



THE END  
OF AN ERA

OLDHAM BEARS V SWINTON LIONS  
KICK-OFF 3.00 PM. SUNDAY 29TH DECEMBER 1996  
AT WATERSHEDDINGS  
SOUVENIR BROCHURE £3.00



# SIR RODNEY WALKER

*Chairman of the Sports' Council and the Rugby League*

I am delighted to have the opportunity to contribute to this commemorative brochure which is produced to mark the closure of the Watershedding's. Oldham, like many of our leading clubs, have now entered a new exciting phase in their history. The advent of Super League and the recently announced World Cup Challenge will, I believe, move our game forward perceptively in 1997. Competitions from other sports and leisure attractions that compete for our spectators' time serve as a timely reminder how important our loyal spectators are

to our game and why it is important that we should take care to provide them with improving facilities and conditions in which to watch rugby league.

I believe the future is filled with great opportunity. We are on the threshold of a unification agreement with our amateur partners which should unlock hitherto inaccessible opportunities to attract and develop more young sporting talent to our sport.

SIR RODNEY WALKER  
*Chairman of the Sports' Council  
Chairman of the Rugby League*

# JIM QUINN

Chairman of the Oldham Rugby League Club



Today is all about three things - recognising the special occasion and what it stands for, reflecting on our club and ground's glorious past and looking ahead to a bright new future for Oldham Beams. On this nostalgic occasion it is interesting to note that we can bring together two clubs, Oldham and Swinton, which met in the very first game at Warrheadings way back in September, 1889, six years before the split that eventually led to the formation of the Rugby League. Despite all the trials and tribulations of more than a century of Rugby League football, Oldham and Swinton can be proud of the fact that they are still alive and kicking; Oldham as founder members of Super League and the Lions as a progressive club that won promotion last season and is now looking forward eagerly to first division rugby next year.

A particular welcome is extended to Tony Barrow and Malcolm White, the former as an ex-Oldham coach who came within one controversial decision of taking us to Wembley for the first time and the latter as a man who has stuck with Swinton through thick and thin and deserves all the success that comes the club's way. Swinton are fortunate to have a fine relationship with Bury FC, with whom they share the Cragg Lane ground.

Talking of grounds it is with some regret, yet with immense pride, that we bid farewell today to our home of the past 107 years... regret that this famous old ground will no longer accommodate enthusiastic crowds, first-class players and big games with its own unique and homey atmosphere, but pride that, in the name of Oldham Rugby, so much has been achieved by so many across a century of sporting excellence at this famous old ground.

The club had a remarkable period of success in the early part of the century, then there was the 1920s and four consecutive Challenge Cup final appearances - a record that stood for nearly 70 years. The 1950s was another sensational period in the club's history. The committee at that time assembled a truly brilliant team and as men rejoiced in their newly discovered freedom after the second War, sport flourished and crowds of 14,000 or 15,000 regularly turned up here to watch the skills of wonderful players in a wonderful team. It was a magnificent time for Oldham Rugby, tinged with the one regret that the team never did reach Wembley despite its Lancashire Cup victories in 1956, 1957 and 1958 and its Rugby League championship triumph on a fabulous day at Odsal in the Spring of 1957.

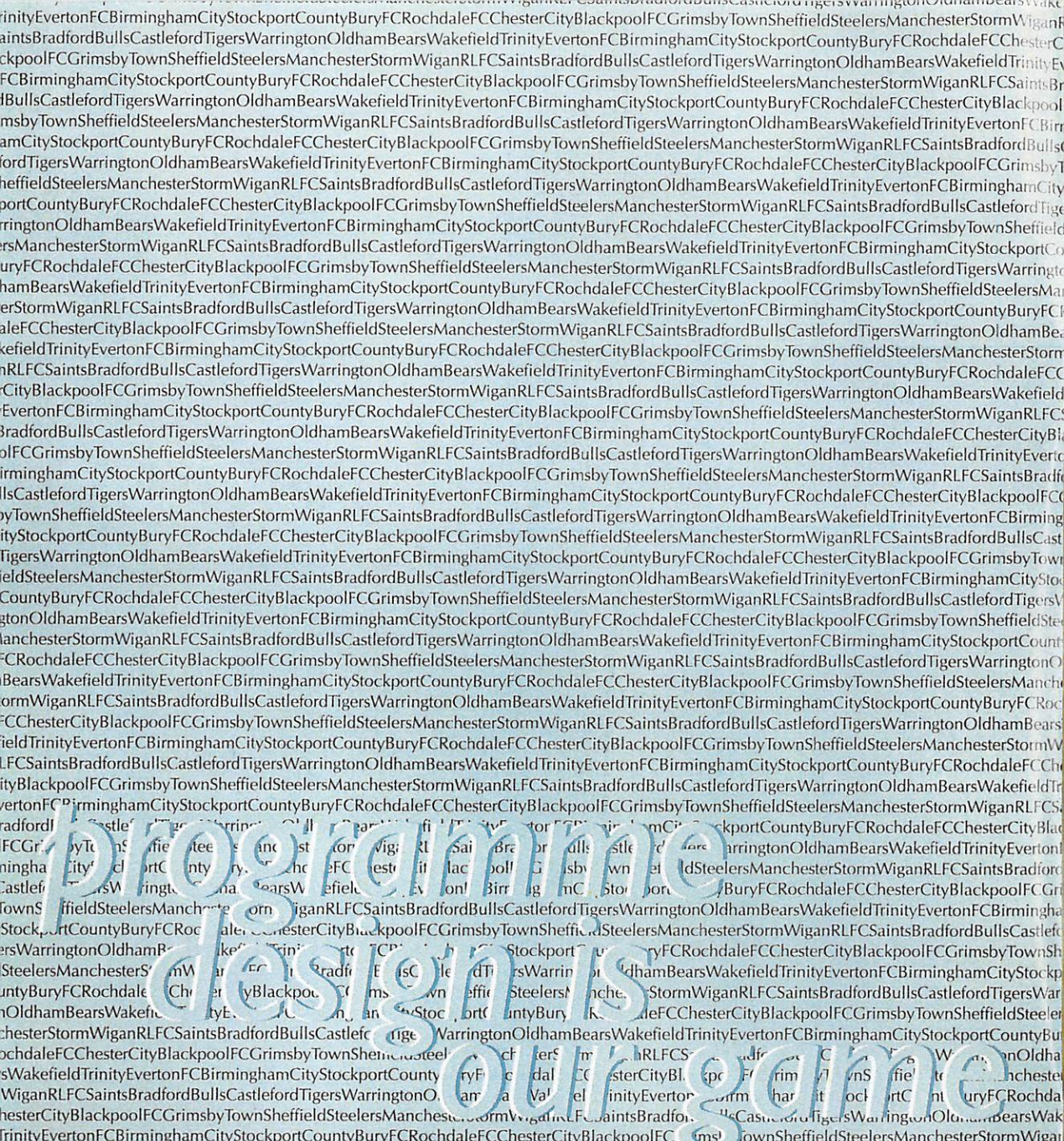
We remember today, perhaps with a lump in the throat, those wonderful times of yesterday. We are, however, currently embarking on another exciting chapter in the Oldham Rugby story. The second Super League season beckons and with it comes the first World Club Championship which will see the Oldham Beams pitting their skills against teams from Australia. Over the past few years we have had to work our way through a minefield of problems involving the burden of great debt and the sale of the ground, while at the same time coming out of the old second division into the first and then finishing high enough to qualify for Super League.

We are now getting a team together which we believe can be successful at the highest level. We signed six new players last year and we have recruited four more recently for the new season. To put that team on show and to continue to attract the quality of player we will need over the next year or two, we need to have our own stadium as quickly as possible.

We will be playing at Boundary Park next season, as you know, and we are grateful to Oldham Athletic for allowing us to share their stadium. Sharing, by its very nature, means we have only restricted freedom and that doesn't make our task any easier.

Today, we are looking back... tomorrow we must turn our attentions to building a Super League club that can become the pride of the town into the new century.

As one page closes, another opens. Let's all pull together to make the new Oldham Beams story a jolly good read.



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# A TWO SWEATER AND FLAT CAP JOB

Wembley it may not be, and Twickenham it certainly isn't. But the decaying terraces, the sloping pitch, and the tiny, primitive dressing rooms beneath the grandstand at Watersheddings evoke just as many memories. Especially of the weather.

No matter what my involvement on the day - player, journalist, or T.V. commentator - Watersheddings has always been marked on my calendar as "a two sweater and flat cap job", even in August! Even my last visit in November of this year to watch a British Colleges inter-county fixture was accompanied by frost and freezing temperatures.

It has always been so. My first encounter with Watersheddings' bone hard pitch was on a cold, clear January Saturday afternoon just five months after my signing for St. Helens in August 1961. With straw piled high around the touchlines, the terraces, despite overnight falls of snow, were packed with fans eager to witness battle on the field. It was my first encounter with the 'Roughyeds' classy, tough, international centre, Alan Davies, and it was not an experience I relished.

Being turned back in full stride and dumped unceremoniously on the hard, freezing pitch was hardly the perfect welcome to Watersheddings. But, as I said, it has always been so.

I well remember that momentous night of February 4th 1987 when one of my former pupils Mick Burke, a cup deadline signing that year, kicked the winning goal in the closing minutes of that epic struggle with

Wigan to boot them out of the Challenge Cup.

Remember Paddy Kirwan's last gasp try to level the scores, and Mick's conversion to clinch the match at 10 pts to 8 pts? I don't because, just at the moment when everyone in front of the Press Box stood up for a better view of the try, a gentleman knocked my umbrella over my eyes. And what was I, and Paul Fitzpatrick of the Guardian doing under an umbrella in the grandstand at Watersheddings? Why, stopping the rain, which was seeping through the roof, from falling on our notebooks!

And then there was a T.V. commentary from B.B.C. when, owing to heavy falls of snow and temperatures of minus 6 degrees, no other games were being played other than (miraculously!) an Oldham v St. Helens cup clash at Watersheddings. As if trying to pick out the numbers on the players' backs was not difficult enough in a six inch covering of snow, the freezing temperatures reduced me to a zombie by half time. Yes, I'd forgotten my flat cap!

Whatever the weather, all will have their favourite memories of Watersheddings, a direct link with those days back in 1895 when League's pioneers made the bold move to strike out on their own. Alan Davies, Sid Little, Charlie Winslade, John Etty, Bernard Ganley, 'Rocky' Turner, Frank Pitchford - the great names are recalled. Their deeds and skills defied the weather, and so did Watersheddings for a hundred years.

Oh that I could have done likewise!

Ray French.





# ONLY THE MOUNTAINS AND RIVERS LAST FOREVER

Rugby League historian Robert Gate remembers Watersheddings

REGate

**T**hey have already taken most of the variety out of the game as it is played on the pitch - competitive scrummaging and raking at the play-the-ball obviously give them all the screaming abds, what with all that uncertainty they used to produce. After all, the coaches need to know what is going to happen next, don't they, poor lambs?

The drive to standardisation encompasses many things, most of them familiar as they are enshrined in "Framing the Future" but that's not the end of it by any means. Now clubs have to have nicknames whether they want to or not, not that they are allowed to say they don't. Perish the thought.

Sooner or later members clubs will be outlawed, even beyond the Super League. Sooner or later they will not allow games to be played if it starts raining. Sooner or later sloping pitches will be banned - that's another reason why Headingley will have to go.

Sooner or later..... Sadly as far as Watersheddings is concerned sooner has arrived. After today the venerable old place will just be a memory, a haunt for ghosts of 107 years worth of players and spectators. Some North American Indians had a saying - "Only the mountains and rivers last forever". History and the destructive, interfering hand of Man has proved otherwise. Nothing lasts forever. Watersheddings has had its day but, whatever the progressives and politically correct claim, some of us will mourn the passing of yet another piece of our heritage.

I have always loved Watersheddings. It was atmospheric. I have been here in howling gales. I have been here and had to go home without seeing the scheduled game as Pennine frost and ice have defeated the groundstaff's best efforts. I have been here in pouring rain. I have even frazzled here in broiling early season sunshine, notably in a game against Leigh a couple of seasons ago. And, daft as it sounds, that was the most uncomfortable spectating I think I have ever experienced!

Oldham was actually the first team I ever saw in a league match and I have always had a soft spot for them. That was back in 1956 when Oldham came to Thrum Hall with one of its greatest teams and beat us 13-9. Oldham always used to beat us in my early spectatorship. Well, they would, wouldn't

they, with the likes of Turner, Winslade, Davies, Cracknell, Ertz and Vines? They had Jack Keith to shovel the ball out of the scrum and, worst of all, from Halifax's point of view, Bernard Ganley to kick us to death. He just had to look at the posts and it was a goal. I used to think it was an immutable law of nature that Oldham beat Halifax until 9 September, 1961 when at last we crushed them (7-5!) at Thrum Hall - another quirk of a place destined for the scrapheap of history.

By the early 1960s I had made acquaintance with Watersheddings. I dare say it was crumbly even then but I would never have noticed. I am, you see, the Rugby League hierarchy's worst case scenario as far as spectators go. All I am interested in is the rugby. I don't go to grounds to eat or drink, although I do admit to once having a cup of tea at Watersheddings. I am not preoccupied, as everyone else seems to be with the state of the lavatories. I certainly would not expect a creche to be provided at a rugby ground and the only merchandising I buy is a programme. I am one of those poor, misguided people for whom eighty minutes of real Rugby League was quite enough excitement. People like me will probably be banned soon in that dreaded drive for standardisation.

So for me Watersheddings has always been a place of pilgrimage, even on those awful days when it has taken an hour and a half to travel the umpteenth odd miles from Halifax to Oldham due to severe weather or even more severe traffic problems. What really used to impress me was the fact that the ground was covered on all four sides and had that funny double-decker stand and every available surface was decorated in red and white stripes. It was an absolute picture. I am an avid collector of Rugby League photographs and have many images of packed out golden, olden days at Watersheddings. Of course, physically they are black and white or sepia or simply fading away but in my mind's eye they are a riot of red and white. Always will be.

I have no doubt that new generations of Owdamers will come to cherish wherever the Roughyeds finally settle but it will certainly be different to dear old Watersheddings and I bet the bus from Ripponden doesn't pass the door!


**Robert Gate's latest book - The Struggle For The Ashes II is a splendid record of the intense Gt. Britain - Australia battles. Individual copies can be ordered by phoning 01422 823074.**

*I will be sorry to see Watersheddings go. That's not just because as a non-car-driving Halifax supporter, who lives in Ripponden, I actually find it easier to get to Watersheddings than Thrum Hall. No, that's just one of life's little quirks. They don't actually like quirks, the Rugby League hierarchy. They would really like everything, everyone and everywhere to be the same.*



# ONLY GOOD CAN COME...

Andy Goodway



At times like these one inevitably looks back and in my case that means a trip back to 1979 and the year I signed for Oldham when the youth policy was in full swing.

The club was passing through a very stable time and I thoroughly enjoyed my early days at the club under men like Frank Myler, Graham Starkey and the late Peter Smethurst.

However, as an 18-year-old Castleford lad I perhaps didn't have the "feel" for the club that I have now. Only now, older, wiser and with my playing career behind me, do I fully appreciate what Oldham did for me in my formative years in the game.

When I look back I realise what a terrific youth policy Oldham had in 1979 and, as head coach, I am particularly keen to build a similar scheme at the club now.

We have set up an apprenticeship scheme, we have signed several promising youngsters and we are going into the New Year with established scouts in Yorkshire, Lancashire and Cumbria.

It takes time, of course, to see the benefits of such a policy and, in the meantime, we are working hard on building and preparing a squad which can do well in Super League.

We won't be making a lot of rash promises or shouting from the rooftops about what we are going to do in 1997, but you can be assured that we are preparing nice and quietly behind the scenes and hopefully we will be able to provide supporters with what they want to see when the new campaign kicks off.

I was relatively pleased with what we achieved last year. We finished eighth, but we could and should have finished sixth. However, all that is in the past and I don't want to go over old ground.

We have improved steadily and consistently over the past three seasons and if we can keep that pattern going in the coming season we will do alright.

The squad has been strengthened by the recruitment of Brett Goldspink, Nathan Turner and Luke Goodwin, but there is also a

vast amount of work to do in other directions - things like developing the youth policy, as I have already said, building up our relationship with schools in both Oldham and Tameside and, last but not least, building bridges with local amateur clubs.

To discuss the last point first I know that relationships between Watersheddings and the local amateur clubs have been less than perfect in recent years.

There is a lot of work to be done to put things right, but I can personally assure everyone connected with Oldham amateur game that my staff and I are keen to build bridges on good faith and honesty.

We will welcome approaches from any club to discuss any point or points which might be troubling them. Only good can come from discussion.

Let's get together, get things off our chest and see if we can work together for mutual benefit to see the name of Oldham in bright lights at all levels of rugby league football.

So far as the schools are concerned, we are keen to develop a close association and we would welcome an approach from any school in the Oldham area, Saddleworth or Tameside which would like us to visit them. Teachers, parents or governors only need to give us a ring and we will be delighted to discuss the possibilities of a visit, perhaps leading to a more lasting association.

We can help with training and coaching, talk about diet and drugs, education in sport and how sport can be integrated into an academic career.

We can also advise boys and girls with special sporting abilities how best to pursue their chosen sport without interfering with their school work.

We can't bring the schools to us. We would be delighted if the schools would invite us along to them.

Here's to a happy new year --- and a bright new start for Oldham Bears.

ANDY GOODWAY.

THE END  
OF AN  
ERA

**OLDHAM RUGBY**

**v**

**SWINTON**

played 28th September 1889

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**OLDHAM BEARS**

**v**

**SWINTON**

played 29th December 1996

Both matches covered by the

**OLDHAM  
EVENING CHRONICLE**

*No. 1 for local News & Sport*





# WE PLAYED RUGBY... BUT SEX WAS SAFE!

*Oldham FC in the 50's, Sid Little remembers...*

It was a surprise, albeit a pleasant one, to be asked to write a few notes on my memories of the period when I played for Oldham to be published in the last match souvenir programme to be sold at Watersheddings. Sadly many of the older players who could have written a better recollection have permanently transferred to another higher league. A few, of course may be playing in that hotter lower division but my first thoughts must be of them. They were all very good teammates. My time with Oldham was in the 50's when, as another old player said the other day, "We played rugby Sid when the game was positively dangerous, but sex was safe!" It is nearly 45 years ago, but I will remember arriving in Oldham in February 1952. It must have been 10 below freezing that night and at Mumps' Bridge when I got off that No 98 bus visibility was nil. I had never been to Oldham before and it looked as if I would not see much of it on this trip! You will perhaps understand my relief when I eventually found the Red Lion. I had been a pilot in the RAF not a navigator. But I did speak the language and several helpful directions got me to my home for the next few days. The bar was heated my bedroom was not, so I benefited from the loose interpretation of the licensing laws that applied in Oldham at that time. The generous hospitality of the people of Oldham impressed me on that first night and during my 10 years living, working and playing in the town that generosity never changed. I made many good friends. My welcome from the Oldham Chron's Northern correspondent was less generous, and simply pointed out to its readers that now Oldham FC had signed a Harlequin that it would complete the circus! But as many will recall the team of the 50's was no circus, although the tricks, moves and dummy options devised, practiced and perfected contributed to the team's success. Everybody has their opinions as to what makes a good successful team that is entertaining to watch. My personal view on our team of the 50's is that it owes its success to only three factors, a fit squad with balanced complimentary talents, encouragement, and good coaching. We had a committee who gathered together such a group of talented players who blended and benefited from each other's skills. Oldham's committee of that period deserve credit for doing that.

Oldham in the 50's was a town full of sportsmen and women interested in the whole range of sport. It was a joy to be a part of it. In the early 50's Bryn Goldswain was a talented player and a very good captain. He was a teacher by profession and I suspect a very good one. His communication skills laid many of the foundations on which the 50's team subsequently blossomed. Bryn Day an ex-paratrooper, played his rugby as he said he had fought the war. Bryn unquestionably believed in the practice of getting his retaliation in first. At his best his ball distribution was as outstanding as his left hook but he was a character and we had many arguments on what rugby was about. I did not win the argument but, while not accepting his pragmatic practices I like the man, as did many others and he certainly played a role in the 50's team development. Frank Daley was perhaps the most under rated player of my time and an example to prove that point was made when Wigan played the great Billy Boston at stand off opposite Frank in a Lancashire Cup Final at Swinton. All that needs saying is that Billy never played at stand off again. Frank was a key player and it is sad that he too died a short while ago. Billy Mitchell, Johnny Noon and Denis Ayres were local lads and they too all played a part in the club's successes of the 50's. Dick Cracknell's arrival in the team acknowledged the importance of side step and pace in any team and Dick's skill was complimented by the strength and perfectly timed crash tackling of John Etry. Alan Davies "a centre exceptional" had everything on and off the field. A charming vociferous character, everyone liked Alan, and his performance on the field was outstanding over many years. Frank Stirrup was our "football brain" and had much influence in devising and refining set pieces. Old supporters may remember the team's No 10 set piece which suited Terry O'Grady's style so well and its 10 dummy was also effective in confusing the opposition. We had good coaching in depth and I will remember the on-going constructive part played by the Leigh mafia! And I should mention Alec Givvons who explained to me some of the game's harder but often clinically executed features considered particularly appropriate for

Rugby Union players! Frank Pitchford another regular match winner was perhaps the outstanding scrum half in the League in the 50's. At his peak Frank's eye for an opening and his ability to go through it in the blink of an eye was devastating to the opposition, that is when we could keep up with him. Bernard Ganley whose goalkicking not only broke records possibly won us more matches than any other player while confirming week in and week out that the first man you pick for your rugby team is a man who never misses his goal kicks. Rockie Turner was surely one of the game's best loose forwards and it was a real pleasure for me to meet him again a few months ago at a Lion's re-union at Headingley. In the 50's with Derek calling the shots we had a strong mobile pack including keep fit fanatic Don Vine a strong ball handling prop, and in Jack Keith our hooker, we had a remarkable player who could always win the ball if he decided to strike for it! For good measure Jack could and did score many tries. Charlie Winslade from Maesteg and Oldham's own Ken Johnson were Internationals and very good players. Indeed if Don, Jack, Ken and Charlie are all packing down in that team in heaven they have the basis for a very good pack. Derek and I miss playing but neither of us feels ready to complete the six just yet. I enjoyed playing at Watersheddings. I had great teammates. There was much humour, there was much success and some disappointment but that is how it should be although we did not think so at the time. I enjoyed playing rugby league which is such a splendid game. I am pleased to have been associated with such a fine club, and with so many of its players and supporters. I am also delighted to have had this opportunity of thanking the club and its supporters for the kindness shown to me over the years. We are now in a period of change, and it is a whole new ball game for others to write about. I wish the club growth and success in the future which surely can be and must be made bright and successful. Sid Little



# WATERSHEDDINGS... MY KINDA PLACE

Terry Flanagan

**T**he Watersheddings is more than just a rugby ground to me. Even though eleven enjoyable years in the first team at Oldham would seem enough experience to most people, my affinity with the place goes deeper. Being a proud born and bred Oldhamer and following my dad Bill and brother Kevin into the league scene of Oldham meant that Sheddings was a familiar place from early days. My first recollection of the massive pitch and unique atmosphere was at the Standard Cup final 1966 when St Mary's beat Langworthy. Little did I know then just how much of my sport and life was to be centred on Sheddings.

My school and amateur days delivered a host of finals, always the thrill of the year "was playing at Sheddings", from Oldham schools, to two Lancashire Cup wins with Saddleworth Rangers under 18's.

My professional career from 1979 to 1990 began in earnest with Great Britain Colts matches against France followed by Great Britain under 24's (both wins) when the club and its impressive youth policy was the envy of the British game. Sadly the policy that put the club at the forefront of the game, 5 Great Britain Tourists in 1984, never maintained its momentum.

It is not an easy task to condense eleven packed years into a few paragraphs so I will try to be concise sharing headline incidents which stick in my mind. It's noteworthy that to me Sheddings is not just the main pitch, but the whole community of Pavilion, Dog Track, Training Ground, Social Club, the Penny Rush and the cold wet dressing rooms under the main stand.

Recollections that will stick with me forever are: fierce battle with Australia

in 1986 when we gave them a real great game, Cup run of 1985 bearing fancied Warrington and Bradford in classic Sheddings atmosphere, Paddy Kirwan knocking Wigan out of Challenge Cup in 1987, Paddy Kirwan knocking Rod Reddy out against Barrow 'A', Andy Goodway placing a rip-rap firework into dressing room toilet which had housed Mick Morgan at the time, Brian Hogan offering to take on whole Hull KR

International pack whilst surrounded by eighteen year olds, Great players like Clive Sullivan, Bill Francis, David Topless, Hussein Mbanki suggesting we get the Fire Brigade in to thaw the frozen pitch with hot water, Peter Smethurst putting his back out of place whilst delivering one of his famous rub-downs, watching the Dogs from upstairs in the Pavilion, the old style pavilion with the long bar downstairs, the draughty treatment room that had a unique smell, kick the opposition deep into the 'bottom corner' the Oldham 'roar' which usually came to help late in the game, the walk to/from the pitch with loyal fans encouraging the team and players, painting the ground in that horrible chocolate brown colour during my summer breaks from University in 1980, reception for fans after completing Second Division double in 1988. Let me assure you there is plenty more! Alas the need of a magical place. I have been proud to be a player and Captain of Oldham Rugby and suggest the good times of the 1980's rank somewhere behind the 1920 and 50s in the league table of Oldham eras. Like most things lives move on, I can perhaps sadly close and reflect through modifying a verse from the old friends, the Oldham Tinkers, most famous songs:

"Up at Sheddings it used to be good  
To see 'em fight for ball in t'mud  
But now the game has changed you see  
You can't see Sheddings on TV."

Terry Flanagan

10 THE END  
OF AN ERA





# OLD... 1 AND 2

*Jack McNamara Manchester Evening News  
Rugby League Reporter for almost 40 years*

Oldham were superb performers week in week out. From fullback Bernard Ganley to the front row of Harry Ogden, Jack Keith and Ken Jackson they were class. Ganley's goal-kicking remains a legend. He was the complete craftsman; if he missed a kick at goal, which was rarely, he held a personal inquest to sort out the error. And he was an excellent all-round fullback as well.

There was never a flaw in the threequarters. Centre Alan Davies was the star with his speed, skill and strength. His flying tackles, always scrupulously fair, made spectators wince, let alone his target. Davies was surrounded by good men. Dick Cracknell stands out as a classic wing with John Etty and, later, Ike Southward in the same rank. Denis Ayres and Johnny Noon kept Davies top-class company in the centre. At scrum half Frank Pitchford tore apart even the tightest defence with his spectacular darts. Two players, however, remain personal favourites - Frank Stirrup and Frank "Dan" Daley. These two shifted round the backline as and where needed. Stirrup was the complete rugby footballer, intelligent, nippy and courageous. Daley not only was tough, but he was a brilliant ball-

handler who could read a game cleverly. He also had a quick wit. Before one Challenge Cup tie, coach Griff Jenkin exhorted him to make sure Pitchford had plenty of cover. "If Pitchford wants more cover than I can give him, tell him to bring an umbrella," joked Daley.

The forwards matched the backs for skill. Who can forget Charlie Winslade's defence-splitting passes, the running of second rower Sid Little, Don Vines' powerful work at prop or Derek Turner's fiery lead and tactical kicking at loose forward?

Swinton had an equally attractive team. Fullback Ken Gowers was a treat to watch and centre Alan Buckley and left wing John Stopford were outstanding. Few clubs could match the halfback pairing of cheeky scrum half Albert Cartwright and stand off George Parkinson, one of the hardest men in the business.

The forwards may have lacked the power of other leading packs, but the music hall act of Dai Moses and that great thinker Albert Blan provided limitless entertainment.

When you watch today's match, spare a moment for the mighty teams of the past. It was a shame then and remains a shame now that neither club reached Wembley where they deserved to show rugby at its best.

*Oldham and Swinton fans with long memories will suffer overwhelming attacks of nostalgia today. They will recall the wonderful teams of the post war years - Oldham in the 1950s and Swinton in the early 1960s. Few teams have matched the standards set by these two clubs in their pomp.*



# MORE THAN AMBITION I WAS GOING HOME

*Dennis Ayres*

Oldham's ground at Watersheddings has always played a part in my life. I was born into the top house on Longfield Street. Bernard Ganley could have kicked a ball from our front step over the Herbert Street stand and landed it on the centre spot.

From a tender age I used to rush into the ground with our gang when the gates were opened at three quarter time. Early memories of steamy forward battles with Norman Pugh, in his scrum cap and Alan Laird still running forward even on his knees.

Later it was playing rugby at school Saturday mornings, and watching Oldham from the penny rush in the afternoon. Formative years, instructive years, watching the brilliance of Norman Harris, the courage and strength of Billy Mitchell and Billy Batten and the do or die spirit of Billy Griffiths and Bert Ambler.

When I finished school I had three happy seasons at Keb Lane but when the chance came to turn pro I seized it, with almost indecent haste. It was more than just ambition I felt that I was going home.

A season in the 'A' team under the wise

and kind Alec Givvons with a couple of first team games took me up to National Service. When I finished that in March 1956 I hoped to do better but Oldham were a very good side on the fringe of honours and it took an injury to Johnny Noon to open the door for me. Bad luck for John but good luck for me. How much good luck - I couldn't possibly have realised. It turned out to be a season when Oldham did better than they had done for thirty years and the achievements haven't been matched since.

It was that season and particularly the matches at Watersheddings which will stay forever in my memory.

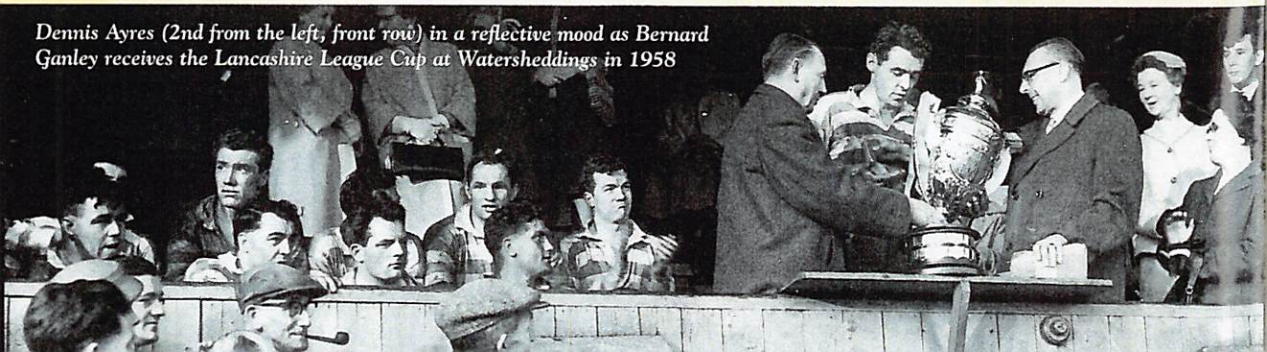
The details are well recorded of course, but bear with me while I list a few of them here. Three out of a possible four trophies were won including the League Championship and the Lancashire Cup. We beat St Helens three times in the season and Wigan three times too. All our matches at Watersheddings were won including a 21-2 victory over the visiting Australians. We lost away to Workington, Barrow, Warrington, York and of all teams, Liverpool, where there didn't seem to be any spectators so we paid to go into the ground. Liverpool repaid our generosity

(and condescension) by beating us 16-8. We also lost unforgettably at Leigh in the Challenge Cup second round. By a score of one try and a conversion to nil we left the cup that should have been ours buried in a sea of mud and icy water.

In spite of those odd lapses we were playing fast and exciting football inspired by the greatness of Alan Davies, Frank Pitchford and Rocky Turner. We had a head start every game from the clinical accuracy of Bernard Ganley's extraordinary goalkicking. That season we scored 214 tries. John Etty had 43 of them.

Watersheddings was alive with anticipation and happy supporters on match days. They loved it and showed it. For the big matches they turned up in droves. Even with the Herbert Street stand in use, it's hard to believe the attendance figures. When Barrow came there were 18,748 on the ground, for Halifax 21,449, St Helens 16,781, Wigan 19,676 and Leeds 19,100. All in all that season was a magical experience. It probably doesn't come much better. It was a privilege to be there, to play a part and to have known Watersheddings at its best.  
DENNIS AYRES

Dennis Ayres (2nd from the left, front row) in a reflective mood as Bernard Ganley receives the Lancashire League Cup at Watersheddings in 1958





# THE LIONS SWEEP THE BOARD VIA WATERSHEDDINGS

Don Yates looks back at Swinton's greatest ever season

Only four clubs have gone through a season winning every competition which they had entered. The magnificent Wigan outfit of recent times won the Regal Trophy, First

Division Championship, Challenge Cup and Premiership in season 1994-95 whilst prior to the First World War both Hunslet in 1907-08 and Huddersfield seven years later won the Yorkshire Cup, Yorkshire League, Northern Union Cup and League Championship.

The other club in this elite company is Swinton who, in season 1927-28, won the Lancashire Cup, Lancashire League, Challenge Cup and League Championship. When the 1928-28 season kicked off Swinton were one of the strongest teams in the competition and favourites to lift at least one of the trophies. The previous season they had won the League Championship and were runners-up in both the Lancashire Championship and Rugby League Challenge Cup.

The Lions began this historic season with a local derby at Rochdale where they won 27-4. They lost only one of their opening seven league matches but then had to travel to Lancashire Cup holders St Helens for their opening tie in that competition. A magnificent 13-7 victory was followed by a home tie against Challenge Cup holders Oldham. Swinton won that match 18-9 and they then had the satisfaction of beating Salford 10-3 in the semi-final. Swinton's opponents in the final were Wigan who had hammered Swinton 21-0 at Central Park three weeks prior to the final. That final was staged here at Watersheddings and attracted a crowd of 22,000.

The Wigan winger Johnny Ring had crossed for a hat-trick of tries in the league match at Central Park but he was well marked in this final and all Wigan had to show for their efforts was a second-half penalty from Jim Sullivan. It was not enough for second-row forward Richard Cracknell scored a try for Swinton which was converted by H. Morris. Swinton's first trophy was on the sideboard. Swinton 5 Wigan 2. The week after winning the Lancashire Cup, Swinton

lost 4-2 at St Helens Recs, one of the contenders for the Lancashire Championship. They then won eight consecutive league matches including a 6-0 victory over Oldham at Watersheddings. The Challenge Cup campaign began with a relatively easy tie away at Whitehaven Recs. Second-rower Richard Cracknell scored five tries as the Lions won 44-0. Round two was much tougher but Swinton won 3-2 at Halifax and they then won 3-0 at Castleford in the quarter-finals. Swinton went on to beat Hull 5-3 in the semi-finals at Huddersfield and so met Warrington, a mid-table club, in the final.

Before that final Swinton had the opportunity of lifting the Lancashire Championship. On March 21st they beat their closest rivals St Helens Recs at Station Road 11-5. Three days later St Helens visited Swinton and they, too, were beaten although it was close at 5-3. That victory gave Swinton the Lancashire Championship despite the fact that the Lions still had five league matches to complete. Swinton's second trophy was on the sideboard. Swinton's next league game was the Good Friday home game against Oldham when the Roughieyds pulled off a shock 9-8 victory. Eight days later Swinton travelled to Central Park, Wigan where a crowd of 33,909 saw them beat Warrington to lift the Challenge Cup. Loose-forward Charlie Seeling scored a try for Warrington to equalise a similar effort from Swinton winger Chris Brockbank. A late Jack Evans dropped goal snatched victory for Swinton. Swinton's third trophy was on the sideboard. Swinton 5 Warrington 3.

Two matches now stood between Swinton and a clean sweep. Hunslet visited Station Road in the Championship semi-final and returned home defeated 12-2. Swinton's season was to finish here at Watersheddings where they met Featherstone Rovers in the Championship Final. Rovers had pulled off a surprise 15-12 win at Leeds in their semi-final but they could not raise their game again and the Lions crossed for three tries against a lethargic Featherstone side who failed to bother the scoreboard operator. Swinton's fourth trophy was on the sideboard. Swinton 11 Featherstone Rovers 0.

*"When the  
1928-28  
season  
kicked off  
Swinton  
were one of  
the  
strongest  
teams in  
the  
competition  
and  
favourites  
to lift at  
least one  
of the  
trophies."*



# WATERSHEDDINGS

## Don Yates looks back at 107 years of Watersheddings memories

The history books tell us that Oldham Football Club, now the Oldham Bears Rugby League Football Club, were founded in September 1876. They began life sporting amber and black colours and played their first match on Glodwick Lows the month after their formation. They lost that opening fixture against Stalybridge but playing fortunes improved during the following twelve years in which time they had moved to a new ground in Clarksfield. It was at the beginning of season 1889-90 that Oldham made two significant changes. It was on Saturday 28th September 1889 that Oldham played their first match at Watersheddings. To mark the occasion they also introduced a new playing strip of red and white hooped jerseys.

Those colours have been worn by Oldham ever since and one hopes that they will continue to do so for many more years to come but today, sadly, Oldham will be running out at Watersheddings for the very last time. Oldham's opponents on that historic occasion 107 years ago were Swinton and they return to pay their last respects to a famous old ground that has housed many great and famous occasions and also been the scene of disappointment and despair. Such is the nature of sport.

The attendance at Watersheddings when the stadium was first used is given as 7,000 who saw Swinton win convincingly by two goals, one try and two minors to Oldham's one minor. I am led to believe that minors only came into play if the teams were level on goals and tries so by my calculation Swinton won 13-0. The Swinton centre Jim Valentine enjoyed the honour of scoring the first points on the new ground with a try.

In those days, of course, there was only one code of rugby but Oldham were heavily involved in the move to professionalism which led to the breakaway from the Rugby Football Union and the formation of the Northern Union, now the Rugby Football League, back in 1895. Events prior to the breakaway are mainly lost in the mists of time but Oldham did have a side to be proud of immediately before the breakaway. They were Lancashire Champions 1894 and runners up during their final season of rugby union.

### Rugby League is Born

Since the breakaway the Oldham Club and Watersheddings have figured prominently in the history of rugby league. When the breakaway competition began in September 1895, Oldham's first match was away at Hunslet but the following Saturday, 21st September 1895, Watersheddings staged its first league fixture with Tyldesley forming the opposition. Another defeat resulted, this time by 11-3, but since then Watersheddings has staged 1,587 league matches involving the Roughyeds. Oldham's record in those matches stands at 1,135 victories, 67 draws and 385 defeats. Included in that total is the official away fixture against Rochdale Hornets in March 1896, a match which was switched to Watersheddings and which Oldham won 16-3. The most important match staged at Watersheddings during that inaugural 1895-96 season took place on Saturday 7th December when Oldham staged the very first

Roses clash between Lancashire and Yorkshire.

A crowd of 9,059 were attracted to the match with Lancashire requiring just a draw to clinch the first County Championship of the new code. It was not to be. There were five Roughyeds in the Red Rose outfit but ground advantage did not help and Yorkshire won 8-0. Despite this set back Lancashire went on to win the title that season. Since then Watersheddings has gone on to stage ten Lancashire fixtures - seven versus Yorkshire one versus Cheshire, one versus Cumberland and one versus New Zealand. Six of those matches have resulted in Lancashire victories and four defeats. In addition to that Watersheddings was awarded the Lancashire-New Zealand fixture in November 1985 but that match was cancelled because of a frost bound pitch.

The third season of the breakaway code, 1897-98, proved to be a particularly successful one for Oldham. They won the Lancashire Senior Competition and, in so doing, won all 114 league matches which were played at Watersheddings, the away Tyldesley match also being switched to Oldham. They also won both home ties in the Northern Union Cup. Their first Challenge Cup tie saw Leeds visit Watersheddings on February 26th with Oldham winning 8-3. Since then Oldham have staged 120 home Challenge Cup ties, winning 77, drawing five and losing the remaining 38.

That year Oldham also staged the Challenge Cup semi-final between Batley and Salford which Batley won 5-0. It was the first of four semi-finals which have been played here at Watersheddings. The season came to a close on Saturday 30th April when Oldham, as champions, played the Rest of the League. A crowd of 7,000 saw the Roughyeds recover from an 8-5 deficit to force an 8-8 draw. Three years later Oldham were once again involved in a similar match. Once again they found themselves 5-3 down at half time but on that second occasion they recovered to win 9-5. Those were the only two matches in which Oldham, as champions, took on the Rest of the League.

The 1898-99 season was another successful one for Oldham because that year they became the first Lancashire club to win the Challenge Cup when they defeated Hunslet 19-9 down at Fallowfield. It was also a fine campaign at fortress Watersheddings where they suffered only one defeat from 16 outings. They conceded only 16 points at home that season whilst they themselves ran in 344. In the opening match of their successful cup campaign they defeated Goleo 63-0, running in 17 tries to register what still remains as Oldham's biggest winning margin for a match played at Watersheddings.

### Standard Cup

On Good Friday 1904 Watersheddings played host to the first of what has developed into the most prestigious occasion on the local amateur calendar. It was, of course, the first Standard Cup Final, the 'Wembley' of the local amateur scene, and an occasion which has produced some thrilling entertainment. That first final saw Heyside defeat Rochdale Rangers 9-0. Since then there have been 86 Standard Cup Finals at Watersheddings including a couple of replays. Last Easter it was perhaps appropriate that Saddleworth Rangers should beat Higinshaw 22-12 in the last Standard Cup Final to be staged at Watersheddings. That result ensured that those two finalists had each won the Standard Cup a record 13 times.

# DINGS

# 1889-1996



The 1905-06 season saw the introduction of the Lancashire Cup. The first round draw sent Oldham to Wigan on Saturday 18th. Round two brought Salford where they won 10-0. Round three brought Wigan to Oldham where they first met on Saturday 22nd. November. Oldham stated their first Lancashire Cup victory, it ended in disappointment with Wigan winning 11-7 en route to lifting the trophy. Wigan were to dominate the competition throughout its history but during that time Oldham played 84 times at Warrington, winning 56, drawing 10 and losing 24.

At the end of the 1906-07 season Oldham found themselves next to top of the Championship table and so faced a home tie in the semi final of the newly inaugurated top four Championship play off. Runcorn provided the opposition and on Saturday 6th April Oldham won 11-3 with pop Joe Ferguson scoring a couple of tries as well as the Oldham goal. Ferguson also scored a try in the final although Halifax won the title 18-5 and to make it a miserable finish to the season, Oldham also lost in the final of the Challenge Cup. There have been a number of different permutations to end of season play-offs with Oldham being involved in quite a few. Warrington has staged 17 play-offs involving Oldham, with the Roughies winning 14, losing two and drawing the other one.

**Kivits And Kangaroos**  
In 1907 the New Zealand 'All Golds' became the first touring team to visit these shores. They visited Warrington on Saturday 27th November and Oldham pulled off a creditable 5-7 victory over the tourists. The visitors must have been impressed with the Warringtons set up for at the end of the tour two of their number, centres Arthur Kelly and George Smith joined Oldham and gave them sterling service. Since then Oldham have entertained eight Kiwi touring teams and have registered four wins and four defeats.

The following year Australia made their first tour of Great Britain and the Kangaroos visited Warrington on Boxing Day. Snow fell on the eve of the match so it was the first time the Australians had played on a snow covered pitch. It didn't suit them. Oldham beat them 11-5. Since then 17 Kangaroo teams have visited Warrington with Oldham winning four matches, Australia twelve and the 1952 match ending in a draw.

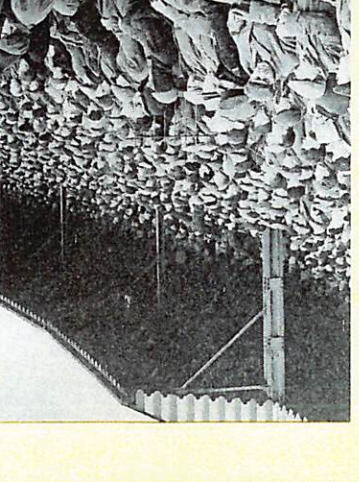
On Saturday 20th January 1912 Warringtons staged the international match between England and Wales. The match was played in poor weather conditions and on a heavy pitch. Only one Roughie was included in the line up, Evan Davies in the Welsh centre and he was given little chance to shine as England dominated proceedings. They led 22-0 at half time and were 31-0 in front in the closing minutes when Davies broke clear to put Will Davies over for a consolation try. England scored nine tries in that 31-5 victory, six from the Huddersfield contingent of Stanley Moorhouse (2), Harold Wagstaffe, Billy Batten and Ivong Clark (2).

## Huddersfield Record Breakers

Huddersfield had a brilliant team in those days - The Team of All Talents - and with Oldham also enjoying a successful spell, there was tremendous interest in the visit of the Farrowers to Warrington. The date was month following the international. The date was Sunday 28th February 1912 and on this date no fewer than 28,000 spectators crammed into Warrington. The record attendance was treated to a pulsating match in which the Huddersfield team were defeated as the Roughies won 6-2.

Three years later, on Saturday 1st May 1915 Huddersfield came to Warrington on more important business. They met St. Helens in the Challenge Cup Final - known then as the Northern Union Cup. Huddersfield had already lifted the Yorkshire Championship, won the Yorkshire Cup with a record score - 35-2 versus Leeds. The Farrowers were expected to defeat Saints comfortably and this probably affected the attendance which was a disappointing 8,000. The Huddersfield supporters were not disappointed as another competition record was established with Huddersfield winning 37-3. Later that month it was decided that all competitive rugby would be suspended for the duration of the war so it was not until mid January 1919 that a competitive match was staged at Warrington. Rochdale Hornets started over it was quickly decided to return to full international competition and a tour of Australia by Great Britain was fixed for the summer of 1920. Two Warringtons on Monday 1st March 1920.

In that match the Reds beat the Whites 21-11. Second rower Herman Hilton scored a try for the Whites and Evan Davies two tries for the Reds. They both made the tour but winger J. Finnelly, a non scorer for the Reds, failed to make the trip. Another Roughie on the tour was full back Alf Wood.

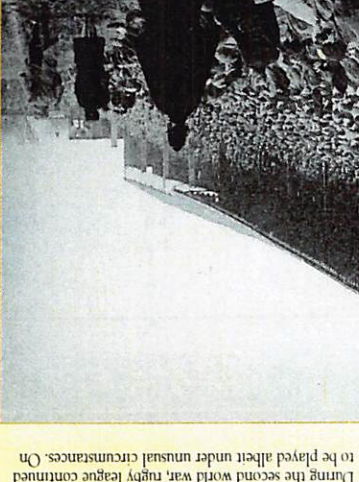


## Law Cup

In May 1921 a charity match was arranged between Rochdale Hornets and Oldham with local hospitals donating a trophy and so began the Law Cup series of matches between Oldham and Hornets. The first match was staged at the Athletic Grounds and ended in a scoreless draw. The replay at Warrington resulted in a 12-2 win for the Roughies. The trophy has been contested, on and off, ever since with Oldham being the current holders by virtue of a 52-24 win at Spodden two years ago. So far 53 Law Cup matches have been staged at Warrington with Oldham winning 21, Hornets two and two have ended all square.

Their appearances in several cup finals was probably the reason why Warrington was not chosen to stage these showpiece matches. That was rectified during the 1927-28 season when both the Lancashire Cup and Championship Finals were played here at Warrington. Our final visitors Swinton will tell you all about those matches. In the Lancashire Cup Final on November 19th before a crowd of 22,000 they defeated Wigan 5-2. Six months later, on May 7th, the Lions returned to Warrington to take on Featherstone Rovers in the Championship Final. Not such a big crowd for that final - 15,451 - but that did not deter Swinton who were crowned Champions after beating Rovers 11-0.

**French Invasion And The War**  
On Monday 7th September 1934 Warringtons welcomed a French team to Oldham for the very first time. Villeneuve were the visitors and after what have been a highly entertaining encounter Oldham ran out winners 26-25. Three years later, on Saturday 24th October 1937, another French outfit under the name Core Basque took on the League XIII at Warrington. Prop forward Jack Read was in the League line up who beat off the French invasion to the tune of 32-3.





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Saturday 9th November 1940 England met Wales in a wartime international at Watersheddings. There was only one Oldham representative involved in that match - English hooker Edgar Brooks. Wales were leading 5-3 when an air raid warning was given and the players left the field and hid under a stand for about twenty minutes until the 'all clear' was sounded. The interruption seemed to upset the Welsh for England recovered to register a thrilling 8-5 victory. Not every club continued to play throughout the war years and, as a result, the Lancashire Cup was suspended with Lancashire clubs competing in the Yorkshire Cup, Oldham, therefore, found themselves in that 'foreign' competition with Watersheddings staging its first Yorkshire Cup tie on Saturday 1st November 1941. York provided the opposition in a first round, second leg tie. The Roughyeds had won the first leg 5-2 and had no trouble completing the double with a 10-0 victory. During the five seasons in which Oldham competed in the Yorkshire Cup, Watersheddings staged five ties, Oldham winning two and losing the other three.

#### Oldham's Record Breakers

Once the war was over, Oldham enjoyed a long period of success right through to the mid sixties. Champions in 1957 and Lancashire Cup winners in 1956-7-8 they set several records on the way. On April 4th 1959 Oldham beat Liverpool City at home 67-6 with full back Bernard Ganley landing 14 goals, the most goals kicked by any one player in a Watersheddings match. The following season Walney Central amateurs visited Oldham for a second round Challenge Cup tie on 27th February 1960. As expected the Roughyeds ran out easy winners 55-4 with winger Ike Southward running in six tries. No other player has ever scored six tries in a Watersheddings match.

In 1965 floodlit rugby was introduced to Watersheddings. The lights were switched on during the evening of Wednesday 20th October when Watersheddings staged the under 24 international between Great Britain and France. Hooker Kevin Taylor was the only representative from Oldham in the British team although second row forward Bob Irving was a non playing substitute. France led 5-2 at half time but Britain came back to win a fiery clash 12-5. Stand off Roger Millward led the revival with a try and three goals on his representative debut. Two further under 24 internationals have been allocated to Watersheddings although the match scheduled for January 1983 was cancelled because of heavy snow. The following season Britain again beat France in an under 24 international at Watersheddings. The attendance at that opening floodlit match was 6,333 which was considerably more than attended the Oldham-Castleford Floodlit Trophy match the following month. Less than 1000 bothered to turn out on a freezing Thursday night 25th November to see Castleford win 6-4 in what was the first Floodlit Trophy match staged at Watersheddings. Since then thirteen such ties have been played at 'Sheddings with Oldham winning seven and losing six. Early in 1966 Rochdale Hornets experienced a fixture

### "In the Lancashire Cup Final at Watersheddings on November 19th, 1927, before a crowd of 22,000 Swinton defeated Wigan 5-2"

backlog and in order to ease the congestion the League ordered them to fulfil their home match with Wigan in midweek. The Athletic Grounds was not equipped with floodlights in those days and Spotland was unavailable so on Monday 28th February 1966 Watersheddings staged the match. For the record, Wigan beat Hornets 35-5 and the attendance was 2,005.

In 1971 the John Player Trophy made its debut on the English calendar. It became rugby league's longest running sponsorship until its controversial axing last year. Oldham's first tie was up at Whitehaven where they lost 5-0. That inaugural competition included a top try scoring contest for first round losers. On Sunday 28th November Oldham met Leigh in what was the first match under the Player sponsorship to be played at Watersheddings. Leigh won that 'top try scoring' match 11-5 and during the 24 years of the various Player competitions 21 matches were staged at Watersheddings. Oldham won twelve and lost nine of those matches.

#### Roughyeds Beat The Lions

As part of Great Britain's preparations for the 1972 World Cup, they met Oldham at Watersheddings on Wednesday 18th October. The match created much interest and there was a crowd of 3,829 who saw Oldham win a thriller 18-15 with scrum half Tommy Gorman in splendid form. He scored two of Oldham's four tries in a match that certainly could not be called a friendly. A great win for Oldham against a side which won the World Cup less than a month later. In 1974 Oldham found themselves in the Second Division and interest in the town slumped to an all time low. On Saturday 30th November Batley visited Watersheddings for a league match which attracted a mere 716 spectators, the smallest attendance to watch a competitive first team game on this ground. Oldham won 17-2 if anyone is interested.

When Batley visited Oldham seven seasons later, on Sunday 10th January 1982, the Watersheddings pitch was frost bound and so the match was switched to Boundary Park which was equipped with under soil heating. Oldham won again 17-9, and the attendance was a little better this time 2,743. Several matches have been played at Boundary Park since whilst three years previously Oldham's Challenge Cup tie against

Ace Amateurs of Hull had been played at the Willows, Salford because of the unfit state of the Watersheddings pitch. In January 1987 a league match against Featherstone Rovers was played at Manchester City's Maine Road ground. But back to Watersheddings where, later in 1982, on Wednesday 22nd September France opened their short tour of England by defeating Oldham 15-11 in a match which attracted a crowd of 1,165. The following season another international outfit visited Watersheddings in the shape of the New Zealand Maoris. They met an Oldham Amateur League XIII on Wednesday 9th November. A crowd of 1,459 saw the Oldham juniors put up a tremendous fight before losing 28-16. Amongst the try scorers for the Maoris were loose forward Hugh McGahan and substitute Dean Bell.

#### Amateur Internationals

On 1st April 1984 Watersheddings staged the amateur open age international between Great Britain and France. France won 21-8 and they also won when that fixture was again staged at Watersheddings on Friday 6th March 1992. The French proved much too fast for Britain in that second international which they won 52-16. Oldham had three representatives in that 1992 side. Scrum half and skipper was Mick Swift (St. Annes) and the second row comprised of Saddleworth Rangers' John Fleming and Steve Maudsley. Saddleworth Rangers staged a home tie on this ground on Sunday 3rd November 1991 when they entertained Workington Town in the preliminary round of the Regal Trophy. The professionals won 30-0 but Rangers gave their best and fared much better than the scoreline suggests.

On Sunday 4th September 1994 Wigan beat Oldham by 58 points to 10. That defeat was the heaviest suffered by Oldham at Watersheddings. Despite that defeat Oldham were able to maintain their status in the top division and with it entry into the European Super League.

The last competitive match at Watersheddings was a Super League fixture against Sheffield Eagles on Sunday 25th August 1996. When referee Steve Ganson blew the final whistle with Oldham leading 34-25 it signalled the end of an era for rugby league in this town. By my reckoning Oldham have played 1,904 first class fixtures on this ground, winning 1,336, drawing 81 and losing 487. There have been a further 27 senior fixtures taking the total of first class fixtures played here to 1,931.

Literally thousands of players have been involved in those matches including rugby league legends from all over the world and from every era. They leave behind them a million and one memories of stirring battles won and lost, of skill and excitement, of joy and sorrow.

From December 29th, Watersheddings will be no more.

And yet for many people it will remain forever as the spiritual home of the Oldham Rugby League Football Club.



Watersheddings -  
"the spiritual  
home  
of the Oldham  
Rugby League  
Football Club."



# FORDS FORWARD TO THE FUTURE

Former half-back stalwart Mike Ford looks back on fond memories at Watersheddings and forecasts a new era on the horizon for Oldham Rugby League

*Best winter  
club*



"I always dreamt of leading an Oldham team out from the Pavilion."

**E**nd of an era, let's now look forward to the new one! That's the philosophical view I'm taking to the demolition of the famous Watersheddings Ground. Don't misunderstand me, I have many fond memories etched on my mind of the Oldham ground but feel in 1997 it is time to move forward.

Since the age of 9, I always dreamt of leading an Oldham team out from the Pavilion, through the eagerly awaiting spectators, up the tunnel and out onto the playing field. I achieved this ambition many times during my playing days with Oldham and I can honestly say they have been some of my proudest moments during my career. Two games always come to the fore when great games are mentioned at Watersheddings, ironically Wigan were the opposition on both occasions. The first a 1987 Challenge Cup tie, a last minute try by Paddy Kirwin sealing victory for Oldham, the last team to beat Wigan for the next 8 years in this particular competition. I was squadding for Wigan at the time with mixed emotions, happy for my hometown team, sad for my team mates. The second game was in 1989, a Lancashire Cup semi-final tie versus once again the Lancashire Cup Kings. Oldham were in the second division and a Gary Hyde penalty from near half way sealed a 19-18 win, five minutes from time, for Oldham. This time I was proudly playing for Oldham and you can imagine victory was sweet against my old club. The atmosphere at both games was electric and there is no doubt in my mind that the Oldham spectators had a big influence on the end results.

During 1997 Oldham will lose "home" advantage for example the slope away from the scoreboard corner, the fact that Watersheddings is infamous for being one of the coldest grounds in the league, the vocal barracking to the opposition from the fanatical home fans to and from the Pavilion, the meat pies and of course the pride and tradition that has been associated with Watersheddings for the past 100 years.

Today will be a very sad day for many Oldham people but for me I feel it's the dawn of a new era. I would like to wish them all the very best for the future.

MIKE FORD



# GOODBYE KNUCKET

The Early History Of Oldham R.L.F.C.



*“The pitch had a decided slope and the playing area was simply roped off to prevent crowd encroachment.”*

**T**he Oldham Club was founded during September 1876 by local enthusiasts who held a meeting at the “Prince Albert Hotel” on Union Street West.

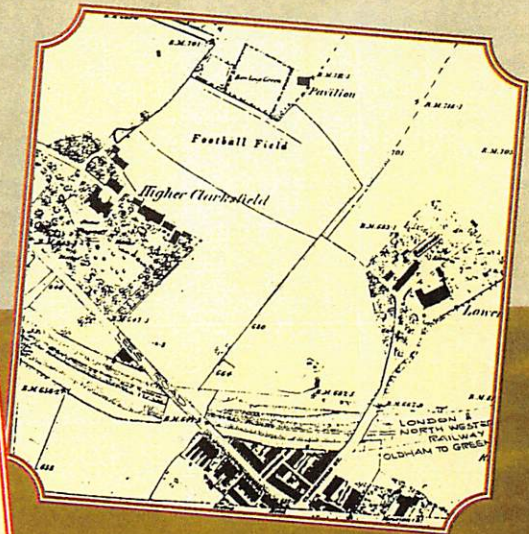
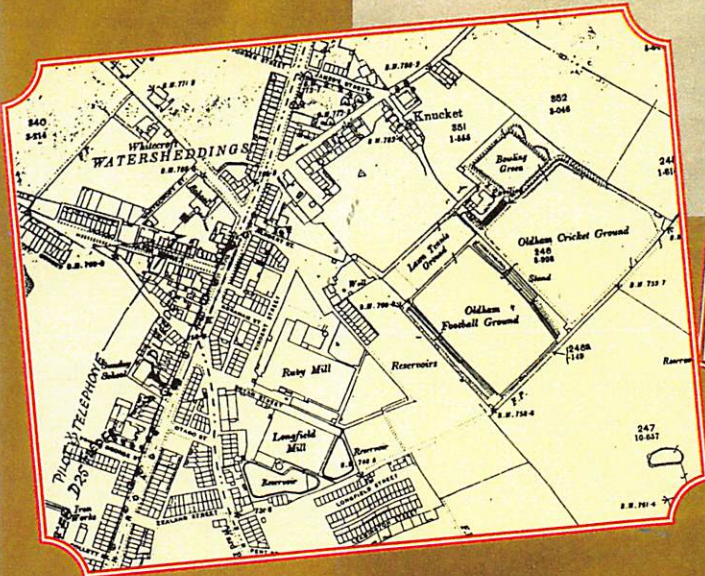
The first game was against Stalybridge on October 21st 1876.

The original ground was called “Sugar Meadow”, which was situated at the rear of the Glodwick Spinning Company Mill, Gartside Street, Glodwick Lows and the players (then still 15-a-side) changed at the “Shakespeare Hotel”, Glodwick Road, with the club headquarters being based at the “Black Swan Hotel”, Bottom o’th Moor. The club colours at this time were amber and black stripes or hoops.

As the club made headway, they arranged to move to a ground owned by Oldham Cricket,

Tennis & Bowling Club, at Hollin Hall, Clarksfield. The pitch had a decided slope and the playing area was simply roped off to prevent crowd encroachment. Although this ground had a small pavilion, the players changed at the “Friendship Hotel”, Mumps and were driven to the ground in Waggonettes.

The most famous match played on this ground was on March 4th 1889 against the touring “Maoris”, Oldham winning by 1 drop goal - 4 minors - 3 tries, to the tourists 10 minors. By this time the team was changing at the “Old Soldier Hotel”, Huddersfield Road. In September 1889 the club, along with Oldham Cricket club moved to a piece of land known as “Knucklet” and the Watersheddings era had begun.





*“My Grandad and his Uncle Oliver set off the day before to walk to Oldham, along with hundreds of others who couldn't afford both ground admission and Charabanc fare”*

# OLDHAM!

*Ian Clayton, Yorkshire T.V. Personality, Rugby Journalist and Author of the acclaimed “When Push Comes to Shove” reflects on the ‘romance’ of Rugby League in the North.*

**T**he very name breathes the words, Rugby League. I've often reassured myself with the thought that my own club

Featherstone Rovers and others like Barrow, Swinton, Batley and of course Oldham could not be connected with any other sport. You just can't even begin to imagine robust northern towns, full of grit, soot and roughyeds being called Saffron Waldon or Bishops Stortford can you?

Apart from a recent talk I gave at Oldham's magnificent Carnegie Library, I've only ever been to the town to watch Rugby League. That suits me, I like ritual. My ritual over recent years has included a couple of pints straight out of the barrel in the Rams Head up on the Moors above Shaw and the odd pint of John Willie Lees in the Black Horse at Shaw itself. After the game we can be home in three quarters of an hour if it's not raining too hard on the 62. Different to my Grandad's day. In 1928 the Championship Final was held at the Watersheddings. It was contested between Swinton and Featherstone Rovers, in those days the Rovers were upstart new comers to the big league, with a fearsome pack of coal mining forwards. My grandad and his uncle Oliver set off the day before to walk to Oldham, along with hundreds of others from our neck of the woods who couldn't afford both ground admission and

charabanc fare. I'm sure though that they will have mustered enough coppers to pay for a pint in the Rams Head. On that day they came home with blisters and disappointment.

Rovers lost and Swinton went on to win all four cups. I shared in their disappointment some sixty odd years later when I came home from Old Trafford after the Rovers had been beaten in the Premiership by Oldham in one of the most exciting finals I've ever seen. Oldham were hammering our lads, but then we staged a terrific fight back to lead with a few minutes left I have never been able to forgive Charlie McAllister for kicking the conversion that got the lead back for Oldham and ultimately sent them home smiling and us sobbing. The ball only just crept over the bar as well!

I like ritual, I also like to have little ambitions. I've always wanted to visit Graecelands in Memphis. I made it a few years ago. I always wanted a son who I would call Edward after my Grandfather. My Edward and his twin sister Billie arrived in May of this year. Since my first visit to the Watersheddings as an eight year old boy holding tight to a big colliers hand I've wanted to go upstairs in Oldham's famous double decker stand. I never have. Now I never will. Some ambitions you don't achieve.

I wish Oldham every success at their new home. May they achieve many ambitions.

Ian Clayton



# MEMORIES OF WATERSHEDDINGS

*“The world seemed a big place to me in August 1950 when as a seventeen year old coal miner I alighted from the train at Mumps station with my two fellow players from Dootsons Park Rangers Amateur RL club of Leigh.”*

**W**ith my precious rugby boots in their brown paper bag I ran across the road to catch the bus that would take

me up to Watersheddings the home of Oldham RL football club. Two weeks before Mr Jack O'Neil had invited Tommy Deakin, Joe Hilton and myself to play in a trial match at Watersheddings the home of Oldham RL Club. For me this was the next step in a journey that had started six years before when my father and my school master Bert Causey decided that I was going to be a Rugby League International player preferably at left centre three quarter.

Seven days passed and I was playing for the "A" team on the turf at Watersheddings and having a good game; after the match I signed a contract and became a member of the Oldham playing staff. One week later and I made my debut for the Oldham first team against Wakefield Trinity and scored a hat trick of tries from the left wing and then for the next twelve years I had the privilege of representing the town of Oldham in one of the best teams ever to play the game of rugby. Watersheddings with its pavilion, stands and rugby post was just the backdrop for a group of people who helped to formulate my character and enrich my life to an extent that I could never have imagined all those years ago. Players like Billy Mitchel, Harry Ogden and Bryn Goldswain and many others who looked after me on the field coached me off the field and directed my life as well as my game. Bert Summerscales a secretary who made Scrooge look like a charity worker when it came to paying out expenses.

Alex Givvons and Jimmy Heywood who ensured that my cap size never varied and that modesty and humility always came to the fore in spite of any glowing press reports.

The signing of two players converted a good team into a first class unit; Frank Stirrup and Derek Turner came to Watersheddings and added the two ingredients of guile and determination that did the trick. The players blossomed, Frank Pitchford, Jack Keith, Sid Little, Bernard Ganley, Johnnie Noon, Terry O'Grady, Dick Cracknell, Ken Jackson, Les Anthony, John Etty the list goes on and on. Supervising all of this a committee who cared and enjoyed the success we brought to the town and basked in it to good measure. Griff Jenkins was the team manager who welded us all together, Committee, Staff, Players and Wives with a blend of something that I can't describe or understand but it was wonderful.

There are many faces that have moved across my mind as I have written this little piece. Not time to mention them all but they are there and remembered with deep affection.

Watersheddings is a place almost on the moors with a climate that many said was worth six points start on most Saturdays, but to the visiting fans there was a warm welcome from the knowledgeable Oldham supporters who saw them as our guests. Yes it was people not things that create the memories, ordinary folk who loved their team and gave it their unstinted support.

Watersheddings may be about to disappear but I say thank you for the memories that other people can only dream about.

Alan Davies



THE END  
OF AN ERA 21

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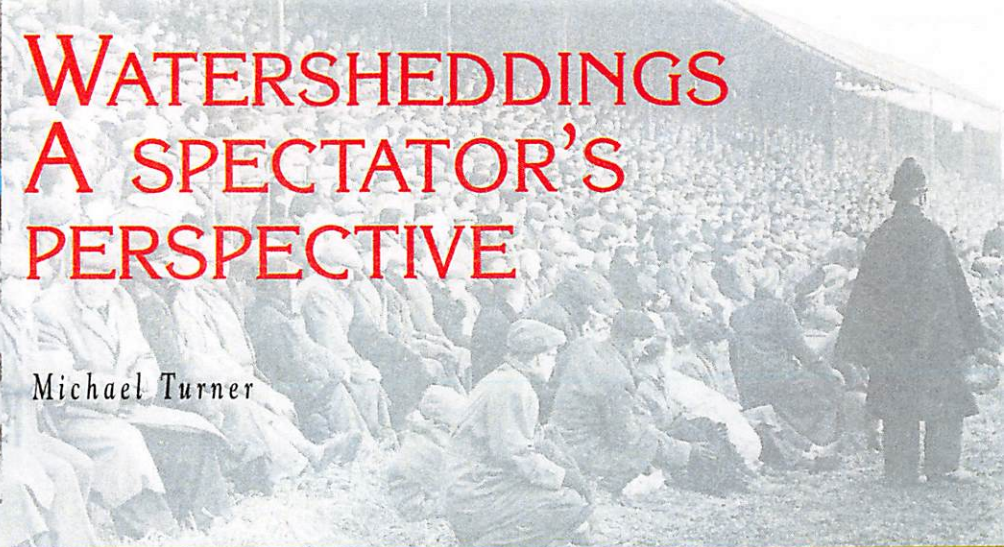
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# WATERSHEDDINGS A SPECTATOR'S PERSPECTIVE

Michael Turner



Since the opening match against Swinton on September 28th 1889, Watersheddings has been the focal point for Senior Rugby Football within the borough of Oldham.

Opened as it was in the late Victorian era, the famous old ground has endured until now while the world, the game of Rugby League and fortunes of the Oldham club has been subject to tremendous change...

The great Rugby divide of 1895, when 22 of the leading northern clubs (with Oldham very much to the fore) first embraced professionalism, with broken time payments. The heady days of 1905-1912 when the club assembled a team of "all stars" that were regularly amongst the honours. The struggles and turmoil of the first World War period when, in 1917, the club had to cease operations for the only time in its history due to the fact that so many of its players were away fighting in the forces. The Cup specialists of the 1920's. The fantastic entertainment served up by the great team of the mid to late 1950's. The introduction of floodlights in 1965. The up and downs of the last 20 years as the club has struggled through severe financial difficulty, still to emerge among the game's elite and secure a place in "Super League".

.... and all the while Watersheddings has been "home". The turf has been graced by ALL the Rugby League greats! Harold

Wagstaffe, Jonty Parkin, Jim Sullivan, Lewis Jones, Neil Fox, Alex Murphy, Malcolm Reilly, Ellery Hanley, Martin Offiah, Paul Newlove, to name but a few. Australian legends Wally Trigg, Clive Churchill, Reg Gasnier, Mal Meninga have donned the green and gold shirts to be greeted by the cheers (and boos) as they emerged from the Watersheddings tunnel. No doubt the fondest memories will be reserved for the Oldham favourites and here again, with no particular personal preference are but a few, Arthur Lees, Herman Hilton, Sid Rix, Fred Ashworth, Bryn Goldswain, Frank Pitchford, Bob Irving, Martin Murphy, Andy Goodway, Martin Crompton...

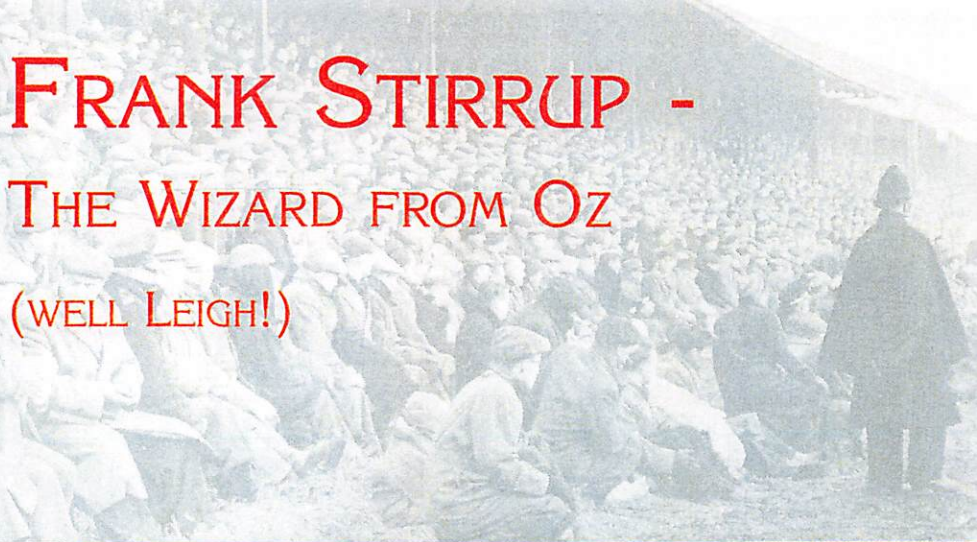
In recent years, if opposing teams' comments are to be believed, the ground became somewhere to be feared, especially if the match was to be played under floodlights. Likewise in these days of media labelling and pigeon holing "Sheddings" has become the target for the most hostile of comments from almost every quarter of the RL media. No doubt after the ground's demise the attention will be turned elsewhere, Wilderspool perhaps, or maybe Wheldon Road or The Boulevard. Time will tell, but prejudices and sentimentality aside Watersheddings was always one of the best grounds for viewing a Rugby League match from the terraces. However it now seems that RL fans have to fall in line, as the men in control tell us that terraces are uncomfortable and out

of date. It is everyone's desire that the tragedy of Hillsborough should never be repeated and one can therefore see the arguments for the switch to all seater stadia, but likewise the horrors of the Bradford City fire were equally distressing when the trapped spectators were seated in the main stand. I have stood on the Watersheddings terraces for 35 of my 41 years and I for one regret the trend towards all seater grounds, however if the disasters mentioned above are eradicated by this innovation, I would be happy to concede the point.

To finish on a happier note for all the Roughyed/Bears supporters Watersheddings will hold more than anything... memories. Snow covered pitches with the straw piled round the perimeter wall, unexpected defeats and shock victories. Like all grounds Watersheddings has had its fair share of high drama and for every joyous recollection of Paddy Kirwan's last minute winner against Wigan in 1987 there will be a memory of an equally dramatic disappointment. Older supporters may recall (I can't) Brian Bevan's heartbreaking interception in 1954. One thing is for sure whenever Watersheddings is mentioned it will instantly bring to mind Oldham RLFC and that is just how it should be.



# FRANK STIRRUP - THE WIZARD FROM OZ (WELL LEIGH!)



**I**t's ironic that I should be writing this as an ex Oldham player on the last match at Watersheddings with Swinton as opponents, as I could have ended up an ex Swinton player. When I was playing for Leigh and not catching a regular first team place, I wrote to Salford and Swinton for a trial and only Salford replied. I played 3 trials and I was signed on. I was happy at Salford and had a regular first team place, but Oldham convinced me that my career was with them. My move to Oldham for the first few months was with mixed reservations. I was having problems with my knee and I still hadn't been selected to play. On top of that there was

the travelling, working in the building trade all day, then having to catch a bus to Manchester then across to Victoria Station for a train to Mump Bridge, another bus to the ground and then the training. Plus the return journey and that was at least twice a week. "O for a SPONSORED car."  
The day I signed for Oldham, Bert Summerscales took me to lunch then to the ground. I knew right away this was it, this was what I wanted. My move to Oldham was the best move I ever made, I made a lot of friends, and have some good memories. I wish I could do it all again. Thanks to Oldham supporters.  
**YOU WERE FANTASTIC**  
My only wish now is to see Oldham at WEMBLEY.





# MURPHY'S MARAUDERS

## PLAY FOR NOWT

**W**ATERSHEDDINGS - Home for 16 yrs (and still is!). Soon after my arrival in Nov '66 I was picked to play against my old town team Leigh. Early in the match I failed to pick up an inswinging "right hook" resulting in 12 stitches to the mouth. Returning to the pitch and painfully passing on this information to an enquiring team mate I was informed they only put 10 stitches into a mail bag - so get on with it big gob! Welcome to the big league.

**Happy moments?** Playing in front of that 18,000 'sheddings crowd in the Bradford Cup replay, beating the British Touring Squad, learning of my selection for county and country and many, many more.  
**Proud moments?** Being appointed club captain and leading out the team to banners proclaiming "Murphy's Marauders" (we were too!), winning the 2nd Division championship in style, progressing to 461 first team appearances - a club post war record. However one particular occasion stands out in my 'sheddings memories - as club captain I was informed by coach Graham Starkey who in turn had been informed by the club's officials that

because of the acute financial situation they could not guarantee paying players for the forthcoming weekend's games. Starkey said that in my role as club captain it was my responsibility to pass this on to the players. I called a team meeting and asked the lads to vote by a show of hands.

The response was unanimous to play. In a sport that is infamous for money wrangles this was reflective of the attitude and team spirit at the time. **Funny moments?** Crash tackling an opposing winger into a disabled drivers Reliant Robin parked in the Herbert St/Sheddings end corner and asking the steward whose decision was it to allow parking on the pitch!

**Sad moments?** Not many, but none more than the hint from Frank Myler that at 34 my playing days were coming to an end. Alan Taylor occupied the full back berth and I was becoming more and more frustrated with my selection as sub. I was

an 80 minutes player - not 10! Signing for Rochdale Hornets I suppose allowed me to prove a point (especially to myself) regularly being selected in "The Team Of The Month".

The years at Watersheddings were fabulous and given the chance I would gladly do it all over again. The 'sheddings fans were tremendous, the Oldham people superb (I never did move back to Leigh) and good luck at Boundary Park next season.

**Oh!** One last point should there be a "Sad flogging session" after the match, a tip! - approximately 10 metres to the right of 'sheddings end sticks and 2 1/2 metres out I lost a full gold tooth. Even the most sophisticated metal detector has failed to turn it up. Mind you groundsman Jack



Walker soon after paraded a metallic toothy grin.  
Martin Murphy



HOWARD

THE END OF AN ERA 25

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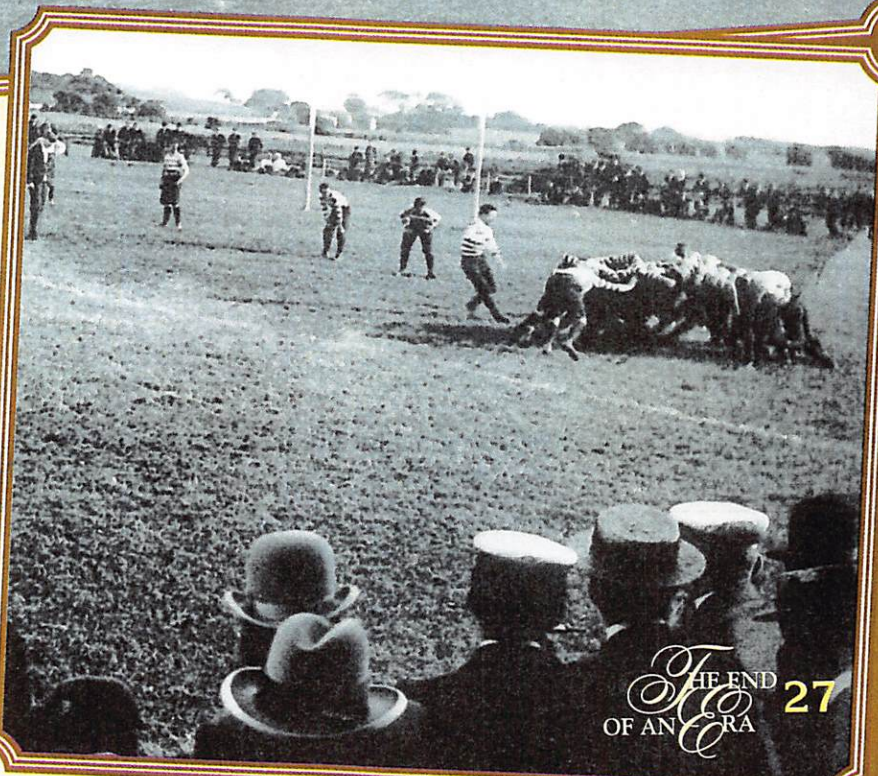
# THE EARLY DAYS!

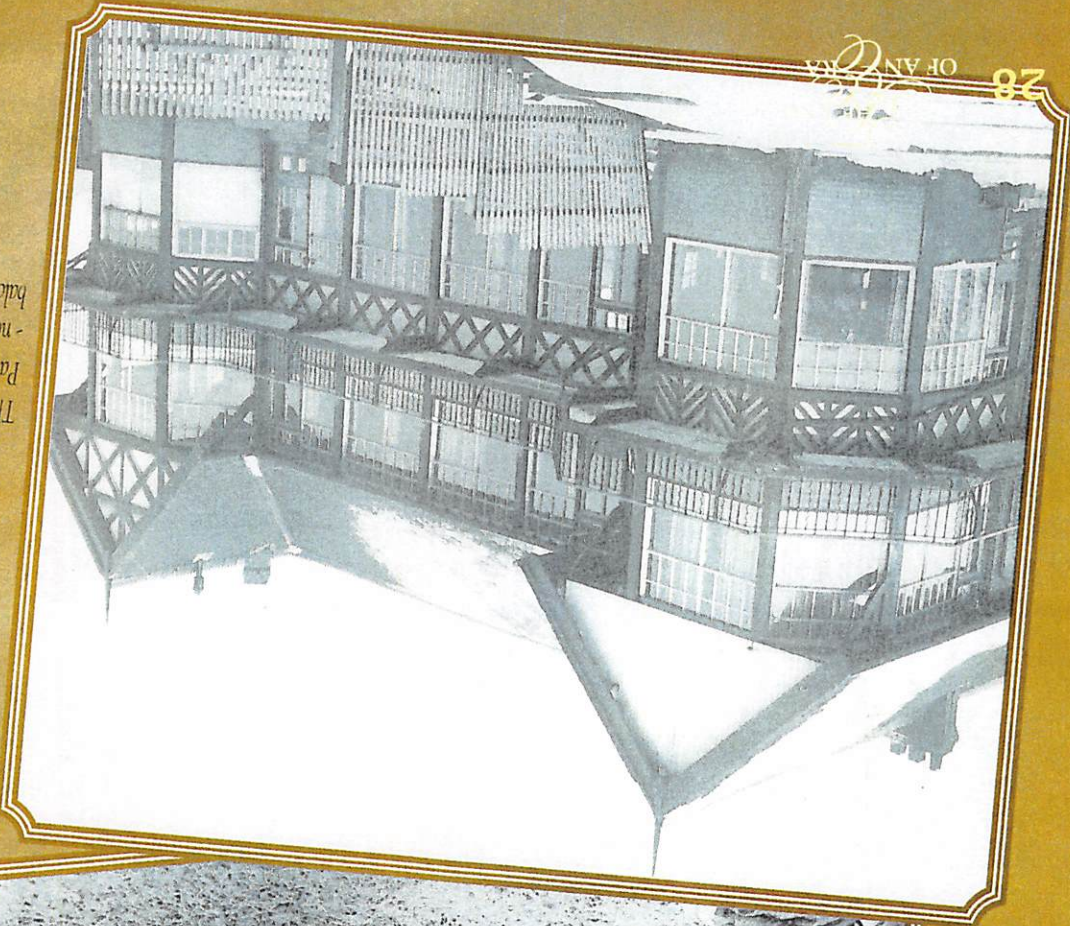
These two rare photographs give us a nostalgic look at Watersheddings



Above: Watersheddings action circa 1898 - note the ref dressed in bowler and overcoat!

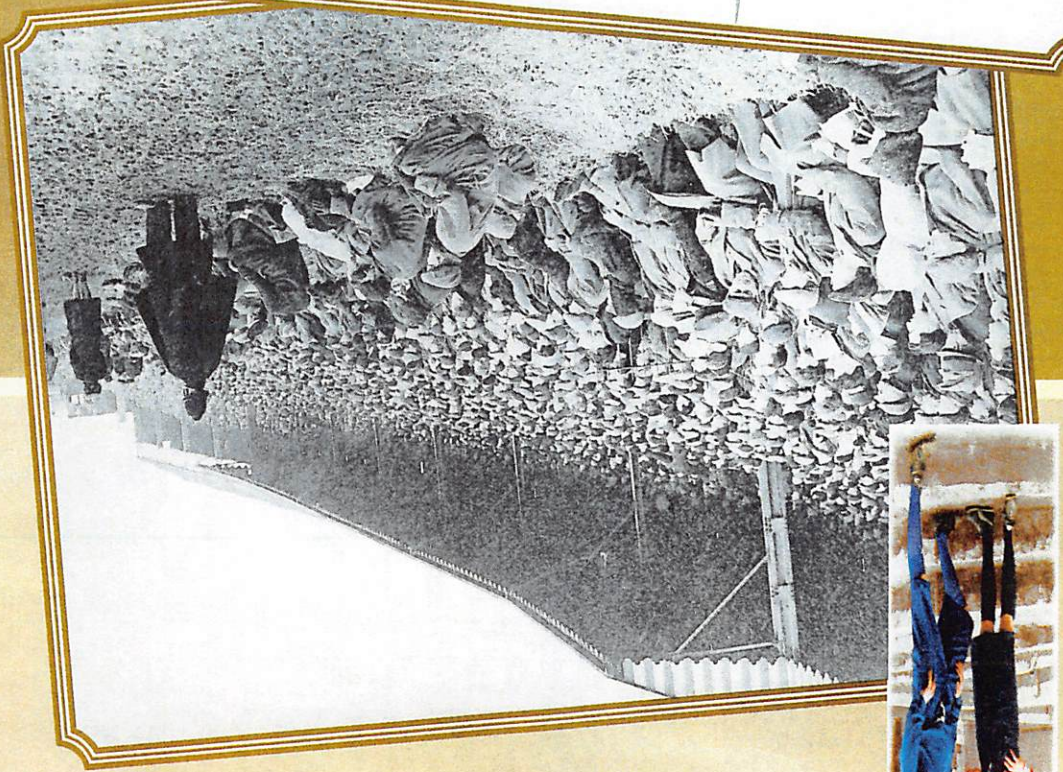
Right: The earliest view of Watersheddings looking towards Waterhead Park from Herbert Street. This picture is thought to have been taken very early in the first season of 1889.





The William Pawlton balcony

Aerial view of the William Pawlton balcony



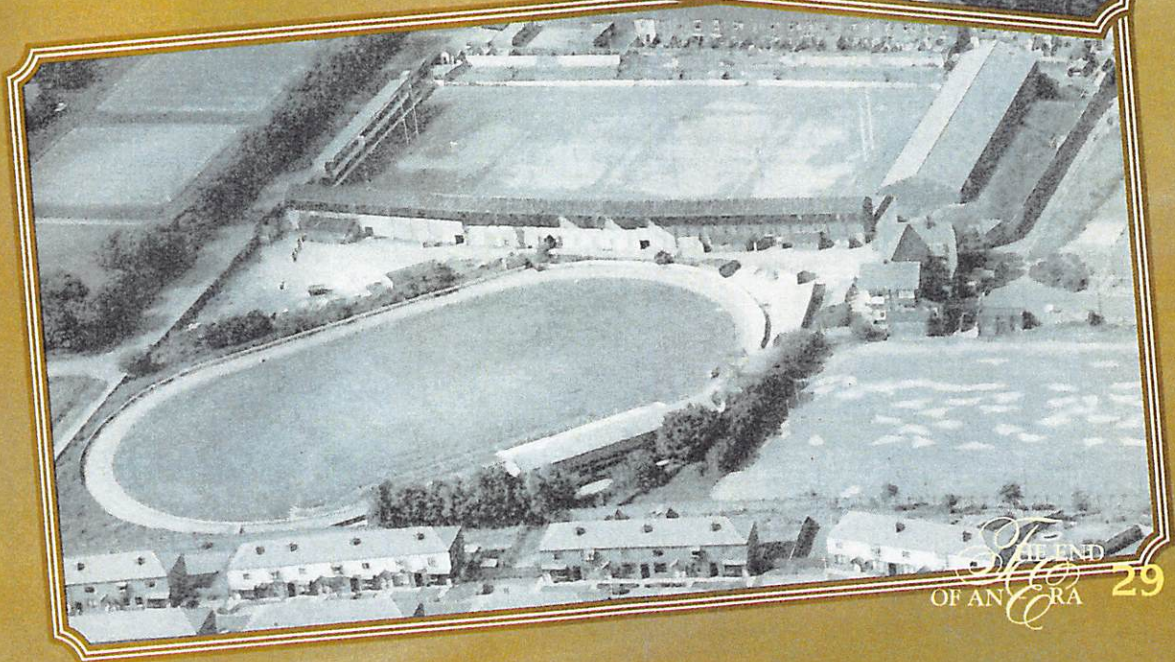
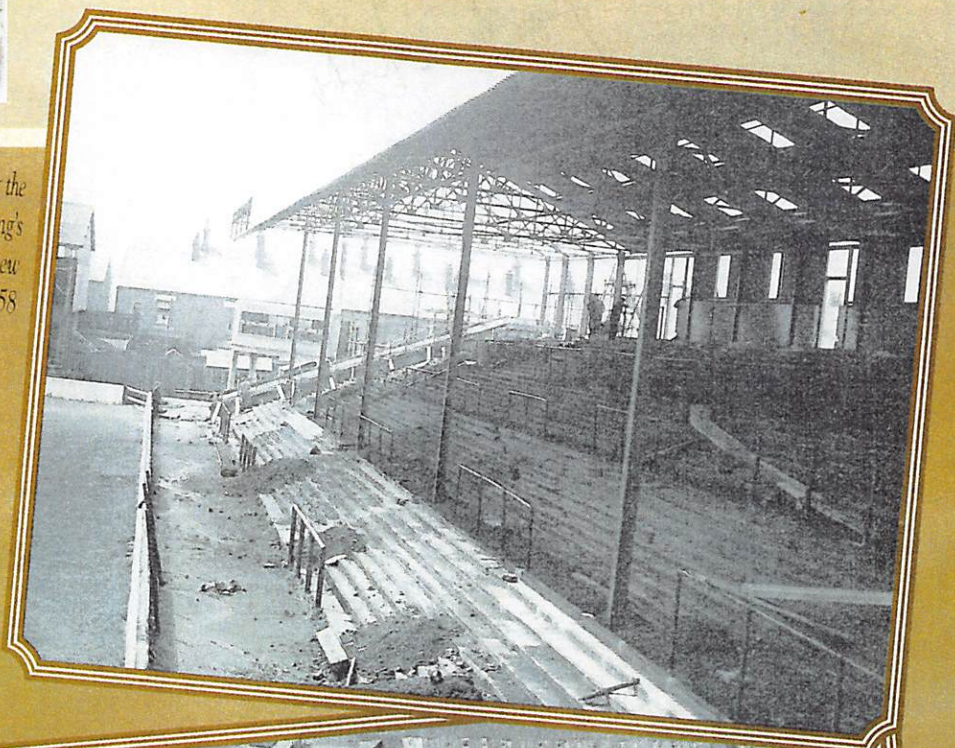
A big crowd up to watch the 1958 Winter Games



# MEMORIES ARE MADE OF THIS



*Building the  
Watershedding's  
stand and new  
score board 1958*



# NICE PLACE SHAME ABOUT THE WEATHER



Above  
and right:  
Two  
contrasting  
views of  
the famous  
old ground





# THOSE BRILLIANT TWO AND A BIT YEARS!

*Tony Barrow reflects on the time  
he spent at Watersheddings*

**M**y first experience of Watersheddings was in 1962 playing for St. Helens; it was an 'A' team game on a cold and wet Saturday afternoon in late November. If my memory serves me right we won with the odd point but to be honest I was glad to get off that freezing mud heap. My thoughts go back to the first game at Oldham as Coach. It was a Sunday Morning and I was

pottering about in the garden, there was a nip in the air but the sun was shining when I received a phone call from the secretary Anita to enquire whether I would like the groundstaff to clear the pitch or just the lines of snow. Thinking she was joking I said just clear the lines. Not taking Anita seriously I dressed in my brand new blazer, a pair of light slacks and a pair of leather shoes. The drive into Manchester and up to Junction 17 on the M62 was quite pleasant, then the sky started to turn grey. By the time we arrived at the ground there was at least 6" of snow as I stepped out of the warm car. I remember thinking "What on earth have I done coming to a place like this". Now I can honestly say that was "shock" because from then on it was without doubt one of the happiest times I have spent in my 34 years in Rugby League. The Directors at that time were Jimmy Knox, Greg Pache, Dave Gardner and Harvey Ashworth, what a great gang! Jim Knox was the Football Director. He was the one I mostly dealt with and I must say it was a pleasure to work with him. We would sit down for hours discussing how to strengthen the team, using limited resources. We signed unknown players i.e. Beefy Newton, Duncan Platt from Widnes, Shaun Allen from St. Helens, Gary Hyde Castleford, Richard Russell from Wigan, Brett Clark and then magnificent John Cogger from Runcorn. I remember

when we signed John a group of spectators pulled me over and enquired whether he knew who his father was. Within three games Johnny was their hero.

While sorting the first team out we did not neglect the 'A' team. We made a policy decision to try to sign the best youngsters, many of whom have gone on to play with other Super League teams.

As the saying goes, no-one can take away the memories of those brilliant two and a bit years. We had more success than any team since the legendary 1950's team. We won promotion to the First Division, won the Premiership Division Two, reached the semi-final of the Challenge Cup (believe me, it was a try) and the final of the Lancashire Cup. Not bad for a gang of Roughyeds!

I don't think anyone will forget the home comings to Sheddings after a big game. Spectators packing the car parks and Club, even on the Club roof just to meet their heroes. I have had some good receptions in my time but never better than Oldham. The spectators must rate with the best in the game. At that time we were averaging about 5,500 spectators per game and we used to get 2,000 watching the 'A' team on a Friday night.

"Great days" and I can say, with hand on my heart, the day the powers that be pressed the panic button was one of the saddest days of my life.



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# JOHN ETTY - DEWSBURY, BATLEY, OLDHAM, WAKEFIELD, YORKSHIRE AND BRITISH EMPIRE WINGER OF THE 50's

*John Etty -*

I had the pleasure and privilege of being one of the few league players fortunate enough to win every domestic medal that the game of the 50's had to offer. With the exception of that elusive Challenge Cup (and of course, the Yorkshire Cup) most of these were with Oldham's crack team of that era. Watersheddings was my home for 4 seasons and I recall with excitement those spectacular games played there. I particularly appreciated the closeness to the pitch of the Watersheddings supporters and their continual encouragement to the players (especially the Wingers).

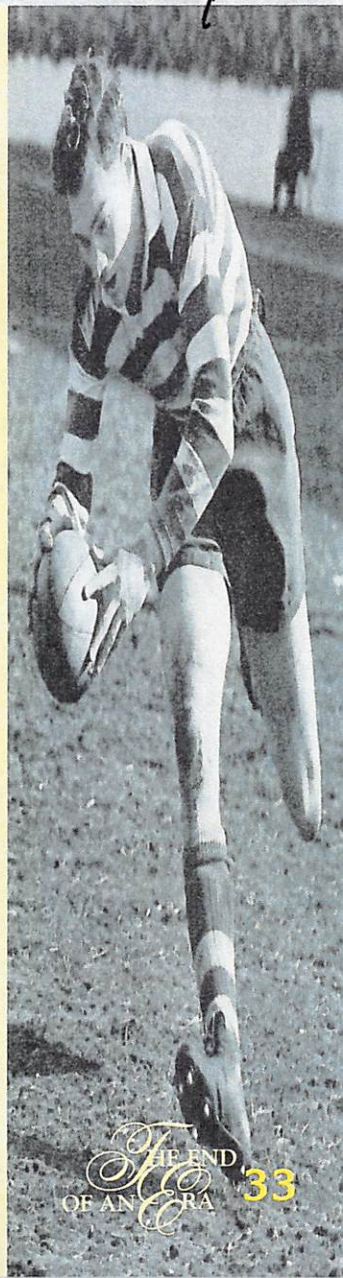
Discipline, fair play (!), sportsmanship and team work forged the success. I vividly remember shivering at my first mid-January training session - mind you I know Watersheddings is high on the Pennines but the players at my previous club Batley, were nicknamed "The Mountaineers!". Coach Griff Jenkins had the sense and

foresight to consult senior players in the formulation and planning of especially set moves, breeding proficiency and cooperation producing spectacular try after spectacular try. Contrary to modern thinking in respect of the fitness of teams from bygone eras, our team was fit - very fit! - we played upwards of 40 games a season, did not have the benefit of substitutes and full time jobs to boot!

The Chronicle writer of the time wrote "never have so few provided so much pleasure for so many" - it was an honour to play in front of the Oldham spectators and in later years, to be nominated to the Bears "Hall of Fame".

I will be at today's game and look forward to future regular trips from my Fleetwood home to cheer on the Bears at Boundary Park.

NB John's superb new book "John Etty - A Rugby League Winner" is now available from the Bear's shop in Spindles shopping centre.





# YOURS TRULY SCORED ALL THE POINTS

*The memories of Dick Cracknell - sometimes goalkicker  
also Huddersfield, Oldham, Yorkshire and Great Britain Winger*

I admit to finding it difficult in selecting the most memorable moments of my time at Oldham as collectively it was by far the most memorable period of my career. There are though two matches for which I have particular fond

memories - our 9-2 defeat of St Helens at Watersheddings in 1955 - yours truly scored all the points - a try and 3 goals (Bernard Ganley was out injured!) and our 15-4 home win against the crack Huddersfield side of 1954.

Extremely gratifying as this was my first game against my old club since leaving Fartown and also because

they paraded their full compliment of overseas players, Cooper, Devery, Hunter, Henderson etc... Conversely there was also the disappointments. The 5-3 defeat at Leigh in the 1955 Challenge Cup - normally we would have trotted in 20 to 30 points and did soon after in a league match! Terry O'Grady scored a cracking try that day, and I missed the conversion - if B.G. had played I am sure we would have won. For me though the biggest heartbreaker was this time at St Helens in a 1958 league match. We were in front for most of the game until a St Helens field kick settled over our try line. Frank Pitchford played the ball dead literally seconds before Alex Murphy cheekily touched the ball down. Quite amazingly Referee Ron Gelder awarded a try! Murphy did not complain but the Oldham players did - furiously. I have never forgiven Ron Gelder for that mistake. It's farewell to Watersheddings but the memories live on. The best of luck to the Oldham Club and supporters and all the best for the Bears at Boundary Park.



# FROM WILLIAM OLDROYD & SONS (GLUEYARD) TO WATERSHEDDINGS

Ray Hicks

**M**y first taste of Watersheddings was while I was supporting my home town team Widnes in the mid sixties. In April of 1968 it was to be my first taste as a player. The game was the Amateur Lancs Cup Final. Dutton Youth Club (Widnes) v Oldham St Mary's unbeaten in 94 consecutive games, they didn't make it 95. Don't need to tell you who won. After the game I was approached by Derek Foy an Oldham scout to have trials, I agreed and the following evening I was playing for the 'A' team at Knowsley Rd. It was the last game of the season so I was invited for pre season training followed by a couple of trials held on the now disappeared training pitch. I was offered terms and duly signed on 30th July 1968. Percy Carter and Bert Jones represented the club. From here on in it started from the

glueyard in Widnes down the East Lanes Rd and turn right up to the Las Vegas of the North Oldham & Watersheddings, I've never looked back since.

Alec Givvons was my first coach "come on me fifty bobbers" he would say. Leaving Watersheddings for the "early bath" happened at the start of my second season. I was substitute for the Charity Cup game against Blackpool Borough. Refereeing the game that day was the famous W H Thompson - Billy to most. I came on as substitute 20 minutes into the second half and was sent off within the minute without even touching the ball. We still reckon it was the quickest sending off ever, but at least the bath water was nice and clean! A few years later Watersheddings was playing host to the Australian Tourists. I was picked to play prop against Arthur Beetson. I think he got wind of it and cried off! We lost but put up an excellent performance going down narrowly.

In 1977 I got the dreaded letter from Watersheddings telling me I was not being retained for the forthcoming season - generally being known as "scratched off" 9 years down the line farewell us a lonely sound.

"Who said I wanted a benefit." I returned to Watersheddings a few years later playing for Saddleworth Rangers in the Standard Cup Final beating arch rivals St. Annes. I returned many times after as coach for Saddleworth Rangers. In fact 3 years on the trot as losing finalists to St. Annes on each occasion.

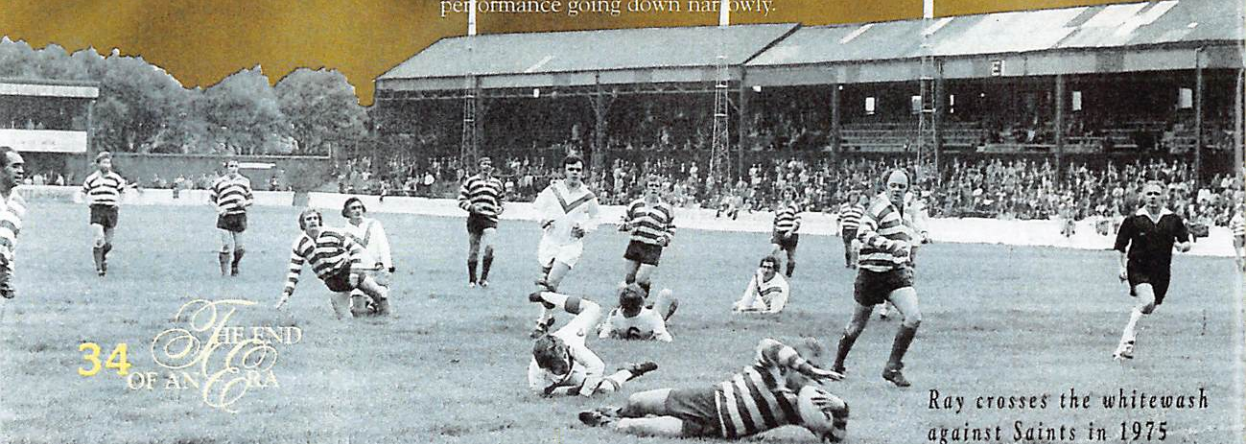
My final return was as a coach with Swinton with the dynamic duo Jim Crellin & Ray Clark, my many visits since have been as a spectator.

Looking forward to the new season and all the competitive challenges ahead.

Good luck to all.

34 THE END  
OF AN ERA

Ray crosses the whitewash  
against Saints in 1975



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# THE OLDHAM PIE EATERS

*Trevor Heywood unearths some memorable experiences of times spent at Watersheddings.*

*Trevor Heywood*



**T**o all Supporters. It is both a pleasure and a privilege to be given the opportunity to look back over the 25 plus years I have been involved with the Supporters Club and select some memories from the past.

It is difficult to reflect on games played at Watersheddings as most of you will be aware we saw very little home games when operating the catering, and I am sure other more distinguished personnel writing this brochure will bring back more memories, than I can remember. However on a playing front, a lasting memory will be of the old Colts teams, which included Andy Goodway, Terry Flanagan, Mick Worall and Ray Ashton, all of whom went on to represent the club along with Des Foy on the 1984 British Lions tour of Australia.

I have no doubt that we all have our own recollections of the 1987 Challenge cup tie against Wigan on a cold February evening, when the cup favourites came to town, and left consigned to a first round defeat, following Paddy Kirwan's last minute try, and Mick Burke goal. My memory is standing at the Canteen doorway watching the many Wigan supporters leaving the ground with the look of total disbelief on their faces at what had happened not 5 minutes before.

Another game that stirs a few memories is the match against the touring Australians in 1986, who arrived at Watersheddings with their travelling band of supporters,

and who promptly declared it the coldest place on earth. However a few cups of hot soup, gratefully received had them thawing out.

In general I will remember the Sundays, arriving at the ground at approximately 12.00 noon to prepare soup and coffee, warm the pies ready for the first of the spectators to arrive. By 4.30 p.m. with feet aching, we would stand and wonder how we had managed to prepare and sell the 1000 plus pies and numerous pans of soup and pots of coffee in such a short space of time. The opposition, the size of the crowd, the weather, it did not seem to matter, the orderly queues, the order for half time (how many grounds could you do that) every home game was the same.

My overall lasting memory of Watersheddings will not be of individuals or games played, it will be of the colleagues I have worked with, some sadly no longer with us, of the Supporters and of the many friends and lasting friendships I have made during my association with the Supporters Club.

To all players, past and present, I thank you for the memories of games both won and lost. To all patrons of the canteens I thank you for your support over the years, and may I ask of you just one question!

"Who are all the pies?"

Thanks for the memories.

TREVOR HEYWOOD

Treasurer

Oldham RLFC Supporters Club

*"We would stand and wonder how we had managed to prepare and sell 1000 plus pies and numerous pans of soup in such a short space of time"*



# FAREWELL, OLD FRIEND AND THANKS FOR THE MEMORY

By Roger Halstead (*Oldham Evening Chronicle*)

**R** E M E M B E R  
this day, December 29th,  
1996, because Rugby  
League in Oldham will  
never quite be the same  
again.

The Town will never be the same again. Like the cotton mills, Tommyfield and Platt brothers, Watersheddings will be confined to the pages of local history. Those who feel its passing will have memories stretching back to the golden days of childhood. They will recall happy times spent on the terraces with loved ones who first introduced them to Rugby League, to the Oldham team... and to Watersheddings.

They will have private memories of Mums, Dads, aunts and uncles... of great games, brilliant players, big crowds, football specials, straw around the pitch in winter, flat caps, schoolboys in short pants and school caps, and posters outside the ground telling potential readers that the national papers had their big-name writers at the match. A link with the wonderful days gone by will soon be severed. And if supporters link arms around 4.30pm today to sing Auld Lang Syne there will be many a tiny tear shed before the fans stream away for the last time.

My early memories of Watersheddings go back to the mid-fifties. Coming from Rochdale, I was a Hornets fan and proud of it. The short trip to Oldham for derby games, complete with red, white and blue bob cap and scarf, was

always a season's highlight.

A Rochdale victory was rare, but to a wide-eyed youngster brought up on the wide, open spaces of the Athletic Grounds it was always fascinating to visit compact Watersheddings, with the splendour of its Victorian pavilion, its two-tier Hutchins Stand, the close proximity of the players and the chap in the white coat who walked around the ground selling Uncle Joe's mint balls. We usually watched Hornets take a beating from the old "E" Stand. Little did I know that, a decade later, I would be sitting on the "posh" side of the ground reporting Oldham's games for the Chronicle.

You don't cover a club for a local newspaper for 32 years without having some affection for the place. In 1964, when I started, it wasn't the Watersheddings we know today. There were no floodlights, no social club and no dressing rooms in the basement of the pavilion. But there was a stand running the full length of the popular side the best view on the ground, the old-timers insisted and a main stand that housed spectators from pavilion corner right through to the Waterhead Park end.

The Oldham team I first reported was the one which reached the 1964 Challenge Cup semi-finals with men like Frank Dyson, Vinnie Nestor, Geoff Sims, John Donovan, Trevor Simms, Len McIntyre, Peter Smethurst, Ken Wilson, Harry Major, Charlie Bott, Stuart Whitehead and Dave Parker.

The seventies was notable for the loyalty shown by so many players to the club that gave them their big chance. For almost a decade any Oldham team began with the big three Murphy, Elliott, Larder. Hooker Kevin Taylor was another long-server.

The eighties produced the fruits of a successful youth policy and a team built around Andy Goodway, Mick Worrell, Terry Flanagan, Ray Ashton and Paddy Kirwan. Goodway was to leave for Wigan before Oldham got the best out of him, but it didn't stop a team bolstered by two young Australians, David and Glen Liddiard, reaching the 1986 Challenge Cup semi-final. Other semi-finals were to follow, but two of the most memorable matches of that period at Watersheddings were the 1987 first round win over Wigan in the Paddy Kirwan match and that nerve-tangling game against the Australian tourists. I can still see Colin Hawkyard racing away to score after a scuttering break by Ashton and Worrall's final pass.

Fans will have their own special memories of a ground that was to Oldham what Thrum Hall was to Halifax, what Station Road was to Swinton or what the Athletic Grounds was to Rochdale.

Another link with the game's glorious past is soon to be lost for ever. Farewell, old friend and thanks for the memory.

ROGER HALSTEAD

# OLDHAM F.C.

## V

# SWINTON

Match Report for the first ever match at Watersheddings played on September 28th 1889.

The opening of the Oldham Football Ground on Saturday was an event which was taken advantage of by a large number of people who assembled to witness the encounter between the Swinton team and Oldham.

The number of spectators on the ground when the kick off took place would probably be about 7,000 and the game was watched with keen interest. The ground is well set

out and there will be every chance of witnessing brilliant play, when the weather permits. Contrary to expectation the weather was pretty good, very little rain falling during the afternoon, the field of play being in capital condition, notwithstanding the enormous amount of rain that had fallen during the week.

When the teams stepped on to the field a hearty cheer was set up. The Oldham men appearing in their new jerseys, namely red and white. After the preliminaries had been arranged by the team captains it was found that the home team had lost the toss and "Mac" had the honour of

setting the ball in motion on the new ground for the first time. Murray replied and the Oldham skipper returned the ball, the first pack being formed in the visitors' territory. Nolan quickly set to work by trying to steal round the scrimmage, the ball ultimately being worked by the Swinton forwards to the Oldham quarter-flag. Some of the home forwards came away with a rush to the opposite twenty five flag, but the Swintonians replied in a similar manner. After some

struggling Nolan got away quite neatly in a dodgy manner, but was brought down in central territory and the Swinton forwards again worked their way through the scrimmage and got down to the Oldham quarter-flag. Some loose work next ensued out of which the ball was brought and Bumbly quickly picked up and threw to Marsh who transferred to Valentine then having no difficulty in getting in, Paul negotiating a goal.

"Mac" kicked out and a return was made to Walkden who allowed himself to be tackled with the ball, the result being that a minor was recorded for the visitors. Quickly following upon this Swinton ran in another try. Valentine, after some good passing, receiving the ball and planting it over the line. Paul on this occasion failing to improve upon the point. On resuming Hurst was noticeable with a good run to centre. After this Walkden was called upon to relieve the line and Whittaker and Mallalieu distinguished themselves by executing a dribble up the Swinton line where some tough struggling was

seen, the visitors eventually easing off a bit. The home forwards however returned to the attack and for some time play was carried on inside the Swinton quarter-flag. Scrimmage after scrimmage was fought and there seemed a chance that Oldham would score. Such was not to be and the ball was kicked to Walkden who again caused disappointment by not getting without the ball. The fight was now conducted in the Oldham ground until "Mac" relieved with a judicious kick and Whittaker made some splendid

*"When the teams stepped onto the field a hearty cheer was set up."*



efforts to get away from the pack. The Swinton backs once more got the ball amongst them and some neat passing enabled Battersby to get in, when Paul succeeded in placing a goal.

Half Time falling due, the score being: Swinton 2 goals - 1 try, Oldham nil. Bumbly started the second half and Hurst failing to return, the visitors forced a touch in goal. Play was resumed in the Swinton half but it was of a very uninteresting description and mostly lay with the forwards, whilst the work was of a scrambling character. The Oldham forwards bore down towards the Swinton line, "Mac" being distinguished by some good kicking and Moseley by sure and strong tackling. A free kick was secured by the home team and much ground was gained but Marsh replied, Nolan bringing the ball back only to be transferred by Valentine to the centre-flag. Whittaker then got away and seemed sure of gaining the coveted try, but failed at the last moment, the ball rolling dead. The whistle sounding shortly after bringing the game to a close.

The score being: Swinton 2 goals - 1 try - 2 minors to Oldham 1 minor.

The Teams:-  
**OLDHAM:** Back WALKDEN. 3/4 Backs HURST, McCUTCHEON, MOSELEY. 1/2 Backs NOLAN, THOMAS. Forwards ARMSTRONG, MAILLALIEU, BLOMLEY, MAYERS, NUFALL, INGRAM, WOLSTENCROFT, ROBINSON, WHITTAKER.

**SWINTON:** Back MURRAY. 3/4 Backs VALENTINE, MARSH, BATTERSBY. 1/2 Backs BUXTON, BUMBLY. Forwards HORLEY, CLAYTON, HOWARD, MARSH, LOMAX, ROTHWELL, HALL, PAUL, HOTCHKISS.

Referee: Mr A.M. Crook (Free Wanderers EC.)  
 Report taken from the Oldham Chronicle, Monday September 30th 1889.

142 Oldham.	
FIRST TEAM.	2ND TEAM.
Sept. 21 Cleekeaton, away	Hollinwood 1st, a
28 Swinton, home	Swinton, away
Oct. 5 Warrington, away	Warrington, home
12 Morecambe, home	Dobcross 1st, away
19 Leicester, home	
26 Leeds Parish Church, h	Leeds Parish Ch, a
Nov. 2 Widnes, home	Widnes, away
9 Rochdale Hornets, home	Rochdale Hornets, a
16 Leicester, away	Rochdale Rangers, h
23 Manchester Rangers, a	Manchester Rangers, h
30 Tyldesley, home	Tyldesley, away
Dec. 7 Huddersfield, away	Huddersfield, home
14 Swinton, away	Swinton, home
21 Cleekeaton, home	Chadderton/Himes, a, a
25 Aspatha, home	
Jan. 1 Heckmondwile, h	Mosley, away
4 Mosley, home	Brighouse Rangers, a
11 Brighouse Rangers, h	Brighouse Rangers, a
18 Tyldesley, away	Tyldesley, home
25 Carlisle, home	
Feb. 1 Brighouse Rangers, a	Brighouse Rangers, h
8 Leeds Parish Church, a	Leeds Parish Ch, h
15 St. Helen's Recreation, a	Chadderton/Himes, h, h
22 Warrington, home	Warrington, away
Mar. 1 Manchester Rang, h	Manchester Rang, a
8 Huddersfield, home	Huddersfield, away
15 Rochdale Hornets, away	Rochdale Hornets, h
22 Widnes, away	Widnes, home
29 Mosley, away	Mosley, home
31 St. Helen's Recreation, h	
April 4 Kendal, home	Rochdale Rangers, a
12 Dobcross 1st, home	Dobcross 1st, home
19 Morecambe, away	Hollinwood 1st, h
27 Carlisle, away	

### 1889 - 90 Fixture List

Hon. Sec.—Mr. Sam Taylor, Derker, Oldham. Dressing room—Pavilion on ground. Colours—Red & white. Ground—Watersheddings.



"It was  
definitely  
the coldest  
ground in  
the game"

**W**ATERSHEADINGS? A face in the history of British League is recalled. It was definitely the coldest ground in the game, just along one Hill Kit's Crown Park. But the warmth of friendship generated in the clubhouse and the fever heat whipped up by the truly great players who wore the red and white jerseys kept us coming back for more.

And more is certainly what you needed for a trip to Watersheadings. More vests, more jumpers, more gloves and the harvests overcoat. You possessed.

When those less hardy or more sensitive would have no hesitation in calling off a game, Oldham would cock a contemptuous snook at the elements and play on. Indeed on the most bitter of days with snow six inches deep, if the sun peeped out for a moment you half expected a Remployed to pop home for the deckchair.

It lives a haunting memory of our old Watersheadings from the game where the Bears played Warrington in the last winter season and, true to form, the match went ahead despite the snow that had wrecked the rest of the day's programme.

The snow was shoveled and scraped away from the half way line and the groundman finished his little walkie, never to strike the division of the pitch in red or green.

Not even Sargentina could have kept the machine steady on the rutted surface and the result was the longest and most vivid recall that the world has ever seen.

Happy days!

George Dawson





*Bob Irving in action  
against Barrow*

# STRANGE JOURNIES DOWN MEMORY LANE

*From over the hill - to the end of the world - Bob Irving*



In September 1964 as a 16 year old A.N. Other trialist with Oldham, living in Huddersfield, the most daunting aspect was the travel to and from Watersheddings. I was totally dependent on Frank Dyson the player coach who also lived in Huddersfield.

Being a mechanic Frank was really into cars and in the swinging sixties the Mini was all the rage. The ultimate Mini was the Cooper S but Frank only had the ordinary mini but drove it as if it were a Cooper S.

Tuesdays and Thursdays training meant a quick dash from work to meet Frank in Huddersfield town centre to start our journey. Although only 16 I was quite well made and Frank in his sheepskin coat was quite a size too, so we were really squashed in this Mini. Whether we took the Stanedge or Nont Sarahs route was purely academic since both were unlit, foggy with sheer drops from the roadside. The only way of knowing whether we were still on the road was by bumping into the sheep. When the weather was really bad Frank would slow down to 50 mph from his usual 70-90 mph, side window open (I think it was to give us a bit more room), fag in mouth, one hand on the wheel, nose against the windscreen, frantically wiping away the condensation. Frank probably thought my silence was due to youthful shyness but in truth I was numb with fear. Lifting sheep off the bonnet was better than any tackling practice.

The worst journey of all in those days of limited motorways was Workington Town away. Saturday 6am - get out of bed. 6.15am - walk to bus stop. 6.30 - bus to Huddersfield town centre. 7am - meet Frank. 8am - team coach leaves Watersheddings and proceeds to Bolton-le-Sands, picking up players



along the way. 8.30am - realise I should not play cards with seasoned professionals. 8.35am - lost last week's winning pay so might as well have a nap. 10am - arrive Bolton-le-Sands for Breakfast. Mid-day - arrive Royal Oak Keswick for steak and egg lunch. 2.30pm arrive Workington wishing I had not eaten all that food. 3.00pm kick off. 3.01pm hit by Brian Edgar and the Martin Brothers (wish I had never got out of bed in the first place). 7.00pm - Wake up in Ambleside at dinner. Cannot eat mixed grill, two teeth missing. 7 pints and as many hours later crawl back into bed.

Eventually I buy my own car which means I can now travel to Oldham for other purposes than training. On several occasions the team was invited by Chief Constable Palmer to enjoy the hospitality of the police social club. The local lads always seemed to get safely back home without having to drive but obviously such hospitality did not extend to that journey over the tops. However I was offered a vacant cell if I was ever stuck. Some weeks later having skidded on black ice and leaving the road, I vowed not to risk that journey again in such bad conditions. Another social evening later at 1.30am on a foggy freezing night I presented myself to the desk sergeant at police HQ. Fortunately my misgivings were banished on being greeted by Walter Alcock who was always at the turnstile on match days and was a kindly soul. He found me a vacant cell and gave me a couple of blankets. At 6am I was awakened by a screaming officer who was throwing out the previous night's drunks. My protestations were ignored and he obviously did not follow rugby because Bob Irving meant nothing to him. Perhaps he was a Rochdale supporter. He physically man-handled me out of the station and onto the freezing street. I decide to make that journey again. The old pavilion with its lights blazing, Mrs Wood making the after training buttries, little Jimmy wisecracking with the lads as he handed out the newly washed kit and polished boots, Sergeant Walter on the gate greeting players and spectators alike with fatherly protection, the buzz of the crowd, the banter in the bar, were yesterday's rewards at the journey's end and today's happy memories. Thank you to everyone who made it so.

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# BEARS' HERITAGE COLLECTION

*A reminder to supporters that there is currently an exhibition of the club's heritage at Oldham Museum and Local Interest Centre on Greaves Street. As part of "The People's Exhibition" this will run until the end of May.*

*Admittance is free!*

*Also, within the Rochdale Road reception area of the Civic Centre are colourful display cabinets plotting the history of Rugby Football in and around the borough. Obviously, this area is open to the public and they are well worth a look.*

**BRIAN WALKER**

**T**HE BIRTH OF RUGBY. Games which involved kicking, catching or hitting a ball have been played throughout history. Rowdy forms of football, without rules or a fixed number of players, were popular in Britain during the Middle Ages. The game was discouraged by the authorities as it often ended in a free fight and was banned for long period between the 14th and 17th centuries. Although many of these early sports had something in common with rugby football, the game's real roots are in the 19th century public schools and at Rugby School in particular, where team sports were assuming new importance in the

educational system. The football played at Rugby School in the early days had flexible rules. Any number of players could take part and the objective was to score goals by a place or drop kick. Passing and running were virtually unknown. Games might go on for up to five days! H-shaped goal posts were used from the start.

It is generally believed that **William Webb Ellis** was the first person to catch the ball (which was allowed) and run with it in his hands (an innovation) during a game of football at Rugby School in 1823.

## EARLY RUGBY IN AND AROUND OLDHAM

When in 1830 **Tom Brown** wanted to play football at Rugby School he was told it would

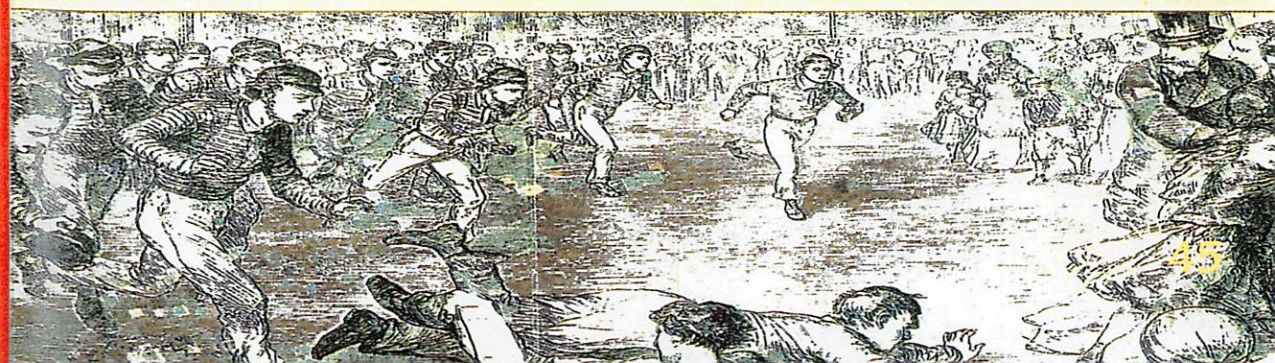
take 3 months to learn the rules!

It took the next 40 years or so for simplified, disciplined rules to evolve and for the sport to take a grip nationally. In 1871 the Rugby Football Union was formed in the same year the first International England versus Scotland was played. By 1874 local teams Oldham Borough FC, Oldham Juniors, Oldham Hornets, Oldham Rangers, Werneth Rangers, Crompton FC, Royton FC, Glodwick FC. Mossley and the 31st Local Rifle Volunteers were amongst the others, in existence.

The game was of course 15 a side Rugby Union!

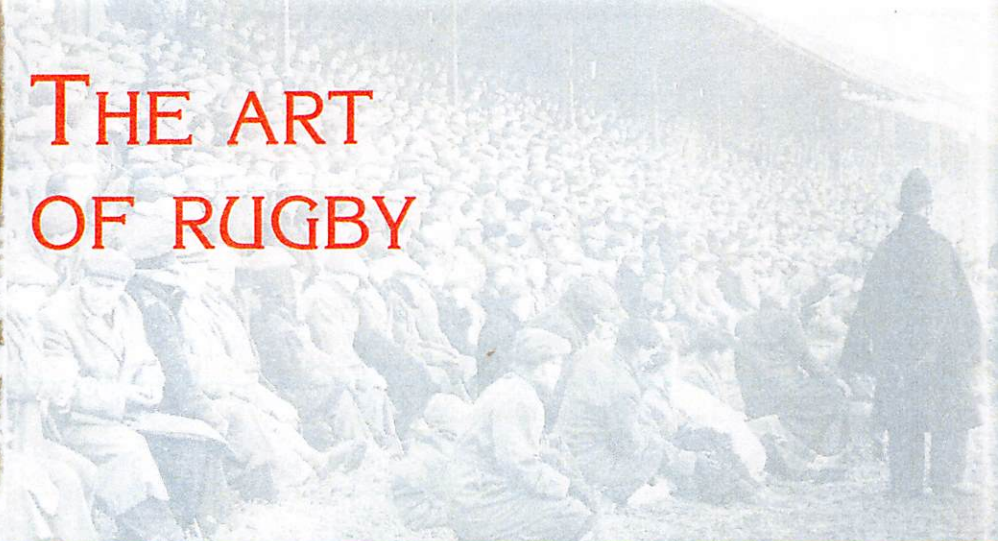
## THE FORMATION OF OLDHAM FC

After a meeting at the Prince Albert Hotel, Union Street West, Oldham FC was formed





# THE ART OF RUGBY



in September 1876 with headquarters at the Black Swan Hotel, Bottom O' Th' Moor. The first match took place on 21st October - v - Stalybridge on a ground at the rear of Glodwick Spinning Companies Mill with the players changing at the Shakesphere Hotel, Glodwick. The word ground is loosely used as this was no more than a field with neither stand or terracing - admission was free and the Treasurer struggled to meet expenses by taking collections at each match. In those days the playing kit was **amber** and **black** and on one occasion, the Team played in its Oldham Club Caps! A progressive Club, Oldham FC was the first Lancashire team to play away to a Yorkshire Club when they travelled to

Wakefield in 1877. In 1878 the Club moved to Clarksfield to share a ground with Oldham Cricket Club. A notoriously sloping playing area, the Club though had at least the benefit of a Pavilion although during one period, the Team changed at the Friendship Inn at Mumps and transported to the ground by bus. On 21st November 1878 Oldham played probably the first ever Club game under electric lights - only partially successful! In March 1889 Oldham defeated the Maoris at Clarksfield. Many of the Maoris played in their bare feet causing a new rule to be introduced banning this lack of apparel. **THE ART OF RUGBY** This atmospheric painting

depicts the Roses Match played on 25th November 1893 at Bradford's Park Avenue Stadium. It was the work of the celebrated portrait artist, W.B. Wollen, R.A., and was the first to be exhibited at the Royal Academy in London in the summer of 1895 shortly before the momentous events which tore the world of rugby asunder. No-one knows who commissioned Wollen to create the image but the painting now hangs at Twickenham, a somewhat ironic setting as the game between Lancashire and Yorkshire embodied most of the problems with which the Rugby Football Union was struggling to come to terms. Here were many of the game's most prominent players, participating in the most fiercely competitive

# THE MOVE TO WATERSHEDDINGS



match of the rugby calendar before a massive crowd of paying customers.

Featured in the portrait are Oldham players Sam Lees (17), Bill McCutcheon (9) and Abe Ashworth (2) who had just been sold to Rochdale Hornets.

Yorkshire won the game 11 points to 3.

## THE MOVE TO WATERSHEDDINGS

In 1880 Oldham Cricket Club vacated the Clarksfield Stadium having secured the lease on land at a small hamlet called "Knuckett" Watersheddings.

Here it provided cricket, bowling and tennis facilities.

In 1889, under the guidance of Official, Joseph Platt Oldham FC joined the Cricket Club as tenants at Watersheddings. (This land was eventually purchased by

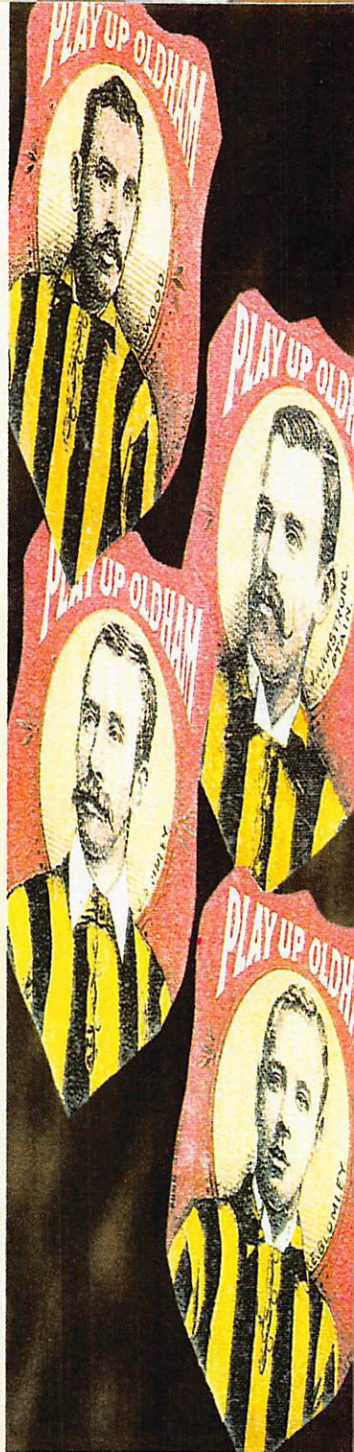
the Rugby Club in 1922.)

The first game on 28th September 1889 was lost to Swinton before a crowd of approximately 7,000.

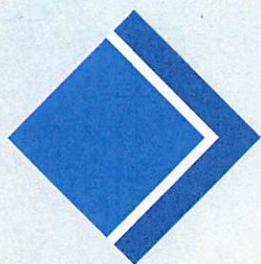
Introduced for the first time at this game was Oldham's red and white hooped now world famous strip.

Around the turn of the century, Werneth FC opened its new ground at Sheepfoot Lane (now Oldham Athletic's Boundary Park Stadium), Oldham FC playing several 'A' Team games on the new ground.

By 1906 the "Line Out" had disappeared, the "Play the Ball" evolved and teams down from 15 to 13 players. This was now the new "League" game. It was at around this time that Oldham Rugby Union Club was formed probably by traditionalists who



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# THE NORTHERN UNION & JOSEPH PLATT



Joseph Platt



## 1895 - THE FORMATION OF THE NORTHERN UNION FOOTBALL LEAGUE

OLDHAM played a major role in rugby's great division 100 years ago.

For 19 years, from its formation in 1876 to 1895, the club was a member of the English Rugby Football Union, but as early as 1890 allegations of professionalism were being made against it.

The Lancashire committee investigated Oldham's recruitment of players from Wales, including Swansea three-quarters, Dai Gwynn and Bill McCutcheon, but found no case to answer.

The case was later re-opened and further investigated by a committee of the RFU, meeting in Manchester. For a second time the charge against professionalism against Oldham was held to be unsubstantiated.

The authorities proved nothing..... but only five years later Oldhamer Joseph Platt, already a club official for 15 years,

was one of the leading figures in the quarrel with the RFU over payment to players for time lost at work.

Platt represented Oldham at the famous meeting at the George Hotel in Huddersfield, which led to the formation of the Northern Union - which we now know as the Rugby League.

He was elected as the first secretary. It was a position he was to hold for 25 years, during which time he laid down the foundations of the game we know today, and was also involved in the promotion of the first touring team from New Zealand in 1907-08.

Of all the men of Oldham who have played great roles in the development of the game at club or league level, few can match the contribution of Joseph Platt. He was the game's anchor man - some would even say its first father figure - at a time when the battle to establish the code in the North was at its fiercest.

A farmer's son, Platt was a surveyor, director of a spinning company





# EARLY CUP KINGS

PLAYER'S CIGARETTES.



and managing director of a firm running theatres in Oldham. There is a popular belief that he was a member of the family which ran Platt Brothers, but that is not the case.

Oldham members voted unanimously at a meeting in the Temperance Hall, Horsedge Street on July 25th, 1895 to support the action of the committee in joining the rebel clubs.

## Plans

By this time Watersheddings had been open for six years. It was soon to house one of the Northern Union's founder clubs. On Thursday, August 29th, 1895 Platt attended the Huddersfield breakaway meeting, at which northern clubs decided to push forward immediately with plans to establish payment for bona fide broken time.

They made it clear, however, that they were against out and out professionalism - and they stuck to their principles when Smith, a Salford player who had been suspended by the Rugby Union for professionalism, asked the rebel group for permission to play with them.

They rejected his request, ruling

that he was a professional in the fullest sense of the word.

For the first three seasons the most a player could receive was six shillings a match.

There were 22 founder clubs: Hunslet, Tyldesley, Huddersfield, Halifax, Batley, Wakefield, Hull, Bradford, Widnes, Manningham, Leigh, Stockport, Warrington, Liversedge, St Helens, Wigan, Brighouse Rangers, Broughton Rangers, Leeds, Rochdale, Runcorn and Oldham.

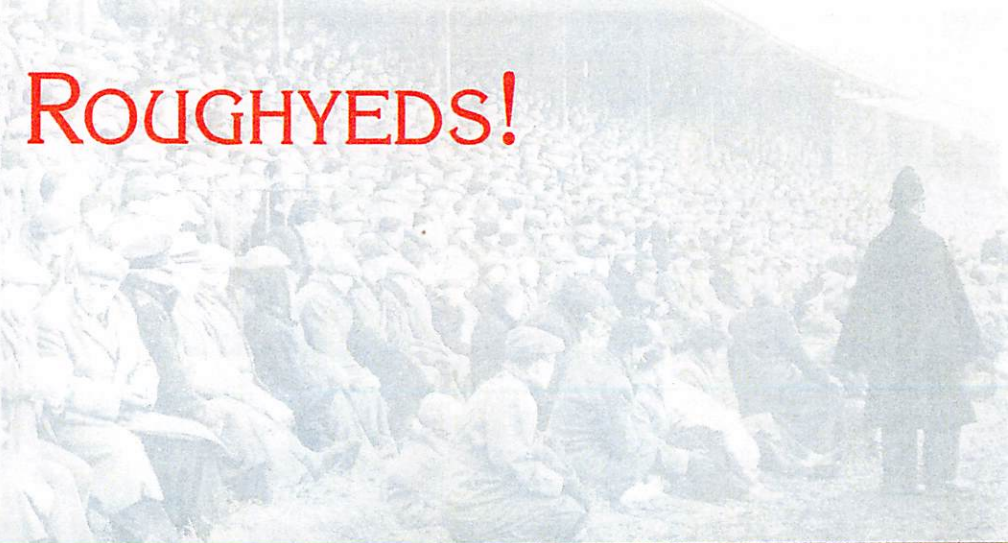
Twenty clubs attended the historic meeting. Stockport and Runcorn did not, but sent telegrams of support and were voted in.

Salford, Swinton and Dewsbury were admitted a year later.

## THE EARLY CUP KINGS

In 1899 Oldham FC achieved their first major triumph when they were the first Lancashire Club to win the **Challenge Cup** defeating Hunslet at the Fallowfield Stadium, Manchester. Arguably, Oldham's most successful (and entertaining) team was the crack outfit of the period 1905-1911. During this period Oldham were never out of the League's top 4 - twice winning the competition and

# ROUGHYEDS!



appearing in 5 consecutive Championship finals. A record (shared by Huddersfield) still standing to this day. During this period 1906-1909 the Team won 60 consecutive matches at Watersheddings. Between 1924 and 1927 Oldham appeared in 4 consecutive **Challenge Cup** finals. The first played at Rochdale was lost to Wigan before chaotic crowd scenes. Wigan player, Johnny Ring diving under a patrolling police horse to score a try! In the second final, Oldham beat Hull K.R. at Leeds losing the third to Swinton at Rochdale. Revenge was gained though the following year. This time Oldham beating Swinton at Wigan in the first final broadcast live by the BBC Radio. The record of 4

consecutive final appearances was not broken until the recent domination of Wigan. Oldham, despite near misses have unbelievably never been to the Challenge Cup final since! Come the day!  
**PLAYING HONOURS**  
Over the years there has been a tremendous amount of Oldham representation in both Union and League representative teams. So many Oldham players have been capped by their Counties. England, Wales, Scotland, Ireland, Great Britain, Other Nationalities - even the Cook Islands. It all started with Oldham's only ever England Rugby Union representative, Abe Ashworth in 1892. Abe "the Ox", not long recruited from the local Mossley Union side -

selected for England - v - Ireland at Whalley Range, Manchester.

With the formation of the Great Britain team in 1905 obviously, the pinnacle of achievement was to pull on the red, white and blue jersey! 40 Oldham players have since carved their and the Club's name with pride.

## **THE 1950's FAVOURITE**

Probably the most fondly remembered team ever to wear the club's famous red and white colours, the side of the mid to late 1950's captured the imagination of the Oldham public with their exciting style of fluid, open Rugby. With match-winners scattered throughout the side, the crowds turned up in their thousands to cheer on the "Roughyeds". The 1954-55 season saw the



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# TODAY'S BEARS

club denied twice at the final hurdle of major competitions, firstly to Barrow in the Lancashire Cup Final and then the Championship Final on a rain soaked Maine Road (Manchester City FC) pitch to Warrington.

The club then entered its most successful post-war period with the Lancashire Cup being won in 1956 and retained in 1957 and 1958. The Lancashire League title was also secured in 1956-57 and 1957-58.

The 1957 Championship Final at Odsal Stadium, Bradford was the zenith of achievement for the club in this era when Hull were defeated 15-14 before the largest crowd ever to witness an Oldham match - 62,217.

## THE BEARS TODAY

More than a century since

helping to pioneer the breakaway movement that led to the birth of Rugby League, Oldham RLFC is still among the sport's front-runners as a founder member of Super League.

The borough can be proud of its rugby league heritage... and proud of the now-named Oldham Bears who will be competing in 1997 on the world-wide stage and in full glare of satellite television. On the domestic front they will be flexing their muscles and testing their skills against big-city clubs such as Bradford Bulls, Leeds, London Broncos, Paris St Germain and Sheffield Eagles.

Internationally, they will be competing in the new 22-club

World Club Championship and jetting off to Australia in mid-season to fly the flag for Britain against Adelaide Rams and Western Reds of Perth.

The Oldham Club last won a major trophy nearly 40 years ago, but directors, coaching staff and players are determined to go all out for glory in 1997, starting with the Silk Cut Challenge Cup at the beginning of the year.

The game of rugby league has changed beyond recognition and so has the Club. But some things never change... like the town's support and best wishes as the Bears reach out for the millennium on a global playing field.

Roger Halstead.





# OLDHAM BEARS

# SWINTON LIONS

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Paul Atcheson  
 Scott Ranson  
 Darren Abram  
 Paul Topping  
 Afi Leuila  
 Francis Maloney  
 Martin Crompton  
 Ian Gildart  
 John Clarke  
 Jason Temu  
 Joe Faimalo  
 Gary Lord  
 David Bradbury  
 Mike Neil  
 Paul Davidson  
 Chris McKinney  
 Robert Myler

**Officials**

*Referee -*  
**GRAHAM SHAW**

*Touch Judges -*  
**John Kinsella**  
**Alan Burke**

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**IAN SKEECH**  
**TESTIMONIAL FUND**

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**BOARSHURST BAND**  
*from Greenfield*

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**SCRUMS**

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**PENALTIES**

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**SCRUMS**

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21	22	23	24	25

**PENALTIES**

<b>PROGRESSIVE SCORE</b>										
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<b>PROGRESSIVE SCORE</b>										
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Mark Welsby  
 Andrew Craig  
 Gavin Price Jones  
 Greg Pearce  
 Simon Ashcroft  
 Martin Birkett  
 John Gunning  
 Mark Sheals  
 Carl McCabe  
 Tony Barrow  
 Leo Casey  
 Colin Armstrong  
 Les Holliday  
 Mark Riley  
 Jim Evans  
 Steve Gibson  
 Wes Rogers  
 Dave Hartill  
 Talite Liavaa  
 Chris Diamond  
 Davide Longo  
 Shaun Casey



No more do we swear at Stand Corner,  
Our heads are bowed quite low,  
'Cause Bob our friend has passed away,  
At Watersheddings in the cold, cold snow.

---

On Sunday the groundsman found him,  
And tried respiration to give,  
We heard Bob say in a voice so low,  
"Leave me here, I don't want to bloody well live"

---

And so they have buried him, under the posts,  
Quite near to the Penny Rush Stand,  
With a photo of Alan Davies on his chest,  
And a Wembley ticket clutched in his hand.

"CUP DEFEAT!" circa 1950's  
*Remembered by David Whitehead*



THE END  
OF AN ERA

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