

## ***History of Old Mitchamians Rugby Football Club***

***1934 - 1938***

***1945-1968***

Contributions from:- D.H.(Doug) Morris (1951 –1958) B.(Digger) Stanley (1955-1967) P.(Paul) Fettes (1957 - 1968)

R.A.(Reg) Brown wrote to me in 1977 mentioning that the Old Mitchamians were formed in 1934. He was the first Captain, holding the post for five seasons, with the first match being played against the Bantams at Raynes Park – losing 52-3. In the subsequent seasons records of match results and the team players were preserved; 1935/36 played 23 won 11 drawn 1 lost 11 (points for 227 against 269); 1936/37 played 19 won 10 drawn 2 lost 7: 1937/38 played 25 won 13 drawn 0 lost 12. During these three seasons regular opponents were Old Beccehamians; played 6 won 2 lost 4 (points for 75 against 80). It is interesting to note that on 13th October 1951 three teams turned out to play Old Beccehamians – 1stXV won 18-3, 2ndXV(14 men) won 32-0 and 3rdXV(12 men!) won 24- 11.

At the 50th Anniversary Dinner, held at RFU Headquarters Twickenham, J.B.(Barry) Pritchard was a Guest Speaker on behalf of the Old Mitchamians. He mentioned that the Club went into limbo during the Second World War and started up again in 1945 with E.A.(Eddie) Golbourne as Captain/Secretary and playing an inaugural match against the Boys' Grammar School. The first full season of fixtures came in 1947/48 with Barry himself as Captain and Secretary. Matches were limited to one team only, which played 22 won 12 drew 1 lost 9 (points for 318 against 135). Top points scorer was A. (Alan) Dew with 44 (1 try 13 conversions 5 penalties) and top try scorer was L.G. (Len) Glover with 10. Thirty players represented the Club and with membership increasing to fifty by the end of the season fixtures for two teams were arranged for the following season. At the end of the 1948/49 the Club made a first entry into Seven-a-Side competitions. Two teams were entered for the Staines tournament with the 1st Seven beating the 2nd Seven in the Final 13pts to 6 pts. In the Surrey Sevens the team was beaten by Streatham in the quarter finals. Arguably the most successful seasons were 1952/53 and 1953/54, under the Captaincy of R.G. (Bob) Brett, with a record of played 25 won 24 lost 1 (points for 419 against 67) and played 27 won 26 lost 1 (points for 431 against 54) respectively.

Before settling onto Figges Marsh and eventually Wandle Valley, the Club played on many grounds. Mitcham Stadium (now a housing estate), NAFFI (now the Tooting & Mitcham FC ground), Kings College (now a housing estate) and Mitcham Common ( Mill House changing rooms now a Restaurant). Playing on Figges Marsh involved changing at the Boys' School, Laundry Van transportation to and from the pitch, retrieval and replacement of the posts kept at the Laundry opposite, tea at the School, and a walk through Mitcham to the "White Hart" for boisterous entertainment. The Lease of the ground at Wandle Valley was a major project involving the construction of a Club House. This was a team effort but it should be mentioned that key members ensuring success were L.G.(Len) Glover in his capacity as Architect and labour force co-ordinator, F.(Fred) Worman as the master Electrician and K.(Ken) Sanders as the Overseer. The Clubhouse was formally opened by C.H.(Cyril) Gadney President RUFC on 19th September, 1962. Use of the ground for matches took effect from September 1963. At first the new ground had two pitches in use but it soon became clear that there was insufficient space to warrant this and by 1965 another pitch was rented at the St Helier sports complex for the two lower sides. This still left the ritual of putting up nets over the hospital windows before each game for the 1st and AXV's.

Wandle Valley Hospital - Club House Working Party -1962





The mid 1960s were a time of economic upheaval and many of the senior stalwart members of the club moved away from the London area because of the high cost of property. This resulted in a fixture list that was far too strong for the younger members who took their places in the 1st XV. In playing terms therefore 1964/5/6 were a real struggle for the club with the 1st XV victories few and far between. The news filtering through that the school was due to close did not help matters. The problems in the field of play did not however affect the ability of the club to enjoy the social facilities offered by the new clubhouse. The children's Xmas parties, the Boxing day festivities and after match entertainment before the days of the breathalyser were well in keeping with the reputation of the swinging sixties. All this ensured that although the club was finding it difficult on the field of play the team spirit amongst the members was second to none. At a Special Meeting of the Club, prior to the 1967/8 season "Digger" and Eddie Stanley, stalwarts of the Club, proposed that the Club should go "Open" and the inevitable conclusion was reached, that without a school to support it the club could not continue to exist as an "Old Boys Club". The decision was reluctantly taken therefore to change the name of the club to Mitcham RUFC (inc Old Michamians RUFC). Thus Mitcham RUFC came into being, which with an extensive recruitment drive enabled the club to run five sides for a while. The bottom team was accommodated by hiring another pitch at Sutton Common (near Rose Hill). The 1st XV improved in strength and began to win almost as many games as it lost. Within a few years Mitcham RUFC was able to feature a team at Twickenham in the Middlesex 7s Finals.

During 33 years of "Old Mitchamian" rugby a number of members contributed towards the successful standing of the Club. J.B.(Barry) Pritchard 1st XV Captain for five years (1947/48-1952/53), Secretary twice (1947/48 and 1961/62) and Chairman twice (1964/65 & 1965/66). E.L. (Laurie) Shepherd Chairman thirteen years (1951/52-1963/64). D.A.(Tony) West in many capacities but particularly as an extremely effective Match Secretary. F.(Fred) Worman also in a number of capacities but particularly as a longstanding player (1949 – 1972). H.(Bert) Fisher who in 2001 registered 50 years membership with the Old Mitchamian and Mitcham Clubs, supporting both on the field, the touchline or clubhouse with equal enthusiasm and loyalty. The support of family and friends, notably J.O. (Pop) Pritchard, H.A (Bert) Brett, T (Tom) Glover and W.E.(William) Ashton, during the early years greatly assisted in the establishment of the Club. Masters at the Grammar School also provided valuable support. A.J. ("Doggy") Doig the Headmaster (1930- 1952), was instrumental in the School playing Rugby and was President (1935-1952). He also improved the quality of the singing! Games Master S.C.("Gaffer") Cook, of Gloucester, Blackheath and a Cambridge Blue, inspired and sometimes terrified the School team to a high level of play. Another Master, H.S. (Stanley) Judge, was the School Representative for many years and Chairman(1966/67). Players of note include E.J.(Eric) Humphries who played for Rosslyn Park, Surrey, Kent and United Services and T.D.(Tony) Gathercole who played for Harlequins, Surrey, London Counties (v Australia) and was an England Trials reserve (2). A number of Club members were selected for County trials, local representative matches and for Bank and Insurance representative teams.