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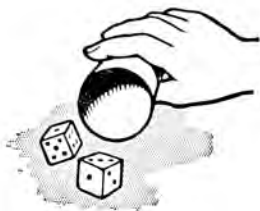
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The Playing Field.

It is in a spirit of humbleness that I have undertaken the difficult job of writing a short history of the Oldham Football Club. With very few actual facts and figures of the dim but glorious past of this old Club, I realise that my account will of necessity require many details to be filled in by those whose connection with the Club goes back very much further than mine.

Records of the Club during its Rugby Union activities are very few and far between, and one has to rely to a great extent, upon the memories of one or two old members and stalwarts and that is rather dangerous.

The First Meeting.

Of one thing we are pretty certain, and that is the formation of the Club. It was planned by a body of young men who were playing Rugby Union on a piece of land adjacent to St. Thomas' Church, Werneth. Little did they realise that they were sowing the seeds for a club that in spite of its varying fortunes would still be a sound and healthy sports organisation 76 years later. Yes, 76 years have gone by since this Club was formed and in the main it remains of similar construction as in those early days, a Members' Club.

This first meeting was held in the Prince Albert Hotel, Union Street West, Oldham, on the 3rd January, 1873, and it was not very long before these men had obtained a new ground and prepared it sufficiently for the playing of matches. This new home of the re-organised Club was on a plot of land adjacent to the now defunct Glodwick Spinning Co., and facing what is now Game Street. The first game to be played there was on February 17th, 1873, against Stalybridge, and as the records do not show any result I am wondering whether these boys were so excessively modest that they did not wish to boast of victory or whether they were so disappointed at suffering defeat in their first match that they forgot to fill in the points "for" and "against" columns.

This ground, no doubt, would be very similar to many of the junior grounds in existence to-day with no stands or terracing and with no means of taking a "gate." Admittance was free and the Treasurer struggled to meet the expenses by the taking of a collection at each match.

The club colours were amber and black jerseys.

* * * *

Reg. Farrar scored 49 tries during Season 1921-22.

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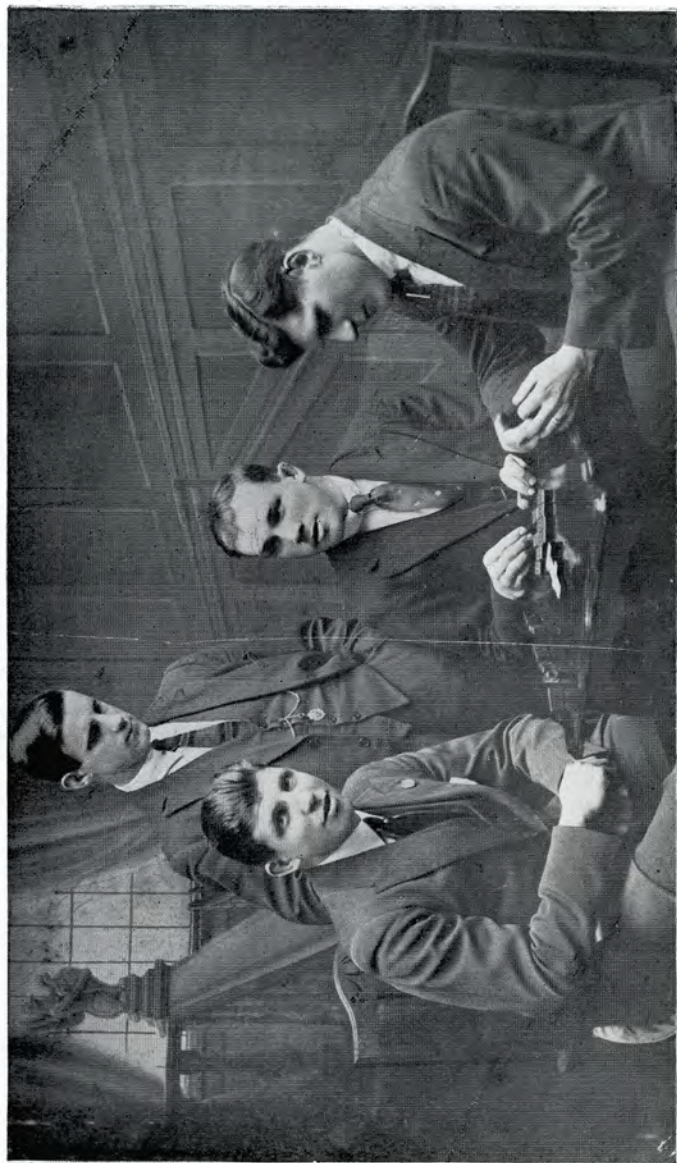
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The four tourists who represented the Club on the 1924 Australia and New Zealand Tour
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Removal to Clarksfield.

After a period on this ground progress was made and a further removal of ground saw the team playing in the Clarksfield area where many eventful matches were played. On the 4th March, 1889, Oldham played the Maoris on this Clarksfield ground, and included in the Oldham team were J. Hurst (of Leigh) and Nolan and Pennington (of Rochdale). Oldham's team was : T. B. Broadbent, J. Hurst, W. McCutcheon, W. H. Pennington, J. R. Mills, J. Nolan, T. Whittaker, H. Court, E. Blomley, J. Armstrong, J. Mellor, S. H. Nuttall, H. Wolstencroft, W. Lees, and H. Jowett, and the result was Oldham 1 goal, 3 tries, 4 minor points ; Maoris 10 minor points.

It was in this team of Maoris that some of the players did not wear boots but played "bare footed." To-day, Rule 14 of the Laws of the Game states that a player will not be allowed to play without boots or shoes.

One of the first importations of the Club, was William McCutcheon, who came from Swansea, and who as a three-quarter was a power in the Swansea team. He came to Oldham and played his first match against Manchester Rangers on the 8th December, 1888. McCutcheon's playing career was not over a long period and he retired after playing one season in the then styled Northern Union, in 1895-96. One of the greatest Welshmen who ever came north, he was eventually a first-class referee, a member of the Oldham Football Committee, and held the position of President. A great legislator, he would have gained greater honours had he allowed his name to go forward as a Council representative. On retirement from official position he had given 33 years' continuous service to the Club.

Dia Gwynn, another Welshman of renown, joined the Club for one season in 1889-90, and thus started a long line of grand Welsh players who have been with the Club from time to time throughout its life.

Jack Hurst was another great player, a household name wherever Rugby Union or Northern Union was played—he played his last game for Oldham against Swinton on October 29th, 1898.

To Watersheddings.

And so to Watersheddings where the official opening of the ground took place on 28th September, 1889. The match was versus Swinton and the result : Swinton, 2 goals, 1 try, 2 minor points ; Oldham, 1 minor point.

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EDGAR BROOKS

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BRYN GOLDSWAIN

The present Captain of the team, played for Wales this season, and is a strong candidate for tour to Australia and New Zealand.

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TEAMS.—*Oldham* : J. T. Walkden, R. Mosley, W. McCutcheon (capt.), J. Hurst, J. Nolan, J. Thomas, Whittaker, Armstrong, Mayers, Blomley, H. Wolstencroft, Ingram, Nuttall, Mallalieu, Robinson.

Swinton : Murray, J. Valentine, J. Marsh, Battersby, W. Bumby (capt.), A. Buxton, Horley, Hotchkiss, Clayton, Paul, Walker, W. Marsh, Rothwell, Lomax, Hall.

Attendance : 7,000.

The Beginning of Northern Union.

The year 1895 saw the great split from Rugby Union as a result of quasi-professionalism or the payment of "broken-time." Oldham, along with other Lancashire, Yorkshire and Cheshire clubs, severed their connection with the English Rugby Union and started the Northern Union, now known to us all as The Rugby League.

In the first season of Northern Union Football (1895-96) Oldham played 43 matches ; won 27, lost 14, and drew 2 and amongst the list of scorers we see the names of Lees, Hurst, Bonser, Taylor, McCutcheon, Varley and Martin. Fixtures were played with Tyldesley, Manningham, Stockport, Liversedge, Brighouse and Runcorn, who were never known to the present young followers of the game and but memories to the older men who can go back upwards of forty years. The odd match of the season is accounted for by the playing of a third match with Runcorn, at Broughton, for in this first season of Northern Union Oldham hit the high spots and tied with Runcorn for the Lancashire League Championship. Although losing in the "play off" by 6 points to 5 points it was certainly a gradely start and warned opponents of what was to come in future years. The Rugby Union scoring of points was still being observed, though the counting of "minor points" seems to have fallen out of the records. A goal from a try was 5 points (try not counting) ; a dropped goal 4 points ; penalty goal 3 points, and a try 3 points.

The season 1896-97 saw the playing of the Northern Union Cup (now the Rugby League Challenge Cup) for the first time, to be won by Batley. Oldham were defeated by Bradford (away) in the first round, 7 points to 3 points. During the season they played 39 matches, won 26, lost 10, drew 3, and amongst this season's fixtures appeared Crompton and Morecambe.

* * * *

Rochdale Hornets won their first match at Watersheddings on 16th March, 1915.

Season 1897-98 saw the alteration in the scoring of points so that from this date a try counted as 3 points and all types of goals as 2 points. In this season the fortunes of the Club appeared to be on the upgrade and the Lancashire League Championship was won. Batley again won the Northern Union Cup and their performances during these early years gathered the name of the " Gallant Youths " to themselves.

By now Oldham had progressed to the 4th Round of the Cup when they fell to the ultimate cup winners by 3 points to nil.

Season 1898-99 saw a further step in the progress of Oldham as it is in this season that the memorable Northern Union Cup Final against Hunslet was played at Fallowfield and won by 19 points to 9 points. The team that played that day was : R. L. Thomas, S. Williams, S. Lees, T. Fletcher, T. D. Davies, A. Lees, J. Lawton, G. Frater, J. G. Moffatt, J. Telfer, Bonser, H. Broome, Barnes, J. Lees and H. Ellis.

It will be noticed that teams were still composed of 15 players each side. Joe Ferguson had just signed for Oldham and watched this match from the touch line.

This was the first of three occasions on which Oldham won the Challenge Cup. The second occasion was in 1925 and finally in 1927.

Season 1900-01 cannot be passed over without mentioning again that great-hearted and long-service player, Joe Ferguson, whose name is now appearing regularly in the list of Oldham " scorers."

On the 12th January, 1901, the match with Swinton was interfered with owing to the great crowd present, and the match was ordered to be replayed. Names now figuring amongst the scorers were Williamson, Pearce, Fletcher and Huzzey.

Season 1901-02 sees the name of South Shields included in the fixtures ; the match at home was won by 43 points to nil and as there are no details for the return fixture of 19th April, 1902, one can only presume that their life was a very short one.

Progress.

Season 1904 : Northern Rugby League Champions.

Succeeding years saw Oldham maintain a steady position in League matches, always seeming to win more than they lost, and in 1905-06 we see the first entries for the Lancashire Cup. After victory against Salford (away) by 10 points to 2 points,

we were defeated at home by Wigan, 11 points to 7 points, and this commenced a long series of cup tie tussles between these two clubs right up to the present season.

By now the name of Avery is being carried on the Club's records along with those of Tyson, White and Cash.

Season 1906 : Runners-up to Halifax in Northern Rugby Football League.

Season 1905-06 was the last season in which the names of Morecambe and Millom clubs appear as league fixtures, but 1907-08 saw games with Merthyr and Ebbw Vale.

Success.

Season 1907 : Runners-up to Warrington in the Northern Union Challenge Cup.

3rd November, 1907. Oldham v. New Zealand. Won, 8 points to 7 points. Oldham scorers, Oldershaw and Beynon, tries ; Ferguson, goal.

30th November, 1907. Oldham defeated Broughton Rangers at Rochdale, 16 points to 9 points, to win the Lancashire County Challenge Cup for the first time.

Season 1907-08. Runners-up to Hunslet in Northern Rugby League. (This was Hunslet's Four Cup year when their forwards became known as "The Terrible Six.")

Winners of Lancashire League. Defeated in final of Lancashire County Cup.

Season 1908-09. Runners-up to Wigan in Northern Rugby League. Runners-up to Wigan in the Lancashire League.

Season 1909-10. Winners of Northern Rugby League. Winners of Lancashire League.

Season 1910-11. Winners of Northern Rugby League. Runners-up to Wigan in the Lancashire League. Winners of the Lancashire County Cup.

Season 1911-12. Runners-up to Wigan in Lancashire League. Defeated in final of Lancashire Challenge Cup. Defeated by Dewsbury in final of the Northern Union Challenge Cup.

Season 1912-13. Winners of Lancashire Challenge Cup, defeating Wigan by 5 points to nil at Broughton.

This undoubtedly was one of the greatest periods in the history of the Oldham Club. Consistency over so many seasons has very few parallels on the playing field, and it is to these that all members look when they are talking of the glorious past and what they hope for and look forward to in the future.

Oldham were certainly a team to be feared in those days, but one which was welcomed by spectators on all grounds, because of the "stars" and personalities which were amongst the team. In their ranks were such players as Llewellyn, Lomas, Smith G., Anlezark, Deane, Avery, Owens, Ferguson, Wood, Young, Cook, Dixon, Davies E., and Farnsworth.

The finish of the 1914-15 season saw the end of the Cup and League Competitions for a few seasons, but with the return of competitive football again in 1919 we find that Oldham is still in a powerful position and they were soon amongst the honours again as the following details show :—

The "Great Era."

May, 1919. Defeated by Rochdale in final of Lancashire Cup at Salford.

December, 1919. Winners of Lancashire Cup v. Rochdale at Salford.

Season 1919-20. Runners-up to Widnes in Lancashire League.

December, 1921. Defeated by Warrington in final of Lancashire Cup at Broughton.

Season 1921-22. Winners Lancashire League.

1922. Runners-up to Wigan in Northern Rugby Football League.

1924. Defeated in final of Challenge Cup by Wigan.

November, 1924. Winners of Lancashire Cup v. St. Helen's Recs. at Salford.

1925. Winners of Challenge Cup v. Hull Kingston Rovers at Leeds. Tries scored by Farrar, Brough, Corsi and Davies.

1926. Defeated by Swinton in final of Challenge Cup.

Season 1925-26. League Matches. Played 34, won 19, lost 12, drawn 3. 62 goals, 103 tries; points for, 403. 46 goals; 53 tries. Points against 251.

Season 1926-27. League Matches. Played 38, won 19, lost, 15, drawn 4. 74 goals; 114 tries. Points for 490. 59 goals; 76 tries. Points against 346.

1927. Winners of Challenge Cup.

Ferguson is still playing a prominent part in the Club's history, and the names we now see amongst the scorers are Wood, Hilton, E. Thomas, Finnerty, Moore, Marlors, Parkinson, Hall, Bates, Farrar, Knapman, Carter, Rees, Tighe, Sloman, Donovan, Collins, Rix, Hurtley, Corsi Bros., Brough, Hesketh, Kendall, Read, Baker, Ashworth, Johnson, Higgs, Oster and Holliday.

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What memories these names recall to us all and particularly to those members of the Club who have followed its fortunes over a long period and so experienced to the full the contrasts of light and shade in the moments of victory and defeat. The days of success must return. How welcome these players would be in the ranks of so many clubs to-day, and what values would be put on the services of some of these masters if they were available to-day. Can it be that the introduction of so much money into our game has had the effect of doing the opposite of what was expected and been the cause in some manner for the fall in the standard of play throughout the League? It is a thought that must come to many with a long connection with the game and like so many other problems that face us it is not possible to get a unanimous verdict. The players of this period had certainly plenty of technical skill and boundless enthusiasm for the game. May they prove to be an inspiration to the younger generation through the praise that we give.

The Recession.

The year 1927 seemed to bring to an end the two great vintage periods in the Club's history and except for winning the Lancashire Challenge Cup in November, 1933, against St. Helen's Recs., at Swinton, we have had no further opportunity of toasting "The Club" in victory or of rousing the town with the triumphant entry of the team to the strains of "See the Conquering Heroes Come!" Loyalty and good service from players we have had in abundance but we have not seemed to be able to get that team of outstanding skill and personality that selected itself.

The 1930's saw such players as Rees T., Rix, Thomas E., Stephens, Farrar, Oster, Read, Scaife, Clayton, Ashworth, Hathway, Kilpatrick, Williams, Lister, Houghton, Dobbs, Reynolds, Bardsley, Watkins, W. T. Thomas, Hanley, McNally, Gibbons, Pugh, Sadler, L. Rees, Macrea, Brooks, Ray Smith, Moore, Downey, Griffiths, Mitchell, Large, Stott, Kerwick and Ambler, wearing the Red and White jerseys with distinction and credit, and even the lack of tangible success in the way of Cups and Championships cannot detract from the memory of many fine games played at Watersheddings during this period.

Difficult years were again experienced during the War Years of 1939-45 and difficult and heavy was the work that was thrown on loyal committeemen and members who kept the game going for us. Many are the times when it was not until the very last minute that it was known that a full team could

be turned out. Those years prevented many of the youngsters developing under the right conditions both as to training and playing, and this has done much to make these post-war years so difficult and unsettled for this country in all forms of sport. The athlete and games player, who reaches his zenith about the age of 27 has lost the best part of six years from the correct training environment and it reflects great credit to the Rugby League that they have been able to withstand the challenge of Australia and New Zealand during this last few years.

Since 1939 many players have been through the team, and though W. Griffiths, Harris, Mahoney, Gummer, Large, Kerwick, Kenny, Shaw, Pugh and Rostron have now either retired or sought pastures new, others are still bearing our colours and the burden of battle at the present time.

Forward to ?

And now for the future. New players have joined us during the past two seasons whom we feel will do much to bring the Club back to that high position it held during the earlier part of the century. Goldswain and Morgan have already received International Honours, and with the younger players such as Platt, Batten, Ward, Fearnley, Leyland, Heyes and Keith is allied the greater experience of such loyal players as Brookes, Mitchell, Ogden, Taylor and Barraclough that I think we can all look to the future with more optimism than in the last few years.

The Committee Room.

No account of the Oldham Football Club would be complete without reference to the administrative and executive sides of our sporting life as there is no Club which has played a more important part in the development of Rugby League football than has Oldham.

Joseph Platt.

In actual fact the very foundations for the success of Rugby League were laid in a very considerable way by a late President of this Club by the name of Joseph Platt. Immediately on the formation of the Northern Union, Joseph Platt was elected the first Honorary Secretary of the game in 1895, to be later joined by Joseph Lewthwaite of Hunslet as the Honorary Treasurer, and these two gentlemen were responsible for the administrative side of the game, appointment of officials, the finances and the arrangements for three Australian Tours in 1910, 1914, and 1920 and they only relinquished these positions in 1924, when

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Mr. John Wilson became the first full-time secretary of the Rugby League. During these years there were all the difficulties of establishing the game in the face of the Rugby Union and it was only by the hard work and careful planning of such men as Joseph Platt that the game was able to get through the early years and become as firmly established as it is now. Early Council Meetings were held in Mr. Platt's offices in Queen's Street, and later in Church Lane and many are the occasions when sporting journalists were found on the steps trying to get the news before their rivals.

There is a ticket in Oldham in the name of Mr. Platt showing him to have been a member of the Oldham Football Club in the year 1880, signed by the then secretary, G. H. Harrop, when the subscription was 5s. When we remember that he was President of the Club during the seasons 1909-10 and 1910-11 and that as well as being the Honorary Secretary of the Northern Union for 29 years he was Oldham's representative on the Lancashire County Committee, we can realise how much this Club is indebted to such a man and his work.

An experience that Mr. Platt used to relate was in connection with the first Australian Tour in 1910 when the main party of the tourists sailed from Tilbury (London) on the "Osterley." As in the coming tour, the boat sailed before the Cup Final and so it was arranged that those engaged in this match should travel overland through France and join the main party at Marseilles. Joseph Platt accompanied this overland party and watched the boat leave Marseilles on this great adventure. As the "Osterley" was leaving, one of the tugs that was helping her out capsized and there was much excitement on the boat and round the harbour.

One hope of Joe Platt's was that one day the Northern Union would be honoured by Royal Patronage, and it was through his personal efforts that the late Lord Derby became President of the Northern Union, and he in turn, was instrumental in His Majesty The King being a Patron of our game. As a sequel to these early hopes and efforts we find that in 1948 His Majesty King George VI attended the final at Wembley and presented the cup to the Wigan captain and Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth handed the medals to all the players of the Wigan and Bradford Northern teams. Thus it took upwards of 40 years for the hopes of Joseph Platt to mature to the full.

* * * *

Inauguration of Infirmary Cup with Rochdale Hornets,
1920-21.

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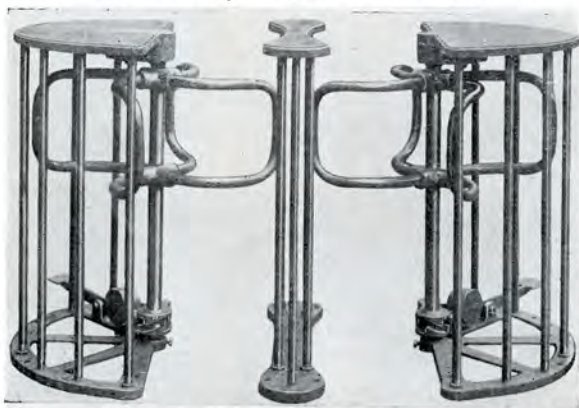
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KIWIS v. OLDHAM Combined teams that played at Watersheddings Saturday, 25th Oct 1947

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G. W. Holden.

The next big man to be provided by Oldham to our game was George W. Holden, who although he did not attain to any permanent position in the organisation of our game, was our representative on the Council for many years and did much to keep the name of Oldham in the foreground over a long period.

He served as President of our Club during the years of the First World War and still remained in office for two seasons at the end of the War to set the Club on its way to a long list of successes. He served the Club as Honorary Treasurer for a long time and finally had to relinquish this office on medical advice at the commencement of season 1931-32.

G. F. Hutchins.

Finally, we come to G. F. Hutchins, whose long connection with the game and offices held would supply sufficient material for a history of his own. After long and valued service to our game through the Junior side of the game to the Committee of the Oldham Football Club, he was elected the representative of this Club to serve on the Rugby League Council following the retirement of George Holden in 1926.

It was not very long before it was seen that Fred was a strong man amongst men, and in the period of two years he had created such a good impression amongst the representatives of other Clubs that he was approached by a number of Yorkshire officials to allow his name to go forward as a manager of the 1928 Australian Tour, a position he occupied with Ted Osborne of Warrington. He again visited Australia with the Touring side of 1932 with Bob Anderton of Warrington as his co-manager. Although we may feel that these two appointments were the great achievement of his career, I personally look upon the work he did as an administrator and legislator as his great achievement, and these are but tokens of esteem granted by those who knew his efforts and skill so intimately.

As an Oldham Committee man, he stood for the Club on the Lancashire County, the Rugby League Council and the League Management Committee and was Chairman of the Rugby League Council during seasons 1938-39 and 1939-40, and is the only Oldham man who has held this exalted position.

I cannot do better than quote the words of John Wilson (Rugby League Secretary, 1924 to 1946) who says :—

“ Joe. Platt, George Holden and Fred Hutchins will go down in our game's history as the three men from one club, who have rendered the greatest service to the Rugby League game.”

Other notable Presidents were : W. H. Greaves, R. Thompson, J. S. Parkinson and H. Whittaker.

To-day's Officials.

To-day our President is Mr. Frank S. Holt, who has had a long connection with sport of all kinds, for as well as his great interest in Rugby he has a deep love for the game of cricket of which in his younger days he was no mean exponent, doing duty behind the wickets. Unfortunately our playing successes have not been so good of recent years and so the story cannot be painted in such bright colours. Much hard work has been done under his chairmanship and we hope when the next history comes to be written it will show that 1949-50 was at least a turning point on the return to brighter days. Mr. Holt represents the Club on the Lancashire County Committee.

Mr. A. Cordwell is the acting Vice-President and Chairman of the Finance Committee.

Mr. Percy Carter holds the important office of Treasurer of the Club and sits for Oldham on the Rugby League Council and serves on the Cup and Rules Sub-Committee.

Mr. J. Coulthard is Chairman of the General Purposes Committee which is responsible for the maintenance and improvement of the ground and general amenities.

The names of your Committee will be found upon another page of this booklet.

Your Secretary is the genial Bert Summerscales, who has served the Club as Committeeman and Lancashire County member. He has the difficult job of carrying out his Committee's instructions and at the same time pleasing a big and lively membership.

Au Revoir.

And now I end my story, very cognisant of the fact that much must have been missed out. My endeavour has been to bring back to some of the older readers a memory of the glorious deeds of the past and to the younger ones to show them the background upon which the Club has grown and the very close contact of the Club with the larger sphere of the game itself. Sufficient has been written in these pages to establish the classification of "First Class Club." We can all be rightly proud of our Club and its work and it behoves all officials, players and members to help in its re-establishment towards the head of the League. Men of character, enthusiasm and vision are as essential to-day as they were in those pioneer days

of 1873 in the Club's history and in 1895 in the history of the Rugby League.

To all who have assisted in providing me with data I say "Thank you" and to the many workers very deserving of praise whom I must have omitted in a short history such as this, I ask forgiveness. May the pleasure you have had and still hope to have at Watersheddings be a reward for those labours that I know were so willingly given.

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Record Membership of Oldham Football Club : 4,563 ;
Season 1926-27. Membership, 1949-50 : 2,671.

* * * *

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Record attendance : v. Huddersfield, 23rd March, 1912 ;
22,811.

* * * *

Record Gate (cash) : Cup-Tie v. Halifax, 19th March, 1949 ;
£2,432.

* * * *

Longest Playing Careers in First Class Rugby :—

Fred Webster of Leeds, 25 years.

Joe. Ferguson of Oldham, 24½ years.

Gus Risman, to date, 21 years.

* * * *

First Match v. Australian Touring Side : 26th December, 1908.
Oldham 11 points ; Australia 5 points.

* * * *

Oldham went from 7th September, 1907, to 22nd February,
1908, without being defeated and we believe this to be the
record. We then lost to Salford 5 points to nil.

* * * *

Last Cup to be brought to Oldham : Lancashire Cup, 18th
November, 1933, v. St. Helen's Recs., at Swinton. Won,
12 points to nil. Scorers : Rees 3 goals, Bardsley 1 try,
Stephens 1 try. Referee, F. Peel, Bradford.

Team : T. E. Rees, A. Taylor, S. Bardsley, S. J. Stephens,
L. Lewis, T. Egan, J. B. Reynolds, J. Read, J. M. Scaife,
E. Hodgson, W. T. Thomas, A. Clayton, F. W. Ashworth.

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