

### Chairman's AGM 2021-22 season summary

It was an exceptional season for our club. 12 months ago (and for a year before that) the pandemic was proving a real test for us, and of course many other clubs alike. The extended, enforced break meant we faced losing contact with players and members and having the heart and culture of our club challenged. But rugby and friendship are of course everything for us and players were back on pitches as soon as possible. Of note is that we created a new role last season of Club Captain, which was taken on by our then 1st XV Captain Henry following his enforced early retirement from rugby.

During the Covid period, Henry kept the players engaged with the club & the game through social media and kept the lines of communication open when times were otherwise quiet. This was great for morale & player retention. This effort to stay in regular contact with our players and members a year ago, facilitated by the energy of our excellent coaching team, undoubtedly paid dividends throughout the season.

The 1st XV, under captain Joe, lost only one competitive game all season, playing 18 leagues games with 797 points scored and only 189 conceded a points diff of +608 and being crowned league champs.

"Gilly's army", the 2<sup>nd</sup> XV, have finished runners up in their league and gained promotion too, playing 19 with 15 wins, points for 748 and against 247 difference +501.

We fielded a 3<sup>rd</sup> XV (when other established clubs couldn't get a 1<sup>st</sup> XV out) at every opportunity and Dave Burns has been extraordinarily dedicated in the delivery of 3<sup>rd</sup> team, and where possible Vets rugby. The thirds finished 3<sup>rd</sup> in their league.

Huge thanks are owed to the captains, senior players and of course Phil and his coaching team for achieving great things. Graham and the medical back up mean that player welfare at this club is as good as anywhere else in this region which gives us another small incremental advantage over others who compete in our space. Thank you Graham and your team for all you do.

Please also recognise the work that Martyn did behind the scenes arranging and re-arranging fixtures on an almost daily basis. It was the work of a very patient man.

All 3 of our senior teams reached their respective county cup finals, bringing home the silverware in 2 out of the 3 finals. Quite fantastic.

Tom Jackson represented EC, as did Harry Papworth, Freddie Papworth and Henry Flint at Colts level, and Arminas Dominias and Jack Zebedee achieved County representation at Colts level.

We were terribly torn when it came to calling off the President's game on boxing day and failing to play the Harrison cup was a particular disappointment in an otherwise bright season.

We hope to make sure those key events in our playing and social calendar are not missed next season and our President is preparing an important piece of work on the history of the Harrison Cup so that element of our history and our culture is protected and preserved properly.

Numbers at mid-week training sessions were, and continue to be, tremendous and our Colts have enjoyed a good season and are now being carefully and progressively integrated into a lot of the senior club's training and playing philosophies. We do our best to help young players progress into our senior

ranks, but it isn't always an easy process; however, we do work hard at it and with an encouraging degree of success. It would be wonderful if more 16, 17 & 18-year-olds continued through to senior rugby - our attrition rate is probably the same as everyone else's in terms of young player retention, but we are working positively on this issue. We are in open discussions with the RFU about comparing Best Practices in a variety of areas but this one in particular.

Now that we have gained promotions, we plan to consolidate our positions in the leagues into which we have progressed for the 22/23 season. The hard work has recommenced with preseason training as we confirm short-, medium- and long-term plans for the club, on and off the pitch.

Included in those plans is the ongoing development of Girls & Ladies rugby in a committed fashion. The first training session of the G&L took place on the 30<sup>th</sup> June and we all look forward to the initiative developing from a small acorn. Lesley Palmer, Jeanette, and I met with the RFU development officer just this week to gather new ideas and routes to further support. We are fully engaged with the RFU generally and seek their support for a variety of development plans we are beginning to formulate, and they are both supportive and helpful.

We will continue to develop our very important mini and youth set up who are so vital in feeding players into senior rugby and maintaining the vitality of the club.

We were delighted to celebrate the success of our U16 team who prevailed in their county plate final. Well done lads.

Furthermore, an exceptional U10's team won the Prima Cup at Welford Road which caused yet more reasons for raucous celebration on their return to Bridge Road. Freddie didn't need an excuse, but it was a suitable reason for an extended Sunday afternoon in the sunshine which was enjoyed by many.

More of the same please this coming season and my grateful thanks go to all coaches and managers of the Y&M teams who are too numerous to mention here but know who they are.

However, I would like to highlight the work of Nev as our Youth Chair. His enthusiasm and dedication and tireless, good-humoured input over many years deserves recognition. Nev has made the difficult decision to step down from organising the Kingswood Mini festival having orchestrated it success for the past 9 years. Held over 2 weekends at Easter, bringing clubs here from all over England, Nev has almost single-handedly (Stacey has been incredible too) organised an army of volunteers to help with Kingswood. This year was no exception with Holt RFC welcoming 872 Children, 89 Teams from 12 clubs, 216 fixtures over 15 mini's pitches, 343 pre- ordered meals and turning up in 18 buses!

As a `Member's Club` enjoying the whole experience of a visit to Bridge Road is core to everything we aspire to. Our club philosophy, coaching or otherwise, is enjoy, enjoy, enjoy and it seems we don't have to reiterate that philosophy too many times on a Saturday afternoon, or Sunday morning, as well as at the variety of social events that have been held this season, including a very well supported Quiz night which we plan to be a regular annual event now. The experience at Holt begins with a focus on enjoying rugby (and perhaps the occasional pint) as well as all the other great benefits that surround our unique sport, and eventually ends with results on the pitch; that is the right formula for our club, and it has worked for us over a great many years.

I mentioned the importance we place in our pre-match lunches in previous correspondence to the members and the response was epic. Bushy excelled as our peerless organiser and naturally enough Julie and Alistair, and their teams have astounded with the level and quality of the food, drink and service provided on a Saturday. This brings me nicely on the Julie and Alistair who have been incredible all year and we, as a club, are incredibly lucky to have them and are very grateful to them for all they do, which is considerable let me tell you.

The lunches gave us the opportunity for a couple of charity fund events, and we have raised over £3k for MND and cancer charities throughout the year

This year the mood has felt very positive; people seem to be having fun and really enjoying the atmosphere. Success on the pitch helps of course but the consequence is we have more and more people coming forward to volunteer, all of whom are hugely appreciated. It seems we are doing less “nudging” to get things done which in turn means that you, as members, are having a good sense of club identity and your role in our overall development.

We put great store on strong club governance, and, within that, transparency and communication are everything. We do try to make sure that the Exec body are available to you and listening hard to feedback is an essential part of that. Please continue to feedback.

I need to thank the Exec for all their hard work. As you all know we transitioned the previous committee structure into its current form after extensive consultation and then ratification at last year’s AGM. Inevitably we had the occasional teething problem as roles and responsibilities settled in, however I must say the new structure has delivered well for the very large part. There has been a fair amount of hard graft by all involved but everyone has rolled up their sleeves and I am perfectly confident to be able to tell you we are in a much better place than we were 12 months ago, and the club as a whole is stronger for it.

Thanks must go to Ali, Nev, Ashley, Chris, Pete and of course Jeanette for their energy, industry, endeavour, and good humour to keep the show on the road. Thank you all.

Financially the club is in good heart and Ali will further describe that financial position to you in due course. May I take this opportunity to specifically thank him on your behalf for a fearsome amount of work he has put in this year. It is certainly worthy of note.

We are delighted to welcome Kaff Booty as Hon Treasurer and she will provide a wealth of expertise and experience as well as a very welcome additional resource. Please welcome Kaff when you are lucky enough to meet her. We also welcome Sara Allen back to lead on membership co-ordination with an aim to improve our efficiency in that key area.

Away from Bridge Road we are delighted and very proud to celebrate the great club and international careers of Tom and Ben Youngs, and now Freddie Steward too, plus a number of other successful professional rugby players who all started their rugby lives at HRFC, including of course Charlie Clare and Harry Simmons, both of Tigers. We have been delighted to celebrate Freddie Steward’s break through into international rugby and Ben becoming England’s most capped men’s player. Ben graciously allowed the quite phenomenal Mural to be “sprayed” on to the wall of the club to celebrate that milestone and it has already proved an amazing focal point and inspiration to a multitude of youngsters. Tom has had a quite extraordinary playing career which has now come to an end, but we

are delighted to welcome him and Maisie back to the club and greatly value his input. We have active discussion with Tigers to further our relationship with them for mutual benefit, so we look forward to seeing where those talks go and to reporting in due course to you.

Nearer to home I hope you have all seen the Rugby Club Magazine where HRFC was elected their "UK Club of the Season 2021-22". Ordinarily we understand that they elect an English, Welsh and Scottish club of the year, so this is an unprecedented award of which the members should be very proud and huge thanks go to Jeanette who committed hour upon hour to secure that accolade for the club.

We hope to keep taking small steps forward next season but are acutely aware of the changes in the game that are taking place and the pressures which some clubs have felt in the last 12 months as players attitudes alter and a more flexible lifestyle is sought.

Perhaps C19 proved to be an accelerator of that change and has exposed weaknesses that have been hitherto hidden but the changes are real and here.

We must not be complacent.

We will continue to listen to all our members, as well as the wider "noise" that is affecting our sport and provide a proper platform for our players at whatever age and level they play to excel if they wish but to enjoy everything that Rugby, and this club in particular, can offer. I hope we will continue to focus on clear and effective club governance so that the foundation stones of this club stay rock solid for everything else to build upon.

So, on behalf of the Exec, may I thank you all for a very supportive year and I look forward to having another go in September, if you will allow me the privilege.