

## E.R.F.C. - A “brief” history.

### *The Beginning*

The rugby club was formed on **28<sup>th</sup> August 1925**, when 37 attended a meeting in Enniskillen Town Hall, when the name, Enniskillen Rugby Club, was agreed, and it was also agreed that the club adopt the rules of Dublin University, as much as possible. Excellent minutes of this meeting still exist.

The first committee was formed by -

President – **Dr L Kidd**

Captain – **O R Darling**

Vice-Captain – **J S Long**

Secretary – **A Graham**

Treasurer – **S G Switzer**

Asst Treasurer – **R Martin**

**J A N Dickson, R L Murray, R Westcopp-George & A McGregor**

The first match was played on **30<sup>th</sup> September 1925** against Ballyshannon, in the Co Donegal town, with a team of -

**McWilliams, Darling, Ongunn, Warren, Eadie, Hare, Maguire, Coulter, Crothers, Daly, Long, Mavitty, Rafferty, Robinson and Sadlier.**

The club leased ground at Raceview, Enniskillen from a Mr Thomas Rutherford for £20 and consideration that “no animals are allowed to trespass or graze on the field between **1<sup>st</sup> September 1925** and **1<sup>st</sup> April 2006**”.

Whilst the club was not officially formed until 1925, the game of rugby had been played at Portora Royal School from the 1870's, and there are records of Enniskillen entering the Junior Cup in 1882, and Provincial Towns' Cup in 1907, so it is likely that the game was played on an ad hoc basis prior to formation.

At the 3<sup>rd</sup> AGM the secretary reported that “keenness was a very visible exhibition right from the beginning to the end of the season. The quality of the players play was very marked in its improvement and everything worked out in perfect harmony, so essential to the life of a club”. In this season the first honour caps were presented to **Ernest Gilpin, George Warren and Walter Cooper.**

### *The First Successes*

During the **1927/28** season the club saw it's first competitive success when they defeated City of Derry, 21 – 5, winning the McMillan Cup on **28<sup>th</sup> March**. When the team arrived home they were met by two pipe bands and skipper, George Warren was carried aloft through the town! Also, **H E Cummings** won an Ulster interpro cap.

In this season it was proposed to change the club colours to Green & Buff jerseys, with White shorts, but this was rejected “owing to heavy expenses on members individually and the club”.

In **1928/29** the success was repeated when Enniskillen defeated local rivals, Omagh on **6<sup>th</sup> April 1929**, and in 1929 the secretary submitted a crimson guaranteed fast-dye jersey sample received from The Athletic Stores, priced 6/9, and sold to members for 5/- each.

**1929/30** was a very successful season with the club reaching the final of the Junior Cup, losing to Ballymena 3 – 0, in extra time, on **22<sup>nd</sup> February 1930**, and also losing to City of Derry in the final of the McMillan Cup. A member of that side, **Robin Pratt**, later went on to play for Ireland, and he presented his international cap to the club in 1982.

**1930** – the name was changed to Enniskillen Rugby Football Club.

The next two seasons were disappointing mainly due to the pitch, as Raceview resisted attempts to drain it, and several matches had to be played on a ground at Ballinamallard, borrowed from the R.U.C. However in **1932** land belonging to a Mr J J West was obtained at Rossahilly, and whilst it was felt at the time that this was too far out of town, it was well drained, and level, and the standard of play improved.

On **Easter Monday 1934**, Enniskillen won the Provincial Towns' Cup, defeating Dungannon 16 – 6 in the final under the leadership of **Ian Eadie**. Then in **1937** the cup was won again, this time with **Mervyn Winslow** as skipper, when Dromore were beaten in a replay, 5 – 3. During this period recruits from the R.U.C. Training Depot provided a welcome addition to the club's playing strength.

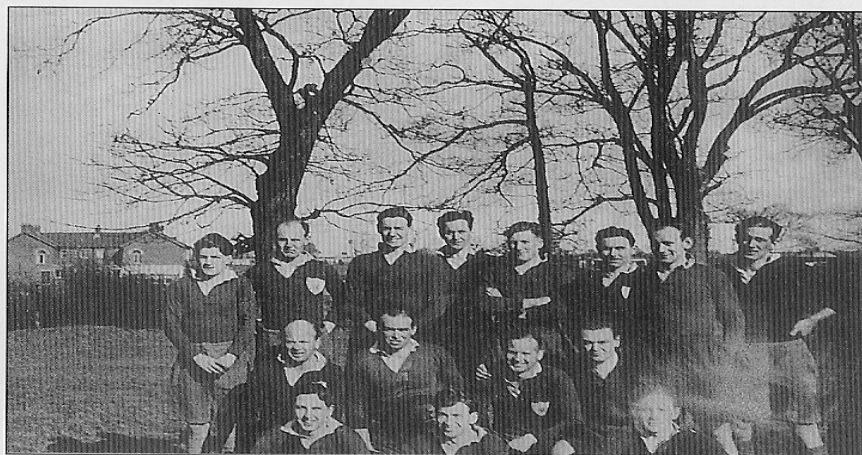
### *A War Intervenes*

The **1938/9** was notable for some fine performances by a young side and had everyone looking forward to the next season, but unfortunately a certain Adolf Hitler put paid to that! On the outbreak of war ten regular club members of that side, together with several others immediately joined the armed forces. Records show that **T R A (Ron) West** was killed in a bombing raid over Cologne and **Ivan Mavitty** died serving with New Zealand forces in the Western Desert.

### *A New Start*

On **24<sup>th</sup> October 1944** a meeting of the club was held and it was decided to once again field a team. **Harry West** was appointed captain, and he along with **Lewis Irwin**, as secretary, and **Eric Geddes** were the only surviving members of the **1938/39** team! The first game since 1939 was played on **11<sup>th</sup> November 1944** against an Army XV, and by the end of that season four matches were played, and all four were won!

### **Enniskillen Rugby Football Club 1945/46**



**Back Row:** Ritchie, Millar, Williams, Clements, Swan, Geddis, Hurst, Cramsie.  
**Middle Row:** H. Irwin, West (Captain), L. Irwin, Clarke.  
**Front Row:** Moffat, Hudson, Knott.

## *St Angelo*

During the war the pitch at Rossahilly disappeared under a concrete runway, strategically important to the war effort, so the club obtained the use of a field at St Angelo, which was again level and well-drained. Interest in rugby increased to the extent that during **1955/56** the club was able to field two teams for the first time.

The club remained at St Angelo, where they had the use of two fields, but many felt that these were too far out of town, and other drawbacks were difficulty in parking, the lack of any shelter and the fact that they had to share the pitches with grazing cattle!

## *Moving Again*

The club secured the use of a playing field from Enniskillen Borough Council at Celtic Park in **1963**, and many felt that this was the end of many difficulties, but Celtic Park proved to be a disaster as it was inadequately drained, and many sharp stones appeared and knee protectors were required by players!

The disappointment with Celtic Park proved to be a blessing in disguise, when at an Extraordinary General Meeting in **November 1965** it was decided unanimously to acquire new playing fields. A special committee was appointed to review potential sites within a reasonable distance to Enniskillen, and in **February 1966** it reported back to an AGM, with a choice between purchasing a Mr Moore's farm at Mullaghmeen, or leasing fields at St Angelo.

The purchase was forcefully backed and it was decided to make enquiries as to the extent of financial support that could be secured, and within a week promises of £1,600 had been received and it was decided to purchase the 15 acre farm.

A portion was not required and was re-sold, with the proceeds used to purchase Mullaghmeen School, the nucleus of the present clubhouse. Funds were raised through debentures, life memberships and donations from local businesses and individuals. A grant was promised from the Ministry of Education and the National Playing Fields Association, whilst the IRFU made a loan of £2,000.

During the summer of **1966** three pitches were levelled., one being completed and sown with grass, and these were officially opened by **Mr Eugene Davy**, President of the IRFU on **9<sup>th</sup> September 1967**, when an Enniskillen Select entertained a British Army XV, with Enniskillen strengthened by several international players, notably **Tom Kiernan**, Irish captain and **Noel Murphy**, who travelled from Cork.

The clubhouse was noted completed by this date as the Ministry of Education wisely suggested a more elaborate conversion and the building of changing accommodation was completed during the winter of **1967/68**, and officially opened by **Mr J E Nelson**, President of the IRFU, Ulster Branch in **September 1968**.

It should be noted that the Army repaid the club's **1967** hospitality when in **1972** they defused a bomb, which had been placed in the clubhouse!

## *50 Years Old!*

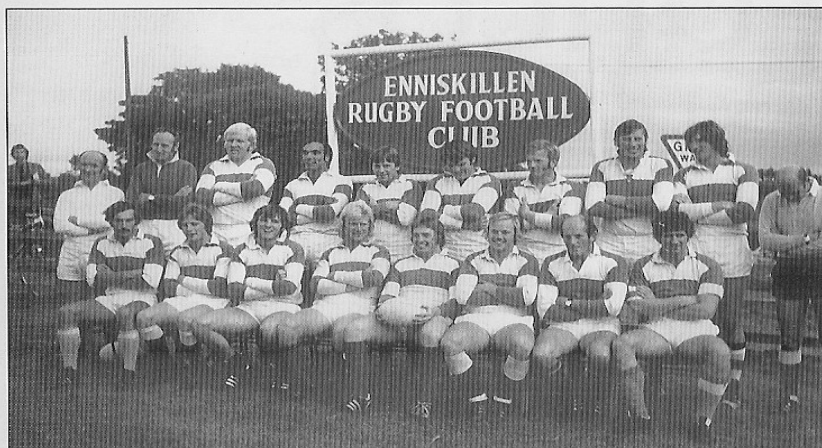
To commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in **1975** the club played the Irish Wolfhounds, which contained notable celebrities such as **Jean-Pierre Rives** of France. It was probably the biggest

game ever seen at Mullaghmeen, and captain **John Latimer**, who played in the front row alongside former R.U.C. Chief Constable, **Ronnie Flanagan**, scored the side's only try in a 13 – 13 draw.

## Enniskillen Select XV v Irish Wolfhounds (1975)



**Back Row Left to Right:** A. Shaw (ERFC), N. Hood (Omagh), G. Crothers (NIFC), L. Galvin (Athlone), P. Agnew (CIYMS), G. Thompson (ERFC), M. Horner (NIFC), R. Flanagan (CIYMS), A. McClean (Ballymena), H. Steele (Ballymena), K. Clarke (Referee).  
**Front Row Left to Right:** K. McComb (ERFC), L. Porter (City of Derry), A. Armstrong (Bangor), C.D. Hudson (President ERFC), J. Latimer (Captain ERFC), A. Harrison (Dungannon), D. Millar (Dungannon), J. Nevin (ERFC).



**Back Row Left to Right:** A. Shaw (ERFC), N. Hood (Omagh), D. Dalton (Malone), J. Duggan (Leicester), S. Kirkwood (NIFC), P. Warfield (Cambridge), P. Robb (Instonians), M. Keane (Lansdowne), A. Ripley (Rosslyn Park), K. Clarke (Referee).  
**Front Row Left to Right:** (Unknown), K. O'Brien (Rosslyn Park), M. Quinn (Lansdowne), J.P. Rives (Toulouse), S. Smith (Leicester), P. Wheeler (Leicester), P. McLaughlin (Northern), M. Sherry (Lansdowne).

### *The New Clubhouse*

During the **1980/81** season the club built its new, and present, clubhouse at a cost of £200,000. The old clubhouse was sold and the members moved across the road so that the pitches and club became one unit of land.

### *Canada 1983*

In the summer of **1983** the club embarked on its first major overseas tour, when they visited Canada

with a 29 man squad. They played five matches with everyone playing at least two games and returned home undefeated and this led to a relatively successful following season.

### ***The Most Successful Season – 1986/7***

Under the leadership and guidance of **Colin Wallace**, this was perhaps the finest Enniskillen team in its history, winning Junior League Section One for the first time, the McMillan Cup and the Past Players' Cup. Just when it looked like a clean sweep was on the cards the side fell in two finals, to Ballynahinch in the Towns' Cup and Cooke in the Junior Cup. Three players represented Junior Ulster – **Brian Rutledge, Niall McEnhill and Colin Wallace**.

Winners of: Junior League (Section 1), Past Players Cup, McMillan Cup  
Finalists: Town's Cup, Junior Cup



**Back Row:** Raymond Bruce, George Richmond, Rodney Connor, Brian Rutledge, Pat Cassidy, Derek Wright, Ken McCoy.  
**Front Row:** Des Reid, John Latimer, Niall McEnhill, Colin Wallace (Captain), Crawford Little (President), Stevie Allister, John Gibson, Garry McQueen.  
**Team Members not included:** Robert Gibson, Jim Brady, Brian Armstrong, Reggie Ferguson.

### ***New Pitch, Lights, and Canada again!***

During **1997/98** the club secured grant aid from the Sports Lottery and Foundation for the Sports & Arts of £100,000 and a proposal was made by some to decline the offer and move relocate closer to the town. For approximately two years the debate raged about the future.

During this time, in **August 2000**, the club again travelled to North America with a 36 man squad, playing in Toronto, Boston & Montreal, and also in the largest rugby tournament in North America, at Saranac Lake, New York State.

Finally, in **November 2000** it was decided to accept grant aid to develop the grounds at Mullaghmeen, and in the Spring of 2001, Dean Public Works started redeveloping the “first” pitch, as well as erecting match floodlights with an overall project cost of £150,000 plus VAT.

The pitch was handed over on **14<sup>th</sup> October 2002**, with the first match played in **November 2002**, against Canadian tourists, Montreal Irish. The official opening featured a game between an Ulster XV and an Ireland Under-21 XV on **16<sup>th</sup> May 2003**.

## *On Tour Again*

Enniskillen's next overseas venture was to France during the 2007 World Cup, where the club fared better than Ireland.

