

A BRIEF HISTORY OF TROJANS FOOTBALL CLUB

This is not intended to be a definitive history of the Trojans Football Club, the oldest rugby club in Hampshire, but more a selection of the highlights of the early years and a brief review of the past few years. More details and snippets can be found at “Some Interesting Historical Snippets”.

The Beginning

On the 3rd of September 1874 a meeting was held at the Antelope Hotel, Southampton, by members of a previous club, with a view to forming the "Trojans" Football Club.

The previous Club was always thought to be the Pirates, which name is still in use within the Club. However, it has now been established that the previous Club was, in fact, the "Southampton Football Club" which existed for one season under that name having previously been the "Grammar School Old Boys". The earliest recorded game so far found was the Old Boys against the Shirley Club on 5th October 1872 at Porter's Meadow. Shirley won the match by 2 touchdowns to one. H F Gibbs, voted the first Captain of the Trojans Football Club, was captain of both of these forerunners and a number of players named in press reports being the same in all three clubs and, of course, all played on the same ground.

The Club colours were voted as blue and red which is unchanged to this day. It was agreed that the first annual subscription should be five shillings per year. The first rugby games of the Club were played at Porters Mead, which is now called Queens Park, Southampton, opposite the Old Dock Gates.

The first Annual Meeting of the Club took place on the 24th September 1875 when the Treasurer reported a small credit balance of five pence halfpenny (2.29p). The results for the 1874/75 season produced five victories and three defeats.

The Club joined the Rugby Football Union in 1881.

The First Results

Southsea (A) lost by two punts out and seven touch downs

Salisbury (A) Won by one goal and two touch downs to nil.

Salisbury (H) Lost by one goal, one try and two touch downs to two tries and four touch downs.

Magpies Won by three tries and seven touch downs to nil.

Southsea (H) Won by one goal to nil

Springhill Won by one goal and three touch downs to one goal.

Royal Academy Gosport Lost by four tries and six touch downs to one try.

First Floodlit game

On the evening of 28th November 1878, a match was played against the Rovers Football Club by electric light, having been cancelled the night before because of rain. This was the first exhibition of electric light in Southampton, and believed to be only the second ever game of rugby under lights. The local newspaper reported that "at times the light was very brilliant and players could be seen plainly".

Ban the Game!

During the 1880 season, S E Gibbs died as a result of an injury while playing against Romsey. There was much local comment and the then Mayor of Southampton issued a handbill trying to ban all forms of football. [More details can be found in “Some Interesting Historical Snippets”.](#)

The Formation of the Hampshire Rugby Football Union

At the Trojan Club's initiative, a meeting was held on 13th April 1883 to discuss the formation of "The Hampshire County Rugby Football Union". In the first season of the County Club, at least seven Trojans represented the County.

In 1901 County activities ceased and it was again the Trojans, along with United Services, who, in 1910, convened a meeting at the Trojans Club for the purpose of forming a Rugby Football Union in Hampshire.

Over 700 Trojan members have represented the county at rugby at the various levels and 283 at senior level including 75 Women.

The First Hampshire Cup

In May 1888 the Trojans Committee proposed the starting of a Rugby Union Cup Competition in the interests of Rugby Football. The County Challenge Cup (Presented by Tankerville Chamberlayne M.P., President of Trojans) was started in the 1889/1890 season and the Club entered the same. During this year, not only was the pitch enclosed by rope, but a charge of sixpence was made to all spectators. The Cup was duly won by Trojans in March 1890. Whether it was ever played for again is not sure as, in 1891, Trojans decided not to enter because " it was felt that it was a farce putting up the cup at the fag end of the season to be competed for by three clubs"! The present whereabouts of the grand cup is not known, although it is believed it was presented back to Tankerville Chamberlayne.

Service to the County

As well as forming the County Union (twice), Trojan members have served the County well and it can be said that there has always been a Trojan involved in Hampshire Rugby since its formation.

In particular, over the 108 active years of the Union, six Trojan members have served as President of the Union serving a total of 49 years. Six Secretaries served a total of 36 years and for the first sixty-two years of County representation on the RFU Committee the Hampshire representative was a Trojan.

Mr. Hampshire

There can be no more respected and faithful servant of the County and the Game than one particular Trojan, Dudley Kemp, as the following record illustrates -

Captain of Trojans 1927-34, 1935-38

Barbarian 1930

Captain of Hampshire 1935

Played for England 1935.

President of the Rugby Football Union 1969

Member of the International Board 1971-77

Hampshire representative on the RFU Committee 1955-69

President HRFU 1973-76

Member of Management Committee of 1974 Lions tour to South Africa

Secretary HRFU 1946-67

Assistant Secretary HRFU 1967-68

Team Secretary HRFU 1946-53

Match Secretary HRFU 1953-56

Dudley died at his home in Devon in January 2003 aged 93.

The Wars!

Trojans Rugby had to be suspended three times because of wars - in 1897 because of the Boer War, 1914, the Great War and 1939 the World War.

Ten Rugby casualties of the Great War have been identified and twelve from other sports.

Moving Home

Although always considered a Southampton Club, Trojans actually now play in the Test Valley District. Over the years there have been many homes -

- 1874 the first games were played at Porters Mead, which is now called Queens Park, Queens Terrace. (by the Dock Gates). In 1883 the Town Council decided to convert Porters Mead into a park (Queens Park) so new grounds were required.
- 1884 the Club donated the sum of two guineas towards the purchase of the proposed Cricket Ground in Bannister Park, until recently, the County Cricket Ground, and commenced playing rugby there in the 1884/85 season.
- 1888 Joint tenants at the Antelope ground sharing it with St Mary's FC (the Saints) with Trojans having first call on the facilities. The ground was then developed for housing.
- 1897 Freemantle Ground, Stafford Road
- 1905 County Cricket Ground, Northlands Road
- 1923 G H Brown's farm in Wide Lane, Swathling with Atlantic Park (now Southampton Airport) being used for the dressing accommodation.
- 1929 the Club took out a five-year lease on Banister Court Stadium (shared with speedway), which had a capacity of 30,000 with covered stands for 6,000. There is no record of the size of the actual crowds!
- 1931 Both Bannister Court and G H Brown's farm were played on.
- 1933 The Trojans Sports Ground Company Limited with Sir George Hussey as Chairman was formed to raise money by debentures for the purchase and equipment of a Ground for the Club. Hampshire Rugby Football Union supplied £1,000, the Sports Section's Trustees invested £1,400 and debentures ultimately produced £2,300.
As a result 11 acres in Cemetery Road, Swaythling were purchased and rugby matches were transferred to the new ground. The ground was sold in 1945 for £7250 and the debentures paid off
- 1946 County Cricket Ground, Northlands Road
- 1947 Sports Centre, Southampton, inside the running track.
- 1958 Stoneham Park (the present ground). The ground, 22.8 acres, was purchased in 1953 for £1,205 and was another example of the members' foresight, as the timber in the ground was sold for sums almost sufficient to cover the cost of purchase! In 1958, a temporary corrugated iron changing room was completed and the foundations of the pavilion commenced. The pavilion was officially opened by A.T. Voyce, President of the Rugby Football Union, on 27th December 1960.

The Prime Years

Throughout the early and mid 1900s, Trojans went from strength to strength and provided many County Players as well a number of Internationals.

The modern peak was probably reached in the early 1960s when the Club could justifiably consider itself to be the premier civilian rugby club in the South of England (outside London). In 1961, seven rugby sides were fielded with over 200 players available for selection.

The success of a club's 1st XV can easily be seen by their position in the leagues. However, before the leagues began it was not so easy but Trojans' best season has to be the 1978/79 one. The local press set up merit tables and Trojans won the Echo Wessex Club Championship with a 100% record the table consisting of Basingstoke, Bournemouth, Guildford, Havant, High Wycombe, Marlow, Newbury, Salisbury and Staines. The Hampshire Senior Merit Table was also won with a 100% record and this table consisted of Andover, Basingstoke, Eastleigh, Gosport & Fareham, Portsmouth and Winchester. The Solent Sevens was also won.

The Lean Years

There were many reasons for the decline from that peak which started in the early 80s. More local clubs, easier transport and a change of working patterns (Trojans being very much a "transit camp" in those days) were some of them. The introduction of leagues in 1987 hit the Club at the worst possible time. In the first year, the Club was put into London Division 3 but could not cope at that level and dropped straight into Hampshire Division One. Luck was also in short supply when the Club, having finished fifth, seventh from bottom (!), the team was still relegated to Hampshire Division Two (a quirk of the league structure). There the Club stayed, battling for promotion with the other strong clubs to be relegated in the mass drop, until the 1992/93 season when the league was won with a record of played 10, won 10, for 353, against 37 which included a league record win of 91-0 against Waterlooville.

Three seasons were spent in Hampshire One but the 1995/96 season saw what was probably the strongest ever Hampshire Division 1 and relegation again befell the team. 1996/97 season saw us just lose out on promotion but success was achieved in 1997/98.

The Revival Years

Success was achieved in the 2000/2001 season when promotion was achieved to London Division 4SW (The old Division 3SW having been broken into two divisions). The first season at that level was quite successful, ending mid-table, but the next was not when Hampshire 1 again beckoned. Promotion to London 4 was achieved in 2007/08, to London 2 (leagues renamed) in 2009/10 and London 1 in 2011/12. Two years were survived in that division but London 3 called within two years.

In cup competitions, Trojans competed in 5 Hampshire Cup finals in the 70s and 80s, won the Hampshire Bowl in 2008/09 and 2016/17 and were runners up in 2015/16.

Competition is maintained throughout the Senior Club with the 2nd XV being in the top Hampshire merit league and the 3rd XV also being in the Hampshire merit league.

One significant advance was the introduction of Women's rugby which has developed into the strongest team in Southern England. The end of the 2006/07 season saw them promoted to the Championship 1 South (National level 2) where they have remained except for an unfortunate year at level 3. In 2009/10 a second team was entered into the leagues and in 2015 girls rugby was started with sides at Under 18, 15 and 13.

The Strength of Youth

One thing that has remained a strength since its formation in the mid 70s is the Youth Section. Being one of the first clubs to introduce Mini Rugby in England (imported from Wales) the Mini and Junior Sections have encouraged many thousands of youngsters into the game and the Youth section

now runs teams in every year group from under 7s to under 18s, holds annual tournaments and is generally held up to be a model of organization.

RFU Accreditation

Every team has qualified coaches and Trojans Rugby was very proud in 2010, to have become, the first club in Hampshire (and about the 20th in England) to be awarded the RFU "Whole Club Seal of Approval" and the Sport England "ClubMark". In 2012 this award was converted to "RFU Accredited Club". This accreditation is awarded for high quality provision of rugby in clubs. It recognises the effort and achievement of volunteers in reaching the standard required in the development of rugby across the whole club, demonstrating evidence of good practice in areas such as club management, player development & recruitment, child protection, sports equity, coaching, refereeing and volunteering.