

A Tiding of Magpies

**A Centenary History of Bedford
Athletic RUFC**

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FOREWORD

When I approached the Club Council with a view to writing a Centenary History of Bedford Athletic RUFC I did so in the knowledge that Alan Cox ably abetted by his father Ron had already compiled the history of the first sixty years or so and that therefore the hard part of the work was already done. Indeed my gratitude to Alan and Ron does not end there for had he and his father not had the foresight to deposit Ron's meticulously kept club papers with the Bedfordshire County Record Office this work would have been well nigh impossible. The nature of the first three chapters in telling the story of the club is so intrinsic to the overall history that I feel it is necessary to continue to incorporate the original acknowledgements set out by Alan in the 1970 version which I have done below:

"One of the most rewarding things about carrying out research for this history has been the interest and kindness shown by so many people. This research, I hasten to stress, has been very much a joint effort between my father and me. As there are no club minutes for the period before the 1914-18 War, we have relied on three sources. First we have collected personal reminiscences, and although most of the founder members are now dead we were fortunate enough to make contact with one, Mr. H. Barratt, who is not only alive and well but has a remarkable memory. He gave us a very full picture of the first two or three years of the club's existence. We have also spoken to three other pre-First World War members, Messrs J. Foster. W. Foster and F. Osbourn. We are also grateful to the relatives of other founder members, in particular Mrs. W. Hills, Mrs. A. E. Wilson, Mrs. B. J. Catlin and Mr. F. C. Catlin. Though never regular Athletic players, Messrs H. G. C. Clarke and S. Perry were able to recall something of its early history both before and after the War.

Secondly we have sifted through local newspapers, the Bedford & County Record, Bedford & District Circular, Bedford & District Evening News, Bedford Guardian, Bedfordshire Mercury, Bedfordshire Standard and Bedfordshire Times and Independent, for reports and references to the Athletic. In doing this we made use of the facilities provided at the British Museum Newspaper Library, the Bedfordshire County Record Office and the reference room of the Bedford Public Library, and are grateful to the staff of each for their kind co-operation. Thirdly, since a considerable number of games took place in those early years between the Athletic and the Bedford and Bedford Modern Schools, we consulted the respective school magazines, The Ousel and The Eagle. In connection with these our thanks go to Messrs. F. M. Fletcher and S. H. Clarke. Finally we are indebted to Major General A. MacLennan O.B.E. (Retd.) of the R.A.M.C. Historical Museum, for information concerning the Bedford Bearer Company.

As there are no minutes from the re-forming in 1920 until the second half of 1923, we have again turned to local newspaper reports and personal reminiscences. We are particularly grateful to Messrs. H. F. G. Tucker, J. C. MacCulloch, and A. E. Sharman who gave us details of the re-founding. Other former players who helped us are Messrs F. E. and S. C. Lowe, T. Northern, N. J. Timmins and G. Wright. From 1923 the club has an almost full set of minutes and we have relied upon these extensively. However, material loaned by Messrs. H. Osbourn, L. F. Phypers and A. E. Sharman has been invaluable. Two members of the Bedford RUFC., Messrs. L. A. R. Fensome and the late E. M. King, also provided information about the 1920s. Messrs F. King and F. Paice were able to supply details of the Athletic cricket section, which ran from 1922 to 1926. For help on a number of points we must thank Mr. D. Bowker, Sports Editor of The Bedfordshire Times.

In conclusion we express our sincere thanks to the subscribers, and particularly to Mr. R. F. V. Armour, who has organised the appeal and handled the financial side."

I in turn benefited from a great number of sources in writing the Centenary edition in 2008. Like Alan and Ron I drew extensively on local newspaper reports since 1970 namely the following publications:

Bedfordshire Times 1970 – 1995

Bedford Times & Citizen 1995 - 2003

Bedfordshire on Sunday 1977 – 2003

Bedford Journal 1982 – 1986

Bedford Herald 1986 – 1998

Bedford & Kempston Express 1982 – 1990

Bedford & Kempston Citizen 1990 – 1995

In addition I was also able to make use of a large amount of material made available to me by club members all of whom have their own recollections and mementos of the relevant years. For the Centenary edition Mick Bowden, David August, John and Jean Ross, Digger Timothy, John Plumb, Bernie Mulhall, and most of all Bob Ingledew provided me with relevant information and prodded me in the right direction over a number of issues. The personality of Ron Cox remains high in the consideration of what makes this history possible. Were it not for his inexhaustible record keeping, his foresight in depositing his collection of materials in the public record and indeed his endeavours with Alan in writing the first version of this book, no further publications would be possible. Although I never met him it says much for the character and dedication of the man that in this manner he continued to assist the club after his departure from this life.

Now that we come to the third edition of this history in the club's 111th year the approach is a little different. This is a story that I am telling in the first person, derived in my case from many hours of (literally) running up and down the touchline following the Bedford Athletic side, writing reports and sharing with them their hopes and expectations and when appropriate their sufferings and jubilations. I have left certain elements of the centenary history behind, for instance the Introduction to that book ... it's job is done, it's story has been told. Alan Cox's foreword also now takes an honourable position in the annals of the club records. In writing this third edition losing a third person perspective may mean to a degree that an element of bias may be introduced. I make no apologies ... I can only relay matters as I perceive them.

I believe that this is a story that merits continuity in the telling. Each generation picks up the mantle of the challenge laid down by the one before. Some successfully ... some not so. As of the end of the 2018-19 season Bedford Athletic had played 2,920 first team matches winning 1,496. The most important fact is that they go on playing matches and that the fourth and fifth editions of this book are required and many beyond. Because that is how we will best honour the inaugural meeting of the club at the King's Arms in St. Mary's Street on 16 April 1908 where a group of men who were like "a lot of old magpies" formed a rugby club and called it Bedford Athletic.

Jeremy Tyrrell

Summer 2019.

The Early Years: 1908-1914

“Bedford Athletic RFC is the name of the new club that has been formed to take the place of the R.A.M.C..... The club’s ground is opposite to the ‘Park Hotel’, Kimbolton Road, and their jersey colours are to be black and white”.

(Bedfordshire Standard, 4 September 1908)

Thus did one local newspaper announce the founding of the Bedford Athletic rugby club in 1908, but as the report suggests, indirectly the club’s history goes back even further for it was born out of the rugby section of the Bedford Bearer Company, Royal Army Medical Corps (Volunteers). The Bearer Company had its headquarters and social club at 60 Park Road West; drilled on the Bedford Modern School field; and played rugby on Bedford Park. The first game they ever played seems to have been on 30 September 1905 when they lost to Kempston ‘A’ by 3 points to 9. Most of the “Rams” as they were nick-named, were young working men who had not been to rugby playing schools and must have learnt the game with the Volunteers. Not surprisingly, many of them came from the network of streets around Park Road. Such was the enthusiasm that from 1906 two sides were run, and fixtures included Bedford School 2nds (then known as the Grammar School), Bedford ‘A’, now the Wanderers, Luton and Olney. In 1908 however the Volunteers were superseded by the Territorial Army system, which required members to enlist for a longer term of service and, in the case of the local R.A.M.C., its headquarters were to be moved to Luton. These two factors caused mass resignations from the Bearer Company, and the last recorded game played by the “Rams” took place on 4 April, 1908, when they drew 3-all with Northampton St. Giles.

If the ex-Rams wished to continue playing rugby they had either to join another local club, and at this time there were only two alternatives, the Town ‘A’ or Kempston, or they had to form another club. This they did at an inaugural meeting at the “King’s Arms”, St. Mary’s, on Thursday 16 April, 1908. A number of possible names were considered, “Ramblers”, “Rovers”, “Harlequins”, “Barbarians”, and why the name “Athletic” was finally adopted is not entirely clear, though possibly it was because a number of the members were also keen athletes (it seems to have had no connection with a “Bedford Athletic” soccer club which was running as early as 1904). It was felt that some change should be made from the old red jerseys of the R.A.M.C. and after some discussion, according to a founder member, someone said “We are like a lot of old magpies, so why not black and white?” W.C. Chalker, who had only just left Elstow School where he played in the first XV and had played for the R.A.M.C. as a schoolboy, was elected Captain. His vice-captain, Walter Churchman, and the first Hon. Secretary, Arthur Leach (known as “Shaver”), had also both played for the “Rams”. J. Foster, G. Wrenn, F. Kingston, A.E. Wilson, and H.C. Baker, made up the first committee, while Ronnie Maclear, who had captained the Town side in 1905-06 agreed to coach club members.

As mentioned in the opening quotation, the first pitch used by Bedford Athletic was in Kimbolton Road, opposite the Park Hotel, on a field owned by Mr. Harry Sell, adjacent to the cycle track, which was also used for rugby by other local clubs particularly the Town ‘A’. The playing surface was not good, for after one game it was reported: “The Athletic ground is a far from ideal one for football; the rough ridges prevented anything like good running, even if the players had the chance”. Changing was provided at the Park Hotel, where barrels sawn in half served as baths (little wonder that many players preferred to turn up in kit).



The inaugural Bedford Athletic team from 1908-09

Back row: J. Foster; G. Wren; F. Kingston; A.E.Wilson; H.C.Baker.

Middle row: J. Bryant; C. Percy; W.Scott; G. Pilgrim; L.Smith; C.Hall; C.R.B. Walker; B.Whaley.

Front row: P. Haynes; E. Childs; W. Churchman; W.C.Chalker (cap); A. Leach (Hon Sec); R.Mayes; W.Hills.

Seated on floor: A.F.Dennis; B.Catlin

The first practice took place on this ground on Saturday 5 September, and the fact that the Athletic had a full fixture list suggests that they took over an existing one made for the "Rams". From the beginning an 'A' team was also run, and indeed the first ever match against outside opposition was an 'A' team game against the Grammar School 3rd XV on 26 September, 1908, when the School playing on their own ground, won 24 points to 3. The earliest match to be played at 1st XV level was against Northampton Athletic on 10th October 1908, resulting in a loss, 17 points to nil., the Bedfordshire Times recording it as a "rough and brutal game". The next week the first team played the Grammar School 2nd XV and the team selected was: W.Hills; C. Whaley, R. Mayes, W. Churchman, B. Catlin; E. Childs, D. Dennis; A. Leach, S. Pearcey, W.C. Chalker, W. Bryant, P. Haynes, L. Smith, C. Hall, G. Pilgrim. This indicates that already the 'Ath' was beginning to broaden its base, for although the majority of the team was ex-"Rams" at least three, Bryant, Hills and Whaley, were former Kempston players, and the latter had also played for the Town senior side. It also shows they were continuing to employ the "New Zealand" formation adopted by the R.A.M.C. from 1906. In this formation the forwards packed 2-3-2 with the single wing-forward putting the ball into the scrum and the single half-back waiting to collect it from the back of the scrum. Behind him were a first and second five-eighth, a centre and two wings. It is probable that the "Rams" adopted this formation after seeing the 1905 All-Blacks team play at Bedford.

A succession of victories followed, culminating in a local derby, away to Kempston, who played on a ground in Spring Road, Kempston. The Bedford Mercury reported:

“Both teams were very keen on winning the match, and as there were one or two Kempston players in the ranks of the Athletic, considerable feeling was at times displayed. To get a jersey ripped off one’s back was of no importance, and hard knocks were expected - and freely given. The Athletic, who have only been beaten once this season, had a very useful pack of forwards, and it was mainly owing to their exertions that victory eventually rested with their side. Twice Kempston took the lead; the game continued most exciting all through, and it was not until near the close that the visitors gained the winning try

The final result was 9 points to 6 in the Ath’s favour. During the rest of the season they sustained only two further defeats, one against a side raised by a contemporary Town player, A.V. Manton, on Boxing day, and the other, with a side depleted by injury, against the Grammar School 2nd XV. Their most notable victory was over Olney, who then still played the Town.

The season was summed up by the Bedfordshire Mercury in these words:

“This, the first season of the Bedford Athletic club, has been a very successful one. Of the 17 matches played they have won 13, drawn 1, and lost 3; with points for 298, and against 76. Their victories have been over the Grammar School 2nd XV (twice), Northampton St. Giles’, Northampton St. Crispin’s, Northampton St. George’s (Northants Cup holders), Elstow School, Kempston (twice), United Schools, Bedford ‘A’, Olney, Northern Nomads and Mr. McNeil’s XV. The drawn game was at the second meeting of the Town ‘A’, and they lost to Mr. Manton’s XV by two points, and to the Grammar School 2nd XV by the odd point. The scorers have been: - W. Churchman 8, E. Childs, A. Leach and W.J. Bryant, 7; C. Whaley and Mayes, 6; Chalker 5; Burder and B. Catlin, 4; G. Pilgrim, D. Denis, C. Pearcey, Haynes and L. Smith, 2; A.D. Heard, Willett, G. Wrenn, F. Kingston, Hall, Stokes and Booth, one each. There were three dropped goals, one of which was credited to Churchman in the last match.”

All that need be added is that the defeat so judiciously omitted was that already mentioned, against Northampton Athletic, and the remarkable fact that on the 14th November 1908, three sides were fielded, the ‘B’ losing to Bedford Modern School 2nd XV by 3 points to 8.

This first season then, proved one of the most successful in the club’s history and immediately established the ‘Ath’ as the leading junior club in Bedford. Yet it was not without its difficulties. Suitable fixtures were hard to find in these early days for relatively few junior clubs existed and games were frequently scratched. This problem was further aggravated by the lack of funds which ruled out long journeys (the furthest the Athletic travelled in their opening season was to Northampton). Even so, the club clearly experienced financial difficulties for two benefit games were arranged towards the end of the season, not altogether with great success since of one it was said: “..... only a few people paid the low admission fee charged to aid the funds of the Athletic club, many preferring to stand on the roadside where they could obtain a good view of the game for nothing”. Although players had to provide all their kit, including jerseys, and paid their own fares to away games, they paid no match fees and few could even afford to pay a subscription. Admittedly running costs were low, for no teas were given and selection cards were often unnecessary, since members could usually be contacted at either the “Cross Keys” or the “King’s Arms”, but the rent for the pitch had to be found and a ball provided. The ‘Ath’ must have felt very fortunate to finish the season with a balance in hand of one pound, fifteen shillings and three pence.

The first Annual General Meeting was held at the “King’s Arms” on Monday 28 June 1909 when Churchman was elected Captain, Chalker vice-captain, and Leach continued as

Secretary. A proposal that 'Ath' should join the Northampton League was rejected. Season 1909-10 seemed to promise further success, but things soon began to go wrong. During the previous season there had been considerable dissatisfaction about selection, and very quickly after the beginning of the season this manifested itself, the Athletic 'A' team breaking away to form a separate club, "Bedford Harlequins". On top of this the 'Ath', lost some of its leading players to the Town, including Churchman, who, with the agreement of the 'Ath' resigned as captain. Chalker took over, but left Bedford at the beginning of 1910 and Leach the Secretary, resigned due to ill health and the pressure of business in February 1910. It is hardly surprising to read that in November 1909: "The Bedford Athletic journeyed to Olney on Saturday with only three parts of a team as only eleven turned up". Even so, at the end of the same month the 'Ath' were able to give the Town 'A' a sound beating by 30 points to nil, and the next week hold a strong Kempston side to a draw. Little is known of the second half of this season: a number of games were scratched because of frost and shortage of players, and the overall record must have been very poor. In April 1910 the Athletic were strongly represented in a Bedfordshire side which played Northamptonshire, and was organized and captained by Leach.

The 'Ath's second AGM took place on July 22nd 1910 at the "King's Arms". By now the balance in hand had dwindled to six shillings and seven pence, so for the first time a treasurer was appointed in the person of H. Baker. C. Chamberlain was elected captain and W. Whaley vice-captain but by the end of November although both of them were still in the team, Billy Hills is described as captain (in fact he had taken over as such from Chalker the previous season and appears as Captain on both the 1909-10 and 1910-11 photographs). Leach had been succeeded as Honorary Secretary by George Wrenn, former secretary of the "Rams" and Wrenn was again elected with a vote of thanks. The possibility of using a field in Cardington Road was investigated but came to nothing, and the Kimbolton Road ground continued to be used. An optimistic note was sounded in the Bedfordshire Standard for 23 September 1910:

"The Athletic have set their mind on bringing their club back to that state of excellence which it revealed a couple of years back. Last season things were allowed to slide and a bad year was recorded Mr. Wrenn, the club's persevering secretary, has arranged some good fixtures, and the wealth of talent at his disposal should get together a powerful XV".

But the season did not go too well at first and there were defeats at the hands of Elstow school, the Grammar School 'A', the Town 'A' and Kempston. However, after Christmas things began to look up and decisions were reversed against the latter three clubs. Of the game against the Town 'A' the Mercury reported:

"Having been soundly thrashed at their last meeting, the Athletic were panting for revenge, and they got it too, well deserving their victory, for judging on the play as a whole they were the better team. Both teams turned out their strongest sides, and a battle royal of the most robust order was witnessed".

The Athletic team on this occasion is given as "Bryant, back; Perry, Churchman, Barrett and Whaley, three-quarters; Catlin and Foster, halves; Pilgrim (wing), Mills, Course, Osborn, Sanders, Harrison, Pacey and Hills, forwards". During the second half of the 1910-11 season they were unbeaten, scoring 203 points and conceding only 3.

The beginning of the next season saw an important change for the Club when it was announced that:

"Owing to their old ground on the Kimbolton Road not being available, Bedford Athletic have had to look for a new pitch; this has been found and for this season they will play on the

Chaucer Road ground, which, though a bit out of the way, is an excellent one from a playing point of view”.

This ground had previously been used by Bedford Harlequins and was situated at the northern end of Chaucer Road, which is now built up. An old player recalls that there was a barbed wire fence dangerously close to the pitch, and that at least one player received serious injuries because of this. Local players again normally went changed, but changing facilities were provided at the Turkish baths in Ashburnham Road.

At the time the Athletic received some coaching from Ronald Maclear’s more famous brother, Captain Basil Maclear, a former Irish international. They certainly seem to have benefitted from this, for 1911-12 proved another successful season, with only three losses. The match against the Town ‘A’ was again a fierce one, according to the Mercury:

“The referee brought the game to an abrupt conclusion some minutes before time owing to the squabbling which both sets of players indulged in”.

And the Bedfordshire Standard added:

“Both teams allege unfair tactics against each other”.

As a result the Town ‘A’ refused to play the ‘Ath’ for a considerable period after this. The most notable victory of the season was a 3-0 win over Northampton Progressives on 17th February which, according to the Standard was:

“The best performance of Athletic’s career. Played at Dallington Park and the Progressives were reinforced by East Midlands, Northampton, Coventry and Leicester players”.

The 1912 AGM was held in July at the “King’s Arms”. Ronald Maclear presided over the meeting and was presented with a silver cigarette case for all his services to the club. The Secretary, George Wrenn reported that there was now a balance in hand of one pound, five shillings. The Standard of 6th September predicted a good season for the Athletic:

“Local junior rugby clubs come and go but the Athletic make their appearance regularly every season with a sound team. Invariably they have a surplus of wins over losses. The club is rapidly establishing itself as the best of the local junior clubs, and this season they are likely to do better than ever”.

And so they did. By the beginning of December 1912 their record stood at Played 10, Won 10, Points For 278, Points Against 22, and so impressive were their performances that they began to be regarded as challengers to the Senior side and it was remarked that “a game between them and the Town would provide a fine game”. The Athletic were not beaten until Boxing Day when they lost heavily to a very strong side of past and present Old Bedfordians, the “Bedford Ousels”, raised by Ronald Maclear and including his brother Basil. The final record was: Played 20, Won 18, Drawn 1, Lost 1, Points For 485, Points Against 64; the best season ever enjoyed by the Athletic prior to the advent of leagues. It is not known whether a match planned to take place on 4th January between the Athletic and a team of “old Athletic men”, which was to be followed by a dinner, ever took place.

At the 1913 AGM it was reported that the Athletic had received a grant of three pounds from the East Midlands RFU and were going to affiliate to the Union. The 1913-14 season was to be the last before the outbreak of the First World War, but in fact before the season was over the Athletic had ceased to exist as a separate club. Fred Booth, captain during two very successful seasons, and George Wrenn, after four years as Secretary both resigned. Wrenn’s successor Charles Pearcey, soon also had to give up because of business commitments. This

left the new Captain, J.S. Smith to carry on alone but unfortunately he in turn left for Madiera towards the end of January 1914. Up to this time the Athletic appear to have lost only two games, one of which was on the club's very first visit to London to play the 2nd Lifeguards (which George Pilgrim, a founder member, had joined a couple of years before).

Their last recorded team (for a match against the Bedford Harlequins on 2nd January, ironically the team that had split from the 'Ath ranks several years before) was: Sawyer; Churchman, Kilby, R.Perkins, J. Clear; S. Brooks, B.Catlin; B. Osborne, F. Harrison, 'Doc' Mills, G. Saunders, S.D. Canvin, J. Litchfield, B. Mackinder, F. Smith, and the last recorded game was against Olney on 10th January when they won by 6 points to nil. The next week it was reported that they were unable to raise a side to play Northampton Progressives. The Standard for the 6th February announced:

"The long talked of joining forces of the Bedford 'A' team and Bedford Athletic is now an accomplished fact, and for the rest of the season the combination will fulfil the engagements of the 'A' team. This is undoubtedly a move in the right direction, for out of the two teams a particularly strong XV should be got together".

Both teams had been experiencing great difficulty in raising a side (the fact that another local club, the Bedford Corinthians, had started in 1913-14 may have aggravated these difficulties) and the occasion of this amalgamation seems likely to have been a fixture between the two teams on 31st January 1914, when in all probability neither could raise a side. Certainly on 7 February five Athletic players appeared for the Town senior side, and another eight played for the Town 'A'. An 'A' side at the beginning of March included no less than eleven Athletic players, and they continued to be well represented until the end of the season. In view of this it may be asked why the Athletic merged with the Town 'A' and not the other way around? Probably because of financial reasons and the fact that the Athletic had lost all their officials. Whether this amalgamation was intended to be permanent or not is unknown, for the outbreak of the First World War brought an end to local rugby.

The Inter-War Years: 1920-1939

“It is interesting to learn that a new rugby club for Bedford was formed on Wednesday, to be called the Bedford Athletic. The name will be remembered as that of probably the most promising junior rugby club ever organised in Bedford, some twelve years ago”. (Bedfordshire Times, 17 September 1920)

It took local rugby some time to recover from the First World War, and even by 1920 there was still no open junior side in Bedford. The Town were fielding a Senior team, but had not yet regained the use of their ground at Goldington Road and attempts to run an “A” side soon failed. The only other rugby club was Queen’s Works (formed in 1919), which did not accept outside members. This fact their secretary Stanley Clarke, had to regretfully convey to two young men who had just left the Bedford Modern School, A.E. Sharman and H.F.G. Tucker, but he did suggest that they might get together and form their own club. Following this Tucker met two older men: R.C. Adkin who had played for the Town, and J.C. MacCulloch, who had belonged to the “Corinthians”, another local pre-war club. The three of them had another meeting in “The Bull” (in Silver Street), at which they received the encouragement and the promise of financial assistance from the landlord, Frank Wright, and from Arthur Gell, owner for many years of a cycle shop in Harpur Street. Finally at a more formal meeting at Ham’s Restaurant, Silver Street on 15 September 1920, the Bedford Athletic rugby club was formed. Adkin was elected captain; Tucker, Hon. Secretary; and Gell, Hon. Treasurer.

However as the opening quotation suggests, there was some ambiguity as to whether this was a continuation of the old Athletic club or an entirely new venture. All the leading officials had had little or no contact with the Athletic before the War and no attempt was made to contact old members or officials. This naturally wrangled with George Wrenn, Secretary for much of the pre-War era, and those who knew him recall that he fiercely maintained that this was a new club having no connection with the old. When subsequently approached for the old minute books he refused to give them up and unfortunately they have since disappeared. Indeed as late as 1929, on 1 September the Bedfordshire Times published a letter from Wrenn in which he said: “...it has also been stated that the Athletic are celebrating their twenty-first anniversary. This is not the case, as the present Club was formed after the War, and there is no link whatsoever between the old and the new Clubs. The old Athletic were defunct in 1914”. Equally many of the new members shared Wrenn’s view, and Sharman, looking back in Rugger in 1932 said: “The first Bedford Athletic was founded in 1908, but the club we know was formed in 1920”. The choice of name seems fortuitous, although there was probably some memory of the old club. Certainly whereas the pre-war players had largely come from a working class non-rugby background, the post-war Athletic was very firmly based upon ex-Modern schoolboys. Even the adoption of the same colours may have been accidental, and in any case for the first three years white jerseys were worn (for reasons of economy, since most of the members being O.B.M.’s already had a white jersey from their schooldays); although the club colours are given as black and white in the 1921-22 fixture card, and in that season the Club purchased pairs of black and white stockings for resale to members. Yet, in spite of all of this, continuity was maintained by a number of old players who re-joined the Athletic, amongst them “Doc” Mills, “Ginger” Sanders, Wally Foster, Benny Catlin and J. Lichfield.

The very first match to be played in 1920 was on 2 October at Bedford School against the School 2nd XV, when the team was: G. Wright; A. Saint, R.R. Rose, J.M. Bowick, C.A.E.C. Howard; F.C. Davis, J.C. MacCulloch; R.C. Adkin, J.J. Gracie, H.C. Nicholls, J. Lichfield. J.W. Sanders, D.H. Mills, S. Perry, H.F.G. Tucker. The result was a win, 27 points to 8. At first all games had to be played away, but the use of a pitch in Bedford Park, situated near the lake, was soon obtained. Changing was provided at Ham’s Restaurant, or sometimes the Park Hotel. Teas were not normally given as most of the fixtures were local. Things went well and

towards the end of October an "A" side was started, including A.H. "Jamie" Greenwood, who was to go on and gain a trial cap for England. The Club received coaching from a former Town player, G.U.A. Read, and at the end of 1920 it was reported that:

"... a ray of hope for the Rugby game of the future in Bedford is the splendid progress being made by the Athletic Club, for this enthusiastic band of youngsters has had a wonderfully fine season up to date and we are informed that not withstanding the fact that on only two occasions has a 'gate' been taken the Club is financially strong – so much so that the committee were able to devote the takings of the Boxing Day game to the Bedford County Hospital, and an excellent sum of money was obtained. Mr. A.C. Powell, Bedford Modern School headmaster, who is President of the Club, takes great interest in its doings..."

By the end of the season the newly formed club could claim to have lived up to the reputation of its predecessor, for all the local sides: Bedford School 2nd XV, Bedford Modern School, Queen's Works, Igranic, Royal Engineers (T.A.), R.A.F. Henlow, and Olney, had all either been beaten or held to a draw.

The 1921 AGM augured well for the Athletic with an attendance of 40 including 38 playing members. All the leading officials were re-elected and at a subsequent committee meeting a set of club rules were drawn up. However, hopes of obtaining another ground were frustrated, but during the season the Club did obtain the occasional use of the ground behind the "Fox and Hounds", at that time normally used by the Town, and on such occasions an admission charge was made to defray running costs. It has to be remembered that the annual subscription had to be lowered from 7 shillings and sixpence to five shillings because the Town only charged six shillings and sixpence. No match fees were levied. In addition the Club generally paid half the fare for away games, but this could still be expensive for the individual member. For instance, when the Athletic travelled to Leicester to play Aylestone each player had to pay five shillings return rail fare.

Once again the proceeds (amounting to 14 guineas) from the Boxing Day game against a United Schools XV were donated to the County Hospital, and this charity match continued as an annual event for much of the early years of the club's existence. In March 1922 the Athletic made a little bit of history at Leighton Buzzard when they took two sides over to Cedar's School; the first game of rugby to be played there. Overall 1921-22 was quite a successful season, especially considering the fact that the club lost its captain Adkin, and its vice-captain, C.A.E.C. Howard, to the Town and that at least on one occasion no less than five Athletic players were selected for the Town, who were still experiencing difficulties, having only just regained their Goldington Road ground, which was still in a bad condition. In fact one of the avowed reasons for founding the Athletic in 1920 was to provide support for the Senior side and a resolution to "back-up" the Town as occasion required was passed at the 1921 AGM. As this was coupled with a proviso that there was no chance of amalgamation, it seems that the Bedford club had made some approach about joining forces. Certainly some members seem to have been unhappy with the situation which was further aggravated by the reforming during 1921-22 of the Town "A" side, and at the annual dinner the Town captain, Nicholson, made a special point of assuring Athletic members that the Senior club wished to be on good terms with them.

The summer of 1922 saw the Athletic embarking on a new venture. A cricket section had been formed at a meeting in January, with K.R. Mackley as Secretary, and B.J. Catlin as captain, and a side was entered in the Bedford and District Cricket League. In 1924 they won the Second Division Trophy, and continued to play in the league until 1926, after which the section ceased to exist.

One of the things which had seriously hampered the Athletic during the first two seasons was the lack of their own ground, but for the 1922-23 season they finally managed to rent the ground owned by Mr. A. Cave behind the "Fox and Hounds" in Goldington Road, where changing accommodation was provided by the publican, Mr. C. Jacques. Teas, when given, continued to be provided by Mr. McKenzie at Ham's Restaurant. Of this pitch a former player recalls "There was a pond which encroached on the north-east corner of the field to include the corner flag, and sometimes the ball floated knee high". In spite of the improved conditions the season was a very poor one from the playing point of view, and the prospects for 1923-24 seemed very dismal when the AGM was called in August. Doubts were expressed as to whether the club could carry on for another season due to the lack of interest amongst members and because of the financial difficulties. It was even suggested that the Town might take over the fixtures and run an Extra "A". The Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer, all refused to stand for re-election. It seemed that again the Athletic might go out of existence, but luckily a strong personality appeared on the scene in the person of Horace Hauberg and as secretary for the next seven years he steered the club safely through a period of development and expansion. He had played for the Athletic before the War, but more recently had been turning out for the Town "A" and perhaps because of this he seems to have healed the rift which had grown up between the Athletic and the Town, for this is the last AGM at which grievances against the Town were aired.

In 1925 the Bedford Athletic RFC were first elected to the Rugby Football Union (RFU). Having continued to use the "Fox and Hounds" ground where an admission fee for spectators of four pence was charged, the Athletic now found itself once more without a pitch. Luckily they managed to rent a pitch from Bedford Corporation at Newnham Lane (now Newnham Avenue) with permission to erect a hut as a dressing room. Until this was completed the "Fox and Hounds" was still used for changing. The hut was first used on 2 January 1926 although for some years it had no lighting or water supply. The move immediately seems to have boosted the playing standard, for 1925-26 proved the most successful season of the 1920s. Whereas the previous season the First XV had lost 16 of 25 games, in 1925-26 with the same total they lost only four, and were unbeaten at home. Undoubtedly their best win was over Northampton "A" (now Wanderers) when the team (not shown by position) was : J.B. Ashton, E.G. Eeles, H.W. Ward, F.J. Barcock, S.C. Lowe, R.G. Richardson, P.H. Sharpe, L.F. Phypers, A.H. Phypers, W.H.R. Street (captain), G. Wright, W.H. Whitbread, N.J. Timmins, W.S. Owen, H.R. Hailstone. Further benefits were felt in the next season, 1926-27 when a regular third side, the "B" were formed.

Up to 1926 all Athletic games were refereed by old players such as for example, W.F. "Jimmie" Bryant, a founder member of the Club, who did much of the refereeing for the 1924-25 season. (He subsequently acted as the club's groundsman at Newnham Avenue until 1939, a remarkable span of service never properly recognised due to the outbreak of the war). In 1926 the Athletic first affiliated to the recently formed East Midland's Referees Society. In spite of this former players and club officials still had to be called upon to do some first team games, and this often tended to be a cause of friction with opponents. It was not until 1937-38 that it could be reported that "practically all" first XV games were covered by the Referees' Society.

For the rest of the 1920s the Athletic enjoyed an unaccustomed period of stability, the only change of note being the transfer from November 1928 of the club headquarters from Ham's Restaurant to the "Silver Grill" in the High Street. 1930 brought not only a new decade but a new Secretary, for Hauberg resigned to become Chairman of the Club, and was succeeded by Captain E.H.G. Chambers who it seems was specifically invited to fill the post since he had little or no contact with the Club prior to this. He had been secretary of the Town club in the early 1920s. He was a great enthusiast, particularly active in recruiting new young players and during his term of office the Athletic continued to expand while important improvements were made to the facilities. In the summer of 1932 modifications were carried out on the hut and

included the installation of hot water. Perhaps as a consequence of this a fourth team, the Extra "A" was started in November and on at least one occasion in December a fifth side was fielded. At the beginning of 1933 largely at the instigation of Captain Chambers, a scheme was launched for the leveling of the Newnham Avenue ground and in doing so provide some work for some of the many unemployed. Incidentally the annual rent for this ground was fifteen pounds at the time, for two pitches, but this was raised to twenty-five pounds the next season, when an extra pitch was provided.

Captain Chambers appears to have been interested in investigating the history of the club and from 1930 the founding date was acknowledged to be 1908. In contrast to this traditionalism an attempt was made at the 1932 AGM to delete the word "Athletic" from the name of the club since it was felt that it sounded like an Association Football club. This was defeated and the name has remained unchanged ever since.

Captain Chambers did not stand for re-election in 1934 and so Horace Hauberg took on again for another two years until he left Bedford in 1936. By this time a number of other clubs had been formed in Bedford and the surrounding area, and the Athletic found themselves reduced to three sides. During the 1936-37 season they even had difficulty in running a third side. John Penson-Whitaker had now taken over as Secretary and when he became landlord of "The Windsor" in Silver Street in 1938 this became the Athletic's headquarters (not for the last time history was repeating itself, for the pub was built on the site of a former headquarters, Ham's Restaurant).

The 1938-39 season was overshadowed by anxieties about the future of the Newnham Avenue ground, for plans were announced involving the widening of the road and possible building development. It was evident that such a scheme would mean moving the Athletic's hut and might also lead to the curtailment of the playing area. Throughout the season long negotiations with the Borough Surveyor went on about alternative sites and compensation for moving the hut. The outbreak of the War prevented housing development, but eventually the hut was dismantled and sold for twenty pounds.

War also meant that the 1939-40 season never started, and at a committee meeting held on 3 July 1940 the club's affairs were wound up for the duration of the war and the records and photographs were stored at "The Windsor". What successes this season would have brought for the Athletic we shall never know, but it is obvious the club had reached yet another peak of excellence. The previous years had seen a gradual improvement in the First XV record culminating in 1938-39 when they were unbeaten at home and lost only three games out of 26. The last game to be played before the outbreak of the War was against a touring side, Old Mid-Whitgiftians on 7 April 1939. It was a very close game, but the Athletic just managed to retain their home record by winning 12 points to 8. The team on that occasion was: Burnage; Kilborn, Scrivener, Thompson, Clarke; Rogers, Sharman; Cross, Tookey, Barker, Lay, Phypers, Dudley-Ward, Catlin, Tory.

By way of conclusion it is worth recalling some of the outstanding players of this inter-war period. One thinks immediately of the families: the Wrights (George and Frank, both formidable players who made appearances in first class rugby, George as club captain and Hon. Secretary in 1923-24, while their father Frank Senior helped with the re-founding in 1920); the Greenwoods (F.C. and A.H. "Jamie" Greenwood who was an England triallist and played in the famous 1930 East Midlands XV, the only side to beat the South African tourists. Their father Arthur Greenwood was a staunch committee man and the Athletic's first life member); the Osbourn's (Alf Osbourn a pre First World War Town player who helped the Athletic in the early 20s and his sons Bert, a life member, Reg, nicknamed "Wigan", and Edgar); and the Phypers brothers (Frank, whose association with the club began in 1920, who was club captain 1926-32 and again 1935-36, and who was a life member, and Alec, for

several years Treasurer of the club). Other notable players were : R.C. Brumwell who first played for the Athletic as a fourteen year old schoolboy against St. Ives in January 1924, and went on to gain a trial cap for England and played with Greenwood in the East Midlands XV against the 1930 South Africans; G.T. "Beef" Dancer, who was awarded his first XV colours in 1928, played for the Barbarians and toured with the 1938 British Lions in South Africa; W.H.R. Street, captain of the Athletic 1926-27, who won an East Midlands cap but was tragically killed in South Africa; Ronnie Eidsforth who gained his club colours in 1928 and was awarded county caps by both the East Midlands and the Eastern Counties; N.L. Dudley-Ward, who won a Welsh trial cap; and Iorwerth Evans, a Welsh international who finished his playing days with the Athletic. If it had not been for the War no doubt there would have been others, but many fine players in their prime went away to return as veterans. Some never returned.



The East Midlands and Leicestershire side that defeated South Africa 30 points to 21 at Leicester on November 14, 1931. A.H. Greenwood (third from left in back row) and R.C. Brumwell (last on the right in the middle row) were both Bedford Athletic members. It was the only South African defeat of their tour.

The Post-War Years: 1945-1970

“A season that can never be forgotten – Peace, after six years of War – and a hope that it will mark the beginning of a better world for all mankind”

(Hon Secretary's Report, 1945-46)

Many junior rugby clubs never restarted after the Second World War, and Bedford Athletic were particularly unfortunate as their Secretary John Penson-Whitaker, had been killed in the War. However, thanks to the prompt action of a group of players and officials the Athletic quickly re-formed and has never looked back since. As early as 24 June 1945 an emergency committee was held at the home of Jack Voyce, chairman of the club at the time when the war broke out, and now elected as acting-secretary. It was decided that if possible two sides should be run. The acting-secretary began building up a fixture list and in spite of the difficulties and chaos caused by the War he had succeeded in arranging 19 fixtures by the beginning of September. The Newnham Avenue pitch was not available as yet, but the Igranic Sports Club offered the use of their ground, and this was gratefully accepted. The annual subscription was kept at the pre-War level of 10 shillings and sixpence, but a weekly match fee was introduced. The AGM was not held until October 31 1945, and took place at “The Windsor”. Having stood in silence to the memory of those killed in the War, thirteen in total, the measures already taken were confirmed, including the appointment of Voyce as secretary. Finally the following resolution was carried unanimously: “That Messrs. J.J. Voyce, R.F.V. Armour and D. Murkett be elected Honorary Life Members of the Club for their services to the Club and their efforts in getting the Club active again”.

The first game against Oundle School away, took place on 29 September 1945 the result being a 39-0 loss. However, the season proved successful, for although only one side was run it won 18 of its 24 games. The Boxing day game in aid of the Hospital, raised a record amount of twenty seven pounds, twelve shillings and nine pence, and the season ended with a Victory and Reunion dinner which was attended by 64 members and guests.

The next season 1946-47 saw the return of the Athletic to Newnham Avenue and after long negotiations the use of a hut, formerly owned by the National Fire service and situated in Barker's Lane adjacent to the Newnham pitch was obtained. With modifications carried out by the Chairman, Frank Phypers, and Bert Osbourn, the hut provided a very handy clubhouse and changing room. The Club now adopted the system of hiring coaches for all out of town matches. The season was particularly memorable for the very bad winter, during which no less than ten First XV games were lost through frost, snow or floods.

Several seasons went by with the First XV enjoying a consistently good record, but 1949 was saddened by the death of Cyril Prigmore, a fine winger, who had played for Bedford and Northampton. Until 1949 the Club had to provide its own referees for all matches, but in season 1949-50 the East Midlands Referees Society started to provide referees again for First XV matches and for “A” XV fixtures as well. From this time onwards the Athletic has been gratefully in the debt of this Society, who now appoint officials to all fixtures the Club plays each week (unless the RFU make the appointment for league and cup matches).

In 1950 Jack Voyce, who had done more than anybody to reconstruct the Athletic in the preceding five years, gave up as secretary and in order to ease part of the burden of this job a new “office” of Fixture secretary was created, Ron Cox being elected to the post. He held the position for 37 years and not satisfied with the stresses and strains of ensuring the Athletic had a full fixture list each week, set up the East Midlands fixture pool in 1959 to ensure all the local sides in the East Midlands had the chance of a game. For 36 seasons he and his family operated this service voluntarily with no fewer than 264,713 fixtures being made. In general

1950-51 was another successful season for the First XV who lost only 5 of their 29 games, which included one on Easter Monday against a visiting Welsh club, Heolcyw.

On the whole 1951-52 was not a very happy season for the Athletic. In November they were given notice to quit the hut at Barker's Lane by May 1952. Coming at a time when the club's finances were seriously strained this was a serious blow. But the event which overshadowed this season took place on Saturday 22 March 1952. The coach returning from Olney was involved in an accident, on the outskirts of Bedford itself, resulting in the death of the First XV's outstanding hooker, Bill Dummer. This tragedy aroused public sympathy, a fund was set up for the benefit of his wife and family, and collections were taken at the Town rugby and football grounds. However, two notable playing achievements in this season should not be overlooked. The Club Captain, John Taylor, rated by many as the best player of this period the Athletic had produced, was selected for the East Midlands, while the veteran Percy Scrivener, certainly a prodigious points scorer for the club reached a personal tally of 1,000 points for the club.

1952-53 proved the most successful season the Athletic First XV had in this period of their existence. They were unbeaten at home and the final record was:

Played 27, Won 24, Drawn 1, Lost 2, Points For 457, Points Against 86.



The famous 1952-53 team that lost only two games all season.

*Back row: R.J.Fitt; J.Bennett; D.Evans; G.Bates; J.H.Valentine; V.Ibbott.
Middle row: L.F.Phypers (Chairman); E.F.Barcock (1st XV Sec); R.G.Clark; J.H.Church;
M.J.Nicholson; W.Anderson; L.Kay; J.J.Voyce (Hon Sec); R.F.V.Armour (Hon. Treasurer).
Front row: T.G.Aughton; E.L.Knight; J.M.Woolfenden (Vice-cap); J.Taylor (cap);
P.W.Scrivener; J.P.Mears; R.J.Ingledew.*

The normal side was; W. Anderson; J. Valentine, J.P. Mears, P.W. Scrivener, M. Lett; L. Kay, J. Taylor (Capt); R.J. Ingledew, R.G. Clarke, J. Bennett, J.M. Woolfenden, M.J. Nicholson, J.H. Church, G. Bates, E.L Knight with D. Evans, J.R. Fitt and E. Tomlin as principal reserves. In spite of the notice to quit, the club were able to use the headquarters hut throughout the season, but at the end it was taken down and moved to another site further along Barker's Lane. This work was carried out by club members, under the direction of Ewart Felts. Once again Frank Phypers and Bert Osbourn helped with installations, and the hut was ready in the 1953-54 season. Once constructed the hut consisted of a clubroom with a small bar from which bottled beer was served, a large "home" dressing room, a kitchen, two "away" dressing rooms, toilets and a seven foot by seven foot bath alongside the coke boiler. Players didn't stay in the bath too long for fear of being overcome by coke fumes!

The possibility of obtaining a licence for the club had been discussed as far back as 1949 but now serious consideration was given to the matter. By the beginning of 1954 a licence had been granted, and the Bedford Athletic R.U.F.C Social Club was formed. Part of the hut was converted into a bar when Bill Protheroe a third team captain but also a gas board engineer persuaded contractors about to demolish an asbestos type Nissan hut, to both donate the hut and re-erect it on the southern end of the clubhouse. With two pitches at Newnham Avenue the Athletic could feel safely established. With a great sense of achievement, therefore, Jack Voyce resigned in 1955, after a total of nine years as Hon. General Secretary.

By 1958 the disputes as to whether the Bedford Athletic of before the First World War was the same as that of 1920 were forgotten, and the Athletic proudly celebrated their 50th season. It was a happy co-incidence that in this year Frank Phypers, who had been so intimately connected as player, Captain, Committee member and chairman with the club for over 30 years of it's history was elected president of East Midlands Rugby Football Union. At the same time Arthur Marshall, who had played his very first game with Athletic was just finishing his first term of office as President of the Rugby Football Union. The clubs annual dinner was a special jubilee event and the guests of honour were seven of the original 1908-09 team: B.J. Catlin, F. Childs, J. Foster, P. Haynes, C. Percy, G. Pilgrim and A.E. Wilson. In all Bob Ingledew with the only original photograph to go on, was able to trace thirteen founding members: A. Leach, W. Scott and G. Wrenn were unable to attend the dinner because of illness; W. Hills, R. Mayes and L. Smith were abroad at the time.

In 1959 part of the Newnham Avenue ground was developed by the Corporation as a running track and pavilion, with the consequence that the Athletic lost one of its two pitches. Representations were made to the Corporation and for season 1959-60 a new pitch was provided in Russell Park. The next season a further pitch was rented from the Corporation at Fenlake Meadow. However, the Athletic were already beginning to think seriously of acquiring their own ground and three possibilities were investigated, though at this stage with no success.

For many years it seemed that the retirement in 1960 of Ron Armour, after 22 years as treasurer of the club, marked the end of an era. Perhaps the best way of paying tribute to Ron is to examine some of the financial problems he had to wrestle with in the difficult post-war years. At first things were not too bad, and for 1946-47 there was a remarkably healthy balance. But rising costs soon began to eat this away. For instance eighteen jerseys in the club colours, purchased in 1947 cost thirty seven pounds, and since rationing was still in force, 72 coupons were also required, (these were obtained from the East Midlands R.F.U.). The introduction in 1949-50 of an annual rent of fifty pounds for the club hut further aggravated the financial situation, and this season saw an overall loss. In 1953 came the expenses of moving the club house, and the clubs finances were so strained that in 1955 some subscriptions and match fees had to be increased. Some indication of the increased scale of spending may be given by the fact that the lowest tender for coach journeys in season 1957-58 was two hundred

and thirty two pounds and it is hardly surprising that the loss on the season was one hundred and sixty four pounds, ten shillings and threepence. Through all these crises Ron Armour managed to remain cool and somehow kept the club solvent.

Finances had increased as the club expanded, for by 1960 the Athletic was believed to be the largest club in the Midlands. Starting from one side in 1945-46, a second and third side, the A and Extra A were added in successive seasons. On one occasion in 1948-49 on September 25th, four sides were fielded (the first time since before the war) and all were victorious. However, this fourth side was very short-lived. It was revived as the B XV in 1950-51, playing in 16 games but using local works grounds. It was not in fact, until 1956-57 that a regular fourth team was established. At the 1957 AGM the teams were re-termed First, Extra First, Third and Fourth. From then onwards followed a period of rapid expansion thanks largely to the efforts of one man, Derek 'Lofty' Norman. On and off the field, as Captain and Team Secretary Lofty Norman ensured that each new team had a full side, was decently turned out, and given effective leadership. Recognition of his great service to the club was given in 1961, when he was made a life member. In season 1958-59 a Fifth XV was started, and also a Youth XV for schoolboys during their holidays. A Sixth XV was introduced in October 1960 but a peak was reached in 1961-62. A seventh adult side was run and on 20th January 1962 the Athletic Colts played their first fixture. At the end of the season the Hon. Secretary was able to report that "on one Saturday, the club turned out ten teams, with one youth XV and two colts teams...".

The formation of the Colts team was one of the most important steps in the Club's history. Since the re-founding in 1920 most of Athletic's recruitment came from boys leaving the Bedford and Bedford Modern Schools. Normally such boys had been coached in the skills of the game and possessed considerable match experience. Even after the Second World War a large proportion of new members were Old Bedford Modernians but, in the fifties and sixties, more and more Modern School boys were leaving Bedford to take up places at universities and colleges. At the same time, however, enthusiasm for rugby was growing at the local secondary schools and a new rugby playing school, Stratton, was developing. It became evident, therefore, that the sources of recruitment were changing and many of the Athletic's new members, though potentially as promising as ever, lacked experience and required further coaching in the game. At first these youngsters could be helped along under the guidance of older players in the lower sides, and an outstanding example of one who benefited enormously from this method is John Cooley, who played for the Athletic Fifth XV and went on the play for Bedford, Northampton, East Midlands, and gain an England trial. But, as numbers increased it was obvious that some other solution would have to be found. Already several clubs in Northamptonshire and the Midlands were running regular Under 18 colts sides and when at the beginning of 1962, the Athletic were asked to provide games for a number of boys who had taken up rugby at Silver Jubilee School, they decided to take the plunge.

A properly constituted organisation for the colts section was drawn up and strictly adhered to. The most important points were that the colts committee was to be made up of responsible adult members and that at least one of these would accompany the colts on every fixture. Matches were to be played against similar Under 18 club sides or school teams. Starting on this firm basis the Athletic Colts soon achieved remarkable success. By the end of the first half season they had already won two colts seven aside tournaments, the Northampton & District and the "Pink" Trophy (Huntingdon). The next season The Bedford Education Committee generously offered the use of the Fairfield Playing Field, Clapham Road, free of charge for colts matches. During this season a second colts side, the Colts "A" was started and on two occasions in season 1963-64 a Colts "B" was also fielded. In the same season, as a follow up to the Colts organisation, a new adult side, the Equal Third, was introduced specifically for ex-colts with a fixture list comprising mainly of school sides. Undoubtedly 1964-65 was the high point of the Colt's success: They provided ten players for the East

Midlands Colts, including the Captain Chris Reynolds, and they won the Colts sevens of the Bedfordshire Colts R.F.U., the East Midlands RFU and the "Pink" trophy. The records for the first three full seasons speak for themselves:

1962-63 Played 23 Won 19 Drawn 0 Lost 4 Points For 383 Points Against 145

1963-64 Played 34 Won 30 Drawn 1 Lost 3 Points For 574 Points Against 109

1964-65 Played 28 Won 26 Drawn 0 Lost 2 Points For 592 Points Against 78



The 1964/65 Colts 7-a-side team which won the Bedfordshire Colts 7-a-side, the "Pink" Trophy (Huntingdon), and the East Midlands Colts 7-a-side.

Back row: Bob Ingledew; Dick Sanders; George Reid; Michael Wright; Jim Fletcher; Chris Reynolds (cap); Nigel Burton; John Watson (Colts Sec); Fred Litchfield; Ron Cox.

Front row: Bob Parkinson; Michael Fletcher; Larry Kitchin; Mike Birdsall; Bruce Church.

The Colts Player of the Year is now awarded the Dick Sanders Memorial Trophy.

In the latter part of the sixties it became increasingly difficult to keep a Colts side running. This was not for the want of trying on the Athletics part, but circumstances changed. Silver Jubilee, who produced several promising players in a very short time, stopped playing rugby and interest in the game was on the wane in other schools. Nevertheless, the Athletic remained the only junior club in Bedford to run a regular colts side, and it reaped the benefits, five of the first XV by the end of the decade being ex-colts. In achieving this tributes must be paid to the three Colts secretaries, Derek Butt, John Watson and George Reid, and two very active committee men, Freddie Litchfield and Dick Sanders.

It was not just the formation of a colts section which made 1962 a momentous year for the Athletic. At a committee meeting held on 1st March it was reported that the Bedford Corporation had promised to lease to the club a piece of land opposite Putnoe Wood. This followed discussions with the Council and the inspection of several alternative sites. The Putnoe Wood

site seemed the best placed, and had room for four pitches and a clubhouse. At last the Athletic had acquired what they had long dreamed of, a ground of their own. But to make the dream come true it would take years of hard work. The ground had to be prepared, levelled, fertilised, sown, cut and constantly maintained. The ground was drained, ploughed and seeded by Mike Pile a former 1st XV scrum half. Val Ibbott a former 1st XV front row provided a tractor and Queens Works a set of gang mowers. The pioneering work was overseen by John Richardson with a small band of helpers, and was carried on by his successor Derek Norman. Once the grass became established John Richardson was to be seen most evenings mowing and rolling the ground. Bob and Joan Ingledew together with Jean and John Richardson erected the tractor shed and set about planting the boundary hedges.

The first game to be played on the new ground took place on 10th September, 1966, when The Colts "A" played Bury St. Edmunds Colts.

In spite of grants and loans from the Rugby Football Union, the National Playing Fields Association and The Department of Education and Science, the club itself had to find large amounts of money. The financial situation was unfavourable and a severe blow was the raising of the weekly rent to one pound on each of the pitches rented from The Corporation in season 1962–63. (Incidentally, this season was particularly memorable for the "great freeze" which caused an enforced lay-off for a continuous period of ten weeks.) This was partly set off by a gesture of goodwill from Bedford Rugby Club, who offered a game with the Town Senior Side. It took place on 3rd September 1963, and raised about 50 pounds for the reserve fund. The Athletic held very well up to half time, but in the second-half they were overwhelmed by the individual brilliance of "Budge" Rogers. This match was repeated at the beginning of the next season, when the Athletic received a heavier defeat, but made a profit of over 77 pounds.



Bedford Athletic v Old Blue (New York); 22 September 1966

In 1966 the Borough of Bedford celebrated the octocentenary of the granting of its first charter and the Athletic contributed to the celebrations by a unique event. On the evening of Thursday 22nd September, 1966 they played host on the town ground to a touring rugby union side from the United States of America, Old Blue of New York. The Americans convincingly proved that they were no novices of the game, beating the Athletic 19 points to nil and they voted their stay in Bedford one of the most enjoyable of their trip. At the end of 1966–67 season the Athletic itself, for the first time went on a foreign tour. It had been traditional for some years at Easter to take a party to rugby festivals in Bournemouth and Southend, but over Easter 1967, the Athletic played three fixtures in France and enjoyed sumptuous French entertainment. In 1968 the club again went to Bournemouth, but the members now had the urge to travel, and Easter 1969 saw the Athletic in the Republic of Ireland. By way of a follow up to this tour, one of the opponents County Carlow, were entertained in Bedford in November 1969. In 1970, the club had gone even further afield, with a highly successful tour of West Germany, which included not only games against British Service teams, but also one against the wholly German Hamburg St. Pauli.

It was unfortunate that the Athletic lost the clubhouse at Barker's Lane (to make way for a new fire station) at the end of season 1966–67 before the new clubhouse was built. It left them nowhere to drink or entertain opponents and without any changing facilities for the new ground (previously players had changed at Newnham Avenue and made their way to Putnoe Woods by coach or car). So for 1967–68 arrangements were made to provide teas and entertainment at the "Fox and Hounds".

Goldington Road and changing rooms were hired at Newnham School in Polhill Avenue. By an odd coincidence things had gone full circle; the Athletic were now drinking in the public house where they had changed and behind which they had played during the 'twenties' and were changing in a school built very close to the site of the original ground used in 1908.

The three seasons without a clubhouse were inevitably difficult, but two factors helped to hold the Athletic together. The first was the regular newsletter, which kept the members in touch with events. Under the editorship of John Slater it reached a standard of excellence which it would be impossible to rival – indeed the "Ath News" received an American award as the best rugby newsletter in the world! Secondly, morale was maintained thanks to the personal encouragement and hard work of the club captain Tony Harvey. His six years of captaincy were not easy, but Tony never lost heart either on or off the field.

From the time that the lease was granted on the new ground, many designs of clubhouses were considered, some getting to the planning application stage. All foundered through lack of finance. As a result a less permanent building had to be considered. It was at this time that David Clarke, a first team player designed a cedar wood building incorporating every saving possible. It was designed around six feet by eight feet modules so that even standard sheets needed no cutting. The Borough planners approved the design and at the suggestion of Gareth Woodfine a very favourable fixed price contract was awarded to Connolly Construction of Luton. As the new ground was located half a mile away from a power supply, as a mains engineer on the Electricity Board Bob Ingledew arranged an overhead supply. Without the help of David, Gareth and Bob the light at the end of the tunnel would have been a lot longer in coming. David never played from the new clubhouse his work taking him to London.

Bob Ingledew then the Chairman of the club having shouldered the burden of most of the work, and with his health suffering as a result, resigned and in David's absence took over as Clerk of Works. Gareth Woodfine took over as club chairman.

1968 marked the beginning of the Athletics sixtieth season and to celebrate the occasion a special Golden Jubilee dinner for former players was held. It was attended by over eighty and the glories and disappointments of the old days were discussed and re-lived again. Two years later the club completed its move to its new premises at Putnoe Woods. The last Athletic home

game to take place at Newnham Avenue was the First XV against Barker's Butts on 4th April 1970, and the following season saw the Athletic fully established at Putnoe Woods with a clubhouse incorporating the most up to date changing and social facilities in the area. The club also began to broaden its activities. From 1964 – 65 a soccer side was entered into the Bedford Sunday League and in the summer of 1970 a cricket section was revived and began playing in the third division of the Bedford and District league. Nevertheless rugby remained the key focus of the club and as the club entered the new decade in its new home it was about to enter a period of new challenges which would bring with them fresh success.

The Clubhouse Years: 1970 - 1990

“... a tribute to those who have unselfishly devoted their efforts to the good of the club.”

(Local newspaper report....Tuesday August 17, 1982)

5 September 1970 was the date when the club finally moved forward into the next phase of its existence. It was on this day that following many years of hard work the new clubhouse was opened by former England captain Ron Jacobs. Also present were the Mayor of Bedford, Alderman Ronald Whittingham and his wife together with three founder members who helped form the club in 1908. The opening was commemorated by a match between Bedford Athletic and the Penguins, an invitational side who included five full internationals. These were A. Hurst (Wasps & England); G Windsor-Lewis (Oxford University & Wales); C. Ashby (Wasps & England); W. Treadwell (Wasps & England) and P. Yarranton (Wasps & England). The Penguins won by 32 points to 9, the Ath scores coming from tries by Steve Foley and Ian Frost (2). The Bedford Athletic side on this famous occasion was:

R. Adair; S. Foley, M. Robinson (cap), I. Frost, B. Neal; R. Timothy, A. Harvey; G. Richards, M. Cooper, C. Reynolds; P. Wheeler, A. Lewis; D. Lukes, J. Summerfield, A. Arnold.

The clubhouse cost eight thousand pounds with three thousand contributed by the RFU, two thousand by the club and the remainder from the Department of Education & Science. The evening preceding the opening was marked by dinner at the Dujon restaurant attended by Bill Ramsey, the President of the RFU. Four founder members were present, Wally Foster (half-back), Harry Barratt (center), Fred Osbourne and George Perry. A tankard was presented to Tony Harvey, the scrum-half and club captain who had done so much to hold the club together over the preceding six years. The week continued with a number of celebratory events the most notable of which was the seven-a-side tournament for the Lord Luke Trophy (then the Club President) which continued to be contested at the start of the season throughout the seventies and eighties.



Ron Jacobs cutting the tape to open the new club HQ. Also in the picture Gareth Woodfine (Chairman) and the Mayor and Mayoress of Bedford (Alderman & Mrs.A. Whittingham).



Inside the new Club HQ on opening day. Left to right – Bob Ingledew, David Clark, Ron Jacobs and the Mayor and Mayoress of Bedford (Alderman & Mrs. R.A. Whittingham).

If the 1970/71 season was marked by the success of the club in upgrading its facilities off the pitch, then the 1971/72 season was marked by the success of the team on the pitch. In fact this season was the most successful in the club's post-war history to date eclipsing the 1952/53 team that won 24 matches. The final record was Played 42, Won 27, Lost 15, with 585 points scored, another club record, albeit assisted by the increase of a try in points value to 4 points. Richard "Digger" Timothy led the way with 192 points and leading try scorer was Eric Quince with 22. Undoubtedly the team benefited from the coaching of former Saints centre, John Cooley. Another feather in the club's cap was the appearance at scrum-half for England of Lionel Weston in two internationals. Lionel had begun his playing career some years earlier on the encouragement of Lofty Norman at the club.

It was a season of firsts. These included the newly inaugurated County Cup competitions, founded to complement the new RFU Knockout Cup as a means of providing junior clubs an opportunity to qualify for a national competition alongside their senior brethren. Athletic's first game in the Bedfordshire Cup was on Wednesday 15th September 1971 when they defeated Vauxhall Motors 39-0 at Putnoe Woods. Victories at home to Luton and away to Biggleswade followed to set up the first ever Bedfordshire Cup Final against Colworth House on Sunday 21st November. The club became the first ever "champions" of Bedfordshire when they beat Colworth House by two tries to a goal, at Sharnbrook. As the Evening Post reported at the time "Despite the icy wind which was often gale force, the final was packed with good rugby, Athletic taking the honours in the first half and Colworth having the upper hand after the interval. With the wind at their backs, Athletic stormed into the attack from the start and Steve Jeffries was soon over for a try but Digger Timothy failed to convert. He also missed his kick after Eric Quince had seized on a bad clearance [to score a second try]. Colworth House struck back immediately after the interval, Litt touching down and Galloway converting but this was to be their only joy".



The Bedford Athletic side that won the first ever Bedfordshire Cup in the 1971-72 season.

This qualified the club for the East Midlands Cup, contested by the winners of the four sub-county competitions. Having beaten St. Neots 24-15, Athletic had to play the final four days later at Franklin's Gardens against Rushden & Higham. Rushden swept into a ten point lead inside an hour, and Athletic were never quite able to match the fiery approach of the Rushden pack. Nigel Clark scored the first try for Rushden after 32 minutes while big bearded No. 8 Colin Clarke got the second in the 60th minute. Fly half Roy Tomlin converted to make some amends for missing three penalty chances, one from in front of the posts in the first half. Digger Timothy fared no better as he also missed three penalty attempts and failed to convert Eric Quince's 70th minute try. The Bedford Athletic side that contested this first ever East Midlands Cup Final was:

N. Danes; D. Gillett, M. Norman, P. McGuckian, E. Quince; M. Birdsall, R. Timothy; C. Reynolds, M. Cooper, E. Carter; M. Careless, P. Hearn; B. Lumsden, D. Lukes, B. Mulhall (cap).

Nevertheless the highlight in what was ultimately a very successful season for the club was the First XV travelling to Stockwood Park and beating them 46-14 scoring 8 tries in the process. The try scorers on this celebrated occasion were: P. McGuckian (2), M. Robinson (2), B. Lumsden, E. Quince, M. Cooper and D. Gillett. Not only did the first team set records but the Extra 3rds set a new club record score of 112-0 against Luton Technical College.

The following season the club reached the final of the Bedfordshire Cup again, this time losing 24-0 at Stockwood Park. A new points scored total was set as the First XV recorded 866 points for in a season. However this was significantly helped by an Easter tour to Denmark, in which the club won all four matches played scoring 402 points in the process and set a new club record victory of 126-0 against RK 72. This tour continued an impressive record of visits to foreign climes with Denmark being added to previous destinations that included France, Holland and the Republic of Ireland.

Bernie Mulhall stood down as captain for the 1973-74 season and his position was inherited by hooker Mick "Charlie" Cooper. John Taylor became coach and a life membership was awarded to David Warren. Ron Cox continued to strengthen the club fixture list with matches being played in this season against the Extra Firsts of Leicester, Rugby, Notts, Birkenhead

Park and New Brighton. Paul McGuckian set a new club record of 42 tries scored, and Bedford Athletic reached the Bedfordshire Cup Final for the third season in a row, this time losing 26-0 at home to Stockwood Park.



Dinner held at Putnoe on 11 October 1974 in honour of Ron Cox (East Midlands President 1974-75).

Season 1974-75 was marked by Ron Cox's presidency of the East Midlands, becoming the third president the club had provided since the war following Arthur Marshall and Frank Phypers. Club captain Charlie Cooper was selected for the East Midlands side that lost 16-15 to Middlesex in a County Championship warm up game at Rosslyn Park. Peter Dawes, Steve Chaplin, Nick Proudman and Nick Meyer were all selected for East Midlands Colts. Ron Cox was guest of honour at his own club dinner on Friday 11th October in his role as East Midlands President. The club reached the Bedfordshire Cup final for the fourth year in succession and at the third time of asking got the better of Stockwood Park. A try from winger Bruce Lumsden gave Athletic the lead, until ten minutes before the end of the match when two penalties in quick succession from John Humphries put Park in front. Martin Robinson was then sent off for kicking a Park forward but Trevor Thomas scored the winning penalty following an offside offence in front of the posts. This victory qualified the club for the East Midlands Cup again but this time they went down 25-7 at home to Kettering in the semi-final.

The season concluded with an Easter tour to Malta where the club played against the Air Force sides stationed on the island. The club also felt it necessary to alter the bar serving arrangements in the season. Originally the bar had been staffed by volunteers but now it was decided the bar would be staffed by a designated home team from 4 to 6.30 with one or two members designated thereafter on a rota basis! At the end of the season David Perry stepped

down as Chairman after a four year stint and was made a life member and was replaced by David Warren. Paul McGuckian took on the club captaincy from Charlie Cooper.

The run of success in the Bedfordshire Cup came to an end early in the 1975/76 season when the club lost 27-9 to Stockwood Park in the first round. Peter Dawes was appointed captain of Bedfordshire Colts in this season and along with Steve Chaplin played for East Midlands Colts. Nick Proudman was selected again for Bedfordshire Colts. At a senior level Charlie Cooper, Paul McGuckian and Geoff Comb were all selected for Bedfordshire. As an alternative to undertaking an overseas tour at the end of the season the club hosted an incoming side from North America. Following the very successful visit of Old Blue ten years earlier, Houston from Texas visited on 18th April and Paul McGuckian led the club to an 18-13 victory scoring two tries in the process. The annual club dinner on 7th May saw ladies invited as guests for the first time. Not satisfied with this level of progress the club members voted in a new constitution at an EGM on 4th July 1976 at which it was agreed that all playing and non-playing members were to be allowed to bring a wife or girlfriend into the club who would be allowed to buy a drink (although they would not be allowed to become a club member!).

Season 1976/77 was Paul McGuckian's last for the club for sometime as he left at the end of the season to have a "crack" at first class rugby at Northampton. Before he left he scored a then club record 202 points in the season, consisting of 44 tries, 14 conversions and 12 penalty goals. He also scored the winning try for Bedfordshire in a 12-9 victory against Norfolk and as a result was invited to attend an East Midlands training session. Fly-half Trevor Thomas turned down a similar invitation as he considered himself not quite match fit. McGuckian became the first Athletic player since coach John Taylor to play for East Midlands in a County Championship match going on as a replacement against Warwickshire and starting against Staffordshire at Bedford when the side went down 16-12. He was joined by Charlie Cooper in appearing for Bedfordshire and later by Mark Ward and Adrian Waller who appeared for Bedfordshire in the Alan Lovell memorial match against Bedford. The following season McGuckian went on to feature in a Midlands trial match and although was once a standby reserve for an international in Paris, sadly never made it all the way to the England team. On 29th January Charlie Cooper played his 500th game for the club and later that same year Ron Cox was awarded the Silver Jubilee Medal. The club had a new captain and a new chairman following the AGM, Mark Ward replacing Paul McGuckian as captain and John Percival taking over from David Warren as Chairman.

At the end of season 1977/78, on 30th April, the new clubhouse extension (the member's lounge) was opened by Club President Ron Gale. In a celebration game the Ath 1st XV lost to the Chairman's XV 33-8. In the second half the experience of the Chairman's XV told with England and Bedford lock Bob Wilkinson dominating the lineouts and John Cooley (former England trialist and former Athletic coach) together with Paul McGuckian showing their power. The extension cost sixteen thousand pounds, ten thousand of which was funded by a loan. The extension was constructed by Ray Clements, a former player who extended the clubhouse eastwards by building the lounge, lounge bar, an entrance lobby and toilets. He also widened the existing clubroom and moved the bar and cellar from the western end of the clubhouse to the eastern end.

The following season was one of almost complete success for the Athletic colts side. Coached by Pat Wheeler they had the best record in the Home Counties and the Midlands with just 5 defeats in 27 games. 8 players appeared for Bedfordshire colts and 7 for the East Midlands. John McCreath played for the Bedfordshire Under 23 side, and George Phillips made two appearances for the Athletic first team twice scoring two tries and also came to the notice of the England Under 19 Group selectors. It was the most successful colts side since the 1964-65 season, but sadly the club lost out in the Bedfordshire Colts Cup Final to Luton when they had 7 players out injured. At senior level Digger Timothy, Adrian Waller, Dick Townsend, John

Blount, Tim Tranquada and Gareth Griffiths were all selected for Bedfordshire and Bob Ingledew became the Chair of the County. Gareth Griffiths left at the end of the season to try his luck at Saracens.

Club participation seemed to be on the decline as the 1979/80 season began, a fact noted by club secretary Nic Davies in his address to the 1979 AGM. David Warren had done a further year's stint as chairman for the 1978/79 season and in 1979 Gareth Woodfine stepped in for his second term as Chairman. Dai Hughes took over the coaching while Mark Ward continued as captain. October 1979 saw several Athletic players trial for Bedford. Left wing John Blount and centre Adrian Waller were the most successful and Waller eventually made the move. Mark Ward, Digger Timothy, John Blount, Adrian Waller, Charlie Cooper, John Robinson, Dick Townsend and Tim Tranquada were all selected to play for Bedfordshire whilst Nick Proudman, C. George, John McCreath and Steve Brown were selected for the Under 23s.

The club reached their fifth Bedfordshire Cup Final after beating old rivals Stockwood Park 15-12 in the semi-final. Led by Mark Ward the club won the Cup on the "away side" rule following a 3-3 draw at Leighton Buzzard. The scoring was even lower in the semi-final of the East Midlands Cup when the Athletic lost 3-0 at Huntingdon. A trip to Paris in the spring saw a 6 point to 4 defeat to Paris British but a victory for the second team by 7 points to 3. Mysteriously this had turned into a fixture against the famous Racing Club by the time it was reported in the local press! At the AGM Mark Ward stood down as club captain to be replaced by Bruce Lumsden and Gareth Woodfine announced to the club members that the next phase of the clubhouse extension would include two more changing rooms, a referees room and an increased showers area.

The new decade brought a new innovation for the club as mini rugby was run by the club on Sunday mornings for the first time. Paul McGuckian brought his Northampton team to Bedford Athletic for the first game of the season and they ran out 26-4 winners. Athletic skipper Bruce Lumsden scored Athletic's only try and McGuckian got the final try of the game for the Saints. In November Ron Cox was presented with one of the highly prestigious Torch Trophies by the Duke of Edinburgh as recognition of his contribution to local sport. The club lost to Stockwood Park in the semi-finals of the Bedfordshire Cup 10-3 in November. However in March the club maintained its American connections by hosting Severn Rivers RUFC. They were the fourth American side to visit the club following Old Blues, Houston and Mid-West. At the 1981 AGM Gareth Woodfine continued as chairman for the third season in succession and the sixth in total and was awarded a life membership alongside Alec Lawton who had been bar secretary for seven years. Geoff Comb took over from Bruce Lumsden as first team captain. The summer of 1981 saw several innovative fund raising ventures by the club as they looked to raise the money to complete the changing rooms extension, notably sponsored walks and a sponsored parachute jump.

Season 1981/82 saw the inauguration of the Heart of England Merit Table. Athletic were placed alongside Towcesterians (to whom they lost their first ever Merit Table game 16-10), Barkers Butts, Wigston Old Boys, Leicester Vipers, Long Buckby and Banbury. The highlight of the season was beating the Wanderers 12-6 at Goldington Road the first time in twenty years. 3 penalties from Nick Proudman and a drop goal from a returned Gareth Griffiths did the trick. The lowlight was losing in the first round of the Bedfordshire Cup to Biggleswade, the first time a side other than Stockwood Park or Leighton Buzzard had beaten the Athletic in the competition. Digger Timothy and Gareth Griffiths were both selected in the senior Bedfordshire side while John McCreath was selected again for the Under 23s. The decline in players selected told its own story about the dip in the club's playing fortunes. The season ended with a testimonial game in honour of Harry Rawkins and Frank Phippers, both former Athletic skippers. Harry was the President of Bedford RFC and the then President of the East Midlands. Frank was a past President of the East Midlands and was celebrating 50 years as

a life member of the club. Fielding full strength first teams for the first time in 20 years Bedford defeated Bedford Athletic 55-0.



Picture of Bedford and Bedford Athletic players at testimonial game in honour of Harry Rawkins and Frank Phypers, both former Athletic skippers.

With Merit Tables having arrived, the RFU were now canvassing junior clubs about leagues. Ron Cox replied with a forthright rebuttal of the notion on behalf of the club. In his opinion “it would almost inevitably produce a tighter and more unsporting type of play, less enjoyable to play in and to referee. Teams would be primarily concerned with the winning of points and be committed to safety first tactics, like the majority of cup matches, where victory usually goes to the side having the more accurate kicker”. Other points he made included (i) leagues would destroy the freedom to choose opposition, (ii) the number of people playing rugby would reduce through the use of substitutes, (iii) administrative paperwork would increase, (iv) the game would become professional. Has time proved him right?

The summer of 1982 saw Bedford Athletic become the first Bedford side to win the Bedford & District cricket league Premier Division since Harpur Sports in 1935. The cricket section had been reformed in 1970 and the 1982 season was the first played on a new wicket at Putnoe Woods. The club went on to win the title again in 1984 and 1985.

At the start of season 1982/83 the club was entering a significant period in its history as the 75th anniversary season approached. The season also marked the first appearance of programmes at home 1st XV games. An early season game against Bedfordshire was arranged to honour incoming Bedfordshire chairman Charlie Cooper and outgoing chairman Bob Ingledew as well as to celebrate the opening of the changing room extension. The extension was completely financed by the club members and incorporated two spacious main game changing rooms, a referees’ room, a new shower area and an updated shower system. John Plumb had taken it upon himself to tile the roof and clad the walls with brick given that the original wooden structure needed replacing. As well as the upgrades to the changing facilities he also built the porch and the ground equipment store leaving the changing room part of the clubhouse much as it appears today. Mark Ward also laid the paving alongside the pitch perimeter fencing at this time. The game in question was Bedfordshire’s 90th senior game following the founding of the sub-county at Silsoe College on 29th January 1969 and their first senior County game against Cambridgeshire at Russell Park in Bedford on Sunday 19th October the same year. The purpose of the sub-county had been and continued to be to give exposure to players of junior clubs who might not otherwise be considered for the East Midlands XVs. Bedford Athletic won the game 19-14.

In October one of the more dramatic events ever to take place at Putnoe Woods occurred when 18 year old Paul Dynes “died” twice in an Avengers match. Paul was kicked in the head twice and was taken off as a result. Steve Mason, a member of St. John’s Ambulance services saw him stop breathing and managed to resuscitate him, only for him to stop breathing again. On the second occasion it took Steve roughly a minute to resuscitate him, leaving his life literally hanging by a thread. Fortunately Paul made a full recovery.

On a more positive note Athletic were making good progress in the Bedfordshire Cup. Dunstablians were dispatched 29-0 in the first round, perennial rivals Stockwood Park were beaten 16-3 away from home in the second round and Vauxhall Motors defeated 14-0 in the semi-final. This left Bedford Athletic facing Amptill in the Final. Paul Evans kicked the side to victory with three penalties, the final two coming in the last five minutes. The platform for success lay in the pack, enabling scrum half and skipper Gareth Griffiths to call the shots in an ideal if dour brand of nine man rugby that kept the ball away from the dangerous Amptill back division. Pete Dawes and Geoff Comb were outstanding and the front row took four strikes against the head. It was Digger Timothy’s fourth Bedfordshire title and now in the twilight of his career he was finally called up for the East Midlands in this season alongside Geoff Comb both playing against Kent in a Division 2 relegation play-off. Kent won 14-3. Geoff and Digger also appeared for Bedfordshire during the season, alongside Pete Dawes and Gareth Griffiths. John McCreath was still young enough to appear for the Bedfordshire Under 23 side for the fifth season and he was joined by Roger Knight.

1983 marked Ron Cox’s 50th year of service as a club officer (and his 24th running the East Midlands fixture pool). It also marked the club’s fourth campaign in the East Midlands Cup. The semi-final against Northampton BBOB was played in pouring rain on 26th February. Inspired by pack leader Geoff Comb, Athletic played into a gale in the first half but 3 minutes from half time Digger Timothy dropped a goal for a 3-0 lead. 15 minutes into the second half, No.8 Nick Proudman touched down for a pushover try. Winger Frank Thompson converted and kicked a penalty four minutes from time for a 12-0 win. For the final Athletic were forced to make a late change in the pack, John Plumb replacing Richard Buckingham who reported unfit, having sustained an eye injury the previous day. Athletic were soon under pressure as Peterborough with a stiff wind at their backs, hammered at their line. The Athletic pack with Geoff Comb head and shoulders above everybody fought all the way and with Gareth Griffiths and Digger Timothy at half backs kicking shrewdly and the three quarters tackling like demons Peterborough were kept out until 5 minutes before half time when Athletic conceded a penalty. In the second half Peterborough chose to run the ball, but a huge kick saw Neil Mears follow up and arrive at the Peterborough line at the same time as the ball and the full back. A penalty resulted, kicked by Frank Thompson and Athletic were now in the driving seat. Thompson kicked a second penalty to put Athletic in front, and when Digger Timothy dropped a goal six minutes from time Athletic had won the East Midlands Cup for the first time in their history without conceding a try in any game. The Bedford Athletic side on this momentous day was:

Evans; Mears, Knight, Brown, Thompson; Timothy, Griffiths; McCreath, Whitwham, Plumb; Liptrot, Comb; Norman, Dawes, Proudman. Replacements; McClaggish, Jones.

The season ended with a tour to Weston-super-Mare and an anniversary game on 16th April 1983 against Harpenden. For the anniversary season of 1983-84 Gareth Woodfine handed the club chairmanship to Bernie Mulhall and Steve Brown took on the club captaincy. Bob Ingledew became the President of the East Midlands, the last clubman in the first century of the club’s existence to hold this honour.

The club was further honoured at the start of its anniversary season to learn that Geoff Comb had been selected to captain Bedfordshire (with Paul Evans and Gareth Griffiths also selected). This was the first year that the Ascroft Trophy was contested between the four East

Midlands sub-counties and Bedfordshire beat East Northants 6-0 in their first game before going on to win the trophy. Liptrot and Proudman were later added to the Bedfordshire side. On Monday September 26th Athletic played a Bedford School 3rd XV being 75 years to the day of the Athletic's first ever fixture against the same side. Bedford Athletic lost that first ever game 24-3 but won the rematch 12-3 with Ian Oxten, Gary Brown and Phil Davies scoring tries. Also in September Athletic won a County Cup game against Potton 12-3 before the club travelled to meet Vipers in the first round of the John Player Cup. Vipers won 18-9 although Athletic did lead 9-3 through a try by Griffiths set up by Steve Brown and Roger Knight and a conversion and early penalty from full back Evans. However the season was soon to go rapidly downhill. Athletic were knocked out of the Bedfordshire Cup 9-0 at Ampthill, with Evans missing five kicks at goal and lock Gary Woods being sent off after hitting Ampthill tough guy Duncan Bathe. To mark 50 years service to the club, Ron Cox was presented with a gold pen at the VP's dinner and later in the season was invited to Twickenham as a guest of then RFU President Ron Jacobs. Sadly another great servant of the club Frank Phypers passed away. At the end of the season the final match of the 75th anniversary celebrations saw Bob Ingledew's East Midlands XV beat Bedford Athletic 23-13. Frank Thompson scored a try converted by Paul Evans and also kicked a penalty for the Athletic. Peter Morris, Paul McGuckian, Vince Cannon and Digger Timothy all scored tries for the East Midlands. At the club dinner Paul Clarke took over as club captain and at the end of the season Geoff Comb left to try his luck playing for Bedford. The highlight for many though was the Easter tour to Arnhem.

The 1984/85 season was a forgettable one for the 1st XV. The team lost to Leighton Buzzard in the first round of the Bedfordshire Cup, and during the season Paul Clarke resigned as club captain with Paul Evans stepping into the breach. The side finished 8th out of 11 sides in the Heart of England Merit Table, winning 3 and losing 4 of the 7 games and in total the first team won only 10 games out of 32 played all season. Gareth Griffiths was selected as captain of Bedfordshire and was joined in the team by Peter Cox. Tim Stanbridge and Peter Cox were selected for the Under 23s for whom John McCreath was finally too old! Tim Stanbridge scored a try in the 25-0 victory against Norfolk. Michael Cato and Ian Oxten represented the Bedfordshire Under 21s. The success story of the season were the colts team coached by Pat Wheeler and Mark Ward. Of their 32 games played, they won 29, drew one and lost two. On 12th January 1985 exactly 23 years to the day that the club first fielded a Colts team, the Athletic Colts defeated Northampton Men's Own Colts 63-0. The try scorers on this historic occasion were Michael Cato (3), John Robinson (3), Jez Craddock (2), Callum Leys (2), Ian Oxten (1), Rob Robinson (1) and Richard Sanders (1). Sadly the two defeats were in the two cups, losing to Bedford Colts in the semi-final of the Bedfordshire Cup and to Biggleswade in the Final of the East Midlands Cup. Another enjoyable tour was had to Amsterdam but at the end of the season it was the fact that the First XV had been without a coach for four seasons that most occupied the council's mind and the decision was taken to appoint the successful Colts duo, Pat Wheeler and Mark Ward to first team affairs. Peter Cox took over as club captain.

In the summer of 1985 the Athletic cricket section gained an unwanted record when the second XI were dismissed for 4 runs against Marston, the lowest ever score at the time in the Bedford and District League. Dick Breen and Charlie Smith top scored with one run each but even they were outdone by extras who got 2. However it is only fair to record that they had both been in the Athletic side that set the 1st XI record of 269-3 against Thurleigh 7 years previously. The rugby First XV fared little better in season 1985/86 finishing 11th out of 12 in the Merit Table winning only one game. Swifts were defeated in the first round of the Bedfordshire Cup but Biggleswade knocked Athletic out in the second round. There was some consolation as the team went on to win the Huntingdon Floodlit Cup. Peter Cox, Richard Buckingham and Gareth Griffiths were all selected for Bedfordshire in the end of season Ascroft Trophy games. Bedfordshire beat the Northants Alliance 13-10, East Northants 12-0

(at Putnoe Woods) with two tries from Cox and Cox scored again in a 32-0 win over Hunts & Peterborough that allowed Bedfordshire to claim the trophy for the third time in the three seasons since it was introduced. In December of that season Ron Cox took a principled stand on behalf of the club at East Midlands level when he opposed the East Midlands support for the Lions tour of South Africa. Explaining his position Ron declared "I voted against the British Lions going, not on political grounds but as a Christian. I cannot accept the policy of apartheid, or the discrimination against anyone on the grounds of colour, race or religion". Ron went on to replace the retiring Ron Gale as club president at the end of the season and Peter Cox stood down as club captain to return to University, and was replaced by Cornishman Steve Brown.

In the final season of Merit Table games Bedford Athletic climbed to 5th position out of 12 with 4 wins and 2 draws from their 10 games. The real progress in that season 1986/87 was made in the Bedfordshire Cup. In the first round Athletic won at Ampthill 20 points to 6 with a returning Paul McGuckian, Chris Rann and Gareth Griffiths scoring the tries. Griffiths got two tries in a 14-0 win at Dunstablians in the second round and then Athletic beat RAE 22-0 in the semi-final with tries from John Robinson, Griffiths, and Rann, Paul Evans kicking a penalty and two conversions and Wayne Miller one penalty. At the end of the year Athletic travelled to Leighton Buzzard for the Final. Athletic had beaten Leighton Buzzard 9-6 at Putnoe Woods earlier in the season and with Geoff Comb and Paul McGuckian both back in the side were expected to give Buzzard a run for their money up front. In the end the side lacked a genuine ball carrier and had only two Paul Evans penalties to show for their efforts in a 13-6 defeat. It was on this occasion that the current Bedfordshire Cup was presented by BBC Radio Bedfordshire. Later in the season Athletic proved their credentials when they beat Biggleswade 10-0 to complete victories against all the top junior clubs in Bedfordshire, namely Leighton Buzzard, Stockwood Park, Luton, Ampthill and Dunstablians. In March 1987 the club made its first venture into match sponsorship when Bushy Croft Developments sponsored the game against Bedford Wanderers which Athletic lost 21-9. However no Athletic player was selected for the Bedfordshire side that season although Steve Turner and Tommy Cassidy did turn out for the Under 21s. Disappointingly the Athletic colts side that had been so successful a couple of seasons earlier folded during the season.

The 1986/87 season saw the end of an institution at Putnoe Woods. Ron Cox finally stepped down from his role as Fixture Secretary and on Sunday April 12th a tribute match was arranged when the Athletic played the East Midlands. He did however continue as club president.

The existence of the merit tables influenced the positioning of clubs in the new league structures that were introduced in the 1987/88 season. Bedford Athletic were placed at what we now know as level 7 in the league structure alongside the other clubs from the Heart of England merit table. Of the other local sides, Bedford and Northampton joined National 2, Stockwood Park and Peterborough joined Midlands One and Kettering and Leighton Buzzard joined Midlands Two. Clubs placed below Bedford Athletic included Ampthill and Dunstablians in East Midlands 1, Colworth House in East Midlands 2 and Bedford Queens, Bedford Swifts, RAE Bedford and Pottton in East Midlands 3. Bedford Athletic played their first ever league game at Putnoe Woods on Saturday 3rd October 1987 against Oadby Wyggestonians, losing 9 points to 4. The first ever league victory came two weeks later 17-6 at home to Old Northamptonians.

Paul McGuckian took over the club captaincy in 1988, a position he was to hold for the next three seasons. At this early stage of the league experience the club continued to have average league campaigns staying comfortably in mid-table. There was a growing feeling in the club that the aim should be higher. Some Council members attended the opening of the new Luton ground and clubhouse in the autumn of 1988. Perhaps as a consequence of this Gareth Woodfine was motivated to pose the question in the club newsletter "How can the Ath improve

its rugby"? He wrote "Every season we hope that the new season is going to be better than the last and that we get as far as winning the Bedfordshire Cup again. Slowly we are realising at the Ath that we are at a standstill and that unless we change policies radically then we can expect no better rugby at Putnoe Woods. The league system has highlighted for example how Leighton Buzzard and Stockwood Park are drawing away from us".

In the club as a whole matters were pretty healthy on the playing side. There were 6 regular Saturday sides including a resurrected Colts team, and a seventh team then known as the Avengers put in an occasional appearance. In the leagues however it was Towcestrians (then beginning their climb to National League rugby) and then Biggleswade who took the honours as the decade came to a close.

The Midlands League Years: 1990-1997

“...this club does not want to take up permanent residence in Midlands Two.”
(Bedford Athletic matchday programme, May 1997)

Bedford Athletic had competed comfortably for three years in the East Midlands/Leicestershire league and so by the 1990/91 season there was a real mood that the mould could be broken and promotion obtained. What turned out to be the most successful season in the club's league history to date began in September 1990 with a 15-7 home win against Long Buckby, a match at which the new scoreboard was christened. At the end of September the club proved the old adage of sacrificing the cup to concentrate on the league by losing their first round Bedfordshire Cup match 9-3 at Leighton Buzzard.

In these early days of leagues not every weekend was a league match, however October 1990 did see three league games. In the second game of the season on 13th October the club secured a vital 13-3 away win at newly promoted Ampthill although the significance was not realised at the time, Ampthill would eventually be the main promotion rivals. This was followed by a 25-9 home defeat of Aylestone St. James before the first real test of the season was encountered away to Leicester side Belgrave. Outplayed up front Athletic went down 23-9 and Belgrave along with Coalville established themselves as favourites for promotion.

On 10th November Bedford Athletic got their promotion chase back on track with a 22-17 win at home to Northampton Trinity. Trinity were leading 11-10 when Andy Cunningham raced clear for a try converted by Steve Turner. Turner then converted another try by Trevor Mulvaney. On the same day Ampthill defeated Belgrave 24-13 to open up the race for the title once more. Athletic consolidated their position as joint top of the table the following week with a 13-7 victory at Luton in a match played in driving rain throughout. Luton led 7-3 at the break, but Athletic sealed the game with 5 minutes left when veterans 'Hoss' Lilley and Paul McGuckian combined to put Cunningham in in the corner.

With the Christmas break intervening before the vital final four league games in the New Year, coaches Pat Wheeler and Mark Ward wrote a letter to each player demanding greater commitment. The coaches showed this commitment by watching arch rivals and joint leaders Coalville four times prior to the top of the table clash on January 12th. One of the largest crowds ever to attend an Athletic home game saw a scoreless first half, but then witnessed a Steve Turner chip at the start of the second on which Andy Cunningham raced through to touch down. Coalville scored a try in the dying minutes to lead 6-4 but Steve Turner held his nerve to convert the winning penalty in the last minute. John Plumb, Kevin Ward and Paul Davies formed a vital front row partnership that day to provide the platform for victory.

Now top of the table Athletic were denied the opportunity to take advantage when the bad weather of February 1991 saw the match at Wellingborough postponed. Athletic did not play a league game again until March 9th when they went back to the top of the table with a 13-6 victory at home to Stoneygate. Steve Turner scored three penalties and Paul McGuckian went over at the back of a rolling maul for the only try. An injury time penalty from Turner was required on March 23rd to secure a 12-9 win at Lutterworth. The team hit the jitters when McGuckian went off injured before half time. The win was vital as Coalville and Belgrave drew 9-9 on the same day, eliminating both from contention and leaving only Athletic and Ampthill in with a chance of the title. The title would be Athletics' if they took a point from their final game; if they lost then Ampthill could win with a better points difference.

The week before Athletic's rearranged game with Wellingborough, Ampthill lost at Coalville leaving Bedford Athletic promoted as champions with a game to go. On the same day

Northampton shocked Orrell to reach the Pilkington Cup Final prompting the champagne to emerge from Paul McGuckian's car in double celebration! On April 13th Athletic lost 7-3 at Wellingborough in comfortably their worst display of the season, but they finished at home with a flourish the following week beating Oadby Wyggestonians in a friendly 32-16. Wayne Shelford was the guest of honour at the end of season VP's dinner and he made long service awards to Bob Ingledew and Lofty Norman. In addition Paul McGuckian was made a life member at the end of a successful three year tenure of the captaincy.

Paul McGuckian stepped down as captain in the summer of 1991 having led Bedford Athletic to promotion. Vice-captain Steve Turner stepped into the breach, and new faces in the squad included Andy Walne and Gerald Bygraves (both props) joining from Bedford plus former Chesterfield captain and hooker Trevor Potter. The league season did not begin until November as the World Cup dominated rugby matters in the British Isles. Once Will Carling had led his men to defeat against Australia at Twickenham, Athletic opened their campaign in Midlands Two East at league favourites Vipers. However they succumbed to a 29-12 defeat. Life in the higher league proved much harder for the Athletic and in the end only four league victories were gained. The first of these was at home to Matlock on 23rd November and saw tries from Tim Dean, Rob Robinson and three Steve Turner penalties secure a 21-7 win. On 8th December tries from Chris Eldridge, Taylor, Russell and Bygraves secured a 23-10 victory at Stewarts & Lloyds.

The final two victories of the season came after Christmas once Athletic had slipped into relegation trouble. The best result of the season was on 28th February with a 34-13 victory at home to Paviers in which Athletic scored five tries. Tries from Miller, Turner, Clarke(2) and Kitchener secured a 38-16 home win over Peterborough in the final league game of the season. Following this the club waited with baited breath to see the result of the RFU's re-organisation of the league structure. In the end the 8th place finish was just good enough to see Athletic retain its place at level 6 and be included in the new Midlands Two league, thanks to Aspatia's 24-3 victory over Vale of Lune at level 4! Oddly enough the club finished as the second highest points scorers in the league that season.

With the new league being a little beyond the Athletic first team, attention turned to trying to win the Bedfordshire Cup for the first time in nine years. Early victories against Dunstablians (19-9) and Swifts (29-0) set up a semi final at home to Ampthill. Athletic were favourites but were undone by a penalty try on half time when Rob Robinson was adjudged to have deliberately knocked on when Ampthill had a two man overlap. Ampthill won 12-6.

At the end of the season Gerald Bygraves took on the captaincy with Steve Turner reverting to vice-captain and Paul McGuckian took over as coach backed by Pat Wheeler and Nigel Chinneck. Athletic started the 1992/93 season in the newly formed Midlands Two. With only Towcestrians and Leighton Buzzard playing at a higher level it made them one of the leading junior clubs in the East Midlands. This strength was recognised by the selection of 5 Athletic layers in the Bedfordshire squad to play in the Ascroft Trophy; Rob Robinson, Andy Walne, David Bygraves, Andy Jones and Gerald Bygraves. Tim Clarke, Chris Eldridge and James Mackay were added for the annual Alan Lovell Memorial match against Bedford at Goldington Road.

The league campaign began with a 26-0 victory at Biggleswade. David Bygraves scored a try and went on to become the top try scorer that season with 12 against Tommy Cassidy's 11. Athletic won four, drew one and lost one of the six league games played before Christmas to sit in second place. An experienced Athletic pack held the key in an 18-6 victory over Stockwood Park in the Bedfordshire Cup. Tommy Cassidy got the first try but then a 35 yard surge by the pack secured the second with Jez Keates emerging with the ball. In the New

Year Ampthill proved Athletic's nemesis in the County Cup semi-final yet again winning 17-13.

Back in the league a comfortable 24-11 win at home to Peterborough and 13-8 away win at Stafford kept Athletic in second place and there were two great "friendly" wins in February over Leighton Buzzard when Athletic scored 5 tries and Bedford Wanderers 17-10 (for whom a young Ashley Tapper turned out). In March Athletic recorded a 39-13 victory over Stockwood Park with Gerald Bygraves, Tim Clarke (2), Dave Norman and Chris Eldridge scoring tries. A further 6 tries were scored against Stewarts & Lloyds in a friendly before the penultimate league fixture was won 21-15 at Whitchurch. For the first time in the season Athletic were outplayed upfront but Steve Turner and John Kitchener scored the tries that left Athletic only needing a draw at home to Worcester to gain promotion. The game against Worcester at the start of April was a bit of a disaster. Athletic lost 10-0 and had Tommy Cassidy (broken ankle) and Mike Swift (broken nose) carried off with injuries. This left Athletic reliant on Biggleswade to defeat Worcester in the final game of the season but Worcester won 11-3 and began their long march to the Premiership. Some consolation was gained in an end of season win over National League side Towcestrians meaning Athletic had beaten all the top East Midlands sides that season.

At the AGM chairman Mark Ward announced a restructure of the committee and Paul McGuckian announced plans for an upgraded training facility including a floodlit pitch. The annual ball was held at the club as opposed to an hotel for the first time and Ron Cox was awarded the Eastern Region Service to Sport award. David Duckham presented Ron with an inscribed whisky decanter at the VP's dinner to commemorate 60 years service to the club. Derek Norman received an award from the AJA Association made to those in Bedford sport who contribute freely of their time to others. Sadly in the summer of 1993 Ron Gale the former President of the club (and mayor of the Borough and High Sheriff of the County) died.

Injuries and unavailability dominated the start of the 1993/94 season. Athletic lost four of their first five games conceding 146 points. Tim Clarke gained recognition for his consistent form by gaining selection for the East Midlands but had a quiet game in their 24-5 County championship defeat by North Midlands. Athletic were still too good for Dunstablians in the Bedfordshire Cup game on 10th October winning 31-10 with tries scored by Chris Eldridge either side of half time, and then Andy Walne, Andy Cunningham and Max Spurgeon.

When the league campaign began Athletic lost at home to Belgrave but then gained a remarkable 24-13 victory at pre-season favourites Broadstreet. On the 6th November Athletic hosted Wasps Vandals who unusually brought a second string XV (rather than the normal 3rd XV) containing several England Under 21 internationals. A fine day was enjoyed by the Athletic vice-presidents who were present at their annual lunch. The weather was not so fine when last minute work was needed to clear water from the pitch before Athletic beat Newark 49-6. The following week a juggernaut pack provided the basis for a 23-10 win at Keresley that took Athletic joint top. At the end of November Bedford Swifts were dispatched 57-0 in the County Cup and at the start of December Steve Turner scored all the points as Athletic beat Matlock 16-15. A defeat at Paviers and victory against Vipers left Athletic in title contention.

New Year's Day saw one of the oldest fixtures in Athletic's history result in an 11-0 home win over Olney. Next came the Beds Cup semi final against Ampthill. Having lost two years running to Ampthill at this stage Athletic were in no mood to make it three in a row and tries from Micky Norman and Andy Jones plus a last minute try-saving tackle by Neil Paterson secured a 13-8 win. The league game at Peterborough was won 17-13, a classic encounter in which Peterborough led 10-0 but succumbed to Athletic's second half forward domination which resulted in tries for Andy Cunningham, Micky Norman and Trevor Mulvaney.

Two crucial games against Stockwood Park in February changed Athletic's season. Defeat in the Beds Cup Final 10-8 when fly-half Steve Turner suffered an early injury and left Athletic without a kicker was compounded by a 32-20 league defeat when Athletic conceded four tries straight after half time. Athletic went on to account for Kettering in the East Midlands Cup but bowed out in the semi-final to Long Buckby 29-10, disappointing given that Long Buckby were two leagues below them. The league season petered out when defeat at home to Whitchurch saw the visitors win promotion. In April Tommy Cassidy made a long-awaited return from injury. At the AGM Neil Paterson became 1st XV captain, Trevor Mulvaney was the first occupant of the new position of club captain and the club decided to advertise for a new role - Director of Coaching.

At the start of the 1994/95 season John Plumb took over the role of chairman from Mark Ward and was delighted to announce that planning permission had finally been received for the new training pitch floodlights. Considerable work on improving conditions and facilities took place in the summer. To improve drainage 20 tonnes of topsoil was removed to allow 10 tonnes of drainage stones to be inserted. The patio at the back of the clubhouse was also extended. Richard Chadwick (ex-Bedford) was appointed Director of Coaching. The summer was also a time of departures. Andy Cunningham, John Kitchener, Tim Clarke and Tim Deans all left to play for Bedford Queens. The latter three all played a part in Queen's triumphant march to the Pilkington Shield Final at Twickenham, Tim Clarke scoring a try in the Final. Saddest of all was the sudden passing of Ian Mayston who left behind a wife and young family.

Matters got off to a slow start on the pitch with four losses recorded in September and Athletic gained only one win from their first five league games. Matters improved on 29th October at home to Paviers as Paul McGuckian fired the Athletic with an inspiring performance and Tommy Cassidy scored a 30 yard try in an 11-10 win. Athletic did not hit consistent form before Christmas the highlight being the try of the year in a home loss to Kettering. Collecting the ball on his own try line, James Mackay beat several Kettering men with a Phil Bennett style sidestep then set up Tommy Cassidy who surpassed Gareth Edwards by running the length of the pitch. There was also a 13-9 Bedfordshire Cup victory over Queens.

Despite a 43-10 loss at Hinckley when the leagues resumed in January Athletic still felt relegation was unlikely and were bolstered by a 21-12 win over Peterborough the following week aided by the kicking of John Taylor. If the club's nemesis the previous year had been Stockwood Park this year it was Leighton Buzzard. In a mudbath masquerading as the Bedfordshire Cup Semi-Final, Athletic dominated with skipper Neil Paterson leading from the front, Chris Homan ruling the lineouts, and Paul McGuckian rolled back the years to show the sort of form from a decade ago.

However Athletic lost 6-0 and two weeks later lost the league match at the same venue 5-0. Later in February Chris Molloy inspired Athletic to a 12-11 win over Stockwood Park (who had lost only one match all season) and at the end of March a crunching 41-10 victory over Willenhall ensured Athletics' survival in Midlands Two. Richard Chadwick (who downgraded to a consulting role at the end of the season) put the fight against relegation down to a lack of depth in the squad and a weakness in concentration.

Sadly the season also saw the death of Bert Osbourn the oldest club life member at the time, and the longest to hold that honour to date, just short of 60 years. In 1996 his family presented a trophy to be played for in perpetuity between Bedford Athletic and Amptill on the occasion of the Bedfordshire Cup Final between the two clubs.

Rugby Union was stunned by its sudden transformation into a professional sport at the start of the 1995/96 season but at Bedford Athletic there was very little change, indeed the season was more about stagnation than progression. There were few new faces and old favourites

such as Gerald Bygraves and Paul McGuckian had to step into the breach to steady the ship. In the seven league games before Christmas Athletic won 2 and drew 2. The victories came at home to Derby (15-13) and Matlock (34-13). There were two draws away from home, at Bedworth (20-20) where Tommy Cassidy scored a 40 yard wonder try but Athletic could not capitalise against 14 men, and a dour 3-all draw at Keresley. The club did make a successful start to the Bedfordshire Cup, winning the first round tie at Biggleswade 15-12 with Steve Turner kicking all five penalties and then the quarter final at Kempston 48-9.

After Christmas Athletic lost 9-3 at Newport and then 15-10 at home to league leaders Scunthorpe. Despite playing well the club now recognised it was in a relegation battle. In mid-January attention turned to the Bedfordshire Cup Semi-Finals and an away tie at Luton. Athletic were favourites with Paul McGuckian and Steve Turner expected to dominate but in the end it was the pace and imagination of the backs that pulled off the victory with Tommy Cassidy and Rob Robinson scoring the tries in a 15-5 win. Back in the league Athletic lost a close game at home to Sutton Coldfield by a point the highlight seemingly being Paul McGuckian conceding a penalty for biting, strangely celebrated in the Bedfordshire on Sunday newspaper by the headline "Safe Ath bite back". The safety in question was the club's league position which was saved by another RFU league reorganisation. Perhaps as a result Athletic won the final league game of the season at Towcestrians 22-7.

Thoughts then turned to the County Cup Final at Ampthill. Playing down the slope Athletic led 17-7 after 25 minutes with Ken Pontefract scoring a try and James Mackay kicking 12 points. They were 18-17 down by half-time however and with the slope in their favour in the second half Ampthill ran out 31-20 winners. The next week Athletic lost the East Midlands Cup quarter final 38-7 at Kettering and thereafter the season petered out. At the AGM Micky Norman was elected as 1st XV captain and Pat Wheeler took over from Trevor Mulvaney as club captain.

If it was not a year of collective achievement then there were some individual successes. James Mackay, Steve Turner, Chris Homan and Neil Paterson were all selected for East Midlands, although strangely no Athletic player was selected for Bedfordshire's end of season match at Ampthill celebrating 25 years of Bedfordshire rugby. Giles Witheat and Jack Matthews played in the East Midlands colts side that won the Colts County Championship at Twickenham against Hertfordshire 13-8. Both would be future Athletic players.

The professional rugby revolution came to Bedford in June 1996 when the club members at Bedford RFC agreed to a deal whereby Sports Network put £2.25m into the club over five years with more money for ground improvements once Bedford won promotion to the first division. Bob Burrows became Chief Executive, Geoff Cooke the Director of Rugby and Paul Turner the Director of Coaching.

Bedford Athletic made the decision not to turn professional. However they were almost immediate beneficiaries of the clearout of players at Goldington Road. Jim Chandler (centre), Ian Simpson and Chris Wright (both locks), Chris Platt (prop), Darren Goodwin and John Egan (backrow) and Tim Taylor (scrum half) all joined from Bedford whilst Gareth Griffiths, Ray Hamilton and Steve Guest returned from Kempston. The injection of new blood so obviously required at the end of the previous season was achieved.

The club had a new President as well, Gareth Woodfine taking over from Ron Cox who sadly died in the summer of 1996, as did a previous long time President of the Athletic, Lord Luke of Pavenham, who had retired from the position at the age of 70, twenty years before. The summer also saw the cricket section win the Bedford & District Premier Division title, ably led by John Taylor.

Despite (or maybe because of) all these changes Athletic lost the first league match of the new season, going down to Ampthill 24-13. They made up for that by beating Peterborough 52-8 at home the next week in the new National Intermediate Cup, Athletic's first entry to a National Competition since the 1983-84 season. This was the start of a seven match unbeaten run including a 33-16 victory over Huntingdon in the Cup before Athletic lost again, in the third round of the Cup away to Market Bosworth. This defeat preceded two further defeats in the league programme before Christmas, away to Bromsgrove and at home to Dudley Kingswinford. Won five, lost three was the league record from the first half of the season. Before Christmas the club had the honour of seeing Jim Chandler, Tim Taylor and Chris Wright represent the East Midlands and the frustration of seeing Kempston concede a County Cup Quarter Final despite having organised a Christmas Party and several sponsors for the afternoon.

The New Year brought progress on a number of fronts. Early in January club officials led by chairman John Plumb met with Bedford Blues representatives to establish closer club links. The long term plan was to create a system whereby the Blues steered players who had not quite made it at Bedford to Athletic, who in turn were to direct any top quality talent they unearthed toward Bedford. Paul Turner was keen to see Athletic make it to the National Leagues, and with

60 or more players attending training on a weekly basis, the Town's senior club appeared to be in a position to deliver on his word. With a new 44 year lease under negotiation at Putnoe Woods, the club announced they were to set up a rugby School of Excellence. Development of youth rugby was to be a priority. In reality this development was a recognition of the fact that the mini and junior sides from the Blues were already using the club's facilities and the Colts and Development XVs had also trained and played at Putnoe Woods. Another interesting link up between the two clubs was the sharing of Ground Secretary Lofty Norman, who ended up marking out pitches at both Goldington Road and Wentworth Drive. Athletic had also improved their facilities by spending £4,000 on renovating and re-equipping the clubhouse kitchen.

On the pitch Athletic were making progress in the Bedfordshire Cup. In the semi-final on 19th January they trailed Leighton Buzzard 6-3 with ten minutes to go before Steve Turner saw his clearance kick charged down on the 22 only for James Mackay to pick up, make a half break and then slip the ball to Jim Chandler. He set the move going which two passes later saw Alf Bartlett scorch in from 35 yards. Athletic won 8-6. The final again proved a disappointment as Ampthill retained the trophy with a 13-12 win despite Athletic having led 12-10 near the end. In the East Midlands Cup the club made no further progress than the previous year, losing once again at Kettering.

The club were making better progress in the league and won four matches in a row to move up to third place by the beginning of March. This included wins at Kenilworth and Long Buckby and a home victory over Newport by 20 points to 8. The highlight of this run was the 16-12 revenge victory over title contenders Kettering, Neil Paterson scoring the Athletic try, a victory that was eventually enough to deny Kettering promotion. Athletic were not to celebrate promotion either though as they went down 21-12 to Luctonians. Although second placed Old Laurentians came to Putnoe Woods at the end of March and were comfortably dispatched 26-3, Athletic surrendered interest in the promotion race with a 17-10 defeat at Sutton Coldfield.

Bedford Athletic entertained Banbury on the final day of the season with Banbury knowing that a draw would be good enough to see them promoted as Champions. A draw was exactly what they got, 13 points all with Neil Paterson scoring the try for Athletic. It was left for the Athletic programme editor to comment in that final home game of the season, "We have to get it right next season - this club does not want to take up permanent residence in Midlands Two". Remarks that would prove to be prescient indeed. Continuity remained the name of the game

as John Plumb continued as Club Chairman (and was given an Honorary Life Membership) and Pat Wheeler continued as Club Captain.

The advent of the professional era meant some traditional Athletic fixtures were now lost, never to be replaced. Hitchin, Old Verulamians, Harrow, the traditional New Year fixture with Olney, and perhaps most loved of all the matches against the second strings of Wasps and Bedford would all become fixtures of a bygone age. Some of these matches would survive for a short time at second team level, but in common with the rest of rugby, the club was about to embrace new horizons and that meant going where the RFU league fixture computer dictated as opposed to the whims of the honest hard working fixture secretary, John Ross, who had now competed ten years since taking over from Ron Cox. There were also new cup competitions to contend with and this combination of league and cup together with the players who had joined during the season from Goldington Road was to create a fresh competitive edge to rugby at Putnoe Woods over the next few seasons.

The Glory Years: 1997-1999

"Mighty Ath are the conquerors of Twickenham" – Headline in the Bedford Times & Citizen Newspaper, May 1998.

In compiling the history of any junior rugby club, the writer must hope for one year that can be pointed to as the most memorable in the club's history. Very often there is probably not even that year. In Bedford Athletics' case miraculously there are two!

By the summer of 1997 the club was poised on the verge of something unique. Over the previous season a number of key players had joined the club from Goldington Road and over this summer the club were able to put the final touches to the squad. Key was the arrival of Neil Beytell who joined as coach from the Bedford Blues' coaching staff along with team manager, Steve Spring. Equally important was the arrival of Ian Skingsley, also from the Blues, a back row player who had been an ever present in the Midlands Division side for two seasons playing alongside the likes of Gary Rees, Chris Tarbuck and Budge Pountney. To complete the picture, number 8 Tom Gray joined from Ampthill (and before that London Scottish), hooker Darren Stapleton joined from the Bedford Queens Twickenham Cup winning side and Ashley Tapper, a former Oxford Blue also with previous Twickenham experience joined at fly half after six seasons at Bedford.

The season started slowly due to fixture cancellations arising from the death of HRH Diana, Princess of Wales. In the first competitive game at Kettering, Athletic were behind at half time before pulling away in the second half to win their first round Intermediate Cup match 36-13. A comprehensive ten try 64-15 victory at home to old rivals Stockwood Park followed, eight tries were scored against Huntingdon, and fourteen against Matlock in the second round of the Cup including four for Tommy Cassidy.

At the start of November a unique event occurred in the history of Bedford Athletic. On Saturday 1st the club entertained Oxford Harlequins in the third round of the Intermediate Cup. Athletic won the game 173-0, breaking all sorts of club records in the process. They were 71-0 up at half time and finished the game with 27 tries. Paul Godsall led the way with four and there were hat tricks for Tom Gray, Steve Turner, Mike Swift and Jim Chandler. Tapper converted 17 of the tries (and Darren Stapleton a further 2) and added a try of his own to finish the match with a club record 39 points. 14 players in total scored that day, but sadly it was not even a competition record let alone a national record win! Three weeks later when Athletic entertained Wolverhampton in the fourth round, the Times of London sent a reporter to Putnoe Woods to cover the game. He would have been impressed by what he saw as a further nine tries saw Athletic through 57-7. Bedford Athletic ended November as the Rugby World National Team of the Month and a feeling was growing that something special might be around the corner. Debate in the clubhouse centered around whether title challenges could be maintained on all fronts!

Biggleswade were lambs to the slaughter in the Bedfordshire Cup beaten by twelve tries and seventy points to five. The following week county rivals Ampthill were dispatched 46-0 in a rearranged league game and then home advantage was of no benefit to Leighton Buzzard as they went down 58-13 in a Bedfordshire Cup semi-final. Athletic were still unbeaten in the league, but they were not without credible opposition and the crunch match came on the Saturday before Christmas when they travelled to play Dudley Kingswinford also unbeaten and joint top. In a markedly different game Athletic trailed 6-5 until late in the game when

Ashley Tapper's penalty (combined with Micky Norman's try) secured the win.

The first Saturday in the New Year should have seen the fifth round Intermediate Cup match at home to Hereford. However the pitches were well and truly flooded at Putnoe Woods with

seagulls proving more prolific than rugby players. The game did take place two weeks later with Hereford from the league above proving quite a handful and Athletic needed an injury time try from Giles Witheat to secure the win.

The following week league rivals Dudley Kingswinford visited for the sixth round but the game was not as close as the league encounter and tries from Tom Gray and Darren Goodwin together with 13 points from the boot of Tapper saw Athletic home 22-3.

Dunstablians proved worthy opponents in the Bedfordshire Cup Final in early February. Playing with the wind in the first half they should have turned around with a substantial lead, but John White missed four kickable penalties. In the second half tries from Chris Eldridge, Darren Goodwin and Mike Curry saw Athletic to a 22-6 win and their first silverware of the year. Old rivals Kettering presented themselves as the opposition in the East Midlands Cup Quarter Finals but for the first time Athletic had home advantage. This nearly proved their undoing as they spurned countless kickable penalty chances and the match remained scoreless until the final eight minutes. Kettering then scored a try to take the lead but Ashley Tapper spared the club's blushes with two late penalties for a 6-5 win. The Cup action was coming thick and fast now as on the last weekend in February Bedford Athletic played Marlow in the National Intermediate Cup Quarter Final. Even Marlow's former British Lion Derek Eves could not stop the Athletic juggernaut as the side ran out with a 32-7 victory thanks mainly to a try hat-trick from Tom Gray.

Going into March Athletic were in touching distance of the league title. On March 14th a 39 points to 5 victory at home to Sutton Coldfield secured promotion and only one point was needed from the final two games to take the Championship as well. There was no better venue than Kettering on Saturday 4th April for Athletic to claim their second silverware of the season. Despite their fierce resistance in the East Midlands Cup, Kettering were undone by 32 points to nil with five tries from Mike Curry, Tommy Cassidy, Nick Parrish, Cameron Glanvill and Ashley Tapper.

Back in cup action Huntingdon were seen off 48-8 in the East Midlands Cup semi-final in a game memorable for an incident in the second half when a Huntingdon attack was halted by the players piling into the post and the bar falling down hitting Darren Goodwin on the head. The rest of the game was played with no bar at one end! In the National Intermediate Cup all eyes were on the semi-final on March 28th when Athletic travelled to play West Park Bramhope for a place at Twickenham. Athletic went 3-0 down in the seventh minute but a brilliant move involving Tom Gray, Chris Eldridge, Ashley Tapper and Ian Skingsley enabled Tommy Cassidy to cross in the corner on the half hour. Nine minutes later Chris Wright stole the ball at the lineout, Nick Parrish spun the ball out to Steve Turner who crashed over for a 10-3 lead which became 12-3 when Tapper converted. Bramhope had the wind after the interval but could only manage a further two penalties and Athletic were through to Twickenham.

The famous day, Saturday May 2nd 1998, saw Athletic with a full strength side and some difficult selection choices. At full back Cameron Glanvill was picked ahead of Steve Turner and Paul Godsall. At blindside flanker, fit again Ian Skingsley was preferred to Darren Goodwin. The full squad selected for this famous day is reproduced in the Appendices. The club took eleven coaches to Twickenham and the team travelled the day before and stayed overnight. The day was memorable for several other events as well. Club President Gareth Woodfine was a guest of the RFU President Peter Brook, the most exclusive invitation possible at Twickenham. The committee were entertained in the Royal Box and Lofty Norman was presented with a plaque at the official dinner by Peter Brook to mark 50 years service to the club. The day saw one of Lofty's lifetime ambitions achieved, Bedford Athletic playing at Twickenham. The second, Athletic beating the All Blacks at Putnoe Woods may take a little longer!

Of the game itself perhaps the action is best left to the reporter from the Times and Citizen:

“Stroud fly-half Steve Thompson...fired a drop goal wide in the second minute, but Ath roared back and seemed to be taking control. Jim Chandler launched the attack from the drop out and once Ath reached the Stroud half they were not coming away empty handed. Ashley Tapper put a penalty wide but they regained the ball from the restart and eventually from a lineout Cameron Glanvill and Ian Skingsley combined to give Tommy Cassidy just enough room to touch down in the corner as he was tackled. The pressure was still on and only some desperate defending kept Ath out until Tapper kicked a penalty via the woodwork.

With thoughts in the stand turning to whether this would be a rout, Ath started to lose their discipline. Thompson kicked a penalty after an unwise word had brought the kick within range and suddenly Stroud realised they were in the game. They thought they had scored a try when they worked an overlap but the final pass from Jerry Perrins to Andre Sharp was marginally forward. However Thompson landed further penalties after 26 and 35 minutes to put Stroud ahead. Ath suffered a big blow even before falling behind as Ian Skingsley limped off with a recurrence of his old knee problem. Stroud's tails were up but they were hit by a superb counter-attack on the stroke of half time that gave Ath a crucial lead. Chandler was again the architect and he found Darren Goodwin – on for Skingsley – who didn't quite have the pace to make it to the line. But support was there in numbers and Chris Eldridge was able to give Bartlett a stroll to the line from a couple of yards out. Tapper converted with the last kick of the half for a lead of 15-9.

Half time was also fraught for Ath as Tom Gray and Cameron Glanvill were also unable to continue.

Stroud attacked from the start [of the second half] and pinned Ath in their own half with a series of scrums and lineouts until the pressure finally told on 48 minutes as Sharpe took a pass from Simon Reed to score in the corner. Thompson kicked a stunning conversion and the South West One side led 16-15. But back came Ath with wingers Cassidy and Bartlett combining well and Stroud going offside. Tapper kicked the penalty and the lead was back with Ath. As the game went into the last quarter of normal time, Tapper added to the lead with another penalty as Stroud again strayed offside.

Stroud had to throw everything forward and Ath defended well. Something had to give and with 11 minutes left, Mark Nicholson had plenty of room to beat Bartlett to the line. Thompson's conversion missed to leave the sides locked together at 21-21. Tapper had a great chance to put Ath back in front on 77 minutes as a period of pressure brought a penalty but his kick drifted wide. With the game going into injury time, Stroud won a lineout in the Ath 22. The ball seemed to go forward in the tackle but referee Nigel Yates waved play on and Chandler dropped on the loose ball. Incredibly, Mr. Yates penalized him and replacement Gareth Fenwick slotted the penalty from in front of the posts to put Stroud 24-21 up. [Ath] recovered the ball from the restart and made ground through Steve Turner and Jim Chandler. Stroud transgressed at the ruck and it was down to Tapper to save the day. With three minutes of injury time played he found himself 35 yards out to the right of the posts but made no mistake. And so, after a spate of substitutions the game went into extra time.

Four minutes in ... Darren Stapleton won a scrum against the head and Ath attacked on the left. Bartlett somehow evaded the tackle of Fenwick, but seemed to put his foot on the line. [He and the touch judge later confirmed he was in play by inches]. The touch judge kept his flag down and the winger raced off to score in the corner. Ath looked the stronger side the longer extra time went on and dominated possession and territory. They had one scare early in the second period when Stroud kicked a penalty to touch inside the 22 but good defence

gave Ath the scrum and the chance to clear their lines. And they sensibly managed to pin Stroud in their own half in the closing minutes, which included a nail biting 90 seconds of injury time, before Mr. Yates allowed the party to begin”.



*Ath players face the fans before the game
(Photo courtesy of Bedfordshire on Sunday newspaper)*



*Alf Bartlett scores in the Cup Final
(Photo courtesy of Bedfordshire on Sunday newspaper)*



Ashley Tapper kicks for goal during the Cup Final

(Photo courtesy of Bedfordshire on Sunday newspaper)



Bedford Athletic celebrate with the NPI Intermediate Cup

Ashley Tapper who lifted the cup, later revealed how close Athletic had come to losing. When Stroud took the lead in injury time, the referee informed him that there were only 30 seconds left. The ploy therefore was to keep the ball alive, fortunately it worked and Tapper was able to slot the equalizing penalty. Darren Stapleton was able to sympathise with Tapper as he too had had to kick a winning penalty for Bedford Queens three years previously, although there were still ten minutes left that day. Perhaps credit should also go to assistant team manager Mick Bowden, who wisely took the team down to Twickenham on the morning of the match, thereby allowing them to dispel their nerves and come to terms with the occasion.

For most teams that would have been a satisfactory end to the season but in the words of coach Neil Beytell, Athletic wanted a "quadruple". The East Midlands Cup Final came a week later, away to Wellingborough. Carrying a number of injuries it needed a second half blitz to rescue the game. Tapper gave Athletic the lead with a penalty, but Wellingborough then raced into a 17-3 lead. Straight after the restart Darren Goodwin scored and Tapper converted, then John Egan made a break and Tapper scored and converted to level matters. Wellingborough visibly wilted and Tapper put Athletic in the lead with a penalty going into the last quarter. Replacement scrum half Micky Norman scored with three minutes to go to make the game safe and earn the side their place in history with a 25-17 win.

Of the 33 first team games played, all were won and an astonishing 1,505 points were scored. Ashley Tapper was the leading points scorer with 366 and Tom Gray led the try scoring charts with 36. Every member of the regular first team squad scored points during the season with the exception of prop forward Richard Porter who had been coaxed out of retirement from the senior Bedford club at the start of the season. Mike Curry and Tommy Cassidy also surpassed 100 points with 130 and 105 respectively.

The club were not prepared to rest on their laurels and the summer of 1998 was spent strengthening the side for the challenges of the first season in Midlands One. Jim Purcell joined from Hitchin at tight head prop, starting the trend at Athletic of active RAF servicemen playing for the club. Three players joined from Bedford, Mark Burgess a tight head prop, Jamie Steele a loose head prop and Garry Wells, a second row. The most significant signing was Justin Cassels a back row forward from Northampton. The success of the 1997-98 season earned Athletic a pre-season match at Goldington Road against the Bedford First XV, but although the match was played in quarters Athletic ended on the wrong side of an 81-0 scoreline.

The season proper began in September with a Tetley Bitter Cup preliminary round match away to Mansfield. Having won the East Midlands Cup the previous year, Athletic graduated from the Intermediate Cup to the full Senior Cup, thereby earning themselves the possibility of facing National League opposition for the first time. Despite Micky Norman's sending off, Athletic advanced 25-13 at Mansfield and did indeed meet National League opposition for the first time when undertaking a 600 mile round trip to Aspatria of National 2 North in the first round. Two tries from Ian Skingsley, one from Mike Curry and one from coach Neil Beytell plus 12 points from the boot of Tapper saw Athletic through with a 32-17 victory. In the second round Athletics' winning run finally came to an end at Whitchurch going down 23-15. It was the first game Athletic had lost in over a season's worth of rugby and brought to an end a 39 game winning streak.

The league season started well with Athletic scoring 85 points and 92 points respectively against Westleigh and Wolverhampton. Midlands One was to prove a tougher league and this was demonstrated in October when a last minute Tapper penalty was needed to overcome Belgrave 10-8 at home. The friendly against the Wasps Wanderers was resurrected for one final season but Athletic cantered to victory scoring eight tries in a 56-0 win. Remarkably Nick

Gregory converted them all. The cup final hero from the previous season Alf Bartlett, incurred a dislocated shoulder in this match.

By the December break in league rugby Athletic remained unbeaten having won all nine games played. A bye in the first round of the Bedfordshire Cup was of little benefit to Bedford Swifts who were dispatched 83-0 in the quarter final, Nick Gregory kicking nine conversions. With Bedford in disarray at Goldington Road, coach Paul Turner and chief executive Geoff Cooke leaving before Christmas (and owner Frank Warren's Sports Network finally selling its controlling shareholding in the New Year), Athletic were joined by back row forward Ross Thomson, a regular in the 1994-95 Division 3 title winning side and by hooker Paul Simmonds.

A combination of cancellations and bad weather left Athletic without a game for 4 weeks and this inactivity seems to have told on the side when Athletic lost their first home league game in two seasons against Banbury on January 9th. Tries from Jim Chandler and Tom Gray with a Tapper penalty had tied matters at 13-all but an interception try took Banbury to a 23-13 win. The following week's match at Hereford was postponed and this gave Scunthorpe, the only unbeaten side in the division a four point advantage at the top of the table. Before launching their title challenge, Athletic comfortably secured the Bedfordshire Cup, defeating Dunstablians 31-6 in the semi-final and Leighton Buzzard 48-3 in one of the most one-sided finals ever.

A friendly defeat at Reading set up the crunch league clash at home to Scunthorpe at the end of February. The sides were level at 6-all at half time but a Skingsley try helped Athletic into a 16-6 lead. A penalty try closed the gap to three points, but two late penalties from Tapper carried the day. This made it more than likely that the title would be decided on points difference in which Athletic had a 26 point advantage.

At the start of March the match away to Hereford was postponed yet again, but Athletic regained top spot the following week when they won 20 points to 18 at Kenilworth. There followed a re-arranged East Midlands Cup Quarter Final against Daventry, in which Athletic scored their biggest win of the season, 109-0, and Nick Gregory equaled the club's points record for a match with three tries and twelve conversions to equal Ashley Tapper's haul of 39 against Oxford Harlequins the previous season. Tom Gray scored 5 tries again for Athletic as indeed he had done the previous season against Towcestrians. Points were imperative in the league as well and in his last match for Athletic, Nick Gregory signed off in style with 7 conversions and a try in a 64-15 win over Stoke. In the final league game of the season Ashley Tapper scored all the points as Athletic gained a crucial 16 points to 13 win at Hereford to set Scunthorpe the target of a 58 point victory the following week at home to Banbury for the title. Despite assurances to the contrary Banbury fielded a virtual second string side including their third team scrum half. But Scunthorpe's 68-13 victory left them 3 points short of Athletic in the title race.

Two championships in two seasons had therefore been achieved and National League rugby at Putnoe Woods had become a reality. It remained to be seen whether back to back East Midlands Cups could also be won. Athletic had won 17-10 at Wellingborough in the semi-final and were away again in the Final, to arch-rivals Kettering. The home side took the lead with a penalty after four minutes but Tapper replied eleven minutes later. Steve Dawkins dummied his way over for the opening try but Athletic turned round level at half time as a back row move released Tapper and when he was stopped Mark Burgess was on hand to score. Kettering took the lead with a converted try but Athletic responded immediately with Ben Mason breaking a tackle to touch down, Tapper converting. He then saw a penalty hit the upright and Chris Eldridge scamper over from the rebound but the try was disallowed for crossing. Kettering had time to miss two penalties before the end of normal time. A penalty in extra time from the trusty boot of Ashley Tapper kept Athletic's hands on the cup. Whilst not as prolific

as the previous season Tapper still scored 260 points and bearing in mind Nick Gregory scored 131 could easily have had more. Adam Lowles was top try scorer with 16 and once again Athletic topped the 1,000 point mark for the season finishing with 1,081.

Most importantly two glorious seasons had propelled Athletic into National League rugby and transformed the club from a competitive East Midlands side into one of the top 68 clubs in the country.

The National League Years: Bedford Athletic in the 21st Century

“Club’s future is now secured” - Headline in club newsletter December 2004

After two years of outstanding success Bedford Athletic embarked on a new life as a National League club. They were only the second ever East Midlands junior club to achieve this status (following Towcestrians). Paul Alston replaced Neil Beytell as coach who stepped down due to work commitments. Paul was captain of the Bedford team that won promotion from National 3 in 1995 and was working as coach of the Northampton Under 21 side. As a result he was able to attract a number of players to the club to bolster the ranks for the first National League campaign. Simon Lincoln, Michael Jones, Andrew Obad (who had Super 12 experience) all joined as did Matt Deans. John Plumb retired as chairman after 5 years, and was replaced by Paul McGuckian. Pat Wheeler continued as club captain.

The first ever National League game played at Putnoe Woods ended in a 25-26 home defeat to Sandal. The team were controversially beaten when the touch judges failed to agree on a conversion kick resulting in two points being disallowed. The first win came two weeks later against Sheffield when Ashley Tapper scored 28 points in his side’s 53-7 victory. In the middle of October Bedford Athletic hosted Fylde in the Tetley Bitter Cup second round. In the first round Athletic had won away at Broadstreet comfortably by 45 points to 24 and in this second round match they scored their highest ever points total in the National Senior Cup competition beating Fylde 60-21. This set up a third round meeting at home to Premiership Two side Exeter who were in third place at the time of the game. However Athletic were already beginning to experience an injury hit season, and went into the game missing Andrew Obad, Ian Skingsley, Giles Witheat and Matt Deans. In a game that is possibly the biggest that Putnoe Woods has ever experienced Bedford Athletic had no answer to the powerful rolling mauls deployed by the opposition but did manage to register three Ashley Tapper penalties to trail 15-9 at half time. Shortly afterward Exeter scored a converted try but with six minutes left, hooker Paul Simmonds scored a try from a lineout catch and drive. With Tapper limping off, Simon Lincoln missed the conversion leaving the gap at 8 points and stifling an Athletic comeback. Exeter scored again in the final minute to win 29-14.

By Christmas the club had won 7 league matches but failed to push on in the second half of the season winning only another 4 games. As two southern sides were relegated from the league above only one side was relegated from Athletics’ league so relegation was never a serious concern. By the end of the season Paul McGuckian noted that playing numbers were in decline and the club were down to running four sides plus a colts. There had been a big effort off the pitch to embrace the club’s National League status with a luncheon club being run in a marquee by Steve Spring, the highlight being a celebrity lunch with Paula Radcliffe.

In the second year of National Leagues the team took on something of an international flavour. The season started with the signing of Yugoslav lock Alexander Mihajlovic, the first Serbian player to play in England, plus the French full back Francois Gueguen. Wing Goran Vucicievic joined Alexander after Christmas, and Spanish international Leo Periera joined during the season. Andy Gallagher took over the first team captaincy from Ashley Tapper. Jon Wells (who returned after two months), Richard Candlin, and Leigh Mansell all departed for Bedford but all in all there were high hopes for promotion. There was also a growing concern that the club was beginning to live beyond its means in its ambition to achieve that promotion. The team started with two league defeats to Aspatia and Dudley Kingswinford. The first home match brought victory over Morley but further away defeats followed to Preston in the Cup and Nuneaton in the league. The second home game was won against Sedgley Park sealed by a Gareth Williams drop goal five minutes into injury time. By the end of October expectations

had been downgraded with coach Paul Alston anticipating third place, recognising that Doncaster and Stourbridge had too much money at their disposal for the rest of the division. Lock Mike Hudson joined from New Brighton but the results did not improve with defeats continuing against Whitchurch, Doncaster, Liverpool St. Helens and New Brighton before tries from Alston, Simon Lincoln (2), and Andy Gallagher brought a 24-19 victory over Sandal. The second team dispatched Bedford Swifts 85-7 in the Bedfordshire Cup before the first team won 24-16 over Walsall. A defeat at Sandal before Christmas meant Athletic had won four league matches out of twelve and none away from home, which was viewed as disappointing given the quality of the players assembled and the money being spent.

After Christmas the team lost away to Liverpool St. Helens and at home to Doncaster (without scoring a point). The tide looked like it might have turned at the end of January when Athletic turned a 22-3 half time deficit at home to Tynedale into a 29-22 victory due to a man of the match performance from Ashley Tapper who replaced Gareth Williams at half time.

The following weekend Athletic lost the return fixture 24-10 at Tynedale and were shocked when coach Paul Alston and first team manager Rob Crowle resigned the following week. The clinching factor occurred (apparently) at Tynedale when following a mix up in responsibilities Alston and Crowle were presented with and asked to personally settle a hotel bill for the team's overnight stay. Alston wrote in a letter that "officials [of the club] did not have the same ambition as the players". The club did ensure the bill was settled and indeed later invited Alston back as a player, although he did not return. However there had been a growing feeling amongst club officials that the growing financial deficit being incurred by the playing side was neither good for the long term health of the club, nor was it obtaining short term results and therefore Paul Alston's departure was a mutually agreeable event

Steve Spring stepped in to fulfil first team managerial duties but unsurprisingly the team suffered a 69-0 reverse the following week at Sedgley Park. By the end of February Athletic had suffered two further league defeats at Stourbridge and at home to Nuneaton and a scratch second team had succumbed in the Bedfordshire Cup Final to Dunstablians by the record score of 74 points to 5, a game in which 11 tries were conceded the sole response coming from Nick Parrish.

Andy Gallagher stood down as captain in March having held the side together in the immediate aftermath of Alston's departure and Ashley Tapper returned to the duty he had held the previous season. Finally the club were able to reappoint Neil Beytell as coach and returned to winning ways against Peterborough in the East Midlands Cup Quarter Final (53-3). The next league game at Morley was lost but by now the country was in the grip of the foot and mouth crisis and league rugby was rapidly disappearing from the radar of the farming communities of the land, indeed many northern clubs did not play again that year.

Bedford Athletic returned to action on 31st March with a 15-10 win at Walsall but then lost at home to Stourbridge. With the season looking like it could run into May or even June to clear the backlog of fixtures Athletic took a firm grip on their own league destiny with victories at home to Dudley Kingswinford 27-22 and on the 5th May against third place New Brighton 23-20. Ian Skingsley, Jon Wells and Andy Gallagher all scored tries before a nailbiting conclusion culminated in a move involving Wells, Gallagher and Giles Witheat finding Dean Taylor who beat the full back for the winning try and ended New Brighton's promotion push as a result.

The RFU then called a halt to the season and Athletic had done enough to finish in safety in tenth place. Under Beytell the side had won three and lost two league matches and also made the final of the East Midlands Cup with a 36-18 victory away to Northampton Old Scouts. This offered a chance for revenge against a Dunstablians side then two leagues below them and who the previous season had mirrored Athletic's Grand Slam of NPI Cup, Bedfordshire Cup,

East Midlands Cup and League (Midlands East 1). Strangely though (largely due to the chaotic end of season) the match was never played.

At the end of a turbulent season for the club in which league status had been retained and credibility restored, Gareth Woodfine stepped down as club President but Neil Beytell did agree to continue as coach.

Over the close season two Athletic dignitaries were recognised for their contributions. The prestigious RFU ViP tie was awarded to Bob Ingledew and Lofty Norman as key voluntary workers in the game. In July 2001 the negotiations on a new lease on the Putnoe Woods ground were renewed with the local council and this meant Bedford Borough Council could offer a grant toward the building of a new clubhouse. A committee consisting of Mark Buddle, Nic Davies, Richard Peck, Bill West, Roger Jackson, Mark Ward, John Plumb and Pat Wheeler was set up to direct progress.

At the start of the 2001-02 season the club lost Giles Witheat, Ben Reynolds, Simon Lincoln and later hooker Paul Simmonds to Bedford while Darren Stapleton took up coaching duties at Biddenham. Newcomers included James Smith, Craig Mitcherson (former England Students prop), Tim Otte, Ollie Peck, Phil Elphick (from Bedford) and his brother Jamie Elphick (a former England under 19 fly half from Coventry), Rob Porteous, Allister Lloyd, Joe Frost, Mark Colbourne and from New Zealand Willy Lio and Ollie Ryan. Simon Williams and Dean Taylor progressed from the Colts side and James Thorp took over first team captaincy duties. Training levels were good with 40 to 50 players attending midweek sessions.

Despite or maybe because of the large turnover in playing numbers Athletic made their by now customary slow start. The first six league games were lost, plus a friendly against North Walsham and a cup tie at home to Preston. The first league win came in November at home to Tynedale by 26 points to 10 and marked a try scoring debut for Ollie Ryan. This was followed by a 13 point all draw at Sandal and then another home win against Nuneaton 25-14 marked by another Ollie Ryan try. By the end of the year however the only other success had been against Scunthorpe where an injury time penalty from Jamie Elphick secured a 41-38 win. At Christmas the club were third from bottom with only 7 points to their name.

It took a while for Athletic to turn the corner in the New Year. However an 8 try 53-0 home win against Sandal in January and a 62-20 win over West Hartlepool in February when Ollie Ryan scored 5 tries restored some confidence as did the signing of Bedford lock Cecil du Plessis for the rest of the season. Following a 30 point to 18 defeat at home to relegation rivals Whitchurch the writing appeared to be on the wall but a late escape involving home victories over Morley, Liverpool St. Helens, and New Brighton meant that the first away win of the season in the final game at Scunthorpe secured safety. Trailing 17-8 at half time, a three try burst in 5 second half minutes nailed a 25-18 win and National League status.

A change of roles occurred at the start of the 2002/03 season. Paul McGuckian became club captain taking over from Pat Wheeler who in turn replaced Paul as club chairman. The club became a limited company incorporated under the Industrial and Provident Societies Act and appointed an executive committee of nine members to provide a more structured business approach. Peter Cook took over as coach from Neil Beytell and came with very solid credentials as a previous England international, and coach of England Students, East Midlands and Bedford. Mark Ward took on the newly created post of Director of Rugby. Sadly however the fourth team disappeared leaving three senior sides plus a colts team.

New signings included Sion Ashley-Jones a former Wales A international, plus RAF hooker Richard Matthews and fly-half Jason Balman. Ex London Irish scrum half Ed Axon joined the club as did winger Matt Aldwinckle a former member of the Great Britain Under 20 400 metre

squad. Richard Candlin and Giles Witheat rejoined from Bedford. Leaving were Gareth Williams who joined Cambridge, Ian Skingsley who joined Letchworth and scrum-half Andy Gallagher who retired.

The plan for a new clubhouse was redesigned as cost estimates spiralled toward the £1 million mark and instead a clubhouse refurbishment was planned with an extended social area, kitchen, changing facilities and toilets split into two stages. This brought the estimate closer to £250,000 and did not involve lottery funding. During the season a further change saw Mick Bowden take over as first team manager from the finally retiring Steve Spring.

The club made a better start to the season winning three and losing three of the first six games. Cup victories over Blaydon and Broadstreet set up a third round meeting with National One side Orrell who at the time were seventh in their division. Athletic were 26-11 down at half time thanks to an Ollie Ryan try and two Jamie Elphick penalties and it was only in the second half that Orrell's pace, power and fitness finally told emerging 74-11 victors. Orrell went on to lift the Powergen Shield that season.

The match took a lot out of the team and although Preston were defeated in the next home league game Athletic then went on a six match losing streak including 50 point plus defeats against Waterloo and New Brighton. In December Andy Phillips made his debut for the club having signed from Northampton and in the next game Athletic halted the slide winning 17-10 at home to Liverpool St Helens. Nevertheless Athletic went into the New Year second bottom of the table with only 4 wins from 14 games. Matters were not helped when hooker Richard Matthews was posted away by the RAF. However Athletic were able to bring in Maltese international Jason Ramage to replace him alongside fellow Maltese international Tom Webber in the front row.

Peter Cook was confident that by getting the defence right and taking the scoring opportunities on offer that wins would come, but the side was denied an early opportunity to execute that as matches in early January against Scunthorpe and Darlington Mowden Park were postponed. A last gasp interception try from captain James Thorp saw Athletic home 15-12 against Blaydon but defeats followed to Nuneaton and Preston. In mid-February came the crunch re-arranged game away to Darlington Mowden Park. A defeat would mean an 8 point gap to safety with 7 games left. Athletic were 15-0 down at half time and in the end tries from hooker Jason Ramage and lock Mike Hudson were not enough to prevent a 22-12 defeat. A further defeat at home to Nuneaton followed.

In previous seasons Athletic had always played their get out of jail card late and this year was no different as results started to take a turn for the better from March onwards. The month started with the club 8 points from safety with 6 matches to play. The revival started with the club securing their first away win, 32-26 at Blaydon. Although 21-10 down at half time Athletic reversed their fortunes with tries from Ollie Ryan, Craig Mitcherson and Phil Elphick. At home to Darlington Mowden Park the side won 19-16. John Haines joining from Bedford made his debut in the centre and a Ross Thomson try secured victory following a first half penalty try and a mazy run from the half way line by Matt Aldwinckle. 11 tries were scored in a 67-7 home win against Scunthorpe to leave Athletic 2 points from safety with 3 matches to go.

As the Scunthorpe game had been rearranged from earlier in the season, the return game away in North Lincolnshire was played the very next weekend. This time affairs were much closer and tries from Mike Hudson, Ollie Ryan and a penalty try were needed to secure a 19-12 win. Athletics' luck was beginning to seep away though as Blaydon also won to leave Athletic still two points from safety but now with only two games left.

The first of these was at home to Waterloo who only two years previously had been a National One club. Athletic were 15-3 down at half time, and the only try of the afternoon for them was scored by Ollie Ryan in a 32-8 defeat. It wasn't the only positive however as mercifully Blaydon also lost at home to Halifax by a point so Athletic still had a chance of survival in the final match of the season at home to already relegated Broadstreet. Martin Jackson, Jamie Elphick, Phil Elphick, Giles Witheat and Ashley Tapper all scored tries as Athletic won comfortably 31-9. Joy turned to despair however on hearing that Blaydon had won at near neighbours Tynedale (and they subsequently won their game in hand as well) and so for the first time in their history the club suffered relegation despite finishing fourth from bottom.

A last minute reprieve may have been earned if proposals to create a new National 3 Midlands had been approved by the RFU Competitions Committee but the proposal was defeated by 8 votes to 7. This season really sounded the death knell for the Midlands sides in the National 3 North league as of the 5 participants, Nuneaton were promoted, Scunthorpe, Broadstreet and Bedford Athletic all relegated, leaving only Dudley Kingswinford and newly promoted (and subsequently relegated) Longton to fly the Midlands banner.

There were however success stories elsewhere in the club. The second team won 18 of 30 matches played and the season saw the emergence of players such as Chris Daubney and Andy Muldoon with Marcus Draycup and Paul Ryder playing for the East Midlands Under 20 side. It also saw the re-emergence of Neil Paterson who stepped up from the third team to the second team and then the firsts and remarkably Neil was then selected for the East Midlands senior side eight years after his first appearance for them. That East Midlands side was captained by Bedford Athletic's Ross Thomson. The third team had a successful season maintaining an unbeaten record in their league for the second year running to retain their league trophy.

Bedford Athletic felt truly aggrieved at losing their National League status, particularly as the rules were subsequently amended to ensure that no more than three teams were relegated in any future season. However there was an unexpected upside. Full planning permission had by now been received for the development of the clubhouse, but the club had been having difficulty in obtaining the necessary finance. A Council grant of £50,000 provided some of the money and due to the club's relinquishment of their National League status the club was now eligible for a loan from the Rugby Football Foundation Community Rugby Capital Fund. This loan would be interest free and repayable over 15 years. The club applied for the maximum amount allowable (£100,000). Negotiations took most of the season, and when the application came before the Foundation's board in March 2004 matters were again delayed when the board decided they wished to make a site visit. The club had the good fortune to host part of the East Midlands leg of the "Sweet Chariot" World Cup winning tour later that same week and a favourable impression on the RFU hierarchy was created. By the end of the season the loan had been agreed and work could proceed. The remainder of the necessary funds was donated by supporters, players and friends of the club with the bricks being donated by the Hanson Building Project.

James Thorp stood down as first team captain at the start of the 2003-04 season as he moved away to Rutland and he was replaced by Ollie Ryan. Andy Bennett, David Jenkins (former England Students, Harlequins and London Welsh), Jamie Rudkin, Matt Ireland and Ed Swanwick all joined the club, mainly due to connections with various local education establishments. Barry Pearson joined from Northampton BBOB. Rob Dunne, a fly half from New Zealand joined the side while on a two year working visit and ended up being the club's top points scorer for the season. Mark Ward had to step down during the season as Director of Rugby and was replaced on an interim basis by Club Captain Paul McGuckian.

The first two games of the season were in the Powergen Cup and resulted in a preliminary round win at Sutton Coldfield and a first round defeat away to Tynedale in extra time. The new Midlands One campaign began with a 25-13 home win against Kettering but concerns about the team's ability to win away from home continued with defeat in the first away match of the season to local rivals Dunstablians. This was however corrected at Whitchurch when tries from Jamie Elphick (2), Matt Aldwinckle (2), Ollie Ryan, Ben Reynolds and 16 points from the boot of Rob Dunne laid to rest the jinx that Athletic could not win away from home before Christmas. Indeed Athletic won 6 games on the trot and obtained top spot in the division with a 46 points to 6 home win against Old Laurentians before travelling away to second place Luctonians on World Cup Final day in November 2003. Athletic lost the game and their lead at the top of the division but the day will be most remembered for the sledging received by Australian Swanwick on the back of the English victory!

Before Christmas the team regained their top position with wins at home to Scunthorpe and against Luctonians and an away win at Walsall. With Luctonians also losing to Kettering it was Kettering who were to emerge as Athletic's title challengers and they had games in hand.

Going into the New Year Bedford Athletic were making the running in the league. They maximised this position in January with wins over Old Laurentians (31-10), Leicester Lions (40-17), Luton (40-0) and Whitchurch (24-8). Indeed the pressure that this put on their potential challengers seemed to pay off when Kettering lost one of their games in hand at Old Laurentians to give Athletic breathing space at the top of the league. Bedford Athletic were also making progress in the Bedfordshire Cup and had already dispatched Stockwood Park and Dunstablians before they met Ampthill in the Final in early February. Ampthill took an early 13-3 lead but tries from Gareth Graham, Matt Aldwinckle, Andy Bennett and Rob Dunne saw Athletic home in a 27-13 victory.

Having taken the initiative in Midlands One, Athletic almost immediately jeopardised it when they lost the home game against Dunstablians by one point (35-36) at the end of February. This turned the subsequent league game away to Kettering into something of a title decider. In a close match Athletic eventually turned the screw in the second half scoring 21 points without reply and although not mathematically certain the club could now be confident that in only their second ever season in Midlands One the title would once again be theirs.

Confirmation of this fact came in the final home game of the season when Walsall were defeated by 41 points to 12 meaning that the defeat in what by now was becoming a traditional final day trip to Scunthorpe was irrelevant.

Two trophies secured and although perhaps not reaching the heady heights of the 1997-98 season Athletic certainly had their sights on a Triple Crown. Huntingdon had withdrawn in the East Midlands Cup Quarter Finals but Old Northamptonians were despatched 86-0 in the semi-final to set up the final game of the season, the East Midlands Cup Final away to Peterborough. As in the Bedfordshire Cup Final Athletic went behind early in the game but tries from Andy Bennett and Ben Gander gave Athletic a 10-8 lead at half time. A Wimpie Jonker penalty re-established Peterborough's lead at the start of the second half but Athletic finished the stronger with two tries from Matt Aldwinckle in the final five minutes sealing a 22-16 victory.

Having guided the club back into the National Leagues at the first time of asking and having won the Bedfordshire and East Midlands Cups in a repeat of the 1998-99 season, Peter Cook stepped down as the first team coach as job commitments took him away from the area. The vacancy was widely advertised through a weekly rugby newspaper amongst other avenues but in the end the replacements came from closer to home with Paul Saffy joining the club from Bedford and Ashley Tapper stepping up internally to form a joint coaching team for the

following season. Ed Axon took over as the Director of Rugby and fellow scrum half David Jenkins took over the first team captaincy as Ollie Ryan also moved away.

There were few changes at committee level as the end of phase one of the development project was now in hand and those who had worked so hard to make all the dreams become reality could see the fruit of their labours in sight.

The 2004-05 season will best be remembered for what took place off the field rather than what was achieved on it. Details of the new 42 year lease extension were finalised with Bedford Borough Council in November 2004 and the clubhouse redevelopment work finally began the following month. The work was completed on 12th April 2005 and the facilities were used for the first time at the Vice Presidents supper on 22nd April when Phil Bennett was the guest speaker, and for the final game of the season when Rugby were the visitors.

The squad had been strengthened by the signing of two South Africans, Shaun Stevens and Mouritz Botha. Two Tongans, Sione Timani and Sione Ofa joined the club following the Under 21 World Cup in Scotland and also made a welcome contribution in the first months of the season. Andy Phillips having fulfilled his wish to play rugby with his brother Chris at Athletic now fulfilled his other wish to play with brother Jon in departing to play for Bedford.

Standards in the National Leagues had moved on considerably since the club's previous participation and although the first match of the season was won at home to Blaydon (including the club's first ever bonus point for scoring four tries), the remainder of the season was always a struggle. The writing was on the wall when home defeats against Dudley Kingswinford and Darlington who were expected to be the easier opposition meant Athletic still only had one win going into December. A second home victory was recorded against Cleckheaton but Athletic reached the turn of the year with only two victories and ten points to their name and in bottom position.

A brief rally was threatened in the New Year when home victories were recorded against New Brighton, Kendal and Fylde but the crunch game came away to Dudley Kingswinford in late February. Mouritz Botha was sent off for kicking an opponent in the first half and the team failed to even gain a bonus point in a 36-19 defeat. Although one further win was gained at home to Darlington Mowden Park, the remainder of the season appeared characterised by long away trips and heavy defeats. Rugby won that final game of the season comfortably but results elsewhere did not go their way and they were relegated along with Dudley and Bedford Athletic as once again Midlands clubs failed to make an impression on the Northern league. Ironically it was a five point deduction incurred against Athletic for fielding an ineligible player before Christmas that sealed Rugby's fate.

It was the end of an era in a number of other respects. Paul Saffy departed after one season as coach and Pat Wheeler stood down as club chairman after the successful completion of the first phase of the clubhouse development. Pat was replaced as chairman by Chris Jordan and the club continued its recent connections with the RAF by appointing Peter Taylor alongside Ashley Tapper as coach for the 2005-06 season. Not only had Taylor got RAF and Barbarians experience he had also played 224 times for Harrogate and been a regular for Yorkshire. David Jenkins moved on and so Scott Grant took over the first team captaincy.



*First XV captain
Scott Grant in
action against
Walsall in
December 2005.*

(Photo courtesy
of A. Pool)

The Midlands One campaign saw Athletic lining up alongside fellow relegated clubs Rugby and Dudley Kingswinford, promoted teams Market Bosworth, Burton and Luton and old regulars Scunthorpe, Kettering, Bromsgrove, Walsall, Dunstablians and Luctonians with Whitchurch and Longton having been moved into the North leagues to make way for the high proportion of relegated Midlands clubs.

September and October 2005 saw Athletic go unbeaten. Early wins against Dudley Kingswinford at home and Luctonians away coupled with a close 23-16 home victory against Kettering and a muddy 25-7 triumph at Market Bosworth set up the top of the table clash with Rugby. Going into the game Rugby were the top points scorers in the league and Athletic the strongest defensive side. On the day defensive structure and commitment prevailed as Athletic won the game 17-7. October finished with a comprehensive 24-3 win at Burton.

Athletics' unbeaten record came somewhat unstuck in November. Firstly the Intermediate Cup game at Dunstablians was lost and then the home match against Luton saw Athletic drop their first points of the season beaten rather more comprehensively than the 27-13 scoreline suggests. The slide was halted with a win at Walsall and at home to Bromsgrove but a second sending off in three matches saw Athletic succumb to a 16-15 defeat at home to Scunthorpe. The club ended the year joint top of the table with Rugby having beaten Dunstablians and Walsall in December and through to the semi-finals of the Bedfordshire Cup following victory at Bedford Swifts. The home game against Dunstablians on December 3rd marked the official opening of the newly extended clubhouse by East Midlands President Phil Elmer.

2006 began with a key game away to Luton. With two defeats already Athletic knew a defeat would drop them back into the chasing pack, conversely Luton had already lost four games and defeat would end their title aspirations. Athletic produced one of their performances of the season to triumph 32-17. They led 29-3 at one stage and the game was memorable for the unorthodox try of the season, juggled over the line by Mike Hudson. Buoyed by this result Athletic went to league leaders Rugby at the end of January full of confidence but on this occasion they started too slowly and although they came back in the second half, eventually lost the match 19-14. This was realistically the end of the club's title ambitions, in fact Rugby did not lose another game on their way to the league title.

Athletics' focus was now on achieving a runner's up spot and a play-off place. This was not helped in February when the playing of an unregistered player resulted in a two point deduction, effectively a fourth defeat. March saw critical games against teams with aspirations

of overhauling the club, however first Luctonians at home and then Dudley Kingswinford away (both in the last minutes and both by Jamie Elphick) were despatched. This left Athletic comfortably in second place going into the final month of the season.



Bedfordshire Athletic celebrate winning the Bedfordshire Cup in 2006

(Photo courtesy of A. Pool)

As well as their strong league showing Athletic had already secured the Bedfordshire Cup for a record equalling eighth time against Dunstablians 24-8 and had overcome Old Northamptonians and Peterborough in the East Midlands Cup. All eyes were set on what should have been a dramatic final two weekends of the season. First underdogs Stewarts & Lloyds were overcome 15-10 in the final of the East Midlands Cup. However the final league game of the season at Scunthorpe which could have been a straight fight for second place was rendered redundant as Scunthorpe previously lost 22-7 at Dudley Kingswinford. In the event Athletic ran out winners 33-28.

One of the key recent matches in the club's history was played at Putnoe Woods on Saturday 29th April as Athletic took on North One side West Park St. Helens for a place in the National Leagues. Athletic who led 10-0 at half time, took a 17-0 lead with a great try from Mouritz Botha early in the second half but then suffered sin binnings to half back pair Matt Ireland and Ashley Tapper turning the tide against the team. West Park drew level by the end of the game and won 24-17 in extra time, condemning the club to Midlands One rugby. The second team won the newly formed East Midlands league losing only two league games all season.

There were few changes for the club over the summer with Chris Jordan continuing as Chairman and Ed Axon, Peter Taylor and Ashley Tapper continuing to head up the playing side. John Ross retired after nearly twenty years as fixture secretary leaving Jeremy Tyrrell to take up the position, only the fourth person to do so in more than fifty years! "Lofty" Norman finally did retire having given the club unstinting service for fifty plus years and his talents as groundsman and general attention to the detail that other people don't see will be sorely

missed! There were some changes on the playing side with Nick Winters and Josh Roberts returning to New Zealand and the club welcoming an influx of South Africans in their stead - Ronaldo Viljoen, Rob Harris and Tokkie Kotze. Mouritz Botha left to join Bedford while the Taylor brothers (Matt and Ben) joined as did later in the season New Zealand prop Ray Brown.

Pre-season training for the 2006-07 season appeared to go well but the warning bells were ringing following a comprehensive 36 points to nil mauling by Loughborough Students. Athletic indeed proved to be slow starters in the league campaign this time around (despite an excellent early season victory at Dudley Kingswinford), losing three of their first six matches and all against the promoted sides. The 35-26 defeat at South Leicester where a nine point lead was surrendered was a catalyst for change and the side at home to Longton the following week showed six changes to the starting line up. The team then went on an undefeated run of five games including a tremendous 26-23 win at league pacesetters Luton who were previously unbeaten in the season.

Ath were back in the RFU Senior Cup now renamed the EDF Energy National Trophy following their East Midlands victory the previous season. Having seen off the minnows from Vale of Lune in the first round, the club hosted Darlington Mowden Park in the second round, the first opportunity the team had to play against National League opposition since relegation eighteen months previously. A scintillating first half performance saw the side into a 27-7 half time lead and despite a strong recovery by the visitors in the second half Athletic did enough to run out winners 37-36. This earned a third round tie away to Cambridge who with three promotions in three seasons had established themselves as rivals to the senior Bedford club, and who were now commanding a spot in National Two. Athletic did themselves no favours at all in incurring a club record defeat by 77 points to nil, conceding eleven tries in the process and totally failing to come to grips with the occasion.

Of more concern was the thumping defeat inflicted by Dunstablians the previous week when Athletic were again outplayed in a 43-23 defeat having very little other than the kicking of the league's leading points scorer Ronaldo Viljoen to offer. That defeat coupled with a previous defeat at Scunthorpe ended any realistic opportunity Athletic had of mounting a promotion campaign before Christmas and the club went into the New Year in mid-table.

Hope of a title challenge re-emerged briefly when the double was completed over league leaders Luton in a nine points to seven victory in filthy weather in early January but by now the forwards in particular were suffering an horrendous run of injuries and unavailability. First team captain Scott Grant sustained an injury in the Luton game, Matt and Ben Taylor were both unavailable at various times, flanker Jamie Rudkin had left to follow a teaching job to the South-West and kicker Viljoen left the club. The result was a six game losing streak that dropped the club into the relegation places going into March. Midlands One was turning into an extraordinary campaign with teams at the bottom regularly beating those at the top meaning that the points safety mark continued to rise each week. By the time captain Grant returned the club needed three wins from its final three matches and his presence was significant in a 25-16 home win over Broadstreet.

The penultimate game of the season was at Dunstablians who certainly had their mind on a Twickenham appearance as Athletic dominated the game from start to finish to gain their second win. Nevertheless these two wins and a points total of 20 still left the club in the bottom three and needing at least a draw in the final home game of the season against Scunthorpe to secure safety.

A gargantuan rolling maul over fully 40 yards started the crucial game off with a try for coach Peter Taylor but gradually Scunthorpe fought back into the game and the club led 16-13 going into the final minutes. Scunthorpe converted a penalty from straight in front of the posts to tie

the scores and minutes later had a drop goal attempt that would have seen Athletic relegated charged down. As it was the game ended in a draw and that was enough to see the club to safety albeit on points difference, remarkable given that they had managed ten wins and a draw from twenty-two matches.

Athletic had not made their usual smooth progress in the County Cup competitions and although there were wins against Kempston and Bedford Swifts in the Bedfordshire Cup, the final was lost against Dunstablians. In the East Midlands Cup a quarter-final victory over Stewarts & Lloyds set up a semi-final at Old Northamptonians but with their mind on the Scunthorpe game a week later and playing a weakened side the team succumbed to a lame 23-18 defeat.

At the end of the season Ed Axon decided he could no longer continue in the role of Director of Rugby given his business commitments so the Club Council decided to change the playing set up and appoint David August as Chairman of the Playing Committee a role geared to overseeing the playing structures across the club. Peter Taylor and Ashley Tapper continued as club coaches and had a big rebuilding job to do as a number of players left the club. Matt Taylor, Ben Taylor, Richard Matthews, Tokkie Kotze (despite a few appearances in the new season) and Barry Kirwan all left the area, Jamie Elphick decided to concentrate on business interests and Jon Wells joined Luton, now newly promoted to the National Leagues. New joiners were Garry Acton from Hull Ionians, Ian Gilmour, another RAF hooker, Tom Ireland from Plymouth, Joe Hunt (previously a GB Students Rugby League international) and from the previous year's National Colts Cup winning Bedford Blues side Matt Mills. Following the start of the season Clinton Prinsloo a fly half from Irvine in Scotland (but with Currie Cup experience in South Africa), and Andy Dockray a backrow player with National League experience at Preston bolstered the ranks.

The Centenary season started with a mixed series of results. A dominant performance from Prinsloo enabled the side to get an early win against Dudley Kingswinford but the away form was poor with defeats at Luctonians, Longton, Loughborough Students and Newport. Of greatest concern were the two games where the team conceded over 50 points for the first time ever in Midlands One rugby, away to Luctonians 53-15 and at home to Kenilworth 52-20. Given the changes over the previous two seasons there were now few players left who had played in the National League days and the team was reliant on the emerging talents of some of its youngsters, props Sheldon Reynecke and Luke Wilson, back row Matt Mills and backs Ben Campbell and Paul Ryder amongst them. Solid home wins were recorded against South Leicester and Scunthorpe and in the Cup again against Dudley Kingswinford, with the Centenary captain Phil Elphick leading by example either from the back row or the centres! The first half of the season ended with a crunch derby away to Dunstablians but another defeat left the club on 8 points with four others and only ahead of the relegation positions on points difference.

The New Year saw an upturn in form but not an immediate return in results. Twice the side established early leads at Kenilworth and South Leicester and twice they were hauled back. The South Leicester defeat was particularly galling as some of the best rugby played all season gave the team a 12-0 lead but this only brought the best out of the home side who produced their finest display of the season to win 24-12. A trip to Middlesbrough in the fourth round of the EDF Energy Intermediate Cup brought another good performance but not a win as the side bowed out 15-13. A home win against Longton showed what could be achieved and the side finally hit a purple patch as league leaders Loughborough Students were beaten 18-15, thanks to a last minute try saving tackle from Paul Ryder. Peterborough were defeated 39-17, the first away win of the season and then Luctonians were overcome 22-20 at home. The double was completed over Dudley Kingswinford. The subsequent break over the

international period did the side no favours at all, and only one more match was won in the run in.

The final games of the season brought some bitter defeats not least to the club's great rivals Dunstablians when victory would have seen the side from the south of the county relegated. A 27-12 lead on the hour mark somehow transformed into a 31-27 defeat as three tries without reply were conceded against a side who had four yellow cards on the day. Victory on the last day of the season at Scunthorpe was enough to see the side safe for another season and Dunstablians were indeed relegated in the end.

There was defeat also to Kettering in the East Midlands Cup Final. A quarter final victory at home to Peterborough and a semi final win at Northampton Old Scouts sealed the club's place in the final but at Goldington Road Athletic had no answer to the onslaught of the Kettering team and were 21-0 down inside the first 12 minutes. Eventually the team rallied but the final score was still 28-13.

There were positives as well to take from the Centenary Season. A celebration game against the Penguin International XV reviving memories of the game that opened the clubhouse in 1970 was a joyous celebration of all that has been good about Ath rugby with players such as Giles Witheat, Simon Lincoln, Mouritz Botha, Ed Axon and Darren Stapleton making a return. The Penguins fielded a strong side too with Bedford favourites Jon Phillips and Matt Allen making an appearance alongside Scottish international Craig Joiner. For the record they won 67-41.

The highlight of the Centenary Season however was the performance of the Bedford Athletic Colts. This was a breakthrough year as the Colts side finally won a trophy with a memorable 14-13 triumph at Ampthill in the final of the Bedfordshire Colts Cup. Luton and Dunstablians had been dispatched in earlier rounds and indeed the Colts achieved another notable first when they took on the Bedford Blues Academy side in the fourth round of the National Colts Cup at Goldington Road giving them one of their closest games of their title winning campaign. Stars of the future were born with players such as James Mortimer, Stuart Polson, Ben Middleton, Charlie Darlow, Tom Neale and Chris Elliott who played for England Colleges demonstrating that they would be in the Bedford Athletic starting XV for many years to come.



Bedford Athletic warm up for Penguins match with future England cap Mouritz Botha in the centre



Captain Garry Acton leads the way with Jon Phillips (Penguins) looking on.



Dignatories at the post match meal with Centenary President Bob Ingledew (centre)

It was also a time for recognising past contributions and the most fitting appointment of the season was Bob Ingledew in his role as club President. An Athman for 60 years (alongside that other great servant Lofty Norman), Bob represented the club with pride wherever we went. The centenary celebrations culminated 100 years to the day of the founding of the club when on the evening of 16 April Bob Taylor, President of the RFU was guest of honour at the club's centenary dinner and a special lunch for Honorary Life Members was held at the King's Arms where all those years ago the club had been formed.

The upheavals in the summer of 2008 were widespread as many people's involvement in the club came to a natural end. Ashley Tapper and Peter Taylor stepped down as first team coaches, David August resigned as Chairman of Playing, Alan Williams concluded his involvement with the second team and Rob Saunders stepped down as manager of the Colts. Norman Barker of Old Northamptonians and East Midlands Under 18s became Head Coach and Val Jones stepped up from Colts Coach to Director of Rugby. Norman Barker began the season with half a dozen of last year's first team, some second teamers and a few of last season's colts.

All of which made it all the more surprising when this combination turned over pre-season league favourites Broadstreet in the first match, 4 tries to 1 (22 points to 14). The spark was not to last. A heavy defeat away to Chester after a long and delayed journey was followed by a conclusive loss to Luctonians and a defeat at Peterborough despite being ahead at half time. Players continued to leave and results did not improve with a big loss at home to a poor Kettering side followed by a 47-7 cup defeat to a rampant Westoe and a 25 point hammering

away to South Leicester. By the end of October the club were second from bottom and had already used 40 odd players in the 1st XV (this would rise to 52 by the end of the season).

In the match at home to Longton a far more vibrant display saw the team lose narrowly to a last minute penalty and then a hugely competitive performance was delivered away to Kenilworth inspired mainly by former Colts fly half James Mortimer (his only start of the season). Trailing 21-18 with ten minutes to go it was only a late flurry of tries by the home side that led to a rather flattering 36-18 scoreline. So it was no surprise when previously unbeaten Newport were beaten at home 17-14 with a late try from Fernely Simmonds. Two weeks later a much changed side without captain Acton lost heavily at bottom side Malvern and further defeats to Hinckley and Newport left the side bottom by the turn of the year.

An East Midlands Cup tragedy awaited the team on January 3rd as a 22-3 half time lead at local rivals Ampthill became a 30-22 full time deficit. Sandwiched in between big defeats at home to Kenilworth and South Leicester was a possible season defining defeat away to second bottom Longton. Trailing 9-8 at the break and with the side bolstered by the return of several old boys such as the Elphick brothers the match was there to be won playing with the slope in the second half. Sadly the lineout went completely awry and with no first phase possession a poor side (who only won 5 games in the season – 2 against us) took confidence and closed the game out 21-7.

A last minute 28-24 reverse to Peterborough and a 22-3 defeat the following week at Kettering were the final straws for coach Barker who was relieved of his duties thereafter, Ashley Tapper taking sole responsibility. An away defeat at Luctonians and home reversals against Chester and Broadstreet would ordinarily have resulted in straight relegation. Due to the increase in league sizes there was a stay of execution and needing to win their last two matches Athletic rose to the occasion at Hinckley with a convincing 30 points to 13 victory. A last day victory at home to Malvern would be sufficient to save the side from relegation. In a game that had to be won Ath trailed 31-8 after 50 minutes. A come back in the last half hour seemed entirely unlikely but tries from Alex Stajka, Garry Acton, Ryan Spence and with two minutes to go from Ashley Tapper, three of which were converted by Stajka brought an unlikely win and coupled with Haywards Heath failure to convert a last minute penalty at North Walsham brought a miraculous reprieve for the following season.

The harsh facts revealed by the statistics for the 2009-10 season conclude this was the worst season of all time for the club at first XV level. Bedford Athletic players were back in training in June being overseen by their new coach Hendry Rheeders, a South African and ex-captain of Coventry who joined from Jersey RFC. With few experienced players signing it was the youth of the club who stepped up to first team level. Chris Elliott and Joe Marsden made their debuts from the successful 2008 Colts side. Matt Jones and Ben Middleton from that side became first team regulars. The new season in a newly named league National 3 Midlands did not start well with 64 points conceded to Luton (64-14) and 71 points to Ampthill (71-10), record defeats for the club at this level. Of equal concern was the injury to captain Garry Acton and the absence of seasoned campaigners such as Mike Hudson. Adam Dempsey a second row was pointed in the club's direction by Bedford Blues and a spate of South Africans joined the club in Chris Blom, Shaun van Rensburg and Henry Blom. Their stay proved short lived and ultimately unhappy.

Two of the better performances of the season came at home to Bromsgrove when two bonus points were secured in a 43-36 defeat and away to Kenilworth. Tries from Matt Jones and Mike Hudson saw the team lead 27-19. A desperate rearguard effort was not enough and two late tries saw the game slip away 29-27. The next weekend the wheels came off at home to Kettering who took the game 31-12. Heavy defeats at Longton and Malvern followed and one of the few successes was a defeat at home to Luctonians when the visitors were restricted to

three tries, one of the few times in the season that Ath did not concede a try bonus point. The end of November saw a swift exit from the East Midlands Cup 57-0 to Peterborough and then a 43-17 defeat at home to Newport who arrived with makeshift props and insufficient replacements. The best display of the season occurred at Peterborough in December when the side was at the height of its (limited) powers. Although the game was lost 15-8 the team with a little more penetration and accuracy may have produced a different result.

The post Christmas (and post snow!) campaign was hit hard in the first match against Hereford when captain Garry Acton and influential prop Dave O'Leary were both forced off through injury, Acton missing four games and O'Leary never to return. Two weeks later Ben Beagent also left injured leaving the back row pruned to the bare bones and the side devoid of experience. Through January and February the side conceded over 50 points on four occasions with a 74-0 loss at Bromsgrove at the end of February confirming relegation. Sadly relegation proved to be the start rather than the end of the trials and tribulations. The following weekend the club could not raise a first XV of registered players to make the trip to Luctonians and for the first time in the club's history a first team league game was conceded. A five point deduction followed reducing the six bonus points previously earned to one. Another headache loomed in finding 15 players to travel to Newport and this was just achieved leaving defeats at home to Peterborough and away to Luton and Luctonians by a club record 108-3 completing the whitewash. The services of Hendry Rheeders were not retained!

On the other side of the coin the Colts had a season to remember. A fifth round success against Dinnington set up a mouth watering National Colts Cup quarter final at home to near neighbours Bedford Blues. A great cup run ran out of steam though in that match as the Ath colts were eventually out played by a side semi-professional in nature eventually going down 44-3. The East Midlands league was won with victory over Leighton Buzzard in the Final although the tables were turned in the Bedfordshire Colts Cup Final with Buzzard victorious on that occasion.

In retrospect the death of this version of Bedford Athletic was a long drawn out affair lasting over two seasons. The National League experience had come to an end and so had a period in which the club looked and recruited externally for its playing base and as a result would too often be the victim of the "journeyman" professional. However right under its nose the future was being born and as the first team faded the future of the club lay in its home grown youth. Just two weeks after possibly the darkest day in the club's history when it failed to raise a first XV to travel to Luctonians, the Ath colts played the Blues colts in the National Colts Cup Quarter Final. Tommy Mills, Andy Ince, David Simpson, Stephen Woodhead and Guiseppe Picanza all played in that side and they would be famous club names of the future. All that was needed now was a coaching team to bring them together.

The Joiceful Years: A new Bedford Athletic emerges

“M’on the Ath” – Oli Joice’s regular rallying call to the team as Head Coach

For the third summer in a row Bedford Athletic made a new coaching appointment. Having won only four games in two seasons and been relegated from National 3 Midlands an attempt to arrest the slide and stop the rot was long overdue. This came in the shape of Rowland Winter and Oli Joice, two coaches from Northampton who looked to start the rebuilding process. This was not made any easier by the departure of club stalwarts such as Ben Beagent, Matt Mills, Matt Jones and Paul Ryder over the summer months. In their place came a blend of youth and experience with ex colts such as Stuart Polson, Tommy Mills and Tom Orton becoming first team regulars and the addition of new Captain Sam Richbell plus Ross Austen from Ampthill, James Ball from Cambridge, Nick Peters from Luton and top points scorer Phil Reed from Rugby Lions adding the necessary spine to the team. Paul Briggs and Ben Mann came to the club with the coaches, there was a brief contribution from hooker Kyle Dufty and having recovered from an operation they were joined by fly half Andy Silley. There were changes off the pitch too with Mick Bowden taking over from John Donnelly as Chairman, Babs Rai stepping up as Club Secretary and Barry Eynon becoming VPs secretary.

When the Midlands One East campaign commenced the first issue was the millstone of the 27 match losing streak and this was not solved immediately. The opening day defeat at Coalville may well have had its roots in this lack of confidence but Athletic were not disgraced by the 34-27 scoreline. A 19-5 loss at home to Paviers the following week showed how tough this league was going to be and so it was a tremendous relief to all concerned that the first win came at Kettering in week three as Alex Miller, Luke Levitt, Phil Reed and Nick Peters ran in tries in a comprehensive 32-8 victory. The fact that the team were still a work in progress was highlighted in the next game when three soft tries just before half time led to a disappointing 31-22 defeat at home to Spalding. A thumping at runaway league leaders and eventual champions Syston was no surprise but there was a key moment the following week when the first home win in 18 months came with a last minute drop goal by Phil Reed earning a 16-15 triumph against Derby. This performance was backed up with a bonus point success at bottom club Dunstablians. The developing nature of the side was highlighted over the next few matches with big home defeats against Ilkeston and Mansfield and close away wins at Leighton Buzzard and Wellingborough. The latter two games demonstrated the growing confidence in defence which allowed the side to cling on for victory in tight circumstances at both venues. A home victory over Wellingborough in the East Midlands Cup saw the club reach the cold weather break in ninth position in the league and in the Cup Semi Finals.

One match was played during the period of snow and ice and it was a real confidence booster. Travelling to one of the top of the table sides Paviers, Athletic were unlucky to return with an 18-all draw. James Ball, Will Quinn and Stuart Polson scored the tries and it was only the lack of a kicker that denied the team the victory. All of which meant the team was in good spirits as the league campaign recommenced after Christmas and the 31-13 victory at Spalding was probably the best winning performance of the season. The side was at or near full strength for the first time with big contributions coming from captain Sam Richbell, James Ball, Kyle Dufty, Ross Austen and Phil Reed. In the following weeks the team were unlucky to take just a losing bonus point at home to Syston and nothing at all away to Derby but the full five points were earned with a resounding 36-12 home success against Dunstablians at the end of January.

From February onwards performances and results took a dip. This co-incided with a season ending injury to James Ball, the return of Kyle Dufty to Northampton BBOB and the intermittent appearances of Ross Austen. A heavy defeat at Ilkeston was followed by a poor first half performance at Matlock where although a 24-0 deficit was pulled back to 24-17 the side offered too little too late. This poor first half syndrome was taken into the match with Leighton

Buzzard which ended in a 14-7 defeat and suddenly victory at home to Newark became imperative to ensure that the side did not slip into the relegation fight. Chris Elliott and Phil Reed scored tries and Chris Bygraves kicked a penalty and two conversions in a 17-0 win.

A tigerish performance at Mansfield followed where Athletic led throughout the game and nearly held on for the win. Unfortunately the sin binning of Sam Richbell in the final five minutes and a series of scrums on the visitors line led to the concession of a penalty try and a narrow defeat. The attitude and spirit of the side continued into the game against Wellingborough and although the scores were close at half time Athletic accelerated away in the second half scoring 7 tries including a remarkable hat trick from prop Sheldon Reynecke. 51-11 was the biggest league winning margin for the club in 8 seasons! This ended relegation as an issue and the following day the team pulled out all the stops to record a 30 points to 5 victory over Peterborough and qualify for the Final of the East Midlands Cup. Chris Bygraves kicked 11 points to take him to 61 points in 11 appearances in the season.

Exhaustion was clearly a factor the following weekend when Bedford Athletic trailed Kettering 19-11 in a close contest but ran out of steam in the final quarter to go down 40-11. Much the same could be said of the match at home to Matlock the following week where a 12-all half time position ended up in a 28-12 defeat. All of which led to the East Midlands Cup Final against Luton at Goldington Road on Wednesday 30 March. As expected the team from the higher division eventually had too much pace and power but a courageous first half performance saw the score at 10-6 at half time although in the second half Luton pulled away to win 43-6. Captain Sam Richbell missed the game with a season ending injury sustained in the match against Matlock and Ross Austen retired hurt on 45 minutes appearing to end his season also. Ben Middleton took over the captaincy and led the team in a 33-29 defeat at Newark. Injuries and unavailability meant a loss of momentum as the season came to a close with five straight defeats the season petering out with a 23-7 home loss against Coalville. Nevertheless 10th place was secured, the 50 point mark reached and stabilization achieved!

The colts once again lost to Bedford Blues in the National Colts Cup for the third successive season but the concern was the fact that they only played nine games. The Vets played two matches but the Warriors were outclassed in their league winning only four games. Although the rebuilding job began the work that remained was illustrated by the fact that only 57 games were played across the club by all teams, the second lowest total ever.

Stability off the pitch and squad strengthening on it were the themes of the summer of 2011. Rowland and Oli remained as coaches and brought in Liam Lancaster and Martin Wolfenden to strengthen the second row, encouraged Ben Beagent to return in the back row, replaced Ross Austen with Rob Watkins and in the backs were able to welcome the experience of Simon Lincoln joining from Old Albanians, Adam Baker joining from Luton, Tom Orton returning from Cambridge via a short break, Ben Johnson and James Mortimer back from University and Stephen Woodhead stepping up from the Colts for his first full Senior season.

The season began well with a bonus point victory at home to Coalville and that was followed up with successes against Kettering, Loughborough and Leighton Buzzard in the first two months. There were also disappointments with a last gasp defeat at Spalding courtesy of disallowed tries, not kicking a penalty with minutes left and some strange refereeing decisions. At home to Peterborough another late try snatched away the win despite the fact that Tom Orton was twice over the line before the final whistle, neither time grounding the ball.

As the evenings turned dark in November so did Bedford Athletics' fortunes on the pitch. An East Midlands cup defeat at Luton may have been expected but the most serious set back came in the home match against Towcestrians. Leading 25-3 with half an hour to play the team somehow managed to contrive a 27-25 defeat and the mental damage was to stay with

the team for some weeks. Matlock were the next visitors to Putnoe Woods and pinched a 24-21 victory and then away to Nuneaton Old Edwardians the team were again denied at the death when first the home winger seemed to have a foot in touch for the crucial try and then a penalty with the last kick of the game saw another two point defeat. Fortunately the losing run was arrested before Christmas as a try from Billy Mills and a penalty from James Mortimer secured an 8-6 win against Paviers.

Matters did not improve significantly after Christmas as a narrow defeat at Kettering and a bonus point win at home to Spalding were the precursors to defeats to Peterborough, Derby and Ilkeston. A much improved second half display at Loughborough at the end of February seemed to herald a change in fortunes and sure enough the next week the team traveled to Leighton Buzzard scored four tries and returned with a bonus point win. The front five were now holding their own and this meant the backs were finally advancing off attacking ball. Market Rasen were summarily dismissed 31-3 and then revenge was taken at Towcestrians where a blistering first half performance saw a 20-7 lead eventually extended to a 34-27 win as Tom Orton touched down in the final moments. Another four try display at Matlock rounded off the month of March and although not quite enough to seal the win did see the team reach league safety on 53 points and a top half of the table position. That 7th position in the final table was secured with victory in the last two games as Nuneaton Old Edwardians were defeated 34-28 at home and in conditions more akin to December the side gave Coalville a 13 point start in the final match before overhauling them for a 14-13 victory. Both opponents were relegated as a result.

As for individual highlights Stuart Polson, Luke Levitt, Dave Rowling and Tommy Mills all reached 50 appearances for the club in the season as did Simon Lincoln albeit there was a gap of 10 years between no.s 49 and 50. In total 41 players played first team rugby with Stephen Woodhead, Tom Orton and Luke Levitt ever present on 27 appearances. Of the 74 tries scored Tommy Mills led the way with 12 and James Mortimer scored 195 points remarkably scoring in every game he played.

The summer months saw no changes off the field or in the coaching set up on the field. Rowland Winter and Oli Joisce continued as coaches for a third season. There was some strengthening of the playing squad as Will Allard joined the team from the Bedford Academy, and Alex Sutherland joined as a wing/full back from Luton. Of equal significance was the return of Paul Ryder from his lengthy trip round the world to strengthen the backs.

In fact the service given to the club by both Paul Ryder and Ben Beagent was marked in the second game of the season when both recorded their 100th appearance for the club. This was in a 38-24 win over Paviers and followed up an opening day one point defeat at Peterborough Lions. The result that really got the season going though was the 99 points to 7 victory at home to Spalding. This was a record league winning margin for the club together with the highest points total in a league match. Alex Sutherland led the way with three tries, Tommy Mills, Liam Lancaster, Dave Brennan all got two and the remainder of the 15 tries (also a club league record) were shared between Paul Ryder, Rob Watkins, Luke Levitt, Stephen Woodhead, Ben Beagent and Ben Johnson. To prove this was no fluke Market Bosworth were dispatched by 62 points to 16 in the next home game. The first real test came at home to Ilkeston who led the league at the time and departed with a 20 points to 8 victory. Despite a spirited effort the visitor's defence was too strong on the day and they scored tries when it mattered.

The team got back on the rails with wins against Newark and Market Rasen before a titanic clash against Amptill in the East Midlands Cup Quarter Final. Tied at 11 points all with the team from the league above going into the final quarter of the game, it was only late tries that earned them a 23-11 victory. Returning to league action a win at Towcester and a defeat at Matlock set up a game against top of the table Old Northamptonians in December, a test that

the side passed with flying colours as fly half James Mortimer dominated the game scoring 19 points in a 44-19 victory. Two bonus points were secured away to Paviers before the Christmas break in a match in which Luke Levitt made his 50th consecutive appearance for the 1st XV as the side finished the calendar year in fourth position trailing the league leaders Peterborough Lions by 7 points. Other players reaching 50 appearances during the season were James Mortimer, Chris Elliott, Tom Orton, Stephen Woodhead, Rob Watkins and Martin Wolfenden.

2013 started in comfortable fashion with wins against Spalding and Peterborough before the snow intervened. There was significant off the field news though in the "snow break" as Rowland Winter suddenly departed the coaching staff to take up a position at Cambridge. The good news was that Oli Joice remained and ably supported by first XV captain James Ball the team's response was impressive as they went top of the table for the first time in the season with wins against Loughborough and Kettering. One player hitting form in particular was Stephen Woodhead who scored 7 tries in 3 games at the start of the New Year to take over from Ben Johnson as the leading try scorer. Such try scoring regularity played a big role in his reinstatement on the wing allowing Tom Orton to resume in the scrum half berth.

Bedford Athletic did not remain at the top of the table for long with a 29-22 defeat away at Ilkeston in February. Athletic dominated the first half but had blown at least two good try scoring chances as they turned round for the second half leading by 15 points to 5. A last minute cross field kick could have produced a draw but it was not to be. With Ilkeston now top of the table Athletic could do no more than keep on winning and wait for them to slip up.

In the final run in slip ups were avoided on Bedford's part, particularly at Market Rasen where on a dreadful day the pack powered the team to a 21-14 victory responding particularly well to trailing 9-3 at half time. The return of Liam Lancaster and James Ball to the side in that game created real competition for places in the pack alongside Martin Wolfenden, Ben Middleton and Ben Beagent. With a fully fit squad to pick from the whole side showed great enthusiasm in overcoming both the snow and Towcester to record a bonus point win later in March. Over the Easter weekend Ilkeston did slip up away to Peterborough Lions and Athletic responded to going back to the top of the table with a 32-14 win at home to Matlock inspired by the control of Mortimer, the speed of Johnson and Woodhead and the power of Wolfenden and Lancaster in the forwards. The penultimate game of the season saw yet another must win game away to Old Northamptonians. A tight game was dominated territorially by Bedford Athletic and they outscored their hosts by 3 tries to 1. Level on points with Peterborough Lions but leading them on points difference both sides were faced with a winner takes all final match for the League title which strangely was unlikely to deliver runners up spot to the vanquished as Ilkeston looked set to bisect the teams for second place with a win at home to Spalding.

The largest crowd at Putnoe Woods for several years saw Bedford Athletic at full strength as full back Ben Johnson remarkably passed a late fitness test having limped off the week before with a hamstring injury. An early exchange of penalties then led to an opening try for Lions following a charge down kick. Athletic responded with tries for both wingers Stephen Woodhead (his 20th of the season) and Alex Sutherland with Mortimer converting one before another defensive lapse saw Chris Humphrey cross to restore Lion's lead. James Ball was driven over by the pack to restore a five point home lead at half time. The second half was a tight tense affair. Early Lions pressure led to the only try of the half duly converted for a 24-22 lead. Bedford Athletic eventually worked field position to allow James Mortimer to kick a drop goal with 12 minutes to go. Trailing 25-24 Lions had an immediate penalty in response which drifted wide and for the final ten minutes it was all hands to the pumps as Bedford Athletic successfully defended their one point lead to become Champions.

James Mortimer led the way as the season's top points scorer with 260 and Stephen Woodhead top try scorer with 20. Ever presents throughout the season were Martin Wolfenden, Stuart Polson, Rob Watkins, Luke Levitt, Stephen Woodhead and Ryan Taylor.

In the off season Andy Phillips a former Bedford Blues and Bedford Athletic player and then coach of the East Midlands Senior XV joined Oli Joice as coach. However Director of Rugby Val Jones stepped down after five years at the helm. The club was sorry to lose players of the calibre of Martin Wolfenden and Will Allard who followed Rowland Winter to Cambridge and Alex Sutherland who returned home to Bournemouth. There were few significant players joining the club in their place. Matt Meek following time with London Broncos Rugby League played half a season, Stefan Hughes-Brand and Sven Meiland came from the Bedford Academy and later in the season Will Affleck joined from Luton and James Hawken from Olney. With an eye to the future it was good to see former colts Giuseppe Picanza, Ben Reed and David Simpson join the first XV squad and Nick Thomas step up from the second XV. In terms of landmarks, Luke Levitt and Ben Middleton both reached 100 appearances for the first team early in the season.

The club avoided any level transfer complications and took its place in National 3 Midlands. Immediately the step up in terms of physicality and power was evident. This took its toll as Chris Elliott, Ryan Taylor and Ben Beagent all suffered injuries that kept them out for a month or more. James Ball and Rob Watkins were sidelined early in the campaign and unable to return before Christmas. Very sadly Stuart Polson's career came to an abrupt end when he suffered a detached retina and with Stephen Woodhead dislocating a shoulder in November and Paul Ryder suffering a hernia in February playing resources were truly stretched.

On the field of play a pre-season East Midlands cup success against Old Northamptonians was the precursor to a season of league defeats. Matters may have been different if a win had been secured in opening back to back home matches against Syston (14-22) and Bournville (27-39) but a side losing players to injury and starting to lack confidence soon began to find all the key calls going against them. There were big defeats to Broadstreet and Nuneaton but conversely strong performances against Longton, Old Halesonians, Scunthorpe and then an agonising two point loss in the last minute at home to South Leicester against whom Bedford Athletic had played all the rugby. Nevertheless, the team struggled to retain concentration at critical moments in key matches and losses at home to Lymm (37-50) and Sandbach (12-25) who were also toward the bottom of the table were particularly disappointing and the club reached the turn of the year with only 5 bonus points.

The wet weather set in with a vengeance in January and February and with an already lightweight pack, the side simply could gain no purchase in any match and six defeats in a row after Christmas without a bonus point saw the club relegated in mid-February following a 32-0 loss at Nuneaton. In the remainder of the season there were vibrant performances at home to Old Halesonians (27-31) and Scunthorpe (24-32) and away to South Leicester (38-55) where 3 more bonus points were picked up. Finally the result everyone had been waiting for came in the last home game of the season as play-off contenders Sutton Coldfield were despatched 16-0 with two Charlie Darlow tries and a massive second half defensive effort.

The Colts provided hope for the future reaching the quarter finals of the National Colts Cup before going out to Tonbridge Juddians, winning the Bedfordshire Cup against Biggleswade, the East Midlands League against Old Northamptonians and the East Midlands Referees Cup against Buckingham. History was also made as the first ever senior ladies game saw Bedford Athletic defeat Stockwood Park 73-12.

The side had that all too familiar losing feeling in the first game of the new campaign as they travelled to fellow relegated side Syston going down 20-8 to a side that beat them twice in 2013-14. For the first home game of the season against Bugbrooke the coaches had a fully fit and available squad to pick from. The team delivered with David Simpson scoring 2 of 8 tries in an emphatic 51-5 win. That momentum was taken away to Derby when another resilient performance reversed an early deficit and saw the team power away to a 29-17 win against the side that finished second last time around. The next trip to Derbyshire was a different story at Ilkeston. The team never recovered from an early season ending injury to leading try scorer Stephen Woodhead and though they had chances in the second half Ilkeston held on to win 15-13. League leaders Kettering were next to visit Putnoe Woods and a poor 15 minutes before half time cost Athletic as they trailed 21-5 at the interval and a second half resurgence didn't win them the game as they went down 26-25. The team were leading a tough league and cup double header at Old Northamptonians before a second half sin binning saw them concede 17 points and lose. The team returned to form with Andy Ince and Luke Levitt to the fore to secure a fine 36-14 win scoring 5 tries at Paviers and completed the first half of the season in 5th place with a 91-0 win against Spalding with both Tom Dolemore and Ben Johnson equalling the 1st XV record of 5 tries in a match and the side equalling the club league record of 15 tries in a game.



*Ben Johnson
races away
against Spalding
in a record try
scoring
appearance*

In the period between the away match at Paviers and the away match at Bugbrooke in the New Year the team went through a remarkable spell when in 270 consecutive minutes of rugby they scored 220 points without reply. January brought a strong home win against Derby and then a miserable away defeat at Huntingdon. It wasn't the best of preparations for season defining matches against top 5 sides Ilkeston and Kettering.

In the first of these games at home to Ilkeston on an afternoon of mud, a slippery ball and hard graft the side triumphed 8-7. All the points came in the first half from a Sven Meiland try and a James Mortimer penalty and in the second an aggressive defensive performance led by man of the match Nick Thomas contained Ilkeston in their own half to enable the team to record their first ever league victory over their opponents. The following week at Kettering the side trailed by 20 points to five shortly after half time but a comeback in the final half hour orchestrated by James Mortimer with tries for Stefan Hughes-Brand, Charlie Darlow and Tommy Mills saw the team home by 26 points to 20. This win moved the side up to third place.

There followed home victories against Mansfield and Newark notable only for the fact that in scoring five tries (out of six) against Mansfield Ben Johnson again equalled the club record for the number of tries scored by a first XV player in a game. Sandwiched between these victories was a 30 points to nil win at Market Rasen & Louth, where ex Colts captain Charlie Reed on his full first team debut scored the first try in a 3 try win.

This set up a battle of 3rd v 2nd when Old Northamptonians visited on March 21st in a game to decide who would contest the play off place. Old Northamptonians triumphed 13 points to 3 and became the first side that Bedford Athletic took no points off in this season. With Bedford Athletic now seven points behind the play off place the league season was decided. A 72-10 win at Spalding secured third place with Ben Johnson again scoring five tries. The final day loss at home to champions Syston 36-34 having led 24-7 with a try bonus point after 25 minutes showed the team might have what it takes to challenge for Level 5 rugby again.

Oli Joisce and Andy Phillips now entered their third season coaching the team but just as significant in the club's development was Stuart Polson taking up the position as second team coach having had to retire from the game 18 months previously. There were some welcome additions in the close season. Steve Smith having been a Bedford Junior Blue at the club rejoined the team from National League side Shelford in the centres. Josh Cassell added further pace to the backline having returned from University where he turned out at Twickenham in the Senior Vase Final for West Leeds. In addition ex-USA Eagles Under 20 scrum half Nick Boyer arrived for the first half of the season. Chris Elliott and Luke Levitt took a break from the game.

There was a pre-season wake-up call with a defeat at Towcestrians which reminded everyone of the standards required. When the league began there were two bonus point victories at home to Wellingborough and Bugbrooke before the first real test came at early league leaders Derby. Bedford Athletic failed that test as they panicked when Derby took an early lead and started forcing the game. A yellow card and a further try from an intercept pass saw the side trail 31-8 at half time. An improved second half showing still delivered nothing in a 31-20 defeat. There were better fortunes on the next trip to Derbyshire as Ilkeston were finally beaten away from home with a score of 39-17. This led to a home game against new league leaders Kettering. On an afternoon when the club hosted a touring Vets team from California – the Bald Eagles – as part of the World Cup celebrations the home side triumphed 16-9 thanks to a dominant scrum led by Tom Neale and a winning try from Stephen Woodhead.

Starting November in third place the side were soon upwardly mobile. A 43-22 win at home to Matlock saw them climb to second and the following week a 38-0 win at Newark saw the top spot secured. Third place Newbold looked to provide a stern test as they arrived full of expectation and departed soundly trounced 53-5 with a first half display of running rugby from a back line of Orton, Mortimer, Dolemore, Simpson, Mills, Woodhead and Darlow that saw a 39-0 lead established in one of the best halves seen at Putnoe Wood in many a season. This was the prelude to several large victories in the league culminating in the pre-Christmas match at Bugbrooke which Bedford Athletic won 50-0. The game marked the 100th appearance for

captain Rob Watkins and also a milestone for fly half James Mortimer as he passed 1,000 points for the first XV scoring a try and 20 points in a man of the match performance.



A rare try for James Mortimer on reaching 1,000 points for the club

The New Year saw the side leading the table by seven points as second placed Derby arrived. It also saw the start of a lengthening injury list as Andy Ince, Steve Smith and Stephen Woodhead all limped out of the side before and during that game. Having trailed 13-5 the side showed immense character to come back and win the game 21-18 with a drop goal from Mortimer in the last five minutes. A predictably difficult game at 5th place Huntingdon followed when the team trailed twice and finished the game defending on their own line only for captain Watkins to haul his side to victory. He too was on the injury table by the time the side travelled to 4th place Kettering at the end of January. Matters looked bleak as the team trailed 5-3 with Stefan Hughes-Brand red carded with ten minutes to go. Amazingly the seven man pack survived a defensive 5 metre scrum and moments later they scored the try of the season to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat. From a scrum in their own half Nick Thomas picked up and drove hard into the home defence. Then play was switched to the open side with David Simpson, Charlie Darlow and Paul Ryder carrying deep into the Kettering half. When the ball was recycled Mortimer fed Tom Rees and he popped the ball off to Steve Smith who waltzed through four defenders for the winning score.

Luton were dispatched 29-17 in the East Midlands Cup Semi Final, the quarter final having been won 21-12 against Wellingborough at the end of October, both wins away from home. Three more league victories were recorded in February (including Ryan Taylor's 100th appearance at Matlock) resulting in the club being awarded the Rugby World Team of the Month accolade for a 20 match unbeaten run for the first team and a concurrent 10 match unbeaten run for the seconds. However that run came to an end at Newbold when on a torrid, wet and windy afternoon the side were outmuscled 27-0 by the third place team to cut their lead at the top of the table from 13 to 8 points.

With three games to go after Easter and a maximum of eight points needed to win the league the 1st XV travelled to Old Laurentians to grind out a hard fought 41-12 win. With Derby beating Newbold on the same day three points were needed for the title going into the last home game of the season against Paviers. A hallmark defensive performance when the side kept their line intact for the first 20 minutes was the precursor to a devastating 10 minute spell when the team scored 4 tries without Paviers touching the ball through Charlie Darlow, Woodhead (2) and Tommy Mills. It was a notable day for Woodhead who made his 100th appearance for the 1st XV. A 31-5 half time lead became 57-24 at full time to secure the title. The league finished with a 14-0 victory at Wellingborough and a final margin of 7 points to 2nd place Derby.

The second team won the Eagle IPA Merit Table (Division Two of East Midlands 2nd team rugby) losing one game despite close shaves at Spalding winning 15-12 with only 13 players and narrow wins in matches against Old Northamptonians and Towcestrians 3rds. A 55-19 win over Peterborough 2s secured the title.

The season concluded with the club aiming for its 6th East Midlands Cup success when they took on Northampton Old Scouts at Goldington Road in early May. Once again the performance was built on defence with their opponents restricted to three penalty goals. In response Woodhead who was to finish top try scorer for the season with 24 (20 before Christmas!) and Josh Cassell scored before half time, with Stefan Hughes-Brand and Cassell finishing off an interception break by Mortimer scoring after half time for a 27 points to 9 victory. It was nearly a fitting end to the season for Mortimer who broke his own club record for most league points in the season with 275 in a total of 291. He also made most appearances with 28 and finished the season on a career total of 1,131 points for the first team.



The League and Cup double secured in 2016

The theme over the Summer was “strength in depth” as the club now knew from the experience what an attritional league National 3 Midlands was going to be. Accordingly three players arrived from Ampthill, Jake Foster in the back row and JJ Raven and Stuart Livesey in the backs. Robbie Povey (from Luton and Canada “A”) and James Hawken (from Olney) provided further cover at fly half and full back, John Clarke (Ulster Academy) and James Aldwinckle (Kettering) added to the front row options along with a short term loan of Charles Robinson from Bedford Blues at hooker. Josh McCann stepped up from the colts as prop forward.

The season started well, at least for 25 minutes at Towcestrians, as the team took a 14-0 lead. However the initiative was surrendered and they slumped to a 19-14 opening day defeat. That slump continued in the next three games through September. At the start of October a 17-3 first half lead against fellow promoted side Derby was not enough to withstand a second half onslaught as the side lost 33-17. The first win of the season came at Lichfield as an inspired performance from Steve Smith at fly half with 16 points and tries from Raven, Livesey, Foster and Ben Middleton produced a 36-32 victory. Smith limped out of the 29-12 East Midlands cup win at home to Kettering and by the time of the visit to league leaders Nuneaton at the end of October there were six first team regulars unavailable through injury. This did not mar the performance as Athletic led deep into the second half before late Nuneaton pressure sealed them a 32-28 win. Two bonus points were welcome and the next week at home to Old Halesonians, although the injury list had grown to nine first team regulars, a brace of tries from Cassell and David Simpson saw the side home 34-12.

This result moved the team off the bottom of the table and two bonus points in the next outing at Peterborough Lions continued to help an upward momentum. This momentum was checked the following week as although Sandbach trailed 20-10 early in the second half this deficit had been narrowed to 23-21 by the final minute when a poor refereeing decision allowed Sandbach a kickable penalty on the 22 to steal victory with the last kick of the game. An unsurprising heavy defeat at then league leaders Sheffield left Bedford Athletic with their final game of the first half of the season at home to bottom club Syston. An emphatic 43-12 win with Cassell scoring his 12th try in 12 games kept the club 6 points behind 11th place and in touching distance of safety. In the early part of the season the attrition rate was high with front row forwards Ryan Taylor, Ian Barnard, John Clarke and Liam Walsh, back row forwards Rob Watkins, Andy Ince and Jake Foster, fly half James Mortimer, centres Steve Smith and Tommy Mills and winger Stephen Woodhead all missing multiple games through injury. The injury rate lessened considerably after Christmas although the club did miss JJ Raven who had to stop playing through personal circumstances.

The final game before Christmas was the first on the long run in and was a good start in the bid for survival as despite being physically outmuscled the team earned a losing bonus point in a 13-9 defeat to Birmingham. The first match after the New Year deserved more than a losing bonus point at Bridgnorth as two late tries were disallowed with the referee unsighted both times. Having trailed Broadstreet 31-11 early in the second half the two bonus points earned in a 31-30 defeat felt more like success than failure but the campaign began to go wrong the following week at Derby.

In a game Bedford Athletic needed to win, they led 10-7 at halftime but then appeared to capitulate under the pressure of the situation conceding two turnover tries to lose 17-10. Worse was to follow the next week at home to Lichfield, third from bottom at the time, in a key relegation decider. Lichfield scored in the first minute and went on to dominate the match as Bedford Athletic delivered their worse display for several years. Lichfield led 24-12 and 31-17 before a late Ath surge nearly earned a win they scarcely deserved, going down 31-27. Gallingly there were 11 points missed from kicks at goal which was well in excess of the margin of victory. The writing was now on the wall. February brought no further points in the league

campaign and irritatingly no wins at all as both Luton (Bedfordshire Cup Quarter Final) and Old Northamptonians (East Midlands Cup Semi Final) conceded their respective cup matches.

March showed what might have been as narrow defeats at Old Halesonians (27-23) and to Peterborough Lions (28-24) kept the side in the business of losing bonus points but not much needed wins. Having dispatched Stockwood Park 62-0 in the Bedfordshire Cup Semi Final the side travelled to Sandbach knowing only a win would save their National 3 Midlands status. Despite outscoring their hosts by 6 tries to 3 and leading 22-6 and 34-19, the team could only draw 37 points all. Once again 11 points were missed from kicks at goal and when the news came through that Longton had snatched a 33-32 win against Derby relegation was confirmed.

Playing for pride in April the side started well at home to Sheffield but could not hold a 22-5 lead and were edged out 46-39 as the losing habit continued. This ended at Syston as although another 22-5 lead was butchered this time Josh Cassell's 19th and 20th tries of the season and Steve Smith's penalty in the final minutes saw the team to their first win of the second half of the campaign 32-27. This confirmed that the side would finish above Syston in the table and the final game at home to Towcestrians was also won 53-19. A Bedfordshire Cup Final win against Dunstablians (27-10) was the precursor to a 27-11 East Midlands Cup Final defeat against Peterborough Lions.

Achievers in the year were Charlie Darlow who reached 100 caps and James Mortimer, Luke Levitt and Tom Orton who all passed 150. Josh Cassell recorded a remarkable scoring rate of 21 tries in 25 games making it 35 in 44 career appearances. The Second team won their merit table losing only one match, a winning streak against other East Midlands sides lasting 34 matches and stretching back to November 2015 and ensuring back to back second and first division East Midlands merit table titles.



Josh Cassell on his remarkable try scoring spree; this against Peterborough Lions

Given the frustration of relegation, stability on and off the pitch was key as the club looked to bounce back. When the new season began the team registered 18 tries in the first three games

to take an early lead in Midlands One East. In the fourth game at home to Kettering the side trailed in the penalty count 14-6, and the try count 4-3 but won the match 21-20. The lost try bonus point saw the side slip to second, but the win kept the unbeaten run going. That run extended through October and top spot was reclaimed with the 104-0 win and 16 tries scored at home to Market Rasen & Louth being club league records. Josh Cassell equalled the 1st XV try scoring record of 5 and James Mortimer his personal best with 29 points, matching his previous week's tally in the 96-0 East Midlands Cup win at Oundle. November and December brought matches against the teams in the league's top half. 6th place Old Northamptonians were dispatched 61-15 away and 7th place Oundle 64-17 at home. These games combined with a 93-0 win at Stockwood Park in the Bedfordshire Cup were no real preparation for a tough match at 5th placed Paviers. Leading 21-12 at half time, ill-discipline and poor game management saw three close range tries conceded and the game was lost 45-24. Down to second place the team got back on track at home to 4th place Peterborough with a hard fought 30-19 win having trailed 12-3. The final game in the first half of the season saw Bedford Athletic travel to league leaders Syston and lose a close contest 19-18. The team were unlucky to be beaten by a try in the final five minutes having been at least the equal of their opponents, the result seeing them drop to third place. The final game of 2017 saw a 98-0 win over Bugbrooke with Mortimer breaking his personal best with 33 points and setting a new club league record of 14 conversions in a match, Stephen Woodhead marked the game with his 100th try for the first XV. At Christmas Bedford Athletic were back to 2nd place four points behind Syston.

The New Year saw two crucial fixtures at the top of the table. First up Syston defeated Kettering 15-3 to maintain top spot. Then Bedford Athletic travelled to Kettering looking to consolidate second position. This they did with an emphatic 27-10 victory, dominating the match and leading 27-3 at half time. Andy Ince led the forward charge whilst David Simpson directed the backs. The league remained unchanged until the middle of February when Bedford Athletic won 48-0 at Northampton Old Scouts, a match that doubled as an East Midlands Cup Semi Final and saw the 1st XV pass 1,000 points in the league for the season. It also saw them regain the lead in the league as Syston lost 31-17 at Old Northamptonians. Bedford Athletic held a one point lead through March, surviving a tricky match at home to Old Northamptonians winning 26-13 with a surge in the final 20 minutes, and then demolishing Paviers 57-12 with 43 points in the first 27 minutes, James Mortimer equalling the 1st XV points record for a season finishing the game with 366. He then surpassed it in a 52-0 Bedfordshire Cup Final win at Biggleswade, (eventually finishing with 436) which was reached courtesy of an 84-0 win at Luton in February. The final month of the season began with a 74-10 victory at Peterborough where Stephen Woodhead's 4 tries took him to 46 (49 by the end of the season) passing the previous first XV record of 44. The second last game saw a title showdown at home to Syston. Bedford Athletic prevailed 25-24 with James Mortimer deciding matters slotting two penalties for victory in a tense second half, negating the fact that the visitors scored 4 tries to Athletics' 3. Josh Cassell was the prolific wing on the day with two tries on his way to 43 for the season. A comfortable win at home to Wellingborough on the final day of the league season secured the title.



*James Mortimer
kicking for glory
against Syston*

Once again the club faced old foes, National 2 bound Peterborough Lions in the East Midlands Cup Final, this time very much as underdogs but looking to complete a league and cup treble. Bedford Athletic took the lead with eighty seconds played with James Mortimer spotting Lions were short on the blind side rifled a pass out to Josh Cassell who beat the defence and crossed for the opening try and a 5-0 lead. Mortimer kicked a penalty for 8-0 on twelve minutes, and in the 18th minute a turnover saw the ball spun wide to Cassell who charged up and then infield scattering the Lion's defence before feeding the ball to his opposite wing Woodhead who crossed for his first try of the day. Mortimer's conversion made it 15-0. Mortimer added a penalty and on the half hour the forwards drove hard and sucked in the defence before the ball was spun wide for Woodhead on the right wing for yet another try and a 23-0 lead. This finally sparked Lions into life and two tries narrowed Bedford Athletics' lead to 23-12 at half time. The start of the second half saw Nico Defeo score and convert for the Lions to leave the Bedford Athletic advantage at 23-19. The kick off was regathered and immediately Bedford Athletic had a try of their own as Harry Sawford-Smith crossed and Mortimer converted to stretch the lead back to 30-19. The pace and physicality of the encounter did not cease and it took a try if not match saving tackle from Charlie Darlow on 58 minutes to shift the momentum Bedford Athletics' way as he flipped the Lions player on his back when over the try line. The Bedford pack obliterated their opponents at the next scrum and the tone was set for a rearguard action in the final quarter of an hour. Eventually Lions ran out of ideas, out of steam and out of time and Bedford Athletic held on for a famous win. The 30-19 victory ended the season in which the 1st XV scored 1,654 points (previous record 1,505) including 239 tries (230).



Stephen Woodhead completes his record try scoring season in the Cup Final against Lions

The 2nd XV finished runners up to Ampthill Jets in both cup and league in their first season in the Herts & Middlesex Merit Tables but retained the East Midlands Merit league title. The colts won the East Midlands Under 18s league for a hat trick of league titles across the club.

The main change during the off season saw Bedford Athletic benefitting from one of the new RFU Artificial Grass Pitches, officially opened by Peter Wheeler prior to the match against Chingford. Promotion meant a level transfer to the London & South East Premier League and the 2018-19 season began at Sutton & Epsom. Bedford Athletic led 10-7 at half time before the start of the second period saw them concede four tries and slump to a 49-25 defeat. Honours were nearly even in the second game when Bedford Athletic shared 8 tries with Tring but the team still lost 26-24. A toe to toe encounter emerged at league leaders Wimbledon when Bedford Athletic trailed 24-20 until the final five minutes before succumbing 36-20 to the side recently relegated from National 2 South. This suggested good foundations had been laid but this was questioned with two home defeats in succession against fellow promoted sides CS Stags and Chingford. These were a set back and raised the question as to whether the side had the composure for must win games. This was most evident against Chingford where a consistent display over 80 minutes would have brought victory, but a malfunctioning lineout meant the side trailed 21-7 at half time and 29-22 at the end. A depressing 50-0 defeat at Dorking followed with a host of injuries and unavailabilities. After six games Bedford Athletic were second bottom with three bonus points, eleven points from safety having produced some good spells but insufficient continuity over 80 minutes. The expected attritional nature of Level 5 rugby meant Liam Walsh, Ryan Taylor, Nick Thomas, Andy Ince, Josh Cassell and Harry Sawford-Smith were now side-lined from the previous season's title winning side.

The first win of the season came in a 32-28 victory against Sidcup. It was a match in which Bedford Athletic took their chances with Ben Middleton finishing off a Rob Watkins lineout steal and a mazy run by Archie Duncan ending in a try for Harry Sawford-Smith before half time. This laid the platform for Jake Foster to win the match from a Sawford-Smith break with five minutes to go. A heavy defeat at Hertford followed but this in turn led to a comfortable home win by 35 points to 22 against Tunbridge Wells as some of the earlier injury concerns began to ease. A critical away match at bottom of the table Shelford saw the side build a 29-10 lead through tries by Stephen Woodhead, Smith, Sawford-Smith, Watkins and Robbie Locke before they held off a late fight back to win 29-22. An 18-17 victory at home to second place Westcliff indicated that the side had finally reached the level required in this league as Steve Smith dominated the game and sealed victory with a penalty in the final five minutes. Two bonus points were gained in a 35-29 defeat at Guildford but given that half a dozen or so chances were missed it could have been more. Brentwood were allowed to build a 17-0 lead in the final home game of the year but this was hauled back until a last minute David Simpson try sealed an 18-17 victory. At the halfway point of the season the side had climbed to 12th, still in the relegation places having amassed 28 points, but only on points difference and with five wins in seven matches were on an upward charge. The last league game of the year saw a bonus point for four tries achieved in horrendous conditions at Tring in a 44-22 defeat and the last game of the year saw a 61-7 Bedfordshire Cup win away to Bedford Swifts.

In January a narrow home defeat to Wimbledon (still leading the league) was followed by a comprehensive away defeat at CS Stags notable for the fact the referee awarded no penalties at all in the match to the Ath side, perhaps a record all of its own. A crucial trip to fellow bottom three side Chingford followed. It was a game where Bedford Athletic led for all but five minutes and nearly lost. A Josh Cassell hat trick saw the side ahead 32-18 on the hour mark but this soon became 32-23. In the final minutes Chingford scored a converted try and had a long distance penalty with the last kick of the game to win. The kick fell short and the win moved Bedford Athletic out of the bottom three for the first time in the season.

The last game in January was a remarkable affair at Putnoe Wood. The side trailed Dorking by 38 points to 19 with half an hour to play and then ran in five unanswered tries to triumph by 50 points to 38. The movement up the table continued into February and suddenly the team began to look less of a side struggling against relegation and more of a seasoned competitor at this level. They never trailed at Sidcup eventually running out 30-17 winners and at home to Hertford led throughout, with the exception of an early try, extending the lead to 26-7 before closing the game out 29-26. Leo Mortimer came to the fore in these matches kicking 15 and 19 points respectively allowing the side to build scoreboard pressure (with his brother James a long term injury he went on to be top scorer for the season with 190). He was ably assisted by the subtle intelligence of Steve Smith at inside centre, the roving presence of captain Rob Watkins in the back row and the raw power of Nick Thomas in the pack who all emerged as key leaders of a side who had by now moved into eighth place, eleven points clear of relegation and with nine wins in the previous 14 matches eyeing a finish in the top half of the table.

February ended with a walk over against Stockwood Park in the Bedfordshire Cup Semi Final before the side moved into March with contrasting matches at Tunbridge Wells and at home to Shelford. A dramatic game at Tunbridge Wells saw tries in the 75th, 78th and 80th minutes secure an unlikely 31-all draw whilst at home to bottom side Shelford the Bedford Athletic back line cut loose with ten tries in a 54-19 win. There was a hat trick for Stephen Woodhead, two tries apiece for Josh Cassell and Harry Sawford-Smith and one for Charlie Darlow, David Simpson and Steve Smith. The unbeaten run continued with a 47-26 success away to Oundle in an East Midlands Cup semi final and although after seven matches it finally ended in a 17-13 defeat at Westcliff (who eventually won the promotion play off) this coincided with confirmation of league safety as with 57 points the side moved eighteen points clear of third from bottom Chingford with three matches to play.

The final three league games saw a 63-7 win at home to Guildford, including hat tricks for Woodhead and Sawford-Smith with Andy Ince celebrating 100 first XV appearances, a 54-34 win away to Brentwood and a narrow 38-31 home defeat to a Sutton & Epsom side that won the league as a result, however a 6th place finish in the top half of the table was secured.



Andy Ince on his way to a try in his 100th appearance v Guildford

The season concluded with Bedfordshire Cup wins at senior level 27-17 at Leighton Buzzard, and at colts level 34-23 against Ampthill, a Herts/Middlesex Merit Table Plate win for the seconds 58-13 against Harpenden and a 54-15 East Midlands Cup Final win against Peterborough. The key success though was keeping the side at regional premier league level, meaning that in 32 seasons of league rugby, Bedford Athletic have spent 4 seasons at Level 7, 13 seasons at Level 6, 5 seasons at Level 4, and now 10 seasons at Level 5, perhaps the level at which the club feels most at home.

At the end of this season, Oli Joisce had overseen nine seasons as Head Coach at the club, taking responsibility for 257 games, many more than any other coach in its history. In that time the club won three league titles, three East Midlands Cups, three Bedfordshire Cups (having been excluded from the competition between 2007 and 2016), and three East Midlands merit table titles for the second team. In those nine seasons, 149 players appeared for the first XV but perhaps more importantly two of these (Ben Middleton and Tom Orton) passed 200 appearances, a further ten passed 150, and another 7 reached 100 appearances as documented later in the appendices. Together with Andy Phillips and Stuart Polson and with five years of astute chairmanship from Richard Parrish plus the aid of club captain Neil Paterson, he built a culture of loyalty, appreciation of rugby, strong performances on the pitch and a renewed enthusiasm for the club off the pitch. All of this was done in a club that did not

make payments to players in the face of the prevailing trend. In short he had revitalised the club's fortunes and perhaps most importantly through the championing of the Artificial Grass Pitch and the facilities that went with it (together with the hard work of Richard Peck in securing the pitch from the RFU), this set the direction of travel for the club as a sustainable community enterprise in the seasons ahead.



Captain Rob Watkins in action against Shelford (photo: Duncan Woodhead)

APPENDIX 1

COLOURS

Jersey

From its founding in 1908 the club has worn black and white hooped jerseys, except during the period 1920 to 1923, when plain white jerseys were used for reasons of economy.

The change strip is red and black hooped jerseys.

Shorts

Were navy blue, now are black.

Stockings

Black and white rings.

Ties

No club tie appears to have existed prior to 1931.

1931 – Three narrow white stripes on a black background. This is the basis for today's full colours tie.

1933 – White eagle, wings outspread, between white hairlines set diagonally on a black background

1950 – Club honours tie, A single white eagle on a black background. This is now a purple diagonal stripe on a black background.

1963 – Half colours tie. Design as for full colours tie but with double stripes.

1998 – Celebration tie – Thick white and black stripes with four emblems representing four titles won at foot of tie.

2008 – Centenary tie – Thick white and black stripes with gold piping between stripes and 1908-2008 moniker on foot of tie.

Today – Club members tie. One narrow white stripe on a black background.

- Vice presidents tie. Miniature eagles and the letters "VP" on a black background.

Jacket – A player's red, white and black striped jacket is awarded for 100 first team appearances

Badge – A club badge featuring the Bedford eagle is awarded for 150 first team appearances

Cap – A club cap in black and white with a gold tassle is awarded for 200 first team appearances.

APPENDIX II

PITCHES

Kimbolton Road (opposite "Park Hotel")	1908 – 1911
Chaucer Road	1911 – 1914
Bedford Park	1920 – 1922
"Fox and Hounds" (Goldington Road)	1922 – 1925
Newnham Avenue (formerly Newnham Lane)	1925 – 1939
Igranic Sports Ground (Kempston Hoo)	1945 – 1947
Newnham Avenue	1947 – 1970
Bedford Park	1952 – 1966
Russell Park	1959 – 1966
Fenlake Meadow	1960 – 1967
Fairhill Playing Fields (Clapham Road)	1962 – 1967
Putnoe Wood	1966 to date
Putnoe Wood (with an Artificial Grass Pitch)	2018 to date

APPENDIX III

HEADQUARTERS

"King's Arms" (St. Mary's Street)	1908 – 1914
"Ham's Restaurant" (Silver Street)	1920 – 1928
"Silver Grill" (High Street)	1928 – 1938
"The Windsor" (High Street)	1938 – 1939
N.F.S. Buildings (Barker's Lane)	1946 – 1953
Club House (Barker's Lane)	1953 – 1967
"Fox & Hounds" (Goldington Road)	1967 – 1970
Club House (Putnoe Wood)	1970 to date

APPENDIX IV

FIRST XV PLAYING RECORDS

Season	Played	Won	Drawn	Lost	Pts For	Pts Against
1908-09	19	15	1	3	303	85
1909-10	14	6	1	7	128	161
1910-11	15	9	1	5	172	101
1911-12	19	14	2	3	341	84
1912-13	20	18	1	1	485	64
1913-14	12	9	0	3	139	74
1920-21	22	16	2	4	385	137
1921-22	23	12	2	9	244	192
1922-23	17	3	2	12	100	125
1923-24	21	12	1	8	264	172
1924-25	25	7	2	16	144	283
1925-26	25	19	2	4	317	125
1926-27	27	15	1	11	293	269
1927-28	24	13	2	9	225	144
1928-29	27	15	1	11	293	253
1929-30	22	13	2	7	272	171
1930-31	28	12	2	14	333	280
1931-32	31	18	0	13	248	235
1932-33	32	12	3	17	247	317
1933-34	26	13	1	12	271	246
1934-35	31	17	3	11	346	208
1935-36	24	7	3	14	138	235
1936-37	23	11	1	11	175	194
1937-38	24	15	2	7	261	137
1938-39	26	22	1	3	399	136
1945-46	24	18	2	4	355	144
1946-47	22	14	2	6	286	143
1947-48	26	19	1	6	511	153
1948-49	29	20	0	9	427	197
1949-50	27	14	1	12	280	242
1950-51	29	20	4	5	354	136
1951-52	28	18	3	7	444	161
1952-53	27	24	1	2	457	84
1953-54	30	21	2	7	352	184
1954-55	29	20	2	7	392	170
1955-56	29	23	1	5	319	171
1956-57	31	16	3	12	393	236
1957-58	30	8	2	20	206	339
1958-59	31	15	0	16	242	321
1959-60	34	3	2	29	151	534
1960-61	36	9	2	25	294	506
1961-62	33	10	4	19	288	367
1962-63	24	10	0	14	222	277
1963-64	36	11	3	22	242	483
1964-65	32	10	0	22	295	616
1965-66	33	17	1	15	379	334
1966-67	37	11	1	25	243	459

1967-68	34	19	2	13	352	327
1968-69	32	12	2	18	338	363
1969-70	34	17	4	13	444	440
1970-71	39	20	0	19	454	464
1971-72	42	27	0	15	585	372
1972-73	45	22	2	21	866	607
1973-74	39	19	2	18	639	492
1974-75	39	13	2	24	317	630
1975-76	32	11	1	20	369	537
1976-77	36	23	2	11	544	326
1977-78	40	19	1	20	512	492
1978-79	33	18	3	12	501	315
1979-80	41	17	4	20	425	548
1980-81	35	16	2	17	408	346
1981-82	32	15	2	15	338	468
1982-83	42	21	4	17	476	430
1983-84	42	15	3	24	463	606
1984-85	32	10	1	21	297	461
1985-86	32	13	2	18	318	484
1986-87	34	18	3	13	328	292
1987-88	34	17	1	16	450	412
1988-89	35	11	4	20	371	496
1989-90	33	15	0	18	374	349
1990-91	32	19	0	13	418	365
1991-92	34	18	0	16	681	468
1992-93	31	19	2	10	641	382
1993-94	32	17	0	15	556	549
1994-95	29	12	0	17	442	568
1995-96	27	9	3	15	584	443
1996-97	28	18	1	9	679	416
1997-98	33	33	0	0	1505	307
1998-99	28	26	0	2	1081	324
1999-00	31	14	0	17	743	843
2000-01	31	12	1	18	624	791
2001-02	30	11	1	18	670	746
2002-03	29	12	0	17	587	710
2003-04	29	24	0	5	922	450
2004-05	28	6	0	22	487	780
2005-06	31	26	0	5	885	484
2006-07	30	15	1	14	755	683
2007-08	28	15	0	13	702	552
2008-09	24	4	0	20	327	709
2009-10	27	0	0	27	283	1397
2010-11	29	11	1	17	542	633
2011-12	27	11	0	16	573	592
2012-13	27	21	0	6	894	419
2013-14	28	2	0	26	472	853
2014-15	26	19	0	7	891	357
2015-16	29	27	0	2	1050	332
2016-17	30	8	1	21	735	753
2017-18	31	29	0	2	1654	321
2018-19	30	16	1	13	916	854

APPENDIX V

LEAGUE AND CUP RECORD

LEAGUE

Season		League	Position	Played	Won	Drawn	Lost	PF	PA	Pts
1987-88	L7	East Mids/Leics	6/11	10	5	0	5	108	98	10
1988-89	L7	East Mids/Leics	6/11	10	4	1	5	123	126	9
1989-90	L7	East Mids/Leics	5/11	10	6	0	4	117	79	12
1990-91	L7	East Mids/Leics	1/11	10	8	0	2	132	94	16
1991-92	L6	Midlands 2	East8/11	10	4	0	6	168	150	8
1992-93	L6	Midlands 2	3/12	11	8	1	2	194	91	17
1993-94	L6	Midlands 2	5/13	12	7	0	5	207	188	14
1994-95	L6	Midlands 2	8/13	12	5	0	7	177	204	10
1995-96	L6	Midlands 2	10/13	12	3	2	7	150	163	8
1996-97	L6	Midlands 2	7/18	17	11	1	5	362	206	23
1997-98	L6	Midlands 2	1/17	16	16	0	0	718	151	32
1998-99	L5	Midlands 1	1/17	16	15	0	1	569	163	30
1999-00	L4	National 2 N	9/14	26	11	0	15	563	729	22
2000-01	L4	National 3 N	10/14	24	8	0	16	386	613	16
2001-02	L4	National 3 N	10/14	26	10	1	15	599	624	21
2002-03	L4	National 3 N	11/14	26	10	0	16	497	625	20
2003-04	L5	Midlands 1	1/12	22	18	0	4	648	330	36
2004-05	L4	National 3 N	14/14	26	6	0	20	468	687	30
2005-06	L5	Midlands 1	2/12	22	19	0	3	617	354	36
2006-07	L5	Midlands 1	8/12	22	10	1	10	494	451	21
2007-08	L5	Midlands 1	6/12	22	11	0	11	498	489	22
2008-09	L5	Midlands 1	12/12	22	4	0	18	298	632	8
2009-10	L5	National 3 Mids	13/14	26	0	0	26	280	1310	1
2010-11	L6	Midlands 1 East	10/14	26	9	1	16	464	560	50
2011-12	L6	Midlands 1 East	7/14	26	11	0	15	570	567	62
2012-13	L6	Midlands 1 East	1/14	26	21	0	5	883	396	10
2013-14	L5	National 3 Mids	14/14	26	1	0	25	438	829	12
2014-15	L6	Midlands 1 East	3/14	26	19	0	7	891	357	97
2015-16	L6	Midlands 1 East	1/14	26	24	0	2	973	294	115
2016-17	L5	National 3 Mids	13/14	26	5	1	20	606	704	46
2017-18	L6	Midlands 1 East	1/14	26	24	0	2	1299	302	117
2018-19	L5	LondonSE Prem	6/14	26	12	1	13	727	789	69

CUP

National Cups

RFU Senior Cup (became the National Trophy)

1983/84	Round 1	Vipers (A)	L 9-18
1998/99	Prelim Round	Mansfield (A)	W 25-13
	Round 1	Aspatria (A)	W 32-17
	Round 2	Whitchurch (A)	L 15-23
1999/00	Round 1	Broadstreet (A)	W 45-24
	Round 2	Fylde (H)	W 60-21
	Round 3	Exeter (H)	L 14-29
2000/01	Round 2	Preston (A)	L 19-49
2001/02	Round 1	Morpeth (A)	W 32-17
	Round 2	Preston (H)	L 16-44
2002/03	Round 1	Blaydon (H)	W 36-3
	Round 2	Broadstreet (H)	W 43-8
	Round 3	Orrell (H)	L 11-74
2003/04	Prelim Round	Sutton Coldfield (A)	W 43-24
	Round 1	Tynedale (A)	L 31-41 aet
2004/05	Round 1	Bradford & Bingley (A)	L 7-54
2006/07	Round 1	Vale of Lune (H)	W 49-5
	Round 2	Darlington Mowden Park (H)	W 37-36
	Round 3	Cambridge (A)	L 0-77
2007/08	Round 1	Westoe (H)	L 7-47

Intermediate Cup

1996/97	Round 1	Peterborough (H)	W 52-8
	Round 2	Huntingdon (H)	W 33-16
	Round 3	Market Bosworth (A)	L 5-48
1997/98	Round 1	Kettering (A)	W 36-13
	Round 2	Matlock (H)	W 85-3
	Round 3	Oxford Harlequins (H)	W 173-0
	Round 4	Wolverhampton (H)	W 57-7
	Round 5	Hereford (H)	W 18-13
	Round 6	Dudley Kingswinford (H)	W 23-3
	Quarter Final	Marlow (H)	W 32-7
	Semi Final	West Park Bramhope (A)	W 12-9
2005/06	Final	Stroud	W 29-24
	Round 2	Huntingdon (A)	W 47-3
	Round 3	Dunstablians (A)	L 18-31
2007/08	Round 2	Dudley Kingswinford (H)	W 35-15
	Round 3	Newport (Salop) (H)	W 38-0
	Round 4	Middlesbrough (A)	L 15-13

County Cups

1971/72	Beds Cup R1	Vauxhall Motors (H)	W 39-0
	Beds Cup R2	Luton (H)	W 13-0
	Beds Cup SF	Biggleswade (A)	W 15-3
	Beds Cup Final	Colworth House (A)	W 8-6
	EM Cup SF	St Neots (A)	W 24-15
	EM Cup Final	Rushden & Higham	L 4-10
1972/73	Beds Cup R1	Bedford Queens (A)	W 29-3
	Beds Cup R2	Luton (H)	W 14-7
	Beds Cup SF	Leighton Buzzard (H)	W 9-3
	Beds Cup Final	Stockwood Park (A)	L 0-24
1973/74	Beds Cup R1	Bedford Queens (A)	W 62-3
	Beds Cup R2	Amphill (A)	W 38-6
	Beds Cup SF	Luton (H)	W 17-9
	Beds Cup Final	Stockwood Park (H)	L 0-26
1974/75	Beds Cup R1	Amphill (A)	W 10-9
	Beds Cup R2	Dunstablians (H)	W 15-14
	Beds Cup SF	Colworth House (H)	W 25-12
	Beds Cup Final	Stockwood Park (H)	W 7-6
	EM Cup SF	Kettering (H)	L 7-25
1975/76	Beds Cup R1	Stockwood Park (A)	L 9-31
1976/77	Beds Cup R1	Amphill (A)	W 7-6
	Beds Cup R2	Leighton Buzzard (H)	L 3-6
1977/78	Beds Cup R1	Colworth House (H)	W 19-0
	Beds Cup R2	Leighton Buzzard (A)	L 7-24
1978/79	Beds Cup R1	Bedfordshire Police (H)	W 102-3
	Beds Cup R2	Stockwood Park (H)	L 7-14
1979/80	Beds Cup R1	Bedford Swifts (H)	W 54-4
	Beds Cup R2	Amphill (H)	W 12-0
	Beds Cup SF	Stockwood Park (A)	W 15-12
	Beds Cup Final	Leighton Buzzard (A)	D 3-3 *
	* won as away side		
1980/81	EM Cup SF	Huntingdon (A)	L 0-3
	Beds Cup R1	Colworth House (A)	W 20-0
	Beds Cup R2	Dunstablians (A)	W 28-7
	Beds Cup SF	Stockwood Park (H)	L 3-10
1981/82	Beds Cup R1	Biggleswade (A)	L 7-9
1982/83	Beds Cup R1	Dunstablians (H)	W 29-0
	Beds Cup R2	Stockwood Park (A)	W 16-3
	Beds Cup SF	Vauxhall Motors (H)	W 14-0
	Beds Cup Final	Amphill (A)	W 9-3
	EM Cup SF	Northampton BBOB (A)	W 12-0
	EM Cup Final	Peterborough (H)	W 9-3
1983/84	Beds Cup R1	Potton (A)	W 28-12
	Beds Cup R2	Amphill (A)	L 0-9
1984/85	Beds Cup R1	Leighton Buzzard (A)	L 3-13
1985/86	Beds Cup R1	Bedford Swifts (H)	W 19-0
	Beds Cup R2	Biggleswade (A)	L 10-11
1986/87	Beds Cup R1	Amphill (A)	W 20-6
	Beds Cup R2	Dunstablians (A)	W 14-0
	Beds Cup SF	RAE (H)	W 72-0
	Beds Cup Final	Leighton Buzzard (A)	L 6-13
1987/88	Beds Cup R1	Bedford Swifts (H)	W 26-0
	Beds Cup R2	Amphill (A)	W 12-7
	Beds Cup SF	Stockwood Park (A)	L 0-16
1988/89	Beds Cup R1	Vauxhall Motors (A)	W 20-0
	Beds Cup R2	Biggleswade (A)	L 0-19

1989/90	Beds Cup R1	Bedfordshire Police (A)	W 21-3
	Beds Cup R2	Dunstablians (A)	W 18-0
	Beds Cup SF	Leighton Buzzard (A)	L 3-15
1990/91	Beds Cup R1	Leighton Buzzard (A)	L 3-9
1991/92	Beds Cup R1	Dunstablians (H)	W 29-0
	Beds Cup R2	Bedford Swifts (A)	W 29-0
	Beds Cup SF	Amphill (H)	L 6-12
1992/93	Beds Cup R1	Vauxhall Motors	w/o
	Beds Cup R2	Stockwood Park (A)	W 18-6
	Beds Cup SF	Amphill (A)	L 13-17
1993/94	Beds Cup R1	Dunstablians (H)	W 31-10
	Beds Cup R2	Bedford Swifts (A)	W 57-0
	Beds Cup SF	Amphill (H)	W 13-8
	Beds Cup Final	Stockwood Park (A)	L 8-10
	EM Cup QF	Kettering (A)	W 18-5
	EM Cup SF	Long Buckby (A)	L 10-29
1994/95	Beds Cup R1	bye	
	Beds Cup R2	Bedford Queens (A)	W 13-9
	Beds Cup SF	Leighton Buzzard (A)	L 0-6
1995/96	Beds Cup R1	Biggleswade (A)	W 15-12
	Beds Cup R2	Kempston (A)	W 48-9
	Beds Cup SF	Luton (A)	W 15-5
	Beds Cup Final	Amphill (A)	L 20-31
	EM Cup QF	Kettering (A)	L 7-38
	EM Cup SF		
1996/97	Beds Cup R1	Bye	
	Beds Cup R2	Kempston (H)	w/o
	Beds Cup SF	Leighton Buzzard (H)	W 8-6
	Beds Cup Final	Amphill (A)	L 12-13
	EM Cup QF	Kettering (A)	L 7-27
1997/98	Beds Cup R1	Bye	
	Beds Cup R2	Biggleswade (H)	W 70-5
	Beds Cup SF	Leighton Buzzard (A)	W 58-13
	Beds Cup Final	Dunstablians (A)	W 22-6
	EM Cup QF	Kettering (H)	W 6-5
	EM Cup SF	Peterborough (H)	W 48-8
	EM Cup Final	Wellingborough (A)	W 25-17
1998/99	Beds Cup R1	Bye	
	Beds Cup R2	Bedford Swifts (H)	W 83-0
	Beds Cup SF	Dunstablians (H)	W 31-6
	Beds Cup Final	Leighton Buzzard (H)	W 48-3
	EM Cup QF	Daventry (H)	W 109-0
	EM Cup SF	Wellingborough (A)	W 17-10
	EM Cup Final	Kettering (A)	W 18-15
1999/00	Beds Cup QF	Bedford Swifts (A)	W 51-24
	Beds Cup SF	Dunstablians (A)	L 12-15
2000/01	Beds Cup QF	Bedford Swifts (A)	W 85-7
	Beds Cup SF	Luton (H)	W 17-13
	Beds Cup Final	Dunstablians (H)	L 5-74
	EM Cup QF	Peterborough (A)	W 53-3
	EM Cup SF	Northampton Old Scouts (A)	W 36-18
	EM Cup Final	Dunstablians	Not played
** Bedford Athletic did not participate in the next two seasons due to their National League status			
2003/04	Beds Cup QF	Stockwood Park (A)	W 40-5
	Beds Cup SF	Dunstablians (H)	W 25-21
	Beds Cup Final	Amphill (H)	W 27-13
	EM Cup QF	Huntingdon (H)	w/o
	EM Cup SF	Old Northamptonians (H)	W 86-0
	EM Cup Final	Peterborough (A)	W 22-16

2004/05	Beds Cup QF	Leighton Buzzard (H)	w/o
	Beds Cup SF	Dunstablians (H)	L 12-39
2005/06	Beds Cup QF	Bedford Swifts (A)	W 29-15
	Beds Cup SF	Stockwood Park (A)	W 29-8
	Beds Cup Final	Dunstablians (H)	W 24-8
	EM Cup QF	Old Northamptonians (A)	W 52-24
	EM Cup SF	Peterborough (H)	W 46-7
	EM Cup Final	Stewarts & Lloyds Corby (H)	W 15-10
2006/07	Beds Cup QF	Kempston (A)	W 46-0
	Beds Cup SF	Bedford Swifts (H)	W 35-15
	Beds Cup Final	Dunstablians (H)	L 32-52
	EM Cup QF	Stewarts & Lloyds Corby (H)	W 47-23
	EM Cup SF	Old Northamptonians (A)	L 18-23
2007/08	EM Cup QF	Peterborough (H)	W 41-12
	EM Cup SF	Northampton Old Scouts (A)	W 51-8
	EM Cup Final	Kettering (Goldington Rd)	L 12-28
2008/09	EM Cup QF	Amphill (A)	L 22-30
2009/10	EM Cup QF	Peterborough (H)	L 0-57
2010/11	EM Cup QF	Wellingborough (H)	W 37-25
	EM Cup SF	Peterborough (H)	W 30-5
	EM Cup Final	Luton (Goldington Rd)	L 6-43
2011/12	EM Cup QF	Luton (A)	L 3-25
2012/13	EM Cup QF	Amphill (H)	L 11-23
2013/14	EM Cup QF	Old Northamptonians (A)	W 20-0
	EM Cup SF	Luton (H)	L 14-24
2014/15	EM Cup QF	Old Northamptonians (A)	L 13-24
2015/16	EM Cup QF	Wellingborough (A)	W 21-12
	EM Cup SF	Luton (A)	W 29-17
	EM Cup Final	Northampton Old Scouts (Goldington Rd)	W 27-9
2016/17	EM Cup QF	Kettering (H)	W 29-12
	Beds Cup QF	Luton (A)	W/over
	EM Cup SF	Old Northamptonians (H)	W/over
	Beds Cup SF	Stockwood Park (A)	W 62-0
	Beds Cup Final	Dunstablians (A)	W 27-10
	EM Cup Final	Peterborough Lions (Goldington Rd)	L 11-27
2017/18	EM Cup QF	Oundle (A)	W 96-0
	Beds Cup QF	Stockwood Park (A)	W 93-0
	Beds Cup SF	Luton (A)	W 84-0
	EM Cup SF	Northampton Old Scouts (A)	W 48-0
	Beds Cup Final	Biggleswade (A)	W 52-0
	EM Cup Final	Peterborough Lions (Goldington Rd)	W 30-19
2018/19	EM Cup QF	Bye	
	Beds Cup QF	Bedford Swifts (A)	W 61-7
	Beds Cup SF	Stockwood Park (A)	W/over
	EM Cup SF	Oundle (A)	W 47-26
	Beds Cup Final	Leighton Buzzard (A)	W 27-17
	EM Cup Final	Peterborough (Goldington Rd)	W 54-15

APPENDIX VI

PLAYING HONOURS

British Lion

G.T. Dancer (1938 tour of South Africa)

International Cap

I. Evans (Wales) 1933-34

L.F. Weston (England) 1971-72

S. Timani (Tonga) 2008-11

M. Botha (England Saxons) 2011

M. Botha (England) 2011-12

M. Wolfenden (Zimbabwe) 2014

R Povey (Canada) 2017-18

N. Boyer (USA & USA Sevens) 2018

International Trials

R.C. Brumwell (England) 1931-32

A.H. Greenwood (England) 1931-32

N.L. Dudley-Ward (Wales) 1933-34

G.T. Dancer (England) 1936-37

H.W. Rose (England) 1949-50

J. Cooley (England) 1964-65

L.F. Weston (England) 1971-72

Divisional Trials

P. McGuckian (Midlands) 1977-78

East Midlands/Leicestershire XV (1930) v South Africa

R.C. Brumwell and A.H. Greenwood

(The only team to defeat South Africa on that tour)

England Classics

M. Norman 1996-97

Under 21 Internationals

J. Elphick (England) v France 2000

College Internationals

C. Bygraves (England) 2007

C. Elliott (England) 2008

AWARDED COUNTY CAPS

East Midlands

R.C. Brumwell
J. Cooley
G.T. Dancer
R. Eidsforth
R.G. Furbank
A.H. Greenwood
P. Jackson
H.W. Rose
W.H.R. Street
P. McGuckian
M. Hudson
P. Ryder

Leicestershire

A.H. Greenwood

Eastern Counties

R. Eidsforth

ADMINISTRATIVE HONOURS

President of the Rugby Football Union

A. Marshall (1957-58)

President of the East Midlands Rugby Football Union

L.F. Phypers (1958-59)
A. Marshall (1962-63)
R.A. Cox (1974-75)
R.J. Ingledew (1983-84)
P. McGuckian (2009-11)

President of the Bedfordshire County Rugby Union

P. McGuckian (2006 - 2019)

Secretary of the Bedfordshire County Rugby Union

J. Tyrrell (2007-11)

Honorary Life Member of the East Midlands Rugby Football Union

P. McGuckian (2011)
J. Tyrrell (2018)

First Class Panel of Referees

S.A. Burman (1956-57)

Silver Jubilee Medal

R.A. Cox 1977

Torch Trophy Trust Award

R.A. Cox 1980

APPENDIX VII

CLUB CAPTAINS (1st XV CAPTAINS FROM 1994)

1908-09	W.C. Chalker
1909-10	W. Churchman (W.C. Chalker took over during the season, subsequently resigned and W. Hills took over)
1910-11	C. Chamberlain (W. Hills took over during the season)
1911-13	F. Booth
1913-14	J.S. Smith
1920-22	R.C. Adkin
1922-23	G. Wright
1923-24	C.C. Ward
1924-25	A.E. Sharman
1925-26	A.E. Sharman (W.H.R. Street took over during the season)
1926-27	W.H.R. Street (L.F. Phypers took over during the season)
1927-32	L.F. Phypers
1932-33	L.F. Phypers (J.H. Craig took over during the season)
1933-34	B.G. Longstaff
1934-35	R.C. Askew
1935-36	L.F. Phypers
1936-38	H.F. Rawkins
1938-39	A.C. Tory
1945-46	D.B. MacArthur
1946-48	P.W. Scrivener
1948-50	W. Berrill
1950-51	J.P. Mears
1951-54	J. Taylor
1954-57	R.J. Ingledew
1957-58	J. Valentine
1968-60	J. Taylor
1960-62	J. Richardson
1962-64	B.J. Salter
1964-70	A. Harvey
1970-71	M. Robinson
1971-73	B.L. Mulhall
1973-75	M.J. Cooper
1975-77	P. McGuckian
1977-80	M. Ward
1980-81	R.B. Lumsden
1981-82	G. Comb
1982-83	G.T. Griffith
1983-84	S. Brown
1984-85	P. Evans
1985-86	P. Cox
1986-88	S. Brown
1988-91	P. McGuckian
1981-92	S.E. Turner
1992-94	G. Bygraves
1994-96	N. Paterson
1996-97	M. Norman
1997-00	A. Tapper
2000-01	A. Gallagher (A. Tapper took over during the season)

2001-03	J. Thorp
2003-04	O. Ryan
2004-05	D. Jenkins
2005-07	S. Grant
2007-08	P. Elphick
2008-10	G. Acton
2010-11	S. Richbell
2011-14	J. Ball
2014-	R. Watkins

CLUB CAPTAIN (since 1994)

1994-96	T. Mulvaney
1996-02	P. Wheeler
2002-13	P. McGuckian
2013-	N. Paterson

APPENDIX VIII

OTHER CLUB OFFICIALS

Hon. General Secretaries

1908-09	A. Leach
1909-10	A. Leach (G.S. Wrenn took over during the season)
1910-13	G.S. Wrenn
1913-14	C. Pearcey (J.S. Smith took over during the season)
1920-21	H.F.G. Tucker
1921-22	H.F.G. Tucker (J.C. MacCulloch took over during the season)
1922-23	G. Wright
1923-30	H.O. Hauberg
1930-34	Capt. E.H.G. Chambers
1934-36	H.O. Hauberg
1936-39	J. Penson-Whitaker
1945-50	J.J. Voyce
1950-51	R.A. Harris
1951-55	J.J. Voyce
1955-57	W.F. Corfield
1957-65	J.R.E. Cooper
1965-67	D.R. Norman
1967-68	D.J. Perry
1968-70	M. Robinson
1970-71	A. Lord
1971-73	R. Sanders
1973-76	J. Percival
1976-84	N.M. Davies
1984-87	D. Clarke
1987-88	D. Clarke (D. Warren took over during the season)
1988-91	D. Warren
1991-99	B. Eynon
1999-01	J. Donnelly
2001-02	P. Bowker
2002-05	Mrs. J. Ross
2004-09	Mrs. J. Jackson
2009-10	Ms. M. Andrews
2010-	B. Rai

Club Chairmen

1920-22	J.C. MacCulloch
1922-23	F.N. King
1923-24	F.C. Peck
1924-25	M. Marshall
1925-27	F.N. King
1927-30	A. Greenwood
1930-34	H.O. Hauberg
1934-39	B. Longstaff
1945-53	L.F. Phypers
1953-61	D. Murkett
1961-68	R.J. Ingledew
1968-71	G. Woodfine

1971-75	D. Perry
1975-76	D. Warren
1976-77	J. Percival
1977-78	B. Gibbons
1978-79	D. Warren
1979-83	G. Woodfine
1983-88	B.L. Mulhall
1988-91	N. Davies
1991-94	M. Ward
1994-99	J. Plumb
1999-02	P. McGuckian
2002-05	P. Wheeler
2005-08	C. Jordan
2008-10	J. Donnelly
2010-14	M. Bowden
2014-19	R. Parrish
2019-	D. August

Club President

1908-14	W.A. Attenborough
1920-23	A. Powell
1923-25	H.B. Wells
1925-35	Lord Ampthill
1935-72	Lord Luke
1972-86	R. Gale
1986-96	R. Cox
1996-01	G. Woodfine
2001-07	T. Wells
2007-08	R.J. Ingledew
2008-10	N. Davies
2010-	M. Cox

APPENDIX IX

CLUB HONOURS

NPI INTERMEDIATE CUP WINNERS

1997-98

MIDLANDS ONE CHAMPIONS (Level 5)

1998-99 2003-04

MIDLANDS ONE EAST CHAMPIONS (Level 6)

2012-13 2015-16 2017-18

MIDLANDS TWO CHAMPIONS (Level 6)

1997-98

EAST MIDLANDS/LEICESTERSHIRE CHAMPIONS (Level 7)

1990-91

EAST MIDLANDS CUP WINNERS

1983 1998 1999 2004 2006 2016 2018 2019

BEDFORDSHIRE CUP WINNERS

1972 1975 1980 1983 1998 1999 2004 2006 2017 2018 2019

EAST MIDLANDS MERIT TABLE WINNERS

“A” Division (Bombardier League) 2005-06 2006-07 2016-17 2017-18

“B” Division (Eagle IPA League) 2015-16

HERTS & MIDDLESEX MERIT TABLE

Plate Winners: 2018-19

EAST MIDLANDS COLTS CHAMPIONS

2009-10 2013-14 2017-18

EAST MIDLANDS COLTS (REFEREES) CUP WINNERS

2014

BEDFORDSHIRE COLTS CUP WINNERS

2008 2013 2014 2015 2019

APPENDIX X

FIRST XV RECORDS

Most Points in a Season	2017-18	1,654	
Most Tries in a season	2017-18	239	
Most wins in a season	1997-98	33	(undefeated)
Most league wins in a season	1997-98	16	(0 defeats) – 16 matches
	2005-06	19	(3 defeats) – 22 matches
	2015-16	24	(2 defeats) – 26 matches
	2017-18	24	(2 defeats) – 26 matches
Most defeats in a season	2009-10	27	(0 wins)
Most career points	(to end 2018-19)	1,667	James Mortimer
Most points in a season	2017-18	436	James Mortimer
Most tries in a season	2017-18	49	Stephen Woodhead
Biggest victory	1997-98	173-0	v Oxford Harlequins
Biggest league victory	2017-18	104-0	v Market Rasen & Louth
Biggest defeat	2009-10	3-108	v Luctonians
Most points in a match	1997-98	39	Ashley Tapper v Oxford Harlequins
	1998-99	39	Nick Gregory v Daventry
Most points in a league match	2017-18	33	James Mortimer v Bugbrooke
Most conversions in a match	1997-98	17	Ashley Tapper v Oxford Harlequins
Most conversions in league match	2017-18	14	James Mortimer v Bugbrooke
Most tries in a match	1997-98	27	v Oxford Harlequins
Most tries in a league match	2017-18	16	v Market Rasen & Louth
Most tries in a match	1997-98	5	Tom Gray v Towcestrians
	1998-99	5	Tom Gray v Daventry
	2014-15	5	Ben Johnson v Spalding
	2014-15	5	Tom Dolemore v Spalding
	2014-15	5	Ben Johnson v Mansfield
	2014-15	5	Ben Johnson v Spalding
	2017-18	5	Josh Cassell v Market Rasen & Louth

APPENDIX XI

BEDFORD ATHLETIC RUFC 1ST TEAM SQUAD v STROUD

NPI CUP FINAL

TWICKENHAM

SATURDAY MAY 2ND, 1998

1. Richard Porter
2. Darren Stapleton
3. Lee Mansell
4. Mike Curry
5. Chris Wright
6. Ian Skingsley
7. John Egan
8. Tom Gray
9. Chris Eldridge
10. Ashley Tapper
11. Tommy Cassidy
12. Jim Chandler
13. Giles Witheat
14. Alf Bartlett
15. Cameron Glanvill

- | |
|---------------------------|
| 16. Marcus Buckle |
| 17. Neil Paterson |
| 18. Darren Goodwin |
| 19. Mike Swift |
| 20. Mick Norman |
| 21. Steve Turner |
| 22. Paul Godsall |
| 23. Craig Mueller-Ahsmann |
| 24. Richard Sheard |
| 25. Nick Parrish |
| 26. David Palmer-Barnes |
| 27. Richard Blunt |

Officials

Coach Neil Beytell
Manager Steve Spring

Asst Manager Mick Bowden
Physio Liz Tuff
2nd Coach Paul McGuckian

APPENDIX XII

In the 21st Century the club established awards for appearances for the first XV and to mark this instituted the “100 cap blazer club”. As at the end of the 2018-19 season the members of this club are:

200 Appearances – Club cap

Ben Middleton

Tom Orton

150 Appearances – Club badge

Paul Ryder
James Mortimer
Stephen Woodhead
Ryan Taylor

Ben Beagent
Luke Levitt
Rob Watkins
Charlie Darlow

100 Appearances – Club blazer

Sheldon Reynecke
David Simpson
Liam Walsh
Nick Thomas

Chris Elliott
Tommy Mills
Andy Ince
Neil Paterson

APPENDIX XIII

FAMOUS BEDFORD ATHLETIC PLAYERS

Gerald Thomas “Beef” Dancer

(Abridged from an interview in Bedfordshire Times, December 15 1983)

Gerald Thomas Dancer known affectionately throughout his life as “Beef” played in all three tests for the 1938 Lions in South Africa, scoring a try in the 21-6 win in the third test. But he never played for England and it’s through that quirk that his name has passed into the wider folklore of the game. Born in Ford End Road, Queens Park on January 15, 1911, Beef started his life as a dairyman with his father. Briefly they ran a tobacconists shop, then they went into the building trade. “Building work hardened me up for rugby” Beef said. “I became a bricklayer and my mates at the time were local boxers like Johnny Seamarks and Reg Perkins. We used to train together. The thirties were a marvellous time for sportsmen”.

He started his life at Queens Park School but when his friends won scholarships to Bedford Modern, his father paid for him to go there as well. “I left at 16. I wasn’t a good pupil. I never made the first XV but I did captain the Under 14s. We were taken for rugby I remember by the Rev. Hartley, vicar of Elstow”. Finally into the world that he couldn’t wait to be let loose on he joined Bedford Athletic and played at the ground off Newnham Avenue. On April 9, 1928 he made a debut for Bedford, having been invited to play against the Old Bedford Modernians. Beef was only 17 and played one more match – he thinks in the second row. “In those days it was often a case of the first men to the scrum packing down first”.

Beef went back to Bedford Athletic and made the most out of life, getting married and didn’t play for Bedford again until 1931-32. He went straight in as a prop and earned the reputation of a tough customer. He played 29 times in his first season, 33 in his second and in the building of the great Bedford team of 1938-39 he played under captains like Arthur Marshall, later President of the RFU.

By 1936 he had represented East Midlands and the Barbarians and played in three England trials. He says he was never interested in statistics but fondly remembers fellow players. “The best hooker I ever played with was Roger Perkins of Bedford. Roger was a country boy from Olney. I remember one year I got him drunk before the Old Paulines match and we tried to bring him round with cold water. During the game the referee asked our captain to send him off”. “I asked him once what a dominoe move was. Wait till the next scrum he said. And then wham! – this bloke who had been hitting him went out like a light! That’s a dominoe said old Roger – double six!”

Beef was a popular tourist and got on well with the Barbarians. When the team for the Lions tour in 1938 was announced he had a feeling he would be included even though he had been overlooked by England. The men who chose the Lions were often the men who chose the Barbarians. They knew he would be a good tourist and a hard enough player to stand up to the Springboks.

The journey to South Africa took two weeks and the party were away for five months. Beef missed the first game but played in 20 out of the remaining 22. At his very first scrum he remembers it was bang, bang, bang. “On my passport on the way out I wrote ‘cauliflower ear’ in the section where it asked for distinguishing marks. On the way back the boys said I wouldn’t be let in as I had grown another one”.

"It was a marvelous tour and the hospitality was terrific. I didn't spend a halfpenny until I was buying presents to bring home. The front row was Eddie Morgan, Swansea, Bill Travers, Newport and Gerry Dancer, Bedford. We played together in most of the games".

The Lions lost the first two Tests, 26-12 in Johannesburg and 19-3 in Port Elizabeth and on the way to Cape Town for the final game they had a big party. "All the papers wrote us off" he recalls, "but we actually won. I reprieved myself when I scored a try because earlier my name was mud when I put out a pass and the South Africans scored".

His career ended abruptly at the end of the 1947-48 season. It was put to him that since he had had a good innings he might like to retire and give some of the numerous younger players a chance. "I was taken aback as you can imagine" he said. "I was so fit that I often played at Number Eight. But I agreed, and that was that".

Iorwerth Evans

(Abridged from an interview in the Bedfordshire Times 2 February 1984)

Iorwerth Evans remembered with affection as "Iori" or "Tishy" by pupils from the old Harpur Central School where he taught made his rugby debut for Wales on February 3, 1934. This match was against the Scots at Murrayfield. In 1934 England wiped the floor with Wales beating them 9-0 and scoring three tries in Cardiff. The selectors made wholesale changes and picked most of the junior trial side. In went Iori, the 5ft, 8 ½ inches, 12 stone, 7 lbs hooker with massive shoulders, no neck and a 44 inch chest. The rejuvenated Welsh won 13-6 but the Scots, says a cutting from an Edinburgh paper weren't too impressed with them until they heard Iorwerth Evans leading the singing at the North British Hotel. He was a fine piano player and always in demand. "We always liked to have a sing after a game" he remembers. "Why, if I ever got back from rugby before midnight on a Saturday my wife thought I had been up to something!"

Iori admits to breaking one of the unwritten rules of rugby and putting his career in jeopardy. He went to watch Bedford Athletic (where he was a member) the week before his international debut, having been told by London Welsh to take the traditional pre-debut Saturday off. "Well", he says "before I knew where I was, Ron Cox had got me stripped off and I was packing down like a meat sandwich at hooker between him and Alfie Muler. And to tell you the truth, I couldn't win any ball. This little ginger headed hooker from Rothwell beat me all ends up!"

"Well, at one scrum, I lifted my knee and accidentally caught this chap where I shouldn't have, and suddenly all hell breaks loose. Fights everywhere. Absolute chaos. The referee, the well known Captain Chambers saw what happened. He blew his whistle, walked off and said "Match abandoned!" He saved my bacon."

His second and final international was against the Irish at Swansea and the Welsh won 13-0. Iori retired at the end of the season to concentrate on introducing rugby into the Harpur Central School alongside the then headmaster, Captain A.B. Wignall.

Mouritz Botha

Mouritz Botha joined Bedford Athletic in 2004 at the age of 22 when he arrived from his native South Africa. Mouritz quickly established himself in the side in the second row and was an ever present from his arrival up to his sending off at Dudley Kingswinford in February the following year! Sadly his presence wasn't sufficient to preserve the club's status in National 2 North and so in his second year at the club he was playing Midlands One rugby.

In that second season he was almost an ever present missing only one league and two cup games over a 30 match season. His final contribution in an Ath shirt was a case of so near and yet so far as although Mouritz scored a rare try, Bedford Athletic went on to lose their National League promotion play off match at home to West Park St. Helens.

Mouritz's hard work and his developing talent led him to join Bedford Blues in the summer of 2006 where he stayed for three years eventually breaking through into the first team in his second season.

From Bedford he moved on to Saracens in 2009 a club he was to stay at for five years and achieve things that could only have been dreamed of in his time at Bedford Athletic. In his first season at Saracens he made 32 appearances and came on as a substitute in the Premiership Final. The following season he was a starter when Saracens defeated Leicester 22-18 to win their first Premiership crown.

It was his performance in this season that brought him to the attention of England selectors who included him in the England Saxons squad for the Churchill Cup in June 2011. In the second game of that tournament, a 41-14 victory over Tonga, he played against Sione Timani whom he had partnered in the second row for Bedford Athletic back in the 2004-05 season. England won all three games to claim the Trophy and Mouritz was named in the 44 man squad preparing for the 2011 World Cup in New Zealand and made his debut in the 23-19 warm up victory over Wales.

He was not selected for that trip and instead he broke into the side for the 2012 Six Nations campaign when he played in all five matches as the team finished runners up in that tournament.

Mouritz's career finally came full circle when he returned to South Africa for England's tour in the summer of 2012, returning to the land of his birth where he felt he had never been given a proper opportunity, but now in an international shirt. Mouritz played in all three tests and his last international was as a substitute in the 14-14 draw in Port Elizabeth. Mouritz made ten appearances in total for England.

Following his period with Saracens Mouritz returned to South Africa to play for Natal Sharks in Durban for a season in the Super Rugby tournament. It wasn't long before he returned to this country signing for Newcastle Falcons at the start of the 2015-16 season. Mouritz was still playing at Newcastle in the 2017-18 season at the age of 35 when sadly at the end of September 2017 he had to retire from the game due to an ongoing battle against concussion. Disappointingly this meant he was never able to make good his promise to Mick Bowden that he would play one more season of rugby for Bedford Athletic before he retired.

To this day Mouritz is still a resident in Bedford and can be seen at Bedford Athletic matches from time to time.

APPENDIX XIV

HONORARY LIFE MEMBERS

A. GREENWOOD (1928)

As far as can be ascertained from the records, Arthur Greenwood was the first life member ever to be elected by the Athletic. He was not himself a rugby player but became interested in the game when his two sons, the famous A. H. Greenwood and his brother F. C. Greenwood joined the Athletic in 1921. In this year he became a committee member and continued to serve on it for fourteen years until his death in 1935. During this period he acted as Chairman (1927–30) and Vice-Chairman (1926–27, 1930–35) He was also a keen supporter of the Athletic Cricket Section and served on its committee.

H.O. HAUBERG (1930)

Horace Hauberg was one of the dominant figures in the Athletic between the Wars. He had played for several local clubs before the First World War and after it was a member of the Town "A" side. He was elected as Hon. Secretary in 1923 when Athletic was in danger of folding up and he was instrumental in rebuilding the club upon a solid foundation. He resigned as Secretary after seven years in office in 1930, but was immediately elected as Chairman of the Club. The same year he became a member of the East Midlands R. F. U. Committee, on which he served until 1936. In 1934 he again took over as secretary of the club, but had to give up in 1936 when he left Bedford. Nevertheless, he kept in touch and regularly attended the annual Boxing Day game until his death.

L. F. PHYERS (1932)

Frank Phypers joined the Athletic in 1922 and learnt the game with the club. He soon showed promise and was awarded his first colours in 1925, he also made appearances for Bedford R.U.F.C First XV. He was Club Captain from 1926 to 1932 (re-elected in 1932–33 but resigned because of injury) and again in 1935–36, making him the longest serving captain at the club over a period of 7 seasons. He did not give up playing until 1945 and was a member for many years of the East Midlands Referee's Society. He served on the club committee from 1926–57, acting as Chairman from 1945–53, another club record. He also served on the committee of the East Midlands R.F.U. and was elected President for season 1958–59.

J. H. CRAIG (1933)

Awarded his First Colours in 1929, Johnnie Craig was elected Vice–Captain for 1931–32. Re-elected the next year he took over as Club Captain when Frank Phypers resigned through injury. He served on the Club Committee from 1931 to 1939 and retained an interest in Athletics' activities for many years.

CAPT. E. H. G. CHAMBERS (1934)

"Stiffy" Chambers came to Bedford during the 1914–18 War having previously been a member of the Bristol Club. He was Hon. Secretary of the Bedford R.U.F.C. during the early twenties and only seems to have become connected with the Athletic when he was elected Hon. Secretary in 1930. During his four years in office much was accomplished, thanks to his personal enthusiasm, including the levelling of the Newnham Avenue ground and the running of a fourth side. In all he served on the Athletic committee for nine years, 1930–38 and was also regularly refereeing club games. After the Second World War he remained a staunch

supporter and was usually to be found helping down in the club house every Saturday. He attended his last Athletic dinner only a few days before his death.

B.G. LONGSTAFF (1936)

Bert Longstaff was awarded his First XV Colours in 1933 and made appearances for the Town Senior side. He was Club Captain 1933-34, served on the Committee from 1933 until 1948, acting as Chairman from 1934 until 1939 when a crippling illness forced him to give up. From 1945 till 1960 he was the Clubs Hon. Auditor and was a regular spectator at First XV games. He died in 1964.

H. OSBOURN (1936)

Since his father, Alf Osbourn was a well known Bedford and East Midlands player it was natural that Bert should take up the game. He and his two brothers, Reg and Edgar, all played for the Athletic. Bert Osbourn was awarded his First XV Colours in 1929, taking over from Johnnie Craig as Vice - Captain in 1932-33. He served on the committee for twenty one years (1928-49). On several occasions he was responsible for electrical installations in the Club house and maintained an active interest in the club for many years. To date he is the longest serving life member falling just short of 60 years when he died in 1995. To this day the club plays an annual fixture against Ampthill for a Memorial Shield in his name.

J. PENSON-WHITAKER (1939)

John Penson-Whitaker was awarded his first XV colours in 1934. He made several appearances for the Bedford first XV but a promising career was cut short by the war. He was Honorary Secretary from 1936 and was still in office when the war broke out in 1939. During the same period, he served on the East Midlands RFU Committee as a Bedfordshire representative. The pub he ran, the Windsor - now the Halifax Bank- became the club's HQ and was so throughout the war. He was killed in 1942 when his ship was torpedoed in the Atlantic. He is commemorated on the memorial plaque in Willington village hall.

R. F. ARMOUR (1945)

Ron Armour was one of the most outstanding Hon treasurers in the club's history, holding the office from 1938-1960. As well as handling a greater volume of financial transactions he was intimately concerned with the general administration of the club, serving on the committee from 1936-1964. Awarded his First XV Colours in 1936 he was Vice Captain of the Extra First XV in 1936-37 and captained the same team the following season. In 1945 Ron was one of those instrumental in quickly reforming the club after the War and for many years accompanied the First XV as touch Judge. Although very busy he maintained contact, lending a hand whenever he could.

D. MURKETT (1945)

Dennis Murkett, always known as "Bud" served on the Athletic Committee from 1934 till 1961 and like Ron Armour was very much involved in the reforming of the Club in 1945. He gave considerable financial assistance to the club in the difficult early post war years and was a tireless worker on countless fund-raising and social activities from sweepstakes to dances. He proved a very able Chairman of the Club from 1953 to 1961 which along with Frank Phipers is the longest tenure of any chairman of the club. He donated a cup for a Schools' Seven- a-Side competition.

J. J. VOYCE (1945)

Having spent his playing days with the Cheltenham Club, Jack Voyce first became associated with the Athletic as a club referee. Shortly before the outbreak of World War Two he took over from Bert Longstaff as chairman. Thanks largely to his personal drive the Athletic got off to a quick start as soon as the war ended, in spite of difficulties about a ground, club hut and fixtures. Elected as Hon. Secretary he served from 1945 –1955 (with a gap of one season from 1950-51) during which time Athletic went from strength to strength, expanding its membership and achieving exceptionally good first XV records. In all Jack served on the committee for eighteen years, from 1939 to 1957. He retired to Cheltenham.

A. C. TORY (1948)

Arthur Tory was the current club captain at the outbreak of the war, having been elected in 1938 and awarded his first Club Colours in 1935. He acted as team secretary for season 1933-34, was Hon. Treasurer from 1935-37 and was team secretary again from 1946 until 1949. In total he served on the committee from 1933 to 1952 and was elected again for 1955-56.

R. A. COX (1952)

Joining the Athletic in 1933, Ron Cox was first elected onto the committee the next year and served on it for many years. In 1959 he retired from playing and took up refereeing until 1968. Ron acted as team secretary from 1934-36 and again from 1946-50. In 1950 he took on the newly created office of "Fixture and Match Secretary" which he held until 1987 when leagues were established. During that time he provided fixtures for an ever increasing number of lower sides and constantly strengthened the first XV list. In 1986 he became the club president, a role he held until his death in 1996. In 1959 he joined Frank Phypers as a Bedfordshire representative on the East Midlands R.F.U. Committee and became their President in the 1974-75 season. He received the Silver Jubilee medal in 1977 and in 1980 he received the Torch Trophy Trust Award for services to sport, one of only 14 given throughout Britain that year. 1992 saw him win the Eastern Regional Sports Council Award for his long and distinguished service to sport in the area. His greatest service to rugby outside of the club was his voluntary running of the East Midlands Fixture Pool which he started in 1960 and which he and his family operated for 36 years making 264,713 fixtures in all.

E. J. FELTS (1953)

Ewart Felts played for the Nondescripts before the Second World War but since they never reformed after the war he joined the Athletic in 1945. He served on the club committee from 1947 until 1953 and was Vice-Captain of the First XV 1947-48. When the club headquarters in Barkers Lane had to be moved and re-built in 1953 he undertook the heavy burden of supervising the work, thereby saving the club a considerable amount of money.

P. W. SCRIVENER (1953)

Percy Scrivener was one of the most prodigious points scorers in the club's history scoring over 1,000 points in total. He was awarded his First XV Colours in 1939, having previously played for the Town club. Re-joining the Athletic halfway through the 1945-46 season, almost as a veteran, by 1952 he had achieved a personal points total of over 1,000 scored in the post war years alone. He was club captain 1946-48 and served on the committee from 1946 to 1949 and again from 1953-57. The club continues to award a memorial shield to mark the fact that he was the first Bedford Athletic player to score 1,000 points.

R. J. INGLEDEW (1959)

Bob Ingledew joined Bedford Athletic in 1948 and remains a member now. He was Club Captain from 1954 till 1957, having gained his Colours in 1951. Subsequently he helped in the lower sides before retiring and taking up refereeing. He served on the committee for many years and was an extremely energetic and active Chairman from 1961 until 1968. He resigned the chairmanship two years before the clubhouse opened to enable him to devote more time to the final negotiations and the building of the new facilities. Once the clubhouse was established he expanded his horizons becoming chairman of Bedfordshire RFU. He became a senior referee with the East Midlands Referees Society becoming their chairman and eventually their President. In 1983-84 he became President of the East Midlands RFU and was elected a life member at the same time. When leagues were introduced he became the East Midlands representative on the RFU Midlands committee and worked unceasingly in administering the leagues within this larger area. Bob accepted the position of President of the club in its centenary season, a fitting accolade to a long history of service to the club.

J. TAYLOR (1959)

An outstanding player of the post war era, John Taylor was awarded his First XV Colours in 1948 and made appearances for the Bedford first XV and the East Midlands. He did five seasons as Club Captain, from 1951 to 1954 and from 1958 to 1960. He has the distinction of having captained the very successful First XV of 1952-53 which lost only two matches. He served on the committee from 1951 until 1962.

D. R. NORMAN (1961)

After a considerable absence through injury from the Club Derek Norman returned to the Athletic in 1956 and was almost immediately taking on the task of Captaining the bottom side, in this case the Fourth XV. This was a post he held until 1959 when he became team secretary and during his term in office, which lasted until 1964, the number of adult teams rose from four to seven. This expansion was due largely to the personal drive and enthusiasm of "Lofty" as he was known to everyone at the club. In 1964 he switched to Membership Secretary and from 1965 to 1967 was Hon. Secretary. Since 1967 he was both Club and Ground Secretary, a most exacting of posts, which kept him busy every weekend and most summer evenings until he finally retired in 2006!

J. RICHARDSON (1967)

John Richardson was awarded his First XV Colours in 1957 and was Club Captain 1960-62. He acted as Team Secretary from 1958 to 1960 and again in season 1962-63. He was the first Club and Ground Secretary; appointed in 1965. He had to supervise the preparation of the pitches at Putnoe Wood and create suitable playing surfaces out of rough ground. By 1967, when he had to resign due to work commitments, the difficult initial stages had been successfully overcome.

A. HARVEY (1972)

Tony Harvey is the longest serving first team captain in the club's history, spanning six seasons between 1964 and 1970. They were six difficult years as the club led a nomadic existence prior to the establishment of the clubhouse at Putnoe Woods. The fact that the club continued playing successfully through this time was very much down to Tony's efforts. Tony

was a lifelong supporter of the club and could still be seen at most first team matches until he passed away in 2019.

D.G. WARREN (1974)

David joined the club in 1954 and played regularly for the first team for ten years until 1969. He was Bar Secretary from 1960–1963 and set up and ran the bar for the first three years at Putnoe Woods. He was Chairman of the club for three years between 1975 and 1979. After retiring from playing he became a club referee and joined the East Midlands Referees Society. He was also the club Colt's Secretary from 1975 to 1978 and went on to become Chairman of the Bedfordshire Colts, a member of the East Midlands Colts Committee and a Midlands Counties selector. He was also the Club General Secretary at the end of the 1980s.

D. PERRY (1975)

David Perry was an active member of the club at the time when the move to Putnoe Woods was being negotiated. He was club secretary in 1967-68 and following completion of the move to Putnoe Woods he oversaw the early years of the club's residence in its new home acting as chairman from 1971 to 1975. It was during his period at the helm that the club won its first major trophy, the Bedfordshire Cup in 1971 and had its most successful season to date winning 27 of 42 matches in 1971-72.

G. WOODFINE (1981)

Gareth was recruited to the Club by John Taylor in 1956. Remarkably for a Welshman he had not previously played rugby so played in Lofty Norman's 4th team where he was put in the second row "out of the way". His achievements on the field bear no comparison to his contribution off it. In his first period as Chairman from 1968 to 1971 he oversaw the establishment of the club in its new clubhouse at Putnoe Woods which consolidated the club's future. In his second period from 1979 to 1983 the clubhouse was extended and updated, a monumental task given that there was precious little funding available to assist it at the time. It was fitting therefore given the amount of tireless work behind the scenes he has always performed for the club that he should be club President in the five most successful years of its history culminating in the NPI Intermediate Cup win at Twickenham in 1998 and achieving National League status the following year.

H.A. LAWTON (1981)

Alec Lawton joined the Ath as a player in the sixties earning a reputation as a combative back row forward but it is as an organiser of rugby tours that he really came to prominence. Alec arranged and ran many European trips to Germany, Holland, France, Denmark and Ireland. These tours became a byword for good fun and surprisingly good and competitive rugby. Having been persuaded that he would make a good Bar Secretary, Alec took on this onerous task and proved an able organiser. Along with Margaret Grummit Alec put in countless hours of work on an unpaid basis. Like a lot of rugby clubs the bar was the single most important source of income and the Ath owed a large debt to Alec for his effort.

M.A. GRUMMIT (1986)

Margaret became involved in the Ath through her connection with Alec Lawton and completely immersed herself in the day to day jobs that needed doing. She cooked and distributed player's meals on Saturdays before helping out in the bar, clearing glasses and finally sweeping the floor on many a long late night. She always sold twice as many Christmas draw

tickets as anyone else and collected monies from all with élan. She has raised a large amount of money for the club through her various draw efforts over the years and latterly has taken responsibility for the gate on matchdays.

E.J. CARTER (1988)

Eddie was a prop forward and House Secretary for many years. He installed the original floodlights on BT telegraph poles still to be seen along the front edge of the field and much of the electrical modifications and additions to the original clubhouse were done by him. After BT was privatised Eddie spent long periods working in Oman in the Middle East and wrote back humorous letters to club members describing life among the sand dunes and alcohol enclaves!

B.L. MULHALL (1989)

Bernie Mulhall played at a higher level with the senior Town club for a while but returned to the club to prove himself a very good back row player. He was club captain from 1971 to 1973 but missed out on lifting the first ever trophy won by the club when he was injured and could not play in the Bedfordshire Cup Final of 1971-72. Once his playing days were over he became club chairman for five years in the mid-eighties. He was a very hard working chairman who would turn his hand to any task, even preparing the teas for the players after the game – in emergencies!

P. MCGUCKIAN (1991)

Paul McGuckian is one of the longest serving playing and committee members in the club's history. His playing career began in the sixties and he was a youthful member playing on the wing for the Bedford Athletic side that won the inaugural Bedfordshire Cup in 1971. He holds the club record for number of tries in a season with 44, and was club captain from 1975 to 1977. He went on to play senior rugby at Northampton, whom he captained and fell one try short of Barry Oldham's all time club try scoring record. He trialled for the Midlands and was reserve for England but sadly the call-up never came. He returned to the club in the mid-eighties and converted into the forwards. He became club captain again from 1988 to 1991 a period that ended with the club capturing its first ever league title in 1991 – the East Midlands/Leicestershire league. Paul was still playing first team rugby well into the nineties and once his playing days were over became club chairman from 1999 to 2002. He then took on the position of Club Captain in 2002 and in 2006 became the President of Bedfordshire. Paul became East Midlands President in 2009, the fifth member of the club to achieve this honour.

N.M. DAVIES (1992)

Nic Davies arrived in Bedford in the mid-Seventies and cannot remember for certain how he joined the Ath but remembers playing in a trial game and “roasting” the incumbent 1st XV fly-half Mike Day. However it was with his legal and administrative skills that he made a real mark at the club. He was a highly competent and efficient Club Secretary for eight years and this contribution to the day to day functioning of the club was followed up with a position as Chairman for three successive years in the late eighties. His legal background was always of invaluable help to the club and guided it through many complex issues such as rewriting the club constitution and renewals of the lease! He became President of the club following the Centenary season in 2009 but sadly died in office.

P.WHEELER (1992)

Pat Wheeler was a first XV player in the sixties and seventies for the club who then moved onto the coaching side. He built a successful colts XV in 1978-79 with just 5 defeats in 27 games and then surpassed this with Mark Ward in 1984-85 when the Colts XV lost 2 of 32 games played. This success brought them to the attention of the Club Council and from 1985-86 they were appointed coaches to the first XV. They coached the first XV that won promotion from the East Midlands/Leicestershire leagues in 1990-91. Pat became club captain in 1996 and together with Paul McGuckian and then chairman John Plumb persuaded many of the recently displaced Blues players to join the Ath. He took on the position of club chairman in 2002 and with his hard work and power of persuasion assembled a team that got the lease renewed and the clubhouse rebuilt. A magnificent achievement and as a result rugby at Putnoe Woods is secured for the future generations.

M. WARD (1995)

Mark Ward played 1st XV rugby in the seventies and eighties in his favoured position of full back. He was 1st XV captain from 1977 to 1980 but his playing career was cut short after sustaining a serious head injury. Together with Pat Wheeler he coached the most successful colts side in the club's history in the 1984-85 season. Having coached the 1st XV to the East Midlands/Leicestershire league title in 1991 he took on the position of club chairman from 1991 to 1994. Not one to retire from the limelight he returned to the playing side of the club as the club's first Director of Rugby in 2002, a position he held until he was required to retire on grounds of ill health in 2003.

DR J. ROSS (1996)

John Ross came from the Swifts to play for the Ath in the 1970s. He was a very good 2nd team hooker. He was always most happy taking the opposition front row apart. Later on he became third team captain and then took on various committee roles but will be most remembered for his tireless work as fixture secretary a post he held for nearly twenty years, finally stepping down in 2006.

B. EYNON (1996)

Barry Eynon was a winger with the lower club sides and always a very good organiser and stand-in after dinner speaker. He was club secretary for most of the 1990s a period of unprecedented change and success for the club. He has always been known as a good socialiser and was awarded his life membership for his hard work as club secretary.

J. PLUMB (1997)

John Plumb was a reliable servant of the club for several decades and the reward for many years of service culminated in his position as Chairman during the 1994 to 1999 period when the club won seven trophies in two seasons, went unbeaten for 39 games and won a Cup Final at Twickenham. John had been a regular first team player in the eighties and was a member of the side that won the club's first ever East Midlands Cup in 1983. John was also responsible for much of the fabric of the original clubhouse building having tiled the roof and clad the walls with brick given that the original wooden structure needed replacing in the early eighties.

A. QUAYLE (1998)

Andrew Quayle joined the club when he moved to the area. He was a very good scrum half at first or second team level. An accountant by profession he was asked to take on the treasurer's position. He did this for over ten years even when his work took him overseas. Andrew was awarded his life membership for his many years as treasurer.

S.J. SPRING (1999)

Steve was a prop forward who played with the club in the early eighties. He held a council position for many years and served as Sponsorship secretary in the early nineties. He returned to the club in 1997 alongside Neil Beytell who joined as coach from the Blues. He was team manager the day that the club won the NPI Intermediate Cup at Twickenham. He continued to hold this position through the 1998-99 season and stepped back into the breach in 2001 when Paul Alston and Rob Crowle left the club. He finally resigned his commission in the 2002-03 season. Steve also played an important role in organising the annual club summer ball for several years and arranged the 20th anniversary ball to celebrate the NPI cup success in 2018.

D.J.P. AUGUST (2000)

David August ran the club bar entirely voluntarily for ten years until 2005, no mean feat given that this was a period when the club was entering quasi-professionalism and the pressure on all areas of the club to make money were rising. Prior to this David was the newsletter editor for many years during the nineties taking it from a paper and pen photocopy exercise into the professional outlook of the digital age. He took over the position as Chairman of the Playing Committee up to the end of the Centenary season. He was then Ground Secretary for a period that included the installation of the Artificial Grass Pitch and in 2019 became club chairman.

M.S. BOWDEN (2004)

Mick Bowden has served the club at all levels even proving dedicated enough to turn out for the Extra Firsts on the afternoon of his wedding in 1987. He was 3rd XV captain in 1993-94, Extra 1st captain in 1994-95 and then Team Secretary for five years. During this time he became Assistant Team Manager and was in this position for the winning cup final at Twickenham in 1998. When Steve Spring stepped down he inherited the Team Manager position and also served a stint as fixture secretary. In 2008 he became vice-chairman and in 2010 took on the role of chairman which he held for four years, seeing the club win the Midlands One East league title in 2012-13 before stepping down due to ill health a year later.

W.G. WEST (2006)

Bill joined the club in the 1970s after moving to Bedford from the London area. He was a very good first or second team hooker. He never wished to stop playing so in his later playing days graduated to the lower sides. An accountant by profession he helped Andrew Quayle in his position as Treasurer and later took the job over. It was his hard work that enabled the club to get back on a sound financial footing in the early part of this century. He put a great amount of effort into the new lease and the latest extension to the clubhouse and was made a life member when he retired from the position of treasurer in 2006.

R. TIMOTHY (2006)

Richard "Digger" Timothy returned from Australia at the end of the sixties and since that time has been one of the members at the heart and soul of the club. In his playing days he captained the Bedford Athletic side that won the first Bedfordshire Cup and played in all four Bedfordshire Cup winning sides in the seventies and eighties. He was instrumental in scoring the winning drop goal that delivered the club its first East Midlands title in 1982-83. In that season his playing efforts were rewarded with selection for the full East Midlands side. He organized several Easter tours, to France, Germany and Ireland among other destinations, and off the field was extremely successful in running weekly raffles and organizing the Christmas carols. In the first decade of this century he was heavily involved in organizing the second team, the Warriors as they are now known, and in the Centenary Season he took on the position of Ground Secretary.

C.J. JORDAN (2011)

Chris Jordan joined the Ath when his son graduated from the Junior Blues to adult rugby. He played his own rugby at St Neots where his career was ended by a nasty injury. He soon became the "go to" man for catering and took over the kitchen in 1999. He used his extensive contacts made through his game dealing and processing business and game pie became a fixture on the Ath menu. He became Chairman in 2005 following the completion of the extension when his managerial skills and practical skills were much needed. He was chairman in the centenary season of 2007-08 and was Ground secretary until 2017. Today he manages the kitchen but still manages to get his hands dirty with any practical problems that arise.

R.A. PARRISH (2014)

Richard joined the Ath in the 1980s when he moved to Bedford from Essex to work at Hanson Brick. His former club, Upminster, where he was chairman and 1st XV stalwart saw his better playing days. He played many seasons for the Ath Veterans team being notorious for his diligent imposition and collection of "fines". On retiring from playing he became a referee where his foghorn voice was a real asset. He held many positions at the Club, particularly on the playing side, coaching and managing teams as well as being VP secretary. He became Chairman in 2014 and served for five years, equalling the length of service of John Plumb and arguably overseeing a similar period of success at the club.

R.P.R. PECK (2015)

Richard Peck joined Bedford Athletic in the 2002/03 season and his son Ollie went on to become the first team scrum half. Richard soon busied himself as Development Secretary and became very active in pursuing and obtaining grant funding for important clubhouse projects. He was on the committee that applied for and eventually obtained the funding for the development of the clubhouse in 2005. He later headed up various applications that included the renewal of the showers. He led the bid to Sport England that eventually saw the upgrade of the second team pitch between 2017 and 2018 and was instrumental in securing the next generation Artificial Grass Pitch as part of the RFU World Cup legacy that was opened at the start of the 2018-19 season.

A.F. MARRIOTT (2015)

Ann Marriott first joined Bedford Athletic in 1998/99 when the Junior Blues moved from Goldington Road to Wentworth Drive. Her son Nick was playing for the Junior Blues and Ann had been a driving force on the Junior Blues committee for some time and quickly became involved in fundraising for the Ath in many ways, firstly taking over the running of the 100 club,

a job she carried out for some 15 years and also helping to organise many of the club's annual events including the Centenary Ball. In 2009/10 season she took over the running of the kitchen, laying the foundation for the successful enterprise that it is today. Ann has been responsible for raising large sums of money for the club and on receiving her honorary life membership she became only the second lady in the history of the club to receive this honour.

N.P. PATERSON (2016)

Neil Paterson played his first games for Bedford Athletic in the 1980s. This meant that when he came off the bench at home to Hereford in January 2010 he became only the second clubman to play first team rugby at the club over four decades. He was a player in the Cup winning side at Twickenham in 1998. Not only has Neil played for the first team he has been an active participant at all levels in the club across all teams. To this day he continues to help field whichever side needs most help on a Saturday. Neil became club captain in 2013 a role in which he actively promotes and supports the playing side of the club.

B. CRICHTON (2019)

Bronwen moved to Bedford in the early 1970s and started following the club while working for Gareth Woodfine. During Nic Davies tenure as secretary, Bronwen typed minutes and correspondence and started spending Saturday afternoons watching which she still does. Bronwen has been a great contributor to the Ath whether it be her typing up of the Committee minutes in times past, her continuing encouragement on the sidelines through times good and perhaps not so good and her generous support in so many ways that has helped the Club so much.

J. J. TYRRELL (2019)

Jeremy Tyrrell joined the club on moving to Bedford in 2004. A year later he had become only the fourth fixture secretary the club has had following in the footsteps of Ron Cox, Mick Bowden and John Ross, a position he holds to this day. Starting in the 2005-06 season he became touch judge to the first XV and has rarely missed a game since. He helped organise a number of events in the 2008 centenary year including the Penguin International XV centenary match and he continues to write match reports and keep club statistics. For many years he represented the club at East Midlands level where he is also recognised as an Honorary Life Member. He is the more recent author of this history of the club.