

The History of Old Illtydian RFC

as written by former committee member Peter Fearby on the occasion of the Old Illtydian 50th anniversary, and sent to Dan O'Neil, South Wales Echo on 28 April 1978 when the club house was based in City Road.

This season 1977-78 finds the Old Illtydian RFC celebrating its 50th Anniversary. It must afford the few founder members still with us a great deal to muse over, when they compare the amenities and facilities available to the present generation with the conditions prevailing back in Sept 1928 when the club was formed as the St. Illtyds Old Boys Rugby Club. As the school had been open for only four years, the number of players available was small, but in spite of an average age of only seventeen, and a full back, Jim Walsh, (lately retired Headmaster, reputed to weigh under half a hundredweight), the club was launched.

Its home grounds were many for five years, until finally in 1932 they came to Blackweir where they were to remain for the next thirty five years. A new home ground brought a new name, for under the captaincy of Terry Donovan, the club was rechristened the Old Illtydian RFC. The history of the club in these pre-war years was one of securing and building on the sure foundations which were being laid by such men as Edgar Welsh, Jack Kennedy, the Cava brothers, to name a few. The fixture lists were strengthened considerably and included most of the best second class clubs in Wales. A second fifteen had been formed, and the results in general were outstanding.

Thanks to players on leave from the services, young students and schoolboys, the club managed to function for all but two seasons during the war years, thus in 1945, the continuity was there and the club continued to expand and flourish. In 1947/48, two very successful Easter tours were made to Ireland, followed by a 1951 tour of Lancashire. In the light of the modern day tours made to America in 1976, and to the Bahamas and Florida these past few weeks, these tours appear 'small fry', but in the early post war years, they were considered very ambitious and exciting.

During the season 1952/53 by which time three XV's were playing regularly, the Silver Jubilee celebrations took place and were marked by an outstanding match against an international XV lead by Irish Captain Des O'Brien on the Arms Park. There were some outstanding achievements, for instance for a period of fifteen years from 1938 to 1953, the first fifteen were undefeated by any other old boys sides in England or Wales. They must also have been unique in being able to claim victories over Cardiff Athletic, Newport United, and Swansea Athletic in the same season. In spite of this however, the Old Illtydians were still a junior club.

Recognition finally came in 1966 when they became full members of the Welsh Rugby Union followed in 1967 by a move to their own ground and clubhouse at Leckwith. This was when the school was based at Sanatorium Road, Leckwith.

Strangely enough, although a dream had been realised, a period of decline in the fortunes of the club followed. It is difficult to pinpoint the reasons – they were complicated and varied, but it was finally decided to sell the club and ground and move to the opposite end of Cardiff where pitches were available at Rumney Recreation Ground. This was done in 1976, and a decisive move this proved to be.

Today finds them stronger than ever. Four senior XV's and two youth XV's run out regularly each week and a small homely clubrooms near the centre of the city caters for their social needs (the 53 club on City Road, first right).

In looking back over the fifty years, the one thing above all which gives pleasure is to read a list of old boys of St Illtyds College who have made the grade in first class football, starting with pre-war Welsh trialist Edgar Welsh and other Cardiff RFC stalwarts such as Duncan Brown and Jim Hickey. In post-war years the list is endless with Welsh trialists John Nelson, Kevin Bush, Paul Donovan, and Cardiff players such as Brian Mark, Peter Nyhan, Tom Burns, John McCarthy, Bernard Neagle, and Chris Jones. To prove there is no bias, they have even provided the Newport 1st XV with players, none better than Maurice Walsh and John Roblin, while Neil O'Brien, Eddie Donovan and Derek Evans are just a few of those players to make the grade with some of the other first class sides.

At the present time the crop of Old Iltydians playing for the Cardiff club is probably greater than ever. Alec Finlayson, the schools first full Welsh cap and long overdue, Mike Murphy, David Barry, Mark McJennett, Julian O'Brian and Chris Camilleri. Long may the school continue to produce players of such calibre.

But no club can succeed unless it has good backroom boys. In this, the club have always been fortunate. Throughout the years, long and outstanding service has been given by such stalwarts as Paddy Dee, Ted Pearce, Laurie Judd, Peter Fearby, Len Perry, John Brown, Jim Regan, this seasons Chairman Gerard McCarthy, and not forgetting the present very efficient hard working general secretary Jim Nyhan. Of the present committee, John Meighan and Peter Chidgey are of the same mould to name but two and on such firm foundations on which to build, the club can look forward to another fifty years of success. May it always be so.

The anniversary will be marked by a celebration dinner on the 19 May 1978 at the school when it is hoped many past members will attend to join the present members in celebrating this notable occasion.