

Surrey Spotlight #1

Nov 2022

HELPING OUR CLUBS TO
PROSPER AND THRIVE



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the intro

Chat from the Chair

For those not able to join the Surrey AGM at London Irish Amateurs on 5th September I am pleased to advise that our Management Committee was elected nem co. We welcome the addition of Joanna Gordon and Geraint Thomason as new members as well as adding Tyrone Lawless to the Exec as Deputy Chair –one of many hats worn by this dynamo. David Doonan -known to many after his sterling service for many years as Hon Sec of Barnes RFC has accepted the role of Deputy President whilst our own Gary Ashburn has the unusual accolade of a second term as President following his Covid affected year in 2020/21.



At the recent RFU Congress at Warwick University it was confirmed that £29million has been earmarked for the grassroots game. These funds will, however, be targeted on specific objectives rather than distributed across the board and it is imperative therefore that our own priorities align with those of the RFU to make best use of these funds - for more information, read the article OUR SIX PILLARS OF SUPPORT.

The RFU President Nigel Gillingham was involved along with myself and Tyrone Lawless in a frantic and enjoyable game of Walking Rugby at Warwick. This was so enjoyable that before his departure for the Women's World Cup in New Zealand, Nigel has agreed to visit Esher with a "Presidential Team" of RFU Councillors to take part in a triangular Walking Rugby evening with Esher and Wimbledon - for more information about Walking Rugby, read the article on page 8 FOCUS ON WALKING RUGBY

Our aim in 2022/23 as Rugby continues to rebuild post pandemic will be to engage more fully with all our clubs and to communicate using all media to do so. If you or your club have any event to publicise please contact the Surrey Office and we will target our efforts in support. We are particularly keen to offer "Presidential Team" support to major celebrations or events – including staging a playing XV if so desired. In the year of the Women World Cup it would also be a great opportunity to stage a Presidential Womens XV match if any club would like to host.

JOHN POWNALL - CHAIR

Targeted Funding Priorities 2022-23

WE HAVE SET OUT OUR PRIORITIES FOR FUNDING FOR THE UPCOMING SEASON, AND THEY ARE LISTED HERE:

- CB LEAD COACH DEVELOPMENT
- FLEXIBLE PLAYING OPPORTUNITIES FOR ADULTS AND YOUTH OFFERING
- SUPPORT STUDENT LINKS WITH LOCAL CLUBS.
- GROW WOMENS & GIRLS GAME ACROSS THE CB
- EMBED NON-CONTACT FORMATS - TOUCH & WALKING RUGBY



TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT GETTING INVOLVED AND ACCESSING FUNDING TO HELP YOUR CLUB THRIVE, CONTACT CLUBDEVELOPMENT@SURREYRUGBY.ORG. DON'T DELAY - APPLY TODAY!

the future

Strategic Plan 2022-2025



£10-£25K PUT ASIDE FOR EACH PILLAR OVER THE NEXT THREE SEASONS

3-YEAR STRATEGIC PRIORITTY TO HELP CLUBS "PROSPER AND THRIVE", AND DELIVER A QUALITY RUGBY EXPERIENCE FOR ALL

CLUBS CAN BID FOR A GRANT FROM ONE OF THE PILLARS BY DEMONSTRATING HOW THEIR PLAN WILL BE DELIVERED, SHOWING IMPACT AND VFM

TOTAL: £100K OVER A THREE YEAR PERIOD

● PILLAR 1 : RETENTION OF 14-23 YEAR OLD MALE PLAYERS IN THE GAME

● PILLAR 2 : GROW THE WOMEN'S & GIRL'S GAME

● PILLAR 3: SUPPORT OUR CLUBS TO ENSURE FACILITIES AND GROUNDS ARE FIT FOR PURPOSE

● PILLAR 4 : MAKE OUR GAME SAFER AND SUPPORT PLAYER WELL-BEING

● PILLAR 5 : MAKE OUR GAME FULLY INCLUSIVE AND DIVERSE, WHILST SUPPORTING VOLUNTEERS AND GROWING FUTURE LEADERS

● PILLAR 6 : IMPROVE COMMUNICATIONS ACROSS THE CB AND SHARE BEST PRACTICE & IDEAS WITH CLUBS TO ENSURE COMMUNICATION IS RELEVANT AND SPECIFIC TO ALL STAKEHOLDERS AND MEMBERS ACROSS THEIR CLUBS

If your club would like to bid for a grant, get in touch with Ty Lawless via gamedevelopment@surreyrugby.org

the opportunities

Sessions run for you



Coaching

England Rugby runs sessions for all levels of Coaching, from beginners right through to Advanced Award . Many of these sessions are on-line and free, but some require clubs to host the sessions. We can help you fill any extra spaces in those sessions through our communications with Surrey clubs. We could also help with funding. Find the course you'd like to run on the England Rugby website by visiting englandrugby.com/participation/coaching.

If you'd like to search to see if a course is already scheduled near you, check gms.rfu.com/GMS/coursefinder



Refereeing

Want to become a referee? Or offer training sessions to your club members? Surrey can run three sessions per season. Make sure your club is involved in one of those sessions! Open to all club members, we encourage you to support diversity of refs at your club. For comprehensive information about refereeing from England Rugby see englandrugby.com/participation/refereeing.

If you'd like to search to see if a course is already scheduled near you, check gms.rfu.com/GMS/coursefinder



Leadership

Leadership in Union is an RFU run, custom-made leadership programme which is designed to support the development of our future constituent body leaders. Surrey regularly puts volunteers forward for this fantastic course.

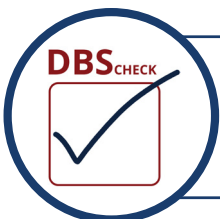
If you'd like to search to see if a course is already scheduled near you, check gms.rfu.com/GMS/coursefinder



First Aid

Sign up to a First Aid course running at a rugby club near you. Or perhaps you'd like to host one? We can help you fill those spots by promoting it on our social media channels, website and in this Newsletter.

If you'd like to search to see if a course is already scheduled near you, check gms.rfu.com/GMS/coursefinder



DBS Checks

The RFU uses the DBS system to ensure that all its staff and volunteers who are in a role that involves working with children or adults at risk, otherwise known as 'Regulated Activity', are safe to do so.

The Volunteer Coordinator is responsible for managing your DBS check and should start your application on your behalf. Your Club Safeguarding Officer may also support this process. Applications for individuals engaging in their roles as volunteers are free through the RFU.

For full details go to englandrugby.com/governance/safeguarding/safer-recruitment/dbs-information-for-applicants

the perks

Benefits of Volunteering

Rugby Clubs across Surrey cannot function without the invaluable contribution of volunteers. But did you know the benefits of volunteering, both on-field and off? Apart from the joy of giving back and becoming part of your local club you could be awarded:

- Honda Volunteer of the Year - award dinner at Twickenham and top prize of a **Honda car for a year**
- RFU President's Value the Volunteer Outstanding Contribution Award - with behind-the-scenes tour of Twickenham
- Surrey Volunteer of the Year Awards - award dinner at with County Awards in a variety of categories
- Access to International Tickets
- Honda Pre-Match Hospitality in the British Airways Fan Village
- Exclusive Money-can't-buy experiences, including lunch with England players



HONDA

Many clubs also have benefits at local level:

- Volunteer of the Month with the winner getting access to international tickets
- Volunteer Pre-Match Lunch invitations
- Volunteer Awards Evening
- Volunteer Club clothing
- Free/discounted/upgraded membership

You could also get access to:

- Free coaching training, First Aid courses and DBS certification
- RFU run Young Leaders/Aspiring Leaders 14-24 Course
- RFU run Volunteer Leadership Course

Comprehensive information, tips and guidance from the RFU is available via [englandrugby.com/participation/volunteers/recruit-and-retain-volunteers](https://www.englandrugby.com/participation/volunteers/recruit-and-retain-volunteers)



Options for Volunteering

YOUR LOCAL CLUB

Volunteering doesn't need to be a massive commitment. Ad-hoc volunteers for special projects are as welcome as regular volunteers for coaching and game day. We know lots of our rugby community have great skills we could utilise but might not know we need them. So join our rugby family today by giving us a few hours of your time and getting to know us better.

SURREY RUGBY

We're also looking for volunteers! If you'd be interested in joining our team, get in touch with volunteering@surreyrugby.co.uk

As a volunteer on our Management Committee you'd benefit from the right to access up to four international tickets per match.



the heros

Celebrating Volunteers

Cobham Rugby Club was the venue for the 2021- 22 Volunteers Awards. On the evening of Thursday 29th June over eighty volunteers and guests mingled with Committee Members of the County in the spacious Cobham Club House. All were welcomed by the President Terry Long (London Irish RFC) and Chair John Pownall. After the bubbly had been consumed, this was followed by an excellent buffet provided by the Clubs catering team, presentations for our new sponsor's HONDA were made.

The categories for the 2021-22 season were

<u>CATEGORY</u>	<u>NOMINATIONS RECEIVED</u>
BEYOND RUGBY	5
GAME FOR ALL	11
UN Sung HERO	66

The 82 nominations received this year was a record number of citations submitted, it was also the largest submitted for all English Clubs.

With such a large number of citations this gave the selection panel the pleasure and satisfaction of reading of the hard work that volunteers do to ensure the success of Surrey Clubs. It is also a big compliment to you the Volunteers that the citations have been submitted by your peers who have taken the trouble to write and have recognised the contribution you have made to the club.

After reading all the citations and two meetings the panel had to select six names for submission to HONDA, from these six HONDA then decide the two finalists. After the President and Chair had presented the HONDA gifts to those who had not made the final, the two finalists to go forward to the final presentation at Twickenham were announced. They were:

GAME FOR ALL - KATHERINE COWLING - STREATHAM & CROYDON RFC

Katherine's award was for her outstanding work at the Club since joining in 2016. She has recognised how through her own experience the contribution rugby makes to mental and physical health as well as offering social inclusion and team support. As a result of her hard work the girls section has grown from strength to strength.

UN Sung HERO - JOOLS GORINGE - CHOBHAM RFC

Jools' award was for all the work and his relentless mission to get all the boys to keep playing. His organisational and motivational skills helped to continue to recruit and retain players. He has a passion for the club that goes beyond his role as manager, as the club has benefitted from his skills as a groundsman. The County also have to thank him for his contribution to the Surrey u 16s, and Waterfall competitions.

Finally a big thanks to all those UNSUNG HEROS in every Club who ensure that the Community, Grass Root Clubs survive. Remember when the requests go out in the New Year for this season's Champions put pen to paper and send in your citation's for the Volunteer of the season in your Club.

Keith Heal - Surrey Volunteer Reward & Recognition



Katherine Cowling & Jools Goringe



Anthony Shenton & Phil Smith



Lloyd Hogbin



Esher RFC Volunteers

Thanks to Leo Wilkinson for the photos. All photos of the evening available via [CLICKING HERE](#)

the winners

Surrey Rugby Season Awards



**Surrey Rugby Coach of the Year
Gareth Rise- Camberley**



**RFU League Winners
Battersea Ironside Women**



**Surrey Woman & Girls Winner
Jane Milton**

At the end of last season we held our annual awards evening to celebrate the end of season achievements by CB Teams, Club Teams and individuals who have been successful and contributed significantly to the game throughout that season at Esher RFC. We celebrated by handing out 90 awards in 1 hour. Surrey Vice President and RFU Councillor John Inverdale compered the evening where over 150 people from over 50 Surrey clubs attended.

Awards that were given out were: League Winners, Cup Winners, 7s/ 10s Winners, Referee & Coaching achievements. TREDs & Values winners, Presidents, Chairmans & Treasurers Awards. Some of those winners are featured here. We hope you also spotted our 7's winners on the front cover - Old Regiatian. Many congratulations to everyone who won an award for the 2021-22 season.

A full list of 2021-22 winners, as well as a complete historical list of winners, can be found on the Surrey website. We will be holding the 2022-23 Awards evening in June 2023 and look forward to seeing many of you there.



**Surrey President Award Winners
Chobham Chargers**



**Young Match Official Winners
Maddoc Hughes & Eddie Matthews**



**Surrey Refs winners
Simon Marshall & Matt Channing**

the game

Focus on walking rugby

HISTORY

Rugby has seen many interesting developments over the years, including Snow, Beach and even Underwater versions being played. In 2015 rugby enthusiasts - in collaboration with Martin Corry (England 1997-2007) - got together to devise a new format for rugby after research showed that 1 in 2 people over 50 wanted the opportunity for a team-based activity.

They designed Walking Rugby - developed as a slower, non-contact form of the game aimed at the over-50's but also positioned as a fully inclusive format of the game where players from all ages and genders would be able to practice and play together in a fun yet competitive nature.

In November 2015 the first game was played, in England.

IN SURREY

Experiencing a strong organic growth throughout the UK in recent years, Walking Rugby has acted as the catalyst in attracting many people back into playing rugby, or to rugby for the first time, due to its various health and fitness benefits and a strong sense of fun and enjoyment. The sessions allow community cohesion and social inclusion, bringing people together in the community and being able to get together before and after sessions.

Surrey are part of a committed and cohesive network of clubs offering walking rugby across the South East & South West divisions. There are currently six clubs in Surrey offering this format - Chobham, Esher, Guildfordians, Reigatians, Richmond and Wimbledon.

Surrey Rugby are looking to identify and support further clubs to deliver walking rugby to its members and the local community.

RULES & REGS

THE MAIN RULES OF WALKING RUGBY

- The game is split into two 7 minute (or longer by mutual team agreement) halves, 2 minute breaks for rehydration between each
- Up to 7 players a side, with rolling substitutes
- Players must not run or jog while the game is in action
- The ball must be passed backwards or transverse (not forward)
- A try is scored by carrying the ball with both feet over the try line
- A knock-on is if the ball is knocked forward and hits another player or the ground, deliberate knock on is a penalty
- If the ball hits the ground this results in a turnover
- A tackle is a two-handed touch to the ball carrier (shoulders down to shorts, including arms)
- A tackled player must pass the ball, within one pace from the spot they were tackled, without delay
- The defence must not interfere with the first pass following a tackle
- Ball in touch the other side re-start with a pass from the point where the ball crossed the touch line
- At a turnover, penalty or other in-field re-start: the player re-starting must tap the ball with foot or knee and may then walk or pass, on-side defenders may advance

Want to start Walking Rugby at your Club?

If any club wishes to start Walking Rugby, or requires information and guidance or support, then please contact Tyrone Lawless on chairofgamedevelopment@surreyrugby.com.

Check out this RFU video for inspiration: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nAdPp6FS2q4>

the game

A New Version of the Beloved Game is Taking Hold Across the County!

Many health organisations now promote walking sports, including Walking Rugby, as “prescriptions” for mental health and general well-being. This is because when engaging in exercise, it has a positive influence on the hormones that regulate mental health as well as the chemicals that put one in a good mood. It can be said that this type of sport plays a much bigger role than just exercise – it’s also an opportunity to get back into being part of a team, the banter, the support, the social engagement. For some, it may be their only weekly opportunity to engage with the outside world. Previous rugby experience is not necessary and clubs are keen to state that anyone is welcome to come along and give the game a try.

On 30th September, a group from Surrey Rugby including Kingswood and Gosport visited Esher RFC, one of the Surrey clubs who offer walking rugby, to see what it is all about and have a go. The feedback was outstanding – the game is very inclusive and much more physical than expected and, most important, was the comradery!

Most clubs offer a weekly or twice weekly calendar of training sessions typically including a warm-up, skills training and then playing a few games. Friendly inter-club games take place during the Autumn and Winter, whereas larger format festivals or tournaments are arranged by clubs during the Spring and Summer months. There is currently no league or similar for this form of the game but “County Cup” games are starting to evolve – Surrey ran one at Esher Rugby Club this Spring and Devon ran one at Topsham Rugby Club later in the Summer.

Photos from the Surrey Autumn Festival, held at Esher Rugby Club

Maxine Thompson - Esher Rugby



Recent Festival
Winners Gosport



Esher



Kingswood

the rules & regs



Tours & Camps

Online Application Process and Non-Compliance

We have previously advised clubs as to the online application process to seek CB approval for tours, summer camps, festivals, etc. This information and online process is available on our Age Grade section within the website.

The advice also emphasised the need for applications to be submitted in sufficient time to allow Surrey to assess the applications and review any errors that might have been found.

Unfortunately, we are still receiving applications with as little as one days notice before the intended camp is due to proceed. This is unacceptable and causes extra administrative work for our team of volunteers who already have lots to do to help our clubs alongside their day jobs.

WE EXPECT TO RECEIVE APPLICATIONS NO LATER THAN THE FOLLOWING

1. To play out of age grade including Age Grade into Adult and combining age grade teams (see RFU Regulation 15) should be submitted no later than 5 days before the match in which the individual or team is due to participate
2. Camps and festivals, no later than 2 weeks before the camp is due to start
3. Outgoing tours, 4 weeks before the proposed tour dates
4. Incoming tours, 4 weeks before the tour proceeds

the rules & regs

We certainly do not want to prevent young people from participating in tours and camps (and the game, more widely), which would happen if we were not able to approve the event on the basis of a late application, or assuming that the applicant club has met the other application criteria. Nevertheless, it is important that clubs adhere to the requirements that have been set.

It is for this reason, therefore, that any club that persistently fails to abide by the above application conditions (incl. timescales) and full compliance, as appropriate, with Regulation 15 (Age Grade Rugby) may, following due process and investigation and having been found to be in non-compliance with the requirements, face disciplinary action by the Surrey committee.

In addition, should we believe it necessary to report a club to the RFU Disciplinary Department for contravention of Regulations, we will do so. Should a club be proven to have breached these conditions, it will face possible sanctions.

This might, for example, include the suspension for one year of your club's and individuals' membership of the CB and consequently the withdrawal of the opportunity to purchase International match tickets via the KCRFU and/or possible withdrawal by the RFU of your International match tickets allocation.

In severe and persistent cases, the RFU may also, as it has done already this season, deduct league points from clubs' respective 1st XV's and/or impose demotion as the ultimate sanction. Such sanctions may also apply to clubs that fail to gain approval from the CB for a 17-year-old to play adult rugby.

We trust that clubs will take due note of the above and seek to comply at all times.

Age Grade Approvals

Please remember that any player playing out of their age grade will require approval from Surrey via our online approval forms under the [Age Grade](#) section on our website.

Age Grade Affiliation

Parents/Guardians will need to renew their child's affiliation by logging onto their GMS profile and re-affiliating to their club. For those new to affiliation, they will need to create a login to affiliate their player(s) to the club.

You can find information and Affiliation FAQs on the Help Portal.

the people

Focus on Surrey CB



TERRY LONG
Past President

Terry has been involved with the County for quite some time. He became a Vice President in 2010 and is our Immediate Past President.

He offered his services to London Irish Amateur RFC in 2000 following an appeal for volunteers who could offer "2 hours of their time per week to the Club". Over the following 20 years Terry held various roles including Website Editor, Honorary Secretary, became a Vice President in 2006 and Club President in 2018-2020.

Terry played rugby in Cork, Athlone and Bristol. When he moved to London in 1978 he was advised, post-surgery, by a consultant at The Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital in Stanmore to call it a day. As a consequence, his intention to play Vets Rugby with London Irish never materialised. He still enjoys watching amateur and professional rugby and is a season ticket holder at the Gtech Community Stadium in Brentford.

Terry's background was in the Food, Tourism and Financial Services sectors. Of the three, he enjoyed his 14 years in Tourism the most. As Overseas Markets Officer for the Irish Tourist Board, he spent a lot of time, particularly in Australia and New Zealand and had a two-year stint in New York.



GARY ASHBURN
President

Gary has served on the Management Board of Surrey Rugby for over 27 years. Originally he was Assistant Secretary for several years and, during this period, also served regularly on the Disciplinary Committee. He later became Editor of In Play magazine and all publications for over a decade, while in his role of Chairman of Marketing & Sponsorship/Revenue Generation.

Gary has also worked on various sub-committees for the RFU and local government, and has worked with various commercial organisations to raise funds for Schools and Clubs development.

As a player, Gary played for Streatham/Croydon for over 12 seasons - from Colt to 1st XV. In later years, Gary moved to Mitcham Rugby Club and was 1st XV and Club Captain for many seasons and later became a busy President for six years.

Gary played many times for Surrey County Clubs, various District and League Representative sides and has also guested for nomadic sides like Voyagers, Anti-Assasins, Rumbidge Pack, Old Lambethans, Rosslyn Park Vets and even Hong Kong.



DAVID DOONAN
Deputy President

For the past 52 years David has been a member of Harrodians RFC - which changed its name to Barnes RFC in 1992. Initially David was a player, then administrator, official and finally President, as he is today. Barnes RFC currently play in National League 2 East.

He has been a Vice President of Surrey Rugby for about 15 years and sits on the Surrey Disciplinary Panel. He is delighted to have been asked to become Surrey Deputy President this season and hopefully (God willing) to be Surrey President next season.

David is always very happy to help out Surrey Rugby - or any Surrey club - at any level or in any way, especially if they are embracing the Surrey Rugby ethos of trying to "Prosper and Thrive" by growing their club, embracing the spirit of rugby and friendship and ifthey enjoy the "Craic"!

David is also a firm believer that you make many new friends - and keep old ones - by being involved in Rugby. He cannot recommend volunteering, either in your local club or at county level, highly enough.

the people



JOHN POWNALL

Chair

Born into a rugby family, including the President of his native Yorkshire, John's playing career extended over 37 years in a variety of clubs from first class to junior and across a broad geographic spread. Since joining Surrey Rugby in 2013 John has served as Chair of Club Development, Honorary Secretary and, since 2019, as Chairman. John was part of the first RFU cohort to complete the RFU Leadership course and has led Surrey's Leadership Academy over a number of years including as both facilitator and mentor.

John's earlier rugby included spells with Gosforth, Stourbridge, Old Halesonians and as a founder member of Farnham where he played at all levels from First XV to Vets before coaching mini and Junior rugby for 12 years.

Originally a linguist and trained accountant John has lived and worked around Europe leading companies in Germany, Switzerland, Austria and France in addition to extensive experience in the USA, Africa and the Middle and Far East. John runs his own consulting business helping SME's within the UK and advising both Private Equity investors and major corporates in his specialist areas.

Other sporting interests include skiing, golf and, of course, as an expatriate Yorkshireman a life long devotion to red ball cricket.



TYRONE LAWLESS

Vice Chair and Chair of Rugby Development & CB Sponsorship

Ty joined the Surrey Rugby committee in 2014 as League Secretary, then moved to Chair of Competitions in 2016.

Assisted by a large team, Ty is responsible for rugby development across the county which includes ensuring the playing offer meets the needs of Surrey rugby men, women and youth sides - whilst managing regulations and playing philosophy across the game.

The team delivers leagues, cups and non traditional formats such as Touch, Walking Rugby, Mixed Ability Rugby & 7s/ 10s Tournaments.

Ty is also responsible for coaching and refereeing development alongside the RFU and ensures courses and CPD reflect the needs of the clubs and individuals. He is also responsible for Sponsorship and Revenue Generation for Surrey Rugby.

Away from Surrey Rugby Ty is on the Esher RFC committee serving as Legal, Compliance & Wellbeing Officer, responsible for: safeguarding, discipline, HR, Licensing and Health & Safety across the club.



SUE GARDNER

Honorary Secretary

Having played women's rugby for over ten years, Sue got asked to 'attend Club lunches' as the new Guildford RFC Club Secretary...that's all she had to do! Fast forward another 10 years and she is now the county's Honorary Secretary.

She originally joined the Committee as a Club Representative of Clubs Level 5-8, then progressed to Chair of Marketing & Communications, and then onto Honorary Secretary. As Honorary Secretary she oversees the Surrey Office and is the key contact for any official RFU communication and governance.

Sue 'graduated' from the RFU Leadership In Union course in 2019, has been involved the RFU Community Group for Communications and GMS Data Management, and is also a founder member of the Surrey Rugby Women's Network.

In her spare time away from rugby she enjoys spending time having lunch and cocktails with friends, her retired guide dog, time with her husband (who is a referee...but lovely!), andoh and actually working in Business Development and Marketing... you can see her order of priorities here....

One thing hasn't changed though....she still enjoys attending Club lunches!

the clubs

Focus on Met Police RFC



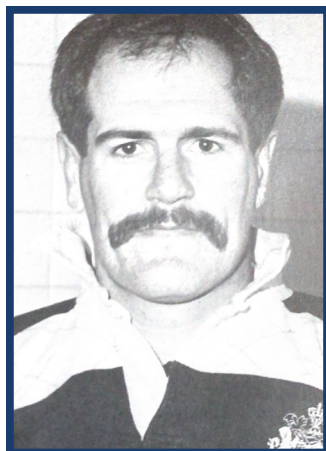
MPRFC v London Media



MPRFC v Egham



MPRFC v Old Freemans



Paul Ackford

The Metropolitan Police Rugby Football Club is about to enter its centenary year. In the very early days of the Metropolitan Police Athletics Association (MPAA) a challenge was received from the Newport Police to play a game of rugby. The Commissioner of the time, Brigadier-General Sir William Horwood, was very keen to meet the challenge and a couple of trial matches against London medical establishments were soon arranged, enabling a full season to commence in October 1923. From these beginnings, playing home matches at Imber Court, the Met established itself as one of England's leading teams. A fixture list boasted opponents such as Harlequins, Bristol, Bath, Wasps and Saracens, as well as many other great sides of the amateur era, including several famous Welsh clubs. Paul Ackford and Martin Bayfield represented England and the British and Irish Lions, while many others gained representative honours at lower levels.

Today, the Met Police Rugby finds itself in a different place, metaphorically, but as a no lesser bastion and representative of the finer aspects of the Service. When rugby embraced the professional era in 1996, it combined with a change in the political attitude to policing. The two had a huge effect on the Rugby Club. Firstly, there was a sea-change in the way that police-accountability was viewed: it was no longer deemed appropriate to have Police Officers playing sport on a Saturday afternoon rather than policing the streets; time-off to train two nights a week (or even once a week) was thought to be a drain on resources; and "special leave" for a long away trip to West Hartlepool, Penzance or Waterloo was anathema to a modern Police Service. By contrast, other clubs started to pay their players, increase the number of training sessions, and actively headhunt the best players from other clubs. For the Met, this was a disaster. The better players found new clubs, the fixture list, built up over 73 years, was far too demanding for those who remained and the Club had a precipitous drop down the rugby pecking order. With no "social" rugby being played anywhere, the Met committee took the extraordinary decision to withdraw the Met, probably the last genuine "works side" still playing, from all rugby. In an effort to keep the Club alive, a Veterans' team was formed, welcoming retired players, ostensibly aged 33 and over, to play the occasional Friday night or Saturday match in the famous blue and white hoops of the Met Police.

After a hiatus of a number of years, a growing interest from younger police officers encouraged the committee to tentatively enter a XV in a local Merit table, a league structure based on win percentages from games played rather than strict home and away fixtures. The Rugby Club also opened its doors to non-Police personnel, hoping to attract local

the clubs

interest from the Imber Court area of Elmbridge, Kingston and Richmond. The initiative was a huge success. The players swept all before them, attracting more players along the way, and gradually developed a strong enough squad, in terms of numbers and ability, to rejoin the RFU Leagues. Additionally, the Club entered the British Police Cup, fielding an exclusively police-only XV on a handful of Wednesday afternoons throughout the winter, to play neighbouring Constabularies and, commensurate with success, travelling to Wales, Scotland and even Stourbridge for the final!

In 2015, the Club established an annual mini rugby tournament at Imber Court which is patronised by some 300 children. It has not been quite so successful at establishing its own mini section but there is an appetite to do so in due course. Where the Club has had success is with the establishment of a Women's XV: the idea was germinated in 2019 and extraordinarily the Covid pandemic gave it a huge boost as a huge number of women turned up at Imber Court for training once rugby was allowed to be played again. Now the Women's squad is building up to join the league system and has become an integral part of the Club.

In 2021, the Met joined with East Grinstead RFC to stage a memorial match for murdered police officer Matt Ratana. Over 1000 people attended the event, including the President and the CEO of the RFU. And between them, the two clubs staged matches involving nearly 100 men and women. The event was due to be repeated last month but unfortunately the death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II caused its postponement.

Nevertheless, Met Police rugby is in rude health. Imber Court remains one of the best playing surfaces and facility in the amateur game. A playing roster of over 70 men and women, combined with a very engaged "Former players" association bodes very well for the future. A fixture list that involves league opponents from the Surrey area is spreading the word that the Met isn't only what one reads in the media. Senior officers are once again appreciating that sport does have its benefits for the well-being of personnel and as an aid to recruitment. A centenary dinner is planned to be held at the RFU Twickenham and a major overseas tour is being put together as part of the celebrations. Whilst the Met Rugby Club will never aspire to the halcyon heights of its history, the future is definitely bright and the Met is destined to be a major contributor to community rugby here in the South East.

Neil Sinclair
(MPS Retired 2016 MPRFC 1985- to date)



PSUK Cup Final v South Wales



MPRFC Ladies XV v Hackney



PSUK Cup Final v South Wales

the connections

Club Development

RFU WEBINAR - Nov 16, 2022 7PM Helping Clubs to Reduce Operational Costs - Waste & Washroom Services

Following a successful pilot scheme, hear how the team at Golf Management Group could help your club reduce its annual costs for 'Waste & Washroom' services. During the webinar you will see how the 10 clubs involved in the pilot achieved on average a saving of 19% per annum, with one club saving close to £3,000 per annum. The team from Golf Management will explain the very simple process and how you can take advantage of their collective purchasing power.

Have your say

Hopefully you've enjoyed this new Surrey Spotlight newsletter. Moving forward we're planning on having a quarterly newsletter, September, December, March and June - or more frequently if there's loads to say.

We'd love to hear from you! Have you got a story you'd like to share about your club, your players, your volunteers, or details about upcoming festivals or courses you're running? The deadline for copy for the December issue is 10th December, but the sooner the better!

Hopefully you read about the Met Police RFU - our club highlighted this month. We're planning to feature a club each edition - maybe yours could be next?

Have something instant you'd like us to share on social media? Please tag us at @surreyrugby so we're sure to see it.

Get in touch

Contact Surrey Spotlight Editor Joanna Gordon via comms@surreyrugby.org or on 077202-44555

Stay in touch

Make sure you keep up-to-date with what's happening in rugby within Surrey, find out first about any courses running and any festivals taking place - by following us on social media!

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Thank you!



Surrey Rugby is not for profit and exists to support the 30,000 players, 5,300 coaches, 2,300 referees and countless volunteers, all of whom contribute to making our community rugby what it is. We are very grateful for the fantastic support of our current sponsors - without whom we could not help our clubs to Prosper and Thrive.