part in "The Great Escape" where 76 Allied airmen escaped. On recapture, 50 of them were shot.

side was led by J.G.W. Davies, continuing where he had left off. He had captained the side in the final season before the war. The Rectory Field was now being shared with the London Irish club. The idea was to provide first class rugby at the Rectory Field each week, an arrangement which lasted until 1958 when London Irish moved to Sunbury.

The Club Emblem

The Club originally used as their badge that of the Blackheath Proprietary School. It was an unregistered assemblage of the coat of arms of Brandram, Cator and the See of Rochester, all of which were connected to the school. In planning for the 1958-59 centenary season, it was decided that the Club should have its own emblem. A new design was drawn by Monica Dunn, who was an artist and also the wife of E.P. Dunn, captain of Blackheath in 1951-52. It is based on a heather with 7, 3 and 5 bells, and was first used on stationery. It first appeared on Club shirts in the 1972-73 season. The design was re-modelled for the 2004-05 season to reflect a new, more modern image for Blackheath Rugby.



BLACKHEATH
RUGBY



The poster and action from the main Festival of Britain Celebration game in 1951



On March 4th 1959, Blackheath played a Centenary Season match against the Barbarians at the White City Stadium. The Baa Baas' team contained thirteen international players to the Club's one. In spite of that, the Club lost by a respectable score of 21pts. to 8.



The Club v Milan

Blackheath F.C. played its first game against an Italian side on November 23rd 1957. Milli Vitale, an Italian actress, kicked off the match which the Club eventually won by 27pts. to 6. She is seen above flanked by the two captains, Harbini of Milan, and John Williamson of the Club. In the following season, 1958-59, the Club celebrated 100 years of rugby at Blackheath.



Blackheath followed up a victory in the Gala Border Sevens Tournament in 1957 by winning the Russell Cargill Trophy in the Middlesex Sevens at Twickenham in 1958. The team, above, skippered by John Williamson, beat Saracens 16 pts. to 3 in the Final.

The Premiership Dream

An open meeting of Club members on 25th March 1996 endorsed a proposal to amend the Club's constitution to form a professional Rugby Club at Blackheath. This was ratified at the A.G.M. in June that year. The first captain of the professional Blackheath Football Club was John Gallagher in the 1996/97 season. He was a local boy who had moved to New Zealand and become a full-back for the "All Blacks." The Club's newsletter in spring 1998 announced, "The Birth of the Blues". Blackheath and

the Auckland Blues of New Zealand were going to join forces to produce a rugby environment that functioned all year round. Executives from Auckland arrived and were established in the new Club Office, built at the Rectory Field during the summer of 1996. The project, however, ran into trouble when concerns arose not only over strife within English rugby and its Premiership clubs, but also over the currency exchange rate because of the strengthening of the pound. The squabbling between the RFU and the top English clubs caused the New Zealand business consortium backing the scheme to withdraw. Black-

heath immediately introduced a share issue to raise £1,000,000, which was the minimum level of funding required, but this failed by the narrowest of margins because of time constraints. This and the sudden loss of the financial support of Frank McCarthy, who died in 1999, ended any immediate hopes of Premiership Rugby at the Rectory Field. At an E.G.M in January 2000, Club members voted to return to being a "one-club Club," agreeing that it should be underpinned by sustainable financial development, and that it should play at the highest level possible within those constraints.

This was a hard learning curve but one that Blackheath survived, unlike a number of other well-established clubs who no longer rank in the top flight of English rugby.



All Blacks John Gallagher, centre, John Schuster, left, and Samoan International John Clarke Became Blackheath stars briefly.



This photograph by the Club's photographer, Jack Kay, has become an icon of Blackheath's venture into professional rugby. In August 1995, the door to full-scale professional rugby was opened by an International Board ruling, but it was not until the 1996/97 season that most clubs were able to take advantage. Matches between Richmond and Blackheath have been played since 2nd January 1864. It is the oldest 1st XV club fixture still played anywhere in the world. The above match, played in October 1996, was the first occasion on which the two clubs had met in the new professional era. Richmond, backed by a millionaire, had a host of stars to call upon. Here Welsh International Scott Quinnell is brought down by Mick Harris and Mark Hanslip with Rob McCorduck in attendance. Richmond's success was short-lived and the club went into receivership when financial backing was withdrawn. Fortunately, Richmond's club members were able to preserve both the club and its name and so games between the 1st XV's of Blackheath and Richmond still take place every season.

Frank McCarthy, 1950-1999

Affectionately known as 'Big Frank' or 'Frank the Bank', he was an ex-player and Chairman of Blackheath F.C. Frank's untimely death in 1999 necessitated the restructuring of the Club's finances and administration. In January 2000, a new team of dedicated former players was installed, including Frank's brother Pat. The aim was to rebuild the Club's fortunes and get the 1st XV back as a major force in the National Leagues.



The Auckland Team

Left, Graham Henry, Auckland Coach; Terry Hall, Blackheath referee; John Baird from Auckland, acting as Blackheath Chief Executive; John Gallagher, Blackheath 1st XV Captain; Steve McHardy, Auckland Development Officer. The occasion was the Club's under-14s Sportsman's Dinner in November 1997 at the Trafalgar Tavern in Greenwich.

A New Millenium - Pain and Progress to Produce a Vigorous Modern Rugby Club

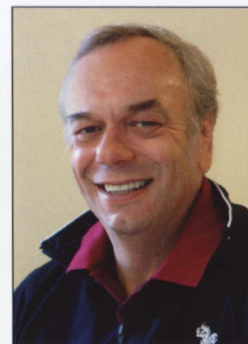
By the start of the new millennium, the English Rugby Premiership consisted entirely of professional Rugby Clubs, many of which were owned by millionaire entrepreneurs. Blackheath's experience of professionalism had split the Club into two parts, the Limited Company running the 1st squad, and Blackheath F.C., looking after the amateur section, with little contact between the two. These divisions, as well as poor results for the 1st XV, brought morale within both sections of the Club to a low level. A choice had to be made, either to sell the Club to finance an attempt to achieve Premiership status, or to remain a members' club. A decision in favour of the latter was taken at an E.G.M in January 2000, leaving the new Club President, Sir Hal Miller, with the difficult job of healing the wounds.

"A One-club Club"

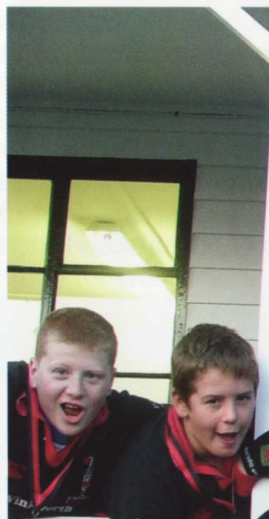
The new aim was to play at the highest level that could be achieved within sustainable financial limits. The business side and 1st XV squad would be run by Blackheath Rugby Ltd, a company that had replaced the liquidated one. This would carry on alongside Blackheath Football Club, the amateur section. The 2000/01 season started with a vastly changed and restructured administration. Important positions were filled by former players who had the Club's interest at heart. A new arrangement was created which gave every section, from Minis to Women's Rugby, representation at Executive Committee level. Sir Hal introduced the concept of a "one-club Club," where all sections worked together for mutual support. A direct path was created whereby a child who joined the Club as an under-7 Minis player could progress through the Junior, Youth and Development sides, into the 1st XV squad, subject only to fitness and playing ability. Toby Booth captained the 1st XV for the second time (the first had been in 1994/95) and, with former Blackheath captain Chris Kibble as Head Coach, team spirit began to return and, with it, results on the field. Blackheath had gone through a chastening period and survived. In the 2003/04 season Sir Hal was able to pass on a rejuvenated Club to the incoming President Barry Nealon, another ex-captain of Blackheath (1973-75). Barry continued the work of development to build the Club into its strongest position for many years.



Sir Hal Miller
Club President
1999 - 2003



Barry Nealon
Club President
2003 - 2008



Top: Action from the Family Fun day, an event which brings all sections of the Club together. This event is held each season at a 1st XV home game. **Above:** Former England International Mickey Skinner presented the awards at the 1st Blackheath Mini Rugby Festival, which took place at Eltham College on November 25th 2007. Over 1,000 children participated, their age groups ranging from under-7 to under-12. Ten rugby clubs from the South East were involved.

Building for the Future

The 2001/02 season was a turning point in the Club's fortunes, with a number of initiatives being introduced. Blackheath took part in youth and community projects, specifically in the voluntary sector, with enterprises such as Lewisham Sport Action Zone. This provided a positive sporting experience for children from socially and economically deprived backgrounds. "Sport in the Park" was introduced as well as "Tag Rugby on the Heath" and "Sessions for Schools," all administered by 1st XV scrum half and Director of Youth and Development, Mark Percival. A team of Rugby Development Officers from Blackheath worked in local primary, junior and secondary schools across five London Boroughs and throughout Kent. Blackheath coaches also provide the rugby element in the curriculum of the successful London Leisure College, part of the Greenwich Community College umbrella. A Schools' Invitational Floodlit Cup was established to allow schools to take part in a competitive tournament at the Rectory Field. In this season a shirt sponsor, Electricity Direct, was attracted, giving a boost to the Club's finances.



The successful London Leisure College squad which reached the Daily Mail National Vase Final at Twickenham in March 2006.



Certificates confirming that Blackheath F.C. is a safe place for players of all ages to learn the game and develop their playing skills were presented in 2005.

A Modern Constitution

During the 2005/06 season Club members voted to become an Industrial Provident Society, creating Blackheath Football Club Ltd. This gave members the benefit of member-ownership, coupled with the legal protection of limited liability. In the 2007/08 season, Blackheath also became a Community Amateur Sports Club (C.A.S.C.) to give the Club the ability to raise funds in a tax-deductible manner.



The Club at Well Hall

By the 2007/08 season, more than 20 teams were representing Blackheath F.C. As well as the 1st, 2nd and Development XVs, there were teams from the Men's, Mini, Junior, Youth and Women's sections. The Rectory Field's one 1st XV pitch and smaller second pitch were proving inadequate for the needs of the rest of the Club. Teams were playing home games at a variety of locations, all of which had to be paid for. A com-



Well Hall provides a large playing and training facility for all sections of the Club to enjoy

mittee was formed to secure a ground large enough to contain the various sections and to provide an income to support the venture. In August 2007, Blackheath F.C. leased, for a period of 25 years, the University of Greenwich sports ground (formerly the Thames Polytechnic sports ground) at Well Hall, Eltham. This was to provide 5 pitches, an all-weather pitch, and, importantly, a clubhouse with a large room and bar facilities, all of which could be used by members as well as being available for outside hire. Greenwich University Rugby still has access to the ground and can also benefit from the Club's coaching team. Askeans R.F.C., who had been given a home at the Rectory Field, were also able to move to the new ground. The Rectory Field remains the home for the 1st XV squad and all important matches continue to be played there. The Club's second home at Well Hall now provides a space for year-round activities not always possible at the Rectory Field because of cricket in the summer months.

Blackheath Women's Rugby Football

Blackheath Women's Rugby Club started life as the Bromley Thunderbirds in 1985. It was founded by Kathryn Hennessy and Janet Wood. In 1988, the Women's Rugby Football Union (W.R.F.U.) set up a league system and the Thunderbirds played in the First Division. In 1989 they won the London Sunday Rugby Festival and in the following season reached the semi-final of the National Challenge Cup. At the start of the 1991/92 season, they joined Blackheath F.C. at the Rectory Field, changing their name to Blackheath



The victorious team which won promotion to the National Championship South East 1 at the end of the 2006/07 season.



The 2003/04 season started with a successful tour to Canada and the U.S.A. Here the team is at the home of Ottawa Irish in Canada.

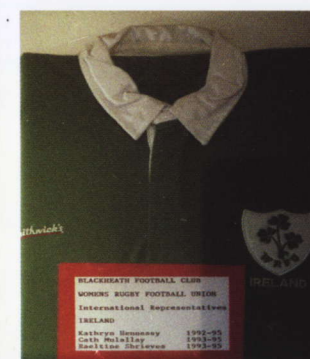
Women's Rugby Club. The team was captained by Maxine Edwards, who later went on to captain the England Women's national team, winning 45 caps. Maxine's sister Jacquie also won English international honours, scoring the winning try for England at the 1994 Women's World Cup final in Scotland. Six Blackheath players took part in that tournament. Since then Blackheath have become established as one of the premier women's teams in the South East. Like all rugby clubs, they enjoy both touring and hosting touring sides. They have made many friends with clubs overseas which they have either visited or entertained. Women's rugby is now an integral part of the Blackheath Club and they are endeavouring to work in the community to progress youth rugby for women.



Maxine Edwards

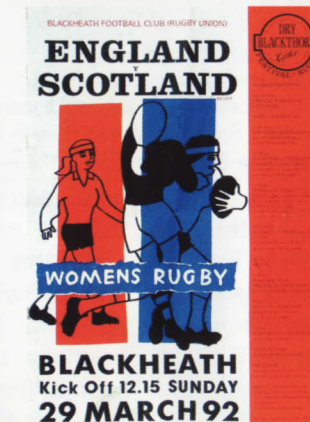


In 1995, members of Blackheath Women's Rugby modelled a working wardrobe for the summer season. The article and photographs were published in the May edition of 'Marie Claire.' Stars of the show were; from the left (seated), Sophie Duig; (standing) Kathryn Hennessy, Maxine Edwards, Carlyne Ansell, Jane Oliver, Sandra Soler-Gomez, Jacquie Edwards (sitting) and Caz Zapatero.



Women's international rugby jerseys are proudly displayed in the clubhouse alongside the those of the men.

First Womens International: England v Scotland



On Sunday 29th March 1992, the first women's international fixture, between England and Scotland, took place on Blackheath F.C.'s original ground on the heath, opposite the Princess of Wales Pub. The game was held to celebrate the first-ever men's international match played between Scotland and England. The English team was organised by Blackheath members and captained by the Club's Frederick Stokes. The match was played at Raeburn Place in Edinburgh on 27th March 1871. Scotland won by 1G, 1T to 1T.

The poster and programme cover was designed by the artist, designer and Club member, Eddie Pond. On the same day, commemorative plaques were unveiled at the pub by Sir Brian Jenkins C.B.E., then Lord Mayor of London, and Mickey Skinner, England World Cup International and Blackheath Club Captain, along with Welsh International Cliff Morgan.

Touring and Tourist



This original sketch of the Frankfurt match is contained in one of the Blackheath scrapbooks. It was painted by a young Sydney Weeks (1878-1949), the well-known cartoonist. The Club won 29-0.

Blackheath have always enjoyed touring and entertaining touring sides. On 20th September 1894, Frankfurt was the first German side to visit Blackheath. In the following April, the Club visited Germany, playing both Frankfurt and Cannstadt, as well as successfully taking part in an athletics tournament. It seems that the experience was so enjoyable that Frankfurt adopted the Club's colours of red and black shirts. In 1993, Blackheath was the first British club to visit a South African township at the end of apartheid and the lifting of the sporting ban. The Club played a match against Zwide United and provided a coaching session for youngsters from the township. Zwide United became another club to adopt the Blackheath colours.

The Sherlock Holmes Connection

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's fictional character, Dr John Watson M.D., the companion of Sherlock Holmes, played rugby for Blackheath Football Club.* During the period in which Watson would have been playing, the Club held its matches on the heath,

almost certainly under the captaincy of Lennard Stokes, who won twelve international caps, and interestingly, like Watson, was a Doctor of Medicine.** There is no suggestion that Sherlock Holmes ever played the game, but he would certainly have been interested in uncovering the identity of "Jack the Ripper", mass murderer, who it was rumoured, was also a member of Blackheath F.C.

Dr Lennard Stokes looks remarkably similar to the film and TV image of Dr Watson.

**The Sussex Vampire*

***Holmes and Watson* by June Thompson

Murderer or Murdered?

M.J. Drutt - Jack the Ripper Suspect

M.J. Drutt was a talented cricketer and was Hon. Secretary to the Blackheath Company. His name came to light as a possible "Jack the Ripper" in the notes of Sir Melville Mac Naghten, who was head of C.I.D. dealing with the Ripper murders. It was thought that Drutt may have committed suicide in the Thames after killing Mary Kelly, the last victim.



M.J. Drutt

D.J. Leighton, in his book on Drutt, "Ripper Suspect," uncovers the secret life of Drutt and suggests that he may have been murdered by members of the homosexual fraternity, which, at that time, included the Duke of Clarence. Drutt was known to move in those circles. They perhaps feared that Drutt's dismissal from a boys' school might have attracted too much interest, thus leading the police to them.

Rugby and Golf at Blackheath

The Royal Blackheath Golf Club is the oldest golf club in England, being 400 years old in 2008. Blackheath F.C. is a mere baby in comparison to that, being 150 in the same year. It is



Royal Blackheath Golf Club instituted on 1608

interesting that England's oldest golf club, the oldest open rugby Club in the world and the oldest hockey club, Blackheath H.C, should all have started life playing on Blackheath.

Many players have been a member of both the golf and rugby club. For many years there has been an annual golfing fixture between the clubs, a tradition that is carried on today.

History was made on 17th June 1939 when fourteen members of the Royal Blackheath Golf Club crossed the English border for the first time and ventured into Scotland to play the Royal Burgess Golf Club, the oldest Scottish club. Included in the team were J.T. Kemp, J.A. Whalley and R.C. Hubbard all members of Blackheath F.C. Just as the first rugby international against Scotland involved Club players, it seems fitting that the rugby club had representation in the first international golf club encounter.

Some influential Club Members



Fred Stokes
1850-1928

He represented Blackheath FC at the meeting to form the RFU and was its 2nd President aged 24. Captain of Club & captain of the first England Rugby XX. A great Golfer & Kent Cricketer.



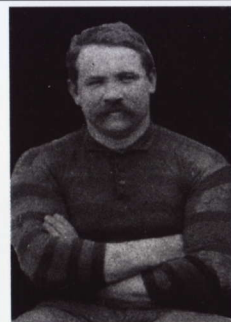
Sir Rowland Hill
1855-1928

Only played once for Blackheath in the Old Cocks side of 1891. He was however Chairman of the Blackheath Cricket, Rugby and Lawn Tennis Company for many years. President of the RFU for 3 years and knighted for his services to Rugby. He unveiled the memorial to Club players lost in WW1.



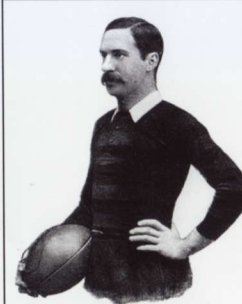
Aubrey Spurling
1856-1945

One cap for England, he is described in Marshall as a "Club Patriot" and a "diligent recorder of the game". He was the Club's historian and it is thanks to him that the early playing records were kept. He was a member of the Blackheath Cricket, Rugby and Lawn Tennis Company for many years.



Henry Vassall
1860-1925

Captain of Club 1884-1885. Credited with introducing the three-player three-quarter formation instead of the use of two three-quarters then in vogue. Captained Blackheath in 1884-85. He is regarded as one the best ever rugby generals.



A.E. Stoddart
1863-1915

Was a sporting god of the 1890s. Captain of England at rugby and cricket. He captained Blackheath in 1889-90 & 1890-91 and was one of the Club's finest players, turning out over 190 times. He died on 3rd April 1915.



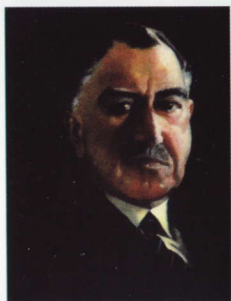
C.B. Fry 1872-1956

Regarded as England's greatest 'All Rounder' playing cricket, soccer, rugby and was holder of the world long jump record for 25 years. Played for the Club & Barbarians. This sketch was drawn in 1894 by S.W. Weeks.



C.H. Pillman (Cherry)
1890 - 1955

English International before and after WW1. Credited with developing wing-forward style of play. He was the Club's first captain after WW1 in 1919-1920, and did much to restore the Club's fortunes. His brother, R.L. Pillman, was also an International but he did not survive the conflict.



Brig H. L. Glynn Hughes
CBE, DSO, MC, QHP.
1892-1973

"Hughie" was the first President of the Club from 1930 to 1955 & fourth President of the Barbarians from 1955 to 1973. He served with distinction in both WWs & was the first Medical Officer to enter Belsen.



A.T. Young
1901-1933

Known as the "Pocket Hercules", at 5ft 5ins he was a brilliant scrum-half for Cambridge & England. He was captain of the Club in 1926 - 27. Died of pneumonia aged 32.



C.N. (Kid) Lowe
1891-1983

The most capped Blackheath player, representing England 25 consecutive times between 1913 & 1923. Shot down 9 enemy planes in WW1 & was shot down himself.



Peter Piper
1922-2007

Wearing Colonel Begbie's blazer with the Proprietary School Badge used by the Club until 1958. He was Club President in 1966-69, Chair of the Blackheath Cricket, Football and Lawn Tennis Ltd 1977 - 80. Originator of the International & Club Golden Oldies.



Mick Skinner b.1958
(Mick the Munch)

Harlequins, England, & the Club. Charismatic wing-forward known for "Boshing" the opposition. The last household rugby name to play for the Club before the professional era.



Kathryn Hennessy

Co-founder of the Bromley Thunderbirds in 1985. The team moved to the Rectory Field in 1990 and changed their name to Blackheath Women's RFC. Kathryn is an Irish International and the first woman to be made a Vice-President of Blackheath Football Club.



Jacquie Edwards

Blackheath & England three-quarter, scoring in the final of the Women's World Cup in 1994 when they beat the USA. Six Club players took part in the tournament.

Acknowledgments

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Blackheath Rugby

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