



## RAMPAGES AUTUMN 2020



I suppose it has been this dreadful Covid 19 lockdown that has brought about the idea of Rampages.

However, it has been brewing for a number of years. Many of my contemporaries at Harlow RFC have moved away from Harlow but they like me feel a strong emotional tie to the Rugby Club.

So, Rampages is a newsletter directed at VPs and former players who have hung up their boots.

I would like to regain contact with as many ex- players that we see less of now at the VP lunches or have moved away.

If you have received this email please forward it to anyone who you may think would be interested but not on my list so we can expand the mailing list.

As many of you may know, we recently lost our former president and founding member Dr. John Huntley – a great benefactor who very generously wrote a cheque which enabled the Club to buy Ram Gorse ground.

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*An article from Andrew (Benj) Vanner who is one of our oldest members of Harlow RFC*

### **Recollections of an old Ram. From Colts to Covid 1959 – 2020.**

The first time I heard the words “Harlow Rugby Club” was in 1959 from my games master and then first team player Peter Field. The occasion was the issue of new kit to Mark Hall School Rugby team. Peter said the new shirts issued to Harlow (white with green hoops) gave the team a boost: the same was expected of us. The original shirts dating from the Clubs formation in 1955 were bottle green with a white collar. In the 50s there were only 2 Secondary schools in Harlow, Mark Hall and Netteswell. Rugby was a fairly recent introduction to Mark Hall and was not very popular at first, many of the pupils coming from families originating from North London with its Soccer tradition. I was from the original village of Harlow. Whilst I was not much good at Rugby, neither were they, so at least with Rugby we started on fairly level terms. I played for the school team and completely forgot the Rugby club until one morning I received a card to say I had been selected for Harlow Colts. At first, I thought the card had been misdirected. But as most of the school team had also received one, off I went to Ram Gorse with my good friend Dave Harriss. He played Second Row and I played wing.

The pitches and Clubhouse at Ram Gorse were very different in 1959 to when we left for Latton Park. There were then only 2 pitches end to end parallel to Elizabeth Way. We had a Clubhouse Bar and one changing room. The Colts pitch was on one of the Water Meadows next to the River on the far bank, it was where a line of drains now crosses the meadow. The water table was high, and the cows scratched themselves on the posts, so they were seldom upright and frequently had no crossbar. We changed at Parndon Mill, the opposition changed in the loft, in conditions so cramped it was impossible to stand upright. The four showers were either scalding hot or freezing cold.

It had been four years since Ron Bracewell placed an advert in the Harlow Citizen inviting anyone interested in forming a Rugby club to meet at the Essex Skipper at the Stow. It was there the club was first formed. In 1959 when I first joined many of the original first team were still playing; many had previously played for the Armed Services. Post-match most players remained at the Clubhouse until the Bar shut. The time of this was (let’s say) flexible! There was always a sing song.

Some time in the 70s our kit changed to plain red (I am not sure why). In those days we had to buy our own shirts so I paid a visit to the club's official stockist Richard Blank at the end of Terminus street to buy a shirt and was given a green and white one. When I told him, the kit had changed he went mad as no one had told him and he had just stocked up with the old ones. As time progressed, we were issued with club shirts, the first team got the new issue and they were handed down team by team in subsequent years. When we fielded a 5<sup>th</sup> senior team there was a problem because they did not have a full set of shirts, the 14 they had were misshapen and full of holes. I was dropped from the 4<sup>th</sup> team because I had my own shirt. I tried to persuade selection just to drop my shirt but to no avail. I went on to skipper the 5<sup>th</sup>s and for a short time the 6<sup>th</sup>s. A dubious privilege. I played 2 games for the first team in the early 60s. Selection said it was my big chance, but I think it had more to do with a shortage of players. Before the advent of Leagues some Clubs would not give us a fixture at first team level they said, reasonably enough, that they would not drop a long-standing fixture to play Harlow.

When we won the Essex Cup, we showed them what we were made of. Meanwhile our Colts went from strength to strength beating top sides like Bristol and Leicester under the management of Ross Loveday and Cliff Bishop. I had previously played with the boy Loveday whilst at Cardiff Uni when he was guest scrum half for a scratch team called the Pussycats.

I was also pleased to introduce a player to the Club who was to make a big contribution on and off the field. I worked for Mike Ryland in the 1970s and in those days, he was anxious to lose a few pounds. In my usual reverential way, I asked him if he had thought of joining an Athletics club. He replied he used to play Rugby for Ipswich Y.M.C.A. To cut a long story short he came training with us and the rest is History.

When I gave up playing in 1982 because of injury, I decided to have a go at reffing. I soon realised that it is one thing to learn the laws from the Referees handbook, but quite another to put them into practice on the field of play particularly as many players in the lower teams, that I invariably reffed, had very limited knowledge of the laws themselves. I remember at the end of one game the winning skipper slapped me on the back and said "a good performance you should join the Referees society and Ref better games". The opposition skipper was heard to remark "we didn't stand a chance with that bloody Ref". You can't please everyone.

The move to Latton Park must be seen as a big positive and was made possible by the generosity of Dr John Huntley who paid for us to buy the freehold of the ground at Ram Gorse. We now have facilities that would do credit to many first -class clubs. But there are a few of us that miss the unique atmosphere of Ram Gorse despite the muddy floors etc and to old Rams like me there was some magic in the ground even if it was badly drained and sloping. After all this is where I played Rugby. But overall the move was a very good thing.

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*Benj worked for Mike Ryland at Air Products and introduced him to Harlow RFC and this is Mike's story.*

### **How I joined Harlow Rugby Club?**

I moved back to East Anglia in 1971 to a house in Thornwood Common and although I hadn't played for a couple of years felt it was time to get playing again. The only Club I knew of locally from my days at Colchester was Upper Clapton. Having asked around I found out which night they trained and went down with my kit. To be honest it didn't go well and the welcome to say the least was underwhelming. The next day I was talking to Andrew Vanner (we were work colleagues at the time) who said:" why don't you come down to my Club".

As it was a Thursday I did just that.

The first people I spoke to were John Hurley, Dennis Parry and soon afterwards Granny Hogarth. Before I had finished my first pint Granny signed me up for membership and Dennis as Hon Treasurer had my cheque and that I was playing away on Sat for Billy Murray's Saints.

The last thing I was advised of was which sport shop to visit so that I could purchase my Club Shirt and socks - no Sponsors in those days.

**The rest as they say is history.....**

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## **RUGBY MEMORIES**

I was talking to Rhys and Gavin recently and independently and asked them what was the most talented player of their time to have worn the Harlow jersey and both answered with the same player – Alan Price (Young centre not old Scrum half).

Rhys followed this up with the best 15 players that he played with.

1. Steve Pope
2. John Locke
3. Mark Coombes
4. Mark Kent
5. Paul Eynon
6. Trevor Boynton
7. Richard May
8. Zane Ansell
9. Lee Harron
10. David Hurley
11. Lee Smith
12. Mark Guthrie
13. Alan Price
14. Keith Hanscombe
15. John Gregory

Subs. Wayne Kearns                  Duncan Reynolds                  David Stradling

I was lucky enough to help coach, along with my good friend Cliff Bishop, a wonderful set of talented Colts. From that group my choice of top player would be Wayne Kearns.

What would your top player of **your era** be and the best Harlow 15 you would pick.

Email me and it may be in the next edition.

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## **DAVE EYNON**

Dave Eynon, former Secretary and legal voice (aka the Judge) is now the organiser of a Cycling club, based around former players and friends of Harlow RFC. This is his story.

## Cycling Club le Ram

It was the last home game of the 2013/4 season, there had been an enjoyable club lunch and later there were a few retired lads mulling over the season and the prospect of no rugby until September.

I had been retired for just under a year and had been cycling during the week on my own.

Suddenly a thought (for I have been known to have had one or two) took shape and within a few minutes I had recruited JP and Fred to the cause.

At first it was just the three of us but numbers slowly increased and we started cycling twice a week, initially from my house but later from the White Horse in Potter Street.

Very soon the lanes around the town became our stamping ground and the rides are made more enjoyable by the almost compulsory stops for coffee and cake and other necessities.

As numbers increased so did the distances. Martin from the Bishops Stortford club came along as did Ian Vanner and Martin the Dentist.

Benj, the president of Racing Club le Ram after which I named our group made some cameo appearances confounding all the newcomers with his cycling speed, he not having cycled for at least six months.

In time we wanted to visit pastures new so we arranged a pleasant ride to Lavenham for a night then a return. Fred managed to entertain us all by falling off his bike into a very soft verge and buying a lovely bag of cherries half way up LaMarsh Hill.

In subsequent years we have gone away for two nights and three days of cycling in Norfolk, Suffolk and Rutland. The pandemic put paid to this year's "holiday".

Most of the riders have a connection with the Rugby club, Fred or my own cycling club, the Crescent and we have three ladies in our group, Alison who rides regularly, Alice who enjoys the holidays and Jane who does spend a lot of time doctoring and seeing to her two (now) teenage daughters.

At the last count we have about 22 cyclists in our group. Punctures and repairs apart, the rides are enjoyable and not taxing and the chat and banter is almost incessant. Two or three of us don't ride with the groups during the pandemic but we keep in touch by email and WhatsApp and ever welcome riders new to cycling and the group.

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**Alan Price, Club President, is now busier than ever being Essex RFC President as well but I've managed to get him to give us a few words as to when and how we will see live rugby at Latton Farm again.**

First of all, a very big thank you to Ross for getting this together so soon. He only bounced the idea off me some weeks ago.

The Club is now open and Covid safe but as I speak it is fair to say that members are not returning in their droves yet. We just about cover the costs of opening with takings from the bar but I suppose we had to start somewhere and recently we have noticed some green seeds beginning to germinate. Our monthly outgoings are coming on at a pace again after a holiday period and so we really do need rugby to start so that we can generate some very much needed income. Needless to say, we have accessed all available funding, cut costs dramatically and furloughed staff to try to tide us over but these have all now come to an end.

And to make matters worse we have had this week's news of new stringent rules and little optimism of an early return to rugby. If my glass was half full I would say late Jan, if half empty then Sept. '21.

Fish and chip Friday, Sat lunch/brunch menus [ 16 oz steaks on offer] and Carvery Sunday have now returned. These are proving popular and the new chef has been getting top ratings from participants. Why not come along and enjoy yourselves while at the same time supporting your Club in these difficult times. Lunches on selected Saturdays have restarted with a very successful September launch with 50 guests. Next lunch is scheduled for Oct 17th.

It would be great to see you. We are totally Covid safe and you can be assured of a warm welcome and great food and company with some rugby on the screens. To book please email me on

[president@harlowrugby.club](mailto:president@harlowrugby.club)

Stay safe and please visit us soon.

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So, I hope you have enjoyed the first edition of Rampages and I welcome any articles or memories that you have for the next edition.

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To encourage you all we need the best caption to this photo that was kindly sent in to me anonymously.

A bottle of wine to the best caption!!!

Ross

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*ps. There is an excellent Blog by Paul Eynon on the Harlow website if you are more up to date on technology. <http://harlowrugby.club/your-club/house-of-rams-podcast/>*