HISTORY

###### The Seniors

The hopes of the club committee and gathered local officials at that emotional presentation night in May of 1962 proved to be too optimistic. The Warrington and District League’s AGM didn’t produce the hoped for U’21s league and West Bank did indeed pass into history.

Their anticipation that a new West Bank would emerge of course did come to fruition but not for another long eighteen seasons.

That first season was documented by the programme compiler in an issue produced for the 1980/81 season:

‘The club was started early in 1979 by Rob Haining, Tommy Reilly, Gordon Brown and Dave Johnson. Several friendlies were organised at the end of season 1978/79 against already established sides. With a team made up solely of West Bank lads the club decided to apply for application to the North West Counties League.

The clubs application was accepted and West Bank began season 1979/80 in Division 4. With the addition of a handful of players from outside West bank and the election of a club committee, West bank soon established themselves both as a force in Division 4 and as a well organised club throughout the ranks of the North West Counties League.

The first season proved very successful for the club, finishing third in division 4 and gaining promotion to Division 3. In doing so West Bank won 15 and lost 5 of their 20 league matches.

The following records will show the achievements of some of the players in the first season and also comparisons with the present season. Only league and cup competitions and been allowed to count in club records.’

Individual Club Records

Season 1979/80 Season 1980/81 (Upto 1980/81)

Most Tries: Jimmy Thompson (11) Dave Beswick (8)

Most Goals: Colin Barlow (41) Gordon Haining (36)

Most Points: Colin Barlow (101) Gordon Haining (81)

The men involved in this re-incarnation were former player Ken Davies, Ted Brown, Derek Burgess, Alan Miller (President) and Alex Haining who was the first secretary. Many of the players in this first team were local West Bank men, attracted from other clubs back to their ‘hometown’ side, like Colin Kinsella, Jimmy Thompson, Peter Dean, Robbie Haining, bolstering novices such as Peter Ratcliffe, Kevin Fletcher, Dave Higginson, Jimmy Brandreth and Gordon Haining. A youth team boasted the likes of Peter Leyshon and club legend to be, Dave Beswick.

The first full season saw the club achieve a respectable position that saw promotion to the 3rd Division after a re-organisation of the league. The recruitment of former Widnes star Ian Thompson as coach enabled the same group of players to compete strongly in what was a year of consolidation. Significantly the club recruited winger Bob McKeever and forwards Brian Catton, Mark Jones and Paul Farrell all of whom would go on to contribute to the famed West Bank pack.

1982-83 saw the club win its first championship, winning the 3rd Division after a thrilling run in with friendly rivals Thatto Heath. The season also saw the club’s first appearance in the Widnes cup final going down (not for the last time) to a very experienced Simms Cross. With West Bank’s star firmly in the ascendancy the club was able to attract some of the town’s finest talent into its ranks. Players such as Ray & Mick Gorry, Terry Rose, Paul Mahar, Peter Curphey and Alan Ditchfield were to serve the club with distinction over the club’s greatest era.

Bolstered by these signings West Bank was able to win its second consecutive title, taking out the 2nd Division championship following a play-off against Woolston Rovers ‘A’ team. Pack star Carl Hamilton was recruited from Runcorn. Carl and his nose were to prove to be more than a handful for most defences.

The following season the club were again crowned Champions, this time of the 1st Division, after a last game of the season win at nearest rivals Folly Lane. Centre star Terry Rose scored a hat trick that day. Terry would later go onto be the club’s second professional when he signed for Runcorn Highfield. West Bank won the Widnes Cup for the first time defeating Lowerhouse in the final.

1985-86 season will live long in many people’s memories as a golden year. The club defeated Wigan St.Patricks on the last day of the season to win the North West Counties League Premier Division Championship. Remarkably West Bank won all its away games including victories at Leigh Miners, Woolston Rovers, Wigan St.Patricks and Blackbrook, all clubs that would help form BARLA’s inaugural National Conference League in 1987.

The following season saw the club remain competitive in the Premier Division and continue to attract talented players such as Ste Hunt and John Rouski. However the clubs achievements that season would be away from the local league as it made its mark on the National stage.

Prior to the commencement of the 1986-87 season the club achieved arguably its finest accomplishment to date when West Bank defeated local rivals Simms Cross to be crowned ‘BARLA Champions of Champions’. With Dave Beswick at his inspirational best and Brian Catton taking the MoM, the future looked bright.

Along with the Champions of Champions tag the club showed how far it had come by progressing through to the semi-final of the National Cup. Notably the club played all its matches away from home defeating, South London, Fryston, Jubilee and Mirehouse before succumbing to the eventual winners Heworth. Crucially the club had lost the services of Dave Beswick who became the club’s first professional signing of the modern era when he joined Graham Lowe’s Wigan team.

Dave had also become the club’s first capped payer when he was selected for the BARLA Great Britain side that faced France at Thrum Hall, Halifax in the spring of 1986. David was to experience international rugby in somewhat more exotic surroundings when he toured Australia that summer with BARLA.

1986-87 also saw the club field a second open age team for the first time. Based on local youngsters who had grown up on the exploits of the 1st team, the team showed they were more than just good singers and competed very strongly. Players such as Gareth New, John Roberts, Ricky Hughes & Paul Grady would go on to be promoted to the first team.

The following season saw the start of a fallow period as the club slipped down the Premier Division table to be relegated. Encouragingly though the same season saw the influx of a new generation of players such as Ian Connor, Andrew (Tav)Taylor and Trevor McKeever all of whom would go onto to give long and entertaining service. The club also recruited Ian Woodward who would serve the club in the role of secretary for many years.

The next three seasons saw the old team gradually break up and be replaced by younger, inexperienced but highly talented players such as Gareth New, Paul Nuttie, Ray Attwood, Tony Haddock and John Cummings. 1990-91 saw the second team bring further honour to the club, winning the Alliance League 2nd Division title. Players such as Keith Prescott, Frank & Peter Curphey, Charlie Laughton and club stalwart Dennis Smith gave West Banks youngsters the benefit of their vast experience.

The 1991-92 season was a year of expansion for the North West Counties league which lead to the decision by the league management to have two 1st Divisions. Heartbreakingly the team lost for the first and only time in its history to local rivals Widnes St.Bede’s on the last day of the season and ended the year just below half way down Division 1A and were therefore relegated to Division 2 for the 1992-93 season.

Despite this reverse the club benefited by the recruitment of outstanding players Paul Morgan, Lee Harvey, John Ogburn, Mark French and Mark Gledhill. Playing some very attractive rugby West Bank easily won the league to become 2nd Division champions for the second time.

Several years in the 1st Division followed that was notable for the arrival into the first team of players like Mark Birmingham, Ste King, Danny Hale, Bryn Pinnington, Alan Ditchfield jnr and Rob Corish.

1995-96 saw the club win its first regional cup competition, winning the North West Counties Cup at Naughton Park against Higginshaw. The game featured a hat trick from Ian Connor.

Unfortunately this era was noticeable more for the instability off the field than for any great achievements on it but this was brought spectacularly to an end by the recruitment of former Wigan star, Billy McGinty as 1st team coach.

Biily was able to mould the players, which now included new signings Simon Prendergast, Chris Nuttie, Phil Moss and John Wilson into a highly competitive outfit, which only just failed to overhaul eventual winners Orrell St.James. A runners-up spot ensured West Bank’s return to the NWC Premier Division. Again West Bank fell to Simms Cross in the Widnes Cup final. Unfortunately, for the club, Billy McGinty returned to Wigan as academy coach.

West Bank’s return to the Premier Division was short lived and they were relegated back to the 1st Division at the end of the 1998-99 season.

Several years of player drain and subsequent relegations culminated in the club withdrawing its open age team from the league prior to the 2002-03 season. However the following season 2003-04 saw the team re-enter the North West Counties league in Division 6 under coaches Ricky Hughes and Tommy Arrowsmith.

To meet the needs of an ever-growing playing membership, the club established its base at Widnes Rec. Club

With the club able to call upon stalwarts Chris Nuttie, Ian Connor, Danny Hale, Bryn Pinnington and Gareth New the team had a solid spine that allowed newcomers like John Cuerdon, Al Faulkner and novices Mike Lloyd and Craig Baxter to do enough to finish in third place and achieve promotion at the first attempt.

For the start of 2004-05 the recruitment of the Littlers, Ian & Ste, Anthony Knight and former Bears junior Ste Butler gave the squad much greater depth and with most of the previous year’s squad still pulling on the boots the season got off to a great start. A mid season wobble looked ominous before recruitment in the shape of more ex Bears, Mark French jnr, Micky Kelly and Paul & Ste Curphey saw the team through to another 3rd place position and promotion to the 4th division. The season also saw the team win the NW counties Bowl final against Leigh East ‘A’.

2005-06 saw further additions to the squad with Jamie Edge, Peter Clarke, Tony Blundell and Ian Wilkinson giving a huge boost while an influx of local talent saw the club resurrect the second team. The decision to field a second string undoubtedly paid off as injuries and work commitments repeatedly stripped the first team of talent and the availability of the likes of Ian Connor, Mark Ryan, Matty Bradshaw, Neil Perigo and Paul McGuinness among others for first team duty ultimately lead the team to take out the Division 5 title.

The club had high hopes for the following season but ultimat

2009-2010 season saw the fruits of many years hard work by so many junior coaches when the club was able to choose from a squad of players that included 17 former Bears Juniors.

Supplemented by the arrival of Mark Hardman