



## RAMPAGES (5) 2021

I've always enjoyed the music written by Burt Bacharach and there is one song "A House is not a Home" sung by Dionne Warwick that to me sums up our Club, especially the old Ram Gorse Club which wasn't much to write home about in the end, but it was the people and not the building that made it special.

At that time there was a lot of snobbery associated with rugby but the first thing that hit me was how inclusive Harlow was. You were never judged on your background, your colour or your religion. You were judged on your ability to play rugby – full stop!

We have lost several members recently that were special to us. I would like to start with one such member who was quiet, unassuming, generous to the Club and wonderful company. His name was Dennis McCombie

When I stopped playing rugby, Cliff Bishop and I started coaching the Colts. We wanted to keep fit so we also started a running club (Racing Club le Ram) That developed into a monthly handicap and all and sundry were invited.

One of those who joined was Dennis McCombie who sadly passed away just before Xmas. Dennis never played rugby for Harlow but immediately joined the Club and up until Lockdown came to most of the VP Lunches. Dennis was a quiet man, a sportsman through and through who, with his partner Jeff Boucher (JD Sports at Staple Tie), donated, without fuss or pomp, gym equipment to the Club.

A lovely man who will be sadly missed by all who knew him.





## **Dennis Powell**

I first met Dennis about 50 years ago at the Rugby Club. He went to Cardiff Teachers College and excelled at weight lifting and became the Welsh Weight Lifting Champion for his weight. He came to Harlow in 1969 and taught P.E. at the old Latton Bush school and was a respected member of staff.

He moved to Cheshunt as Head of boys P.E. in the mid 70's. He also played rugby at Bishop Stortford for a while before returning to Harlow. He lived in Brockles Mead where a lot of teachers lived. He joined the "Sunday Dinner Syndicate" where each took turns in making dinner every Sunday while the others went to the pub. He went on holiday to Corfu, Spetses and Rhodes in 1983, where he met many friends from all over the world.

Although he always said he would never go on holiday to the same place twice, he returned to Rhodes many times on his annual pilgrimage until as recently as 2019.

He met Spiros and Maria in the Top 3 bar which was his local. He taught the children Dimitris, Lukas, Costas and Litsa how to play "tipit". A skill they still talk about to this day. His second local was "Popeyes" close to where he stayed in a pension. Here he met Alan and Stergos the owners, and many Brits who worked in Rhodes. I could write a book about the visits he made to Top 3 and Popeyes and the shenanigans that took place.

Dennis and his ex-wife Lynn were Steward and Stewardess at the rugby club at Ram Gorse for a short time before they ran a pub in Wales with another couple Gerry and April. This was a difficult time financially and they eventually returned to Harlow. Dennis carried on teaching as a Supply Teacher in several of the Harlow schools where he was well known.

He played rugby on the wing, was very quick and a ferocious tackler. Nobody would get past him. He also taught me how to sing several songs in Welsh!

He will be missed by many! He was a gentleman with a good sense of humour and a very generous person. There are so many tales I could relate to times I've spent with Dennis. Sleep well old friend until we meet again.

***Ian Dawson***

## **Graham Drage**

It is my privilege to pen a few words in memory of Life member and club stalwart, Graham Drage.

We were very fortunate that Graham chose to join Harlow in 1978 after his brief spell at Upper Clapton, doubly so since he brought his sons Ashley and Richard with him, both of whom went on to become regular first team players and served Harlow well for many years.

Graham soon became involved in many useful aspects of running the Club, regularly organising mini bus tours to rugby and cricket games but which always seemed to end in a beer tasting/quaffing session. Many of us remember the annual brewery trips to Furneaux Pelham and then to Bury St Edmunds. Well, when I say remember, not much would have been remembered the next day I would have thought, considering the amount of beer "tasting" that went on. The annual Steel Bodgeys games in Cambridge were looked forward to with great relish and followed a ritual and a pattern involving visiting several pubs in Cambridge, some revelry at the ground and then further visits to at least 2 pubs and a meal on the way



back home. Great memories. Rugby was the catalyst but camaraderie was the order of the day. We all look back on those times with much fondness.

Graham was a loyal committee man who much preferred to do his work unnoticed and in the back ground. As bar chairman he always made sure that we had the correct stock and amounts, well at least it can be said we were sure never to run out of real ale.

He became vice chairman and again did many things in the back ground but all so necessary for the smooth running of any voluntary organisation. Most members probably didn't realise that Graham was a committee man since his work was done without fuss and without bother. This was his strength. Graham never wanted the glory and resolutely refused any suggestion that he take on the role of chairman.

Graham was involved in trips to Czechoslovakia which he enjoyed immensely. No- one can confirm that he enjoyed their continental beer but he certainly enjoyed the experience and threw himself into the many activities and visits that Havisov had organised. He went to Australia with a Club group to support the Lions.

Mike Ryland remembers that Graham was in charge organising the minibus to Heathrow. Being Graham, he told the party the time to be at the Clubhouse. He didn't however mention that the time given meant the time for a few pre -journey beers and not for the leaving time. More beers were quaffed on the minibus and at Heathrow another session followed. It was in the departure lounge that it was remembered that surgical stockings should be worn because of the dangers of DVT.

Apparently, the mayhem that ensued watching a slightly worse for wear bunch of elderly gentlemen, Graham being one of the main protagonists, falling about try to get shoes off, socks on and looking for their boarding cards all at the same time in full view of the public was a sight to behold! One of the few times Graham was in the forefront.

He was a true connoisseur of the National drink and if he said the ale was good, then it was. If he declared his pint was off there were few barmen who would argue with him. He was a man of few words but was always ready when asked if he wanted another by saying *no it was his shout*. I think it fair to say that Graham liked his beer but that few would ever have seen him the worse for wear.

It was difficult to rile Graham to wind him up or get him into an argument. He had his very firm views but would always listen to arguments, always be fair and you could be sure he always had the Club's best interests at heart.

Graham, you were a gentleman, a true companion, a loyal Clubman, a hard -working committee man, a respected Life member and an aficionado of our great game. You will be missed by the many, many of friends you made not just at Harlow Rugby Club but also at Upper Clapton, Bishop's Stortford and indeed your friends at your fantastic local, The Raising Sun in High Wych aka Sids.

We look forward to when we can all raise a glass at Latton Park to toast and honour your part in the history of our Club.

**RIP**

***Alan Price [President]***



## Memories of a Bygone Era

In 1963 I came to Harlow on the crest of an Educational Revolution with its workforce setting out from Wales through Teacher Training Colleges. A lot of us joined Rugby Clubs, to keep the love of the Hallowed Game alive and to get cheap beer!! It was no different in Harlow and in many clubs, in and around Essex and North London, whose teams we played on a regular annual calendar basis. No leagues in those days!! I regularly played against school mates from Merthyr Tydfil, playing for Basildon, Thurrock and Stevenage - the latter always being the FIRST match of the season on the FIRST Saturday in SEPTEMBER.

The year I was skipper of the First XV, 1964, two distinguished Welsh players were regularly in the Team - John Davis and Dilwyn Thomas. John at scrum half was the best player I ever played with and Dil the hardest player - even harder than Keith Clarke, if that is possible. John went onto greater things at London Welsh and Dil was going the other way - into retirement. He played for Maesteg previous to Harlow.

Many other names come to mind but apologies if I don't mention them all. No doubt older readers of RAMPAGE will fill in the gaps.

At full- back, John Hurley. Not a teacher from Wales but an architect. We owe a tremendous debt to him for the work he did in producing our new grounds. It all could have ended for John in that year as he nearly drowned, playing in a snow-covered pitch at Romford and Gidea Park. A pile-up occurred with John at the bottom and he had literally inhaled a considerable amount of snow! His replacement and a real Harlow personality was Eric Smith. He was the biggest, out of hand, kicker with the old leather ball I have ever seen. We had many welcome breathers whilst somebody found it - there were no luxuries in those days such as a good spare one. One of the many chores was pumping up the balls before the match and hoping that at least one stayed inflated. Other pre-match jobs included walking the pitch and picking up flint stones, putting the flags out and the MOST important one - making sure the boiler was on for showers after the game! A few generations of players had the same concern for the boiler's efficiency.

The two regular centres were David Minchen and Gerry Walsham, both great players and I hope David (a fellow life member) will acknowledge this in the Bar when Covid is long gone!! Throughout the year Dai Evans (ex- Welsh Triple Jump Champion) played on the wing but unfortunately was very injury prone and we never got full value for his undoubted talent.

At fly- half, John Packer, still a stalwart member of the club, and on his day the best player around. Scrum-half, I have already mentioned, John Davis, only one word 'brilliant' and in those days he acted as the unofficial coach. Here is a question! How many non- Welsh First XV scrum halves have we had since John? Names to the Editor of Rampage who is of course Welsh and was a First Team SC himself!

Now to the Pack! Hugh Mcquigan was hooker and Treasurer of the Club for some years. David Taylor, always, always remembered. A wonderful man and a great prop. Joe Wilcox at wing forward and still attending ex-players gatherings. Cliff Bishop, a young inspiring backrower. Alex Snow and Peter Jackson, both veterans at the time but Club Icons. I remember that if you ever wanted to remain sober and stay out of potential trouble never get in Alex's car for the journey home from an away game.

Great times and great people!!



The club owes its present position to the Chairman at the time, Alex McGowan, who worked for Harlow Development Corporation and had the foresight to buy the freehold of the land. Thanks also to Doctor Huntley for lending the money to purchase it.

There is NO comparison between the club then and now except for the continuing club spirit and dedication to succeed right across the board. EVERYTHING then was done by volunteers Teas after the game were prepared and delivered by players' wives and girlfriends, rotar'ed by Sylvia Woods wife of Noel Woods, Club Secretary.

I learnt a lot about 'behind the scenes' rugby from Noel in a sport still totally run by the 'old f--ts'. We attended the fixture exchange together to try and get different and/or better games. You went round tables to try your luck. We arrived at another local club's table (clue - the nearest geographical one to us!) and Noel asked if they had any spare dates. 'Yes' said their official, (they were on the slide at the time!) - who are you? Harlow! Sorry we won't play you! That caused a lasting reaction for me for many reasons but thankfully it has all gone.

Supporters should be mentioned and who better than Dick Elvis who was an 'ever-present' - both on the touchline and in the bar.

Then to refereeing, which I know for many of you should be a short, sharp comment!

All I can say is I tried my hardest and was completely biased in favour of the opposition to ensure fairness. It was very unfair that any potential abuse was directed towards me and not our opponents! A great time with many memories!! I was always ably helped by every scrum half - 'did you see that ref.?' 'and the one man and his dog' who saw a forward pass from outside the club bar on the far- most pitch! After match analysis by the group near the fireplace made me feel I had been refereeing a different game.

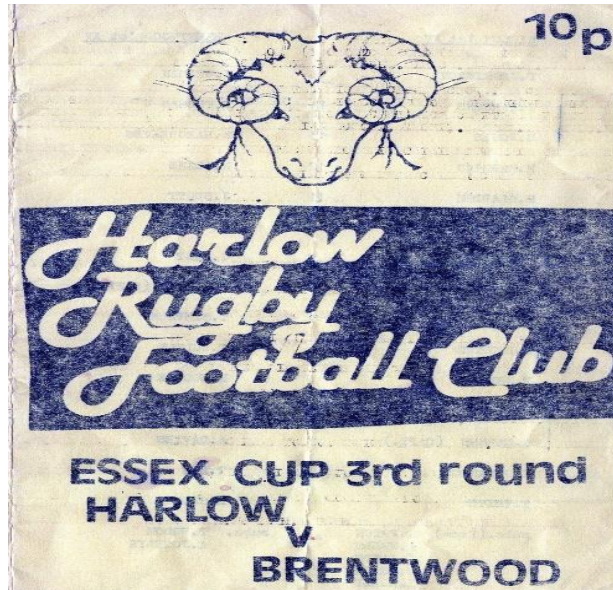
The leading light in the home referees' cabal was wonderful Ron Bracewell who looked after his flock with true diligence. The only time when this broke down was when a past international referee was to officiate at the club - a one Roger Quinteten (I think that is the correct spelling - apologies if not). Fresh from Twickers, he insisted on high standards for his visit. His own changing room and a pot of tea before the game! Panic! – a POT of tea - did we have one in the Club other than a gallon one? Miracles do happen and one was found, albeit with an odd lid! But here is an example to us all - his clothes were immaculately folded on his bench seat during the game, ready for instant dressing afterwards. The other three home referees, including me, were left to fend for ourselves without Ron's weekly reassurances.

After the game, worse was to happen, - a silver plated tray with a pint of something was delivered to Roger. A step too far! Revolution started, which luckily was quelled by the three of us having our rewards as well! Bless you Ron.

Other memories - a 3-3 draw against a London Welsh Sunday Team, full of stars. A team getting totally lost between the club house and the Mill pitch with searchers finding them on the industrial estate! Last of all coming off the pitch to find nobody had turned on the showers!!

A final thank you to all those people making our club a 'living thing', where memories, such as mine, can be buried but not forgotten.

***Derek Fenny***



<u>HARLOW 1st XV</u>			<u>BRENTWOOD 1st XV</u>	
P. JENKINSON	15		J. WELMAN	
J. PARSONS	14		R. THOMAS	
G. JONES	13		M. HARGREAVES	
M. MARMION	12		M. ADAMS	
K. GLADDEN	11		J. SCOTT	
R. DRAGE	10		I. FARRAR	
M. TENNISON	9		G. SALT	
S. GRIFFITHS	8		C. GALISE (CAPT. )	
B. WHITE	7		T. SIMPSON	
M. BRUFORD	6		T. BOLTON	
P. NEWMAN	5		M. HOOTON	
M. LEESE	4		S. SMITH	
A. HARMES (CAPT.)	3		A. DAVIES	
I. C. DAWSON	2		T. LEE	
T. WHITE	1		A. SCOTT	
subs. (from)	A. PRICE A. WELLS J. SANDS B. PRIOR I. ROALF		subs. T. BROOM A. JOSELYN	

I have received a reply from Jim Parsons who thinks it was Season 80 / 81 a Sunday in October???

Can anyone else be more specific? Let's have a few more suggestions before I give the result in the next Edition.



## Recollections of An Ageing Ref. by Andrew (Benj) Vanner

In the game of Rugby few players spare a thought for the Ref, even fewer tell him (or her) they had a good or bad game. Perhaps no comment is praise, but I can vouch for the fact that Refs have difficult games that are nothing to do with the players or even the game itself.

For me one such game was when I dropped my score card and pencil during the game and could not find it on the muddy field. To make matters worse I could not remember the score. I could remember it was 3 tries to 2, but as far as penalties and conversions were concerned, I was a bit vague.

What to do? My instinct was to stop the game and ask the players to find the scorecard, then re start with a scrum to the defending side. I quickly decided against this cop out, so I carried on regardless and as the result of the game was not in doubt no one would notice if the score was wrong. In this I was mistaken!

I thought the incident had been forgotten until the following Saturday when I was presented with the "Silver Pencil" award. A stub of pencil glued to a piece of wood! The award continued to be presented for the next few weeks but was re named the wanker of the week award.

One worthy recipient was awarded the trophy for forgetting to take the shirts to an away game.

Ram Gorse was never a very friendly place for Refs to visit, despite Ron Bracewell's best efforts to make them welcome. One reason was the panel of "experts" that used to gather in front of the fireplace and give a critical analysis of the game, the ref and just about everything else. They were known as the Summer Whiners. Despite this all were good blokes who would be happy to buy the Ref or anyone else a Beer.

At lower team level Refs usually act as first aid man. In one match there were 4 doctors present. Two playing for Harlow one for the opposition. The other Doctor on the touch line just happened to be a Consultant Neurologist. A player was laid out after a head collision. Nowadays he would (quite rightly) be hospitalised and have a brain scan. In those days it was the magic sponge at the back of the neck. This however failed to work and the patient was taken to the changing room.

All the Doctors came to the same diagnosis, he was suffering from a bang on the head!

### **REMINDER TO ALL**

Please if you have a story to tell as I'm sure you have, write it down and share it with us.

**Ross Loveday**

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