

Waterloo Rugby Union Football Club

A view of the club as seen from
"Boozers' Bank"



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Introduction

Waterloo Rugby Union Football Club (R.U.F.C), affectionately known as "Loo" by the supporters, is steeped in history and tradition and "Boozers' Bank" is part of that tradition. As the name may suggest, Boozers' Bank is an elevated section of the spectators' terrace nearest to the club house and bar which facilitates "liquid top ups" during the game.

During a match some suggestions may emerge from Boozers' Bank to "help" the referee and touch judges with their decisions and knowledge of the laws of the game. However, most comments are given and taken in good spirit and, win or lose, we die-hard fans return for the next game and another eighty minutes of banter.

Even at away fixtures the Boozers' Bank is recreated on the away team terraces with Loo supporters taking up their normal viewing positions. There has also been a suggestion that Boozers' Bank should go "on tour" to the grassy knoll on the far side of St Anthony's Road for a picnic. It is a special concept.

This pamphlet aims to trace the history, development and memorable moments of Waterloo R.U.F.C. from its foundation to the adoption of its new name in 2012, Firwood Waterloo.



1. History

Based in St Anthony's Road, Blundellsands, Merseyside, Waterloo Rugby Union Football Club (RUFC) celebrated its 130th season in 2012. The club was founded in 1882 by George Abercrombie and brothers, Sidney and Harry Hall, all former pupils of Merchant Taylor's School. It was created to keep together a successful Merchant Taylors' School team.

The club's original ground, near the Serpentine, Blundellsands inspired the name of the Serpentine club. There is then a difference of opinion as to the next chapter of the club's history. One version says that the club moved to Manley Road, Waterloo in 1884 after, as Waterloo historian Ian Hamilton-Fazey stated in the Crosby Herald on 20th November 2003,

"...club officials were falsely accused of poaching by a disgruntled gamekeeper as they filled in rabbit holes one moonlit Friday ready for the next day's match. Evicted, the club relocated to a field off Manley road, Waterloo and renamed itself."

The other version was that the club relocated to Haig Road, Waterloo, the former ground of the Northern Cricket Club, and from 1906 the name was changed to Waterloo.

Waterloo RUFC is now situated in St Anthony's Road, Blundellsands. This ground, known originally as The Memorial Ground in honour of the fifty-one club members who lost their lives in the Great War, was opened in 1921. The Crosby Herald of 17th December 1921 reported the unveiling of the War Memorial Tablet which was installed over the fire place in the pavilion where it still hangs today. It includes the words of the President of the club at the time, Mr T.B. Schofield, who said,

"....the real War Memorial was the ground itself but the tablet had been erected as a lasting regard to those members of the club who fell in the Great War. He hoped that gentlemen and players when they looked upon it would "play the game" not only on the field but in their daily life."

The ground itself in the past had been a nine hole golf course which, according

to Ray Physick's book of 2006, "Made in Liverpool", members helped to level to be playable for rugby. £10,000 was raised by the membership who worked over many hours to help to build the core of the current pavilion. The pavilion's wood panelling in the dressing rooms and great open fire in the bar make it one of the best preserved pavilions in senior rugby. It is thought to be one of the few, if not the only bar in the United Kingdom from which the players emerge to start the match. Around the walls are boards of honour showing the club's past glories, captains, chairmen and presidents alongside memories and photographs of past players, teams and events.

The move to the new Memorial Ground in 1921 was to have a dramatic effect as the new facilities helped attract good players and prestigious fixtures. As reported by the Crosby Herald in an article looking back at Waterloo in October 1998,

"There was a terrific influx of new, non-playing members. You have to remember that life was so very different in those days. There was no radio or television and if you wanted to watch sport you had to go there and see it as it happened.....Waterloo's game started to grow to figures beyond the wildest fancies of its founding fathers.....Derby matches against Birkenhead Park regularly attracted more than 8,000 spectators.....Waterloo, in fact became much more than a rugby club, it became a social institution. Crosby was growing continuously and the club was a principal point of focus in the community."

The original club colours were navy blue with dark red hoops, similar to the Merchant Taylors' sporting colours which also inspired the Barcelona football team kit. However, according to the Crosby Herald of April 15th 2004, this was changed in 1893 to the more familiar team kit of, not ordinary green, red and white but myrtle green, white and scarlet. The club badge displays the Lancastrian red rose with a black griffin in the centre.

This picture shows Waterloo in action at Blundellsands with the distinctive myrtle, scarlet and white kit.



At one point in the club's history a griffin was adopted as a mascot who wandered around the ground and amongst the crowd during matches. The talk on Boozers' Bank suggested that the griffin could be any one of several club members as they were never seen at the same time and in the same place as the griffin. There was also a memorable occasion, at the end of the successful 2003/04 season when the team had won their league, gained promotion back to National League Division 2, reached the final of the Powergen Shield at Twickenham and were voted Rugby World Magazine "Team of the Year" that the griffin was seen to disrobe of his costume, streak the length of the pitch and swallow-dive under the posts. The griffin's identity - and more - on this occasion was revealed but other accusations were never proven and the griffin has since disappeared.

Another of Waterloo's many traditions is the rivalry with the Irish team Wanderers. The two teams meet and play for the coveted prize "Percy the Pike". Percy is a two foot long pike mounted on a wooden board which bears the names and years of the winners. The victorious team gets to keep the trophy in their clubhouse until the next encounter.

Currently, Waterloo has four senior men's teams, a Women's team, a girls' under 18 and girls' under 15 team, a Senior Colts and Junior Colts team and several junior rugby teams. The club was affiliated with Liverpool's Capital of Culture year in 2008.



2. League and cup highs and lows

Waterloo's best supported years were from their move to St Anthony's Road up to the Second World War when crowds of up to 10,000 could be expected. These days the crowd capacity is limited to 6,000 and between 600 to 800 supporters attend home games.

It was during the 1970s that Loo showed national prowess when, as well as normal league fixtures, Waterloo competed with varying degrees of success in a national competition, the John Player Cup. This cup, originally known as the Anglo-Welsh Cup was the RFU Club Competition for which no cup was awarded nor sponsorship sought. It was renamed the John Player Cup in 1976 and in the 1976/77 final, Waterloo were runners up, defeated 27 points to 11 by Gosforth.

On the night before the Waterloo team was meant to travel to Twickenham, the Crosby Herald reported that Southport Magistrates had "put damper on rugger celebrations" by cutting short planned victory celebrations. They reported on 15th April 1977 that,

"An application for an extended bar licence until 2 am was refused. The celebration, they announced, must end by midnight. But that won't stop the jubilant fans from making the most of this unique match."

Also in December 1977, Waterloo was presented with the Pernod Rugby World team of the month pennant for September. Again the Crosby Herald reported that,

"..with the pennant came a case of Pernod which football committee chairman Bob Atlay assured was still intact on Saturday night."

Waterloo achieved a quarter final place in The John Player Cup in 1983/4 and 1984/85 and won the Glengarth Sevens at Stockport RUFC in 1986. In the 1987/88 season, not only were they quarter finalists in the John Player Cup, they finished tenth in the Courage League.

Although Waterloo was able to compete in the top division of English rugby for the first two seasons after changes in the league structure, they were relegated in 1989. Also in this year the name of the John Player cup was again

changed for the 1989 tournament and it became the Pilkington Cup.

In 1991/2, although being defeated in round 16 of the Pilkington cup, Waterloo finished third in the Courage League Division 2. In 1992/3 they finished second in the same league and again were defeated quarter finalist in the Pilkington Cup having beaten Bath 9-8, a team featuring former England star Jeremy Guscott and Orrell, a former local team, 8-3 to get there. They met Harlequins in the next round who included another former England star, Will Carling, in the quarter final and despite a valiant struggle, were defeated 14-21.

The Pilkington cup changed its name once again in 1997 to the Tetley's Bitter Cup but Waterloo had little success. By 2001 the tournament was further renamed the Powergen Cup.

Waterloo remained in Division 2 of the league until the 2000/2001 season when they gained promotion to National Division 1. Unfortunately, success was short-lived and they finished fourteenth in this league and were relegated back to National League 2. They did, however enjoy another quarter final appearance in the Powergen Cup in this year but the following year, after a disappointing thirteenth place in National League 2, they slipped down into National League 3 North. As Rugby World magazine in July 2004 pointed out,

"Waterloo had suffered successive relegations in 2001 and 2002 and a year ago finished third in their first season in Three North."

During 2003 to 2004 the team won the National League 3 North league and gained promotion back to National League Division 2. As the "Rugby World" also printed in July 2004,

"Extinction seemed not far away for Waterloo a few years ago, so winning this title has rewarded all the tenacious efforts to keep the club afloat."

The club also reached the final of the Powergen Shield at Twickenham having been underdogs to the first division Wakefield. Waterloo were 9 points to 20 down early in the second half but made a stunning comeback with a winning 27 points to 25. As the Crosby Herald reported on 15th April 2004,

"The home spectators will remember the fantastic all round performance of the team, and particularly the efforts of Waterloo captain Tony

Handley who deservedly took the Man of the Match award."

They met Bristol Shoguns at 12.00pm on Saturday April 17th 2004 but unfortunately were beaten 53 points to 24 to the National One side. As the Crosby Herald were proud to report on 22nd April 2004,

"Hundreds of Waterloo fans enjoyed an unforgettable day out at Twickenham.....On the pitch, the players fought bravely in the sunshine against superior opposition and gave their merry band of travellers something to shout about by scoring three excellent tries."

Waterloo was voted Rugby World's "Team of the Year" for 2004 and the magazine article in Rugby World reported that the Rugby World's Team of the Year only lost one league match 24 points to 20 in April to runners-up Halifax. Following this, Waterloo needed to win all three of their outstanding games, two of which were at Longton and one at Blaydon. They succeeded and were promoted as champions. As the Crosby Herald reported on 13th May 2004 following the final game of the season against Longton,

"Even the damp weather could not spoil the celebrations after Waterloo clinched the National Division three (North) championship with a win on the last day of the season."

We members of Boozers' Bank actually migrated onto the pitch to join the other supporters, watch the presentations and to join in with the celebrations. A memorable day!

In October of this year Waterloo made the news again. This time it was to celebrate the "first woman in rugby role" when Gill Burns became president of the club. She took over from Tony Pugh, but more about Gill a little later.

Between 2004 and 2007 Waterloo achieved success, by coming fourth in 2004/5 season and second in 2005/6 season in National League 2. They again gained promoted to National Division 1. Australian Mick Melrose was installed as coach and Ian Aitchison moved from head coach to director of rugby. However, in April, part of the coaching team, Ian Aitchison and Phil Winstanley announced that were to step down after the end of the season because of the demands of balancing full time occupations and coaching a first division rugby

team.

The step up to the higher level of rugby proved difficult for Waterloo's first fifteen and once again their success was to only last one season. Having finished sixteenth, Waterloo was relegated in 2007/8 with two games to go and Mick Melrose was replaced by Dave Blyth as the head coach. Dave Blyth was a former Waterloo player over many years, having started as a junior.

Despite winning the Lancashire Cup for the seventh time in their history during the 2007/8 season, beating Sedgley Park 30-19, all was not well at Blundellsands. The relegation saw many of the first fifteen players leaving the club including Captain Freeman Payne and coach Dave Blyth and a new coach Chris O'Callaghan was brought in from Aberavon. Joe Lydon, a legend of Rugby League was installed as a performance consultant. With all of the changes the league campaign got off to a slow start and Waterloo did not come close to challenging for promotion.

By the end of the 2008/9 season Waterloo was experiencing financial problems and plans for rebuilding were dashed. The club actually struggled to field teams and relegation to National Division Three North sadly followed.

Head coach Martin O'Keefe departed during the 2009/2010 season and a new head coach, Steve Moore, a former Welsh International, was installed. Having a successful youth policy, the club tried to build on this and provide opportunities for the developing players, but the season again turned out to be too tough a challenge and relegation followed after Waterloo finished bottom.

Steve Moore resigned soon after this season and ex player and crowd favourite Jan van Deventer, known affectionately as J Lo, became director of rugby with Gareth Hopkin as assistant coach. Despite a slow start to the 2010/2011 season, Waterloo's position gradually improved and they avoided relegation with a win over Middlesbrough in the final game. The season ended with Loo having more bonus points than anyone else in the division to the relief of Boozers' Bank. Celebration called for the "Kings of the Bonus Point"!

The 2011/2012 season saw Jan van Deventer still in charge and a great deal of the season witnessed Waterloo in the middle of the table but then dropping away in the final weeks. They narrowly remained in the division by a losing bonus

point at home against Rossendale.

In the women's game, as mentioned, Waterloo by 2004 was under the presidential guidance of Gill Burns. Gill was a Women's Rugby Union World Cup winner with England and vowed to try for promotion. The Crosby Herald of 14th October 2004 described how,

"Her new role has already caused a stir among some of the National League Two teams who have visited St Michael's Road in Blundellsands."

Gill herself was quoted as saying,

"A few eyebrows have been raised by members of the opposition this season but once they know about my involvement with the club they seem fine."

Gill was also dedicated to promoting the club as a whole and stated in the Crosby Herald on 14th October 2004 that,

"...this club isn't just about the first team. It's a joy to support the other teams such as the minis and the women's team. The social members of the club matter as well."

The Bootle Times also reported on 14th October 2004 that Gill Burns, "a woman from Litherland" had been installed as Waterloo President and quoted her as saying,

"It's such an honour to be the head of a great club like Waterloo. We had such a successful season last year and we hope to be equally so this year".

2005 saw the club president and former England Women's Rugby Union international receive an M.B.E. for services to sport. In the 2005/6 season the women's fifteen finished top of the northern regional division. They won the playoffs and gained promotion into the Premiership 2 division. Gill Burns stepped down in the 2006/7 season as president.

The women's team now play in the RFUW Championship North 1 which is the league below the Premiership. The ladies sections also boast many regional and county players at senior, under-eighteen and under-fifteen levels. At present

(January 2013) the ladies first team is leading the league with 43 points with their closest rivals, Camp Hill Ladies, having 35 points (Waterloo programme Saturday 12th January 2013). This programme also details how the ladies are,

".... in the process of pulling together a development plan and demonstrating to the RFU that we are capable of competing in the Premiership on and off the pitch."

Waterloo has also had success at Colts level (under age nineteen). The most successful team to date won their league in 2002/02, gained promotion and won the Lancashire Cup the following season. The present Colts team currently compete in the Senior B league of the Lancashire Colts section.

Always prepared to encourage junior participation in rugby, an article in the Crosby Herald of October 5th 2006 reported that a party was held to celebrate the Waterloo junior team being "kitted out" by a major luxury car company, Lexus, Liverpool.

Lexus was to hold a Lexus Junior Rugby Festival in April 2007 in which twelve clubs from the North West and Midlands were to enter. Waterloo had accepted the invitation to play and represent the Liverpool branch of Lexus. The General Manager of Lexus, Paul Beaman was quoted in the Crosby Herald on the October 2006 as saying,

"We are very proud to support budding rugby players and we are absolutely delighted that so many young people from Waterloo Rugby Club will have the opportunity to play in the tournament".

There were to be regional rounds and a national final - great experience for the youngsters.



3. Players' achievements

As detailed in the previous section, Waterloo had won the Lancashire Cup seven times by the 2007/8 season and at the end of that season, several Waterloo players made significant contributions to the success of the Lancashire team in the national country championship campaign. The players included Dan Palmer, Martin O'Keefe, Jan Van Deventer, Freeman Payne, Steve Nutt and Neil Kerfoot. The result was a 32-26 triumph over Devon at Twickenham, England's spiritual home of rugby.

Waterloo also boasts many present and former players who have gone on to achieve national and international success. Some of the more recent England players include World Cup winners, Ben Kay, Will Greenwood, Andy Titterrell, Kyran Bracken, Austin Healey and Paul Grayson. James O'Brien and Tom Holloway are two current men's first team players who play internationally for Malta and recently retired Nicholas Christopherson was a Norwegian international.

There is a board in Waterloo's club house listing Waterloo players who have earned international caps. It includes some of the following:

England	Alan Ashcroft 1956-59	Jasper Bartlett 1951
	Reg Bazley 1952-55	N.O. Bennet 1948
	Eric Bole 1946	John Cain 1950
	Roy Foulds 1929	Dick Greenwood 1966-69
	Dicky Guest 1939-49	Jack Heaton 1935-47
	Chris Jennins 1967	Roy Leyland 1935
	Humphrey Luya 1948-49	Graham Meikle 1934
	Steve Meikle 1929	Joe Periton 1925-30
	Sam Perry 1948	Gordon Rimmer 1949-54
	Jim Syddall 1982-84	Peter Thompson 1959
	Bert 'HB' Toft 1936-39	Dick Uren 1948-50
	Harold Uren 1946	Jack Wallens 1927
	Bob Weighill 1947- 48	Gill Burns
	Sonia Harris	

Scotland	Alastair Fisher 1947 Jackie McArthur 1932 Allan Roy 1939 Ally Little 2001	Colin Fisher 1975-76 Sammy McQueen 1923 J.W. Scott 1928-30
Ireland	Robin Godfrey 1954	
Wales	Raymond Bark-Jones 1933 Kylie Wilson Jennifer Davies	Watcyn Thomas 1931-33 Rachel Brown
Italy	Nicola Mazzucato 2007	
Spain	Pablo Feigoo 2007-2008,	Jaime Nava 2008
USA	Chad Erskine 2006	
Canada	Ander Monro 2006	
Cameroon	Njike Tchakoute	

Before the final of the 2003 Rugby World Cup in which England beat Australia 20 points to 17, Waterloo planned a special breakfast at 8.00am to cheer on ex-players. Those included in the England squad against the Wallabies were scrum half Kyran Bracken, outside half Paul Grayson, centre Will Greenwood and lock Ben Kay. According to the Crosby Herald of 20th November 2003,

"In total 34 international players past and present have started off their careers at the famous Blundellsands club".

The final itself would take place to be followed at 12.30 at the club by a primary schools' mini "World Cup" tournament. Then, before Waterloo played Fylde in the National League Three (North) match, the Waterloo Chairman, Colin Brennand, would officially open the new 500-seater stand.

In the paper of 27th November 2003 the Crosby Herald published a story citing "Waterloo's vital role in England's fabulous world cup win". The report went on to say how the President of the club, Tony Pugh, was proud owner of Ben Kay's first England shirt which Kay wore when England played the Barbarians in 2001. The shirt is signed and reads, "To all at Waterloo mini and juniors. Thanks for getting me here - Ben Kay."

The shirt was initially given to Tony Pugh to auction after Ben Kay discovered

that Mr Pugh, his friend, was suffering from cancer. He thought is could raise money so that Mr Pugh could go away on holiday with his wife. Since then, Tony Pugh made a full recovery and auctioned the shirt to raise money for the junior sections at the club. He was quoted as saying,

"We are very, very proud of Ben and what he has achieved. He came through the minis and junior ranks here. He's a massive hero to all the kids in our junior teams. They all want to be the next Ben Kay.....This club can also feel proud that it has helped produce four players who were in the England squad that won the World Cup."

There was also a piece in the same newspaper of 27th November 2003 which reported how the teachers at Merchant Taylors' School were "glued to their TV screens" following Ben Kay. Former England and Lions wing, a former national coach and Director of PE at Merchant Taylors', Mike Slemen, said,

"I thought he played well. He made a couple of mistakes but his contribution right across the field was immense and he put his body on the line time and time again."

Headmaster Simon Dawkins described Ben as a "modest character" who was,

"...a good academic as well as being a sportsman..... He had a natural presence and command not merely because of his size, but because of his personality and he was still extremely modest and unselfish."

Ben Kay had a botched try attempt at the end of the first half of the final and in a half-time speech, Tony Pugh is reported in the Crosby Herald on 27th November 2003 to have jested,

"What a man Ben Kay is. Let's just hope the next time he receives the ball he bloody catches it".

If there is ever any ball juggling or missed passes in front of Boozer's Bank it is accompanied by a loud cry of "Hands of Wood!" This, thankfully, is normally ignored by the players.

The Crosby Herald reported how the clubhouse was packed for the final with 150 supporters who erupted into song as the final whistle blew with a spontaneous chorus of "Swing Low Sweet Chariot". Special cheers rang out for

the four "local" players, Ben Kay, Will Greenwood, Paul Grayson and Kyran Bracken when they received their winners' medals. Ben Kay, following that try attempt at the end of the first half, jokingly juggled with his medal when it was handed to him.



4 Waterloo and the community

Being based in the centre of the residential area of Blundellsands with independent rugby playing schools in the area, access to budding talent is readily available but the club seeks to encourage involvement from a broad range of young people and is ready to introduce the game to newcomers. The club prides itself on its junior participants and runs weekly training sessions for under 16s. But alongside the achievements on the pitch, Waterloo is at the centre of community activity in other ways.

A report in the Crosby Herald from August 1958 reports on the Bank Holiday carnival at Waterloo. It says that more than 5,000 people had turned up for the event by the time the carnival closed its gates in the early evening and that the club easily exceeded its target profit of £500. It says that

"Three sides of the ground at St Anthony's Road Blundellsands were occupied by stalls in great variety. Of the events that took place on the pitch itself, the mannequin parade and Waterloo Personality Girl contest attracted most attention, although no local girl was placed in the first three in the personality Girl competition. The stand was packed to capacity and crowds thronged four or five deep around the edges of the roped-off enclosure."

Another of Waterloo's community activities involve fund raising for particular events. A report in the Crosby Herald of September 1976 tells of a "fund-raising marathon" to put players on the road for a two-week tour of North America. This particular event started with a barbecue and ended with a disco in the club house. Again there were many stalls and sideshows to attract crowds and as the Crosby Herald stated,

"Delighted with the success of their first main fund-raising event, the organisers have many more crowd-pulling attractions lined up for the months preceding their tour."

In May 1979, after a lapse of fifteen years, Waterloo decided to revive the Bank Holiday Carnival on Whit Monday. The carnival was described as

"spectacular" and included 28 stalls and sideshows, two parachute drops, music by a local radio station and music from the pipes and drums of the 1st Battalion, Gordon Highlanders. Ken Dodd the Liverpool comedian performed the opening ceremony.

A year later in June 1980 the Crosby Herald again reported that nearly 5,000 had enjoyed the Waterloo fun day. It states

"Waterloo Carnival has proved to be one of the most popular events in the area despite being continually hampered by bad weather"

Again there were parachutists, and stalls and sideshows, a display by dog handlers from Liverpool Prison Service and also by Waterloo Judo Club. The carnival lasted five hours and made a total of £2,000 which was donated to the club funds.

In 1980 the Crosby Herald reported that a facelift on the grounds and the buildings had given Waterloo a boost so that it now housed some of the best sports facilities in Sefton. It said,

"The Mayor, who described the club as a prestigious asset to the borough, said he was delighted to see the results of the work which had been carried out."

The article also went on to describe how the club "throws open" its doors allowing youngsters to use its facilities.

Every year the club continues to hold an annual firework display for Guy Fawkes night along with a Christmas carol concert to engage the local community. The Crosby 5k and 10k runs start and finish at the club and The Waterloo Old Players and Supporters organisation hold regular lunches before matches to raise money for junior teams. Boozer's Bank usually fields a table for these events where the rugby game interrupts a leisurely lunch and gradually gives way to repaying to the bar. Conversation on these afternoons is usually even more fluid than normal.

Doors are always open to non-members to come in and join in organised events and fund raising. One such fund raising event reported on May 6th 2004 in the Crosby Herald told how "Big names are back for fund raiser". This article told

how some names from Waterloo's past came back for a charity match. President at the time, Tony Pugh who, until kidney cancer forced his retirement was a long serving player for Waterloo, had selected a "mighty team" to take on an equally strong team lead by Vice-President Gill Burns.

Gill was to take over as President in the following season to become the first woman president of Waterloo. This was in addition to being President of the Woman's RFU and being the most capped woman player in history. Both Tony and Gill were to take part in the game alongside names like Peter Buckton, Mark Beckett and about sixty more including several of the 1977 Twickenham cup finalists. This game was to kick off at 12.30pm.

Competitions and raffles were also arranged to raise as much money as possible for charities and the Sefton under 11 tag rugby final was scheduled to take place before the main first XV game between Waterloo and Longton. This game was the final match of the season and would decide the Division 3 North title which, if Waterloo won, they would gain promotion to national Division 2. Also, as the Crosby Herald of 6th May 2004 reported,

"If Loo manage to score 43 points it will take them to 1,000 for the season."

Waterloo was crowned as Division Three champion after a closely fought game by eventually scoring four tries to Longton's sole penalty.

On 15th July 2004 the Crosby Herald reported that Waterloo was to host a BBC radio sports show. The BBC Radio Five Live's "Any Sporting Questions" was to be broadcast from the clubhouse in front of an audience of 120 people. Guests were to include World Cup Winner and ex-Waterloo player, Ben Kay, Liverpool's footballer Jamie Carragher, Everton football legend Derek Mountfield, high jumper Steve Smith and ex-Waterloo President and England rugby international Dick Greenwood. The chairperson was to be TV and radio presenter John Inverdale who was quoted in the Crosby Herald article as saying,

"I am very much looking forward to doing the show from Waterloo. They are in the same league as my club Esher next season, so I'm looking forward to going up for a match when we meet. I think it would be great for the game if Waterloo were able to establish rugby union once again on

Merseyside."

The club secretary at Waterloo, Eddie Bentley, said in the same article,

"It 's a great coup for the club. News that the show was coming to the club generated a lot in interest and enthusiasm among members. We are expecting a jovial and convivial atmosphere and I anticipate there will be a lot of banter and laughter."

According to the next report in the Crosby Herald on 22nd July 2004, hundreds attended the live radio show which was a great success.

On Thursday 8th June 2006, the Crosby Herald reported that the England Rugby World Cup winner and ex-Waterloo player, Will Greenwood and his father, Dick Greenwood, another former England international and Waterloo player, had been guests at a sportsman's dinner. The report said,

"The father and son 'double act' spoke to a packed club house with Dick posing questions to Will about his career with England and the British Lions. They gave an insight into what went on behind the scenes at some major matches and talked about the difference between the old amateur game and the modern professional one."

It was also reported that the event was sponsored by the Bank of Ireland and Hill Dickinson which helped the fundraising needed after Waterloo's promotion to National League division 1. The evening was completed by comedian Sean Styles.

Also on Thursday 8th June 2006 the Crosby Herald published an article that detailed that the emphasis at Waterloo was on "fashion and fun". It told how an event was to take place on 13th June from which proceeds would be donated to the Echo Sunrise Fund. A marquee was to host a six-scene fashion show featuring some first team players and models from Liverpool's Pulse Agency. There was also to be a raffle and champagne reception.

A further sportsman's dinner was then planned to take place in conjunction with The Wooden Spoon Society which is the official RFU charity for disadvantaged children. This dinner was to follow the evening of fashion and was also to be held in the marquee on Wednesday June 14th 2006. The guest speaker at this

event was to be Gerald Davies, ex-Wales, Barbarian and British Lion.

The marquee was again in use on Friday June 16th when "An Evening of Entertainment" was to be held which was to feature Professor Longhair's Rhythm and Blues Soul Revue along with a soul disco.

To maximise the value of the marquee, another event was the Waterloo Rugby Club Wedding Fayre to be held on June 18th. This event was supported by World of Flowers and the Crosby Herald and was to feature, as the Crosby Herald reported on June 8th 2006,

"....stalls dedicated to flowers, cakes, catering, hat hire, card, jewellery, lingerie, hair and beauty therapies and much more."

Entry to this was free but there was to be a raffle in aid of the Crosby Summer Fun Run.

Charity fund raising was again at the forefront when Waterloo attempted to smash the world record for the longest ever touch rugby match. Trials for places in the two squads of 14 players were to be held in January 2012 to cover a six-a-side match with roll-on-roll-off substitutions. Although players of all ability were welcome to compete for places, the entrants had to be over 16 years of age and had to pass fitness tests.

The current record stood at over 27 hours and was set in Queensland, Australia. Waterloo hoped to break the 30 hours mark to raise money for Macmillan, Clatterbridge Hospital, Liverpool Heartbeat and rugby charity Wooden Spoon. The Waterloo President at the time, Steve Christopherson said in the Crosby Herald of 29th December 2011,

"We are proud to be associated with this world record attempt that will both involve and benefit the local community. Touch rugby is a non-contact game, so it is open to both males and females and for this event, no previous rugby experience is required. Good fitness levels and bags of stamina will be the key factors in players making the team."

The record attempt started at 10.00am on Saturday 12th May and finished at 4.00pm on Sunday 13th May 2012 with the selected squad beating the standing record of 27hrs and 15 minutes to play for 30 hours. The Liverpool Echo

reporter Joe Thomas was chosen to join the selected players and as he reported in the Liverpool Echo on Monday 14th May,

" With 14 players on each team, the aim was to keep six players on the pitch for each side at all times, playing rugby no matter how tired they were.....Going 30 hours without sleep was bad enough, but to also be playing sport throughout that period took its toll on all of our bodies."

The nominated local charities benefited from more than £15,000 raised during the event.



5 Testing times at Blundellsands

Waterloo had big plans for improvement during the 1980s including the first sports injury clinic in the Northwest of England and a new gymnasium. They instigated a door-to-door drive for membership throughout the borough of Crosby. However, despite success on the field and within the community, by 1984 Waterloo found itself in debt for £17,000. This was blamed on the lack of use of club facilities by members and falling gates over a long period of time. Liverpool is a football city with rugby taking a second place.

The Crosby Herald reported in February 1984 that the club president Mr Bob Atlay had described the situation as being of "financial concern" and he went on to say

"The club owns the ground, there is no way we are going to let this financial situation get us down.....I am determined that this club grows in all directions."

Applications were to be made to government sporting agencies for help with the new facilities and it was hoped that the club facilities would be used more widely within the community for organised events like whist drives, bingo and coffee mornings. There was also to be a room in the new complex for entertaining visitors.

By April 1985 Waterloo were celebrating what the Crosby Herald described as a "three year dream" when the new £65,000 multi-purpose sports complex was officially opened. It included the gym and the injury clinic and a balcony overlooking the pitch and, as Mr Atlay was reported on 4th April 1985 in the Crosby Herald as saying,

"...the club now has some of the finest facilities of any rugby club in the north. He hoped the various organisations would use the hospitality lounge for functions and business occasions."

Throughout the 1980s, Waterloo continued to play at a reasonably high national level and was under pressure from the rugby league to improve the ground further by installing flood lights. The Chairman of Waterloo at the time, Ray Wilson, explained the need for the lights and was quoted in the Crosby Herald on July 3rd 1997 as saying,

"Firstly, to aid training during winter evenings, secondly to fall into line with the rest of the clubs in the league who start at 3.pm. With the endowment of professional status on Rugby Union, we are having to be more professional in the way we approach things. Thirdly, the floodlighting would be needed for the very occasional midweek game".

Application was made to a planning committee meeting for permission to erect eight 18-metre high floodlights around the ground and although the club stated that neighbouring streets would only experience minimal disruption, the residents of the area did not agree and launched a campaign against the proposals.

It was in August 1997 that residents lost their battle with Waterloo after a five to seven defeat in the planning committee meeting and the club was allowed to go ahead with the installation of the lights. The residents were extremely disappointed with the result and were determined not to let the matter rest implying that it was a huge intrusion on a residential area but the club officials were delighted that they would now,

"....not be the only club in the top two divisions without sufficient lighting". (Crosby Herald 14th August 1997)

From the perspective of Boozer's Bank, the floodlights form part of the afternoon's banter. They are, in fact, only classed as training lights by the Rugby Football Union and are only put on when absolutely necessary. Comments are usually made that the lights make it darker. Usually several requests abound asking teams to play quicker as Waterloo may not have the money to put in the electric meter! Also, the floodlights are always an obstruction to our view of the action on the pitch. A solution has been put forward that we invest in a "sky hook" from which to hang the lights but as, allegedly, the floodlights exist to hold up the sky, this could cause problems. We spectators could, of course, move - but that is far too simple a solution for Boozers' Bank! This may give an indication of the level of conversation on a Saturday afternoon.

By July 1998, Waterloo was again in conflict with local residents when it was announced that the club had plans to sell half of its present land at Dowhills Road and build on farmland at the end of St Andrews Road. The new development would provide four training pitches, four floodlights, four mini pitches and a pavilion with car parking space for 122 cars. Access was to be via St Andrews Road.

Residents were outraged by the proposals saying that their houses had been

bought to be near the tranquility of farmland and not by a rugby club. They did not want busy traffic and floodlighting. Waterloo informed the club members and shareholders of the proposals by letter citing the introduction of professionalism in 1995 and its problems and complications as the need for change. It noted that the main playing pitch is recognised as being one of the best in the country but it is showing wear while the back pitch has been the only training area and is often unusable by mid-season owing to poor drainage. It was estimated that the club could be half a million pounds in debt by the end of the next season and may be forced back into amateur status without drastic action, As the Crosby Herald of 23rd July 1998 stated,

"It is obviously time for us to look for a new site. We have therefore decided that the preferred option open to us is to sell the back pitch and use the proceeds for this major redevelopment."

By 18th February 1999, the Crosby Herald continued the story which began with the headline "Pitch Battle At Waterloo". It described how the Waterloo had unveiled plans to develop the ground and secure the future of the club by selling off the training pitch to the developers Alfred McAlpine Homes enabling new homes to be built subject to planning permission.

The idea was to build a "Centre of Excellence" next to Merchant Taylors' school's existing pitches behind Spinney Crescent, Blundellsands and with a successful deal, Waterloo would receive £1.2 million allowing the clearance of an estimated overdraft in excess of £500,000. McAlpine would become a major sponsor and a new low-level stand would replace the existing stand alongside the new housing development.

Waterloo's director of rugby Tony Russ was reported in The Crosby Herald of 18th February 1999 as saying,

".....It is a long term investment in the future of the club. In announcing these plans we are laying the foundations which will take us into the next millennium."

The Crosby Herald went on to explain that some members and local residents were still opposed to the plans and that meetings had been arranged to show disapproval. It quotes one of the campaigners, Phil Hunter, as saying,

"We are not only concerned about the effect of floodlights, noise and traffic to our peaceful cul-de-sac, but also about the loss of Green Belt

and Heritage Landscape."

At this point planning permission was still to be granted and the Crosby Herald paper published a double page spread entitled "Battle of Waterloo" giving the opposing views on the matter. Those for ranged from Waterloo's Director of Rugby, Tony Russ to the Crosby MP at the time, Claire Curtis-Thomas, the Bursar of Merchant Taylors' Boys School Philip Gaunt to the club Bank Manager. The against views included St Andrew's residents, Dowhills Drive residents, some of the club members and Sefton Planning Department who were concerned with loss of urban green space.

One week later on 25th February 1999, another report in the Crosby Herald told how residents opposed to the "Centre of Excellence" and had established a fighting fund bank account. Again Phil Hunter was the spokesman who described the residents' mood as,

".....determined. The group is willing to fight the application to appeal and inquiry if necessary. It could take six months, but resolve is very strong."

By 4th March 1999, the residents group which was now known as the North Blundellsands Residents Group (NBRG), had grown in numbers following the balanced article published in the local paper and in an article entitled "No time for silent apathy" readers were urged to,

"...make their voices heard to the planners and the rugby club before the deadline on March 12."

On 18th March 1999, more letters appeared in the Crosby Herald pushing forward views on the crisis at Waterloo. One letter congratulated the club for its,

"....efforts to secure planning permission to add a much needed training facility at Hall Road.....it seems obvious that more action is needed to halt the decline of this once great club."

Another letter from one of the residents who was objecting showed the gratitude at public support and also stressed that it would be a,

"...crying shame if the club folded.....The issue of property values has not been in the fore in our objections which are mainly concerned with disturbance and loss of amenity."

A third letter explained that debt was the problem for Waterloo and this was

the only reason to sell the back pitch and so the debate continued until an article appeared on 3rd June 1999 in the Crosby Herald with the headline "Homes scheme D-day", mere days before the meeting of Sefton's planning committee.

In this June article, Phil Hunter of the North Blundellsands Residents' Group who were in opposition to the club's proposals said,

"The club might win if the deal goes through, as will the developers - but the residents and wildlife in this Green Belt area certainly won't."

A spokesman for Waterloo Rugby club said,

"We obviously await the planner's decision with considerable interest."

On 10th June 1999 it was reported in the Crosby Herald that it had been recommended by Sefton's planning chief, Jeff Gibbons, that Waterloo's plans be rejected but that there had been a last minute appeal which convinced councillors to defer judgement on the proposals so that the club could address any problems highlighted by Mr Gibbons. A representative of Waterloo said that Waterloo had not been given the planning agenda in time and needed extra time to prepare revised ideas. Meanwhile Malcolm Baucher, Waterloo Rugby club director was reported to have said that,

".... It is important to us that the council and community are happy with our developments and understand our needs."

A week later on 17th June 1999, Waterloo again was upsetting local residents and hit the local news with a report following an exposed story which accused Waterloo of planning to erect a mobile phone mast at the club. The club had apparently agreed to consider housing the mast for an annual rent, helping boost club funds, but upon discovering that the mast would be 55 feet high, they asked the agents of One To One (the mast company), to withdraw the planning application.

One again, residents were outraged because of the possible health risks associated with such masts but the club refused to rule out the possibility of a smaller receiver being accepted. The Crosby Herald reported one resident as saying,

"Of course we're delighted the first application has been withdrawn but we want the whole plan scrapped. You can't just ignore the health risk"

and any money the club could earn is only going to be a drop in the ocean anyway."

Trouble trundled on and a week later on 24th June 1999, another article told of a new set of plans being developed for the future of Waterloo. These included shelving the application for floodlights on the training site at Hall Road and bringing forward plans for floodlights at the main pitch on St Anthony's Road. The number of proposed new homes to be developed was revised from 15 to 14 and plans for emergency access via the new Dowhills Drive development were unveiled. The proposed new stand to replace the 1,000 capacity old wooden construction was downsized from 1,000 to 600.

On 5th August 1999 the hopes of the club were dashed when the Crosby Herald reported that the club's future was in crisis and that councillors had refused permission for the housing development and also for the four new training pitch development at Hall Road. A club spokesman was reported to have said,

"The objective behind the application was not only to secure the club's future as Sefton's only sporting national league division team, but also to enhance the provision of sports facilities and playing fields in the area."

Residents were delighted and celebrated that the green belt and character of the area was to be maintained.

By late September 1999 Waterloo was dealt another financial blow when, following an official inspection by safety experts, it was found that the 1920s wooden stand was not strong enough to hold a capacity crowd. The stand needed repair or demolition - both options meaning expense for the struggling club and with the proposed housing development having been rejected. The stand was closed to the public.

On 28th October 1999 the Crosby Herald reported that Waterloo had started another bid to build rugby pitches with a "downsized" application but that nearby residents,

".....are adamant the same objections still stand for the new application."

This application was still dependant upon the sale of the back pitch and an appeal date on the original application was still to be decided with the inquiry being set for sometime in early 2000. By 24th February 2000 Waterloo learned again that the redevelopment plans had been blocked again.

A public enquiry was scheduled to take place in early March to determine whether four pitches could be created on green belt land and some development could take place in St Anthony's Road for the proposed housing. With the extra revenue generated, the old stand could be demolished and the ground re-developed providing better facilities for junior and mini-rugby and improvements at St Anthony's Road. The Crosby Herald stated that,

"Waterloo Rugby club has just received grants, totalling £30,000 from McAlpine Homes and Sportsmatch to develop youth sport in the area."

On 9th March 2000 in the Crosby Herald, Waterloo claimed that,

"....its survival is threatened if plans to sell of land are rejected by the public inquiry being held this week."

The inquiry was due to conclude on 10th March 2000 and by 16th March 2000 the talk in the Crosby Herald revealed how residents "fear defeat by club" and went on to say that,

"Objectors to Waterloo Rugby Club's development plans say the only winners would be players and members - with local residents and the environment coming off second best".

The inquiry eventually ended at the end of June 2000 having heard the points of view of the club, the residential objectors and representatives of English Nature and Council experts, but a decision was not expected until September.

The wait continued for all parties concerned with Waterloo's debts still outstanding and at the end of September the club received another blow. The council forced it to again reconsider plans after losing another appeal to sell off the land but the club felt that the problems could be overcome and started proceedings to resubmit plans within the coming weeks. The club chairman, Colin Brennand was quoted in the Crosby Herald of 28th September 2000 as saying,

"The next stage is the modification of the housing layout - that's the substantive issue - amending the two pitch scheme or looking for an alternative site. This isn't a money-making exercise, what we're looking to do is reinvest the money to improve club facilities. We're not only looking to secure the future of Waterloo Rugby Club but also the future of this area of Blundellsands."

Discussions continued well beyond April 2001 amid rumours of Waterloo's financial ruin with estimated debts of around £600,000 but these were dismissed by the club who upheld that discussions were underway to ensure survival. Despite being relegated which meant a reduced grant from the R.F.U, chairman Colin Brennand said, as reported in the Crosby Herald on 26th April 2001, that the club would not fold and that sponsorship was being sought from local businesses.

It was not until 15th August 2002 that the Crosby Herald reported that Waterloo had been given the green light by the Sefton planning department to build a new stand and to install eight 18 metre high floodlights around the first team pitch. Then, by 5th September 2002 another article in the Crosby Herald described how Waterloo was celebrating following the approval of the scheme to build luxury houses on its training pitch. The article detailed how much the club needed the funds to help to clear debts which were estimated at around £750,000 and a spokesman from the club said,

" Everyone involved with the club is delighted. It secures the club's future and means we can now move forward."

The article went on to say that money from the sale of the land could now be used to upgrade the facilities at St Anthony's Road and by 6th November 2003, another article in the same paper headlined with "New look for rugby club" and described the refurbishment with a new function room and restored bars. Hoping to boost trade with more wedding receptions, parties and conferences, the commercial director of Waterloo, Eddie Bentley was quoted as saying,

"Waterloo Rugby club has always provided an attractive venue and with the upgrade of our function room facilities, we've been able to enhance its appeal even further."

Still struggling with finances, on 15th January 2009 the Crosby Herald ran the headline, "Loo handed lifeline by unnamed cash group" and described how the future of Waterloo looked secure after they were offered a "sizeable cash injection". The article revealed that the club would be unable to fulfill its fixtures and that £100,000 had to be raised to see the team through to the end of the season. It stated how members and shareholders had responded with around £35,000 in loans but that an unnamed group had agreed to donate the rest of the cash.

The club had been hit by the credit crunch with commercial sponsorship down and having their overdraft facility halted. Outgoings had to be reduced and the

playing budget was slashed with overnight stays being limited to games in Cornwall only. Waterloo had struggled throughout the 2009/10 season losing 13 out of their 14 games to date and had also suffered their biggest defeat ever being thrashed 103 - 5 at Launceston. Waterloo club chairman at the time, Simon Robb said in the Crosby Herald of 15th January 2009,

"It's been necessary to be fairly brutal with the budget and there won't be any more money available for players, but we've been encouraged by the spirit in the squad. We've had so many injuries but people are starting to come back now."

In September of 2008, members had agreed in principle to the idea of selling the ground at St Anthony's Road and moving to a nearby greenfield site to cope with the financial situation and Robb added,

"We might not have much cash, but the club's assets are considerable and certainly sufficient to ensure a real and viable future."

To date, 2013, Waterloo and Boozers' Bank are still in situ at Blundellsands, but who knows of the future.



6 Current state of play

With its 130 years of history what does the future hold for Waterloo RUFC? Following the dawn of professionalism in rugby in 1995, Waterloo attempted to attract bigger crowds by adopting the name Waterloo Drummers. They also employed the services of the local radio station to play music before, during and after the games. Face painting was introduced to attract more children to matches and the club attempted to create a carnival feel to the day. Unfortunately, despite great support throughout the good cup runs, none of these changes had much of an effect on the weekly gate takings. A letter in the Crosby Herald on 18th March 1999 from a long standing supporter urged local people to get behind the club so that it could become,

"....a progressive, vibrant and well supported club, underpinned by a training facility and rugby school of excellence which could be the envy of many."

The Liverpool Post ran an article about the club in December 2012 stating how life in National League Three North was so different from previous seasons in the top flight of the English Rugby game. It said,

"Their most recent past has been one where they have risen and then fallen at an alarming pace through the levels, with relegations often being tied to growing financial concerns. The St Anthony's Road side currently find themselves mid-table in the fifth tier of the national game, akin to playing football in the Conference."

The article points out that this story is not unusual but stressed that the club needed to

".... change its perceptions of what the club is, of what its priorities now are and, just recently, what it is called"

It reported that in October 2012, Waterloo signed a five-year deal giving naming rights to local building firm Firwood. The team is now known as Firwood Waterloo. Traditionalists may find this totally unacceptable, but as Waterloo

Chairman Dave Raywood says,

"Clearly it was a big decision and one we didn't take lightly. Waterloo was formed in 1882 and we are preserving the club for the next generation. But we felt this a right decision. It is not the first time anyone has done it and we have to take income where we can find it in a period where sponsorship and corporate hospitality is down because of the recession. This is someone we know, someone who has been a member at this club for 40 years. He believes in what we are doing and the way we are running the business."

Although the extra money involved in the name change was more than welcome, it is recognised that the club itself has to be creative and this was shown in the launch of MyWaterlooRugby.com website three years ago in 2009. This was an internet based fan management scheme which allowed supporters, having paid a subscription, to have a vote on team selection, new signings, bar prices and all aspects of club life. Unfortunately, it is no longer in operation, but the initiative showed Waterloo's ability to adapt to modern times. The teams are also involved in Twitter and the Saturday scores may be accessed via a Twitter account.

Waterloo, the article continues, is one of the most "vibrant grounds on the circuit" and as Raywood says,

"they (Waterloo) must make more people aware that the club - and its facilities - exists.....Next season it is unlikely that the north will have a Premiership rugby club. And we are in a football city so the future for us is to become a community club and dismantle some of the structure we had in place when we wanted to be a top professional side.....we must invest in our facilities because this is our home and it is badly in need of some serious updating."

The summer of 2014 is when the first part of this improvement is set to start with new changing rooms provided to accommodate the growing junior and ladies' teams. The first team do not dominate the whole club, all teams are important.

For the next few years, the future of Firwood Waterloo does seem to be stable and based at St Anthony's Road and we on Boozers' Bank will continue to turn up

and support those "Magnificent Green Boys". If we are forced to move, the Bank would be re-created at the new site.

With such a long history and tradition it would be sad to leave Blundellsands but if needs dictate we will carry tradition with us and Firwood Waterloo RUFC and Boozers' Bank will live on.



I would like to thank

:

The Crosby Herald

The Bootle Times

The Liverpool Echo

The Liverpool Post

"Played in Liverpool" Ray Physick (2006)

Rugby World Magazine

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Pastscape.org.uk

Waterloo RUFC

Crosby Library Local History Department

