

# Riverstone Rugby League Club

Clarrie Neal

For many years it was thought the Riverstone club was born in 1915; with the following article printed in *Rugby League Week* in July 1977.

*Riverstone is a peaceful, sleepy little town lying at the foot of the famous Blue Mountains, 56 km west of Sydney. The Riverstone club was born during one of the most turbulent times in world history. As World War 1 broke out the Riverstone Butchers, as they became known, got off to a modest beginning, but no one knows exactly when the club was formed. The clubs records only go back to 1915 , but some claim the club was formed shortly before World War 1, others argue it was as early as 1911.*

The *Windsor & Richmond Gazette* on the 28th April 1900 noted that 22 members held a meeting to form the Riverstone Football Club and the club's colours were Blue, Black and Gold. However, as Rugby League was not played in Sydney until 1908, it is likely that this reference is to the Rugby Union code that was occasionally played in the district. Match results do not appear in the *Gazette* until 1907 when Riverstone played two games against Windsor and another against Glebe Island.

The following article appeared in the *Gazette* on the 3rd September 1910 - *The Riverstone Football Club will hold their annual picnic at an early date, and in the evening a dance will be held. Mr Harry Smith will take the opportunity by presenting the best player during the season with a handsome trophy, which is now on view at the Riverstone Hotel. Thanks are due to Mr Smith.*

Riverstone Rugby League Club has seen many changes in their 90 year history and have played in three district competitions. From its inception until 1946 it played in the Western Districts (under the control of Western Suburbs), from 1947 till 1966 it played in the Parramatta District , and has played in the Penrith district from 1967.

It is not certain what the club's original colours were, some believed the guernseys were all maroon, others believed the club's first colours were black with gold bands, old photographs seem to confirm both to be correct. An undated photo shows a plain guernsey and photos taken in 1922 clearly show the black and gold bands that were the colours until c1930 when it became a maroon guernsey with a gold V. The gold V remained until 1955 when it became a narrow gold band on the maroon.

The Butchers first two playing fields were cow paddocks, both located on the meat works property. It is believed their first field was at the rear of the houses in 'Butcher's Row'. Later they moved to another paddock, 200 metres down the road and opposite the railway station. The club used voluntary labour to build a pavilion on this ground which later became the site of the Riverstone Showground.

'Tiger' Locke, Claude Schofield, Dennis Rosa, Dick McCarthy and Dick McDonald were all players from this era who played grade football with Western Suburbs. 'Tiger' played for Wests in 1927 and was considered by many to be the best halfback to ever play in the district.

Life in Riverstone has always revolved around the Riverstone Meat Co. and over the years a large majority of the footballer players worked there - hence the club being known as the 'Butchers'. Another identity from this era was Billy Teale, the undefeated AIF heavyweight boxing champion

who was a regular player in the 1922 'A' grade side. He later became a fight trainer and a referee at Sydney Stadium.

Teams playing in the 1920 Western Districts competition were Parramatta North, Parramatta Endeavours, Granville, Lidcombe, Auburn, Windsor, Wentworthville, Blacktown, St Marys, Emu Plains, Penrith and Riverstone.

The club had many successes in these early years winning the 'A' Grade competition three years in succession, 1931-2-3. Their 'C' grade team won the competition three years in a row, 1937-8-9. These 'C' grade teams featured such names as McCarthy, Ward, Asher, Anderson, Drayton, Whelan, Schofield, and McNamara and were coached by 'Tiger' Locke.

Frank Crowley, (who was better known as Toodles), wrote in an article in the Penrith book 'Bound For Glory' recalling the old pavilion being built. He also recalled Riverstone's 'Mr Rugby League', Basil Andrews building the showers at the end, and the copper boiler that was used to supply the hot water (sometimes).

This pavilion was moved to the site of the present ground in the 1940s by placing it on log rollers and a truck owned by Dick Stacey was used to drag it across Garfield Road. to the site of the present oval. The stand remained there until it was reduced to ashes one bonfire night.

Frank recalled the club in the 40s attracting crowds of 300 - 400 to their home games, a very good crowd for those days, with the club being able to buy new guernseys, to replace the old ones that had become tattered and faded. Over the years Riverstone was very fortunate to have the services of committee men of the calibre of Frank Crowley, Basil Andrews and Charlie Harris, all of whom gave a lifetime of service to Rugby League.

Frank Crowley, after playing football, was club Secretary for many years, became a referee, and remained a club official in his later years. As a reward for all these years of service to Rugby League, Frank was made a Life Member of the Riverstone Club. He was also made a Life Member of both the Parramatta and Penrith District Junior Rugby Leagues for his efforts to those clubs.

Basil Andrews was a foreman at the meat works and the club secretary who was born about the same time the club was founded. Basil was considered to be one of the 'fathers of the club'; such was his love for the Butchers that while fighting with the AIF in New Guinea he sent money back to Australia to buy a shield for which clubs from the Western Suburbs could compete. He spent much of his time working for the Riverstone club and was rewarded with Life Membership.

Basil Andrews was also made a Life Member of the Parramatta Junior League and later became the Penrith Junior Leagues first Life Member; a just reward for the many hours he spent working for the Junior Leagues in the district. Charlie Harris, after many years service to the Riverstone Club and to the Penrith J.R.L. was another who was rewarded with Life Membership of both organisations.

One of the Butcher's most colourful supporters was a Mrs Britton, an elderly lady who always sat in the same spot on the sidelines at the Riverstone games. Mrs Britton was regarded as a health hazard to the opposition players. She often used her umbrella to trip players running up the sideline and several times clobbered them with the broom.

Wally Brown was another interesting Riverstone personality. Wally owned a pig farm at Rouse Hill and always ran to training and back home again, 7 km each way in his army boots.

The Butchers 'A' Reserve grade side had an outstanding record when they won the premiership in 1947. They scored 301 points and conceded only 31 that season as they swept all before them. Captain Coach of this team was Noel (Butch) Drayton.

In 1952 there were so few players in the area that Riverstone was forced to unite with Richmond; they met with only mediocre success that year and in 1953 their coach was Bernie Becke. Things were much better when in 1954 Riverstone were able to secure the services of Freddy Brown as a playing coach. Freddy was a top class player who had spent a few years playing with the Balmain & St George 1st grade sides in the Sydney competition. His guile and leadership led the team to the semi-finals that year.

The following year 1955, the team coached by Jack Munday won the 1st grade Premiership, defeating Richmond in spectacular fashion. After trailing 11-0 at half-time and down 14-0 midway through the 2nd half, they produced a whirlwind finish scoring 5 tries and 2 goals to win 19-14.

The 1950s was a golden era with the club winning both the 'A' Grade and 'A' Reserve premierships in 1956, and the following year the 'A' grade were beaten in the Grand Final. The '56 and '57 teams were coached by Bobby Hobbs. Training became a serious task in those days and Des Cartwright recalls after training Mick Woods boiling up a large pot of meat extract for the boys to enjoy.

Jack Munday was to become a controversial figure later in his life as the leader of the NSW Builders Labourers Federation, figuring prominently in the Green Bans disputes of the 1960s. Being a member of the Communist party, he was savaged by the media of the day; he was thrown into gaol, but he is a survivor and is now credited with having saved the historic Rocks area of Sydney for the general public to enjoy. He is now the widely respected President of the Historic Houses Trust of NSW.

Several players of this era went on to play Presidents Cup and district football with Parramatta - Bob McHugh, Des Cartwright, Bobby Hobbs, Brian McNamara, Colin Crouch, Charlie Sandilands, Ron Neal and Mattie Johnston. Mattie was captain of Parramatta club's first premiership winning team, the 1964 third grade.

A promising player from this era was Johnny Waters, some believed he could have played for Australia one day. But fate struck a cruel blow when Johnny was killed in a car accident just after he played in Parramatta's Presidents Cup team.

Another very promising player of this period to have his career cut short was Eric Magennis, who became a paraplegic after a motor cycle accident. But this setback did not dampen Eric's enthusiasm for sport and in 1972 he won two Gold Medals at the 1972 Paraplegic Olympics held in Munich, and another at the games held in Toronto, Canada in 1976.

Another man who has contributed greatly to the success of the club is Bill McNamara. After several years as a player he became a member of the committee and then served as the club Patron for many years. Throughout his life he continued this interest in football and gave up much of his valuable time to manage and coach the junior teams.

He was the man responsible for building the Footballers Hall at the corner of Creek Street and Garfield Road. He organised the removal of two army huts from Ingleburn and then provided much of the labour to help the volunteers to assemble it. The hall was opened in 1957 and was widely used for Balls, dances, wedding receptions, parties, club meetings etc. for the 30 years it existed.



It was a source of amazement to many people as to how such a small settlement as Riverstone could compete so successfully against teams from areas with much larger populations. Riverstone in the early 1950s was playing teams that represented Wentworthville, Merrylands, Guildford, Liverpool, Blacktown, St Marys, Penrith and Richmond. No doubt the support the club received from the community was a big factor, in the 50s the town would be deserted whenever there was a home game. This support was still evident in the 1970s when the Riverstone High School team played in the University Shield, a competition between teams from High Schools from all over the State.

These matches were usually held on a Friday afternoon and when held at Riverstone, local shops have been known to close to allow supporters to attend. For some unknown reason industrial unrest would develop at the meat works, resulting in a strike from midday. Needless to say there was always a huge crowd at the oval to support the local school that afternoon.

When Penrith was admitted into the Sydney competition in 1967 Riverstone came into their Junior League organisation. Ron Bates became involved with the club at this time.

Names from some the older families of Riverstone still appeared in the programs - McNamara, Britton, Smith, Watton, Johnston, Drayton, Parkes, Wallace and they were now joined by such names as Petrow, Olejarnik, Poniewierka, and Wolffe.

Charlie Wheeler, after coaching the junior teams for several years took control of the 'A' Grade and was an immediate success, with the club winning both the 'A' grade and 'A' reserve premierships in 1971 and 1972. Ron recalled the celebrations lasted for weeks.

1971 was the clubs most successful year when from 12 teams they had 7 teams reach the semis and 5 won their premierships. But the year was also tinged with sadness when the club lost its greatest supporter, Basil Andrews.

The '70s saw a large increase in the number of junior teams and the club was fortunate to have a willing group of supporters to coach and manage these teams. Names that come to mind are Johnny Judge, Eric and Barry Crouch, Ron Bates, Des Cartwright, Alan Drayton and Rob Shepherd. Ron recalled the Windsor/ Richmond games against Riverstone which were always a tough battle, characterised by a real love-hate relationship, but all were the best of mates.

Throughout the '70s the club won more than its share of premierships and also won the club championship in 1976 and 1992. The club again won the 'A' grade premiership in 1988, 1989 and 1990. Players from Riverstone that went on to play grade with Penrith include Roy West, Ken Wolffe, Geoff Pfister and Zac Olejarnik.

By the 1980s the club grounds received a big boost with the construction of new amenities and grandstand. The oval was fenced and underground watering was supplied. The work was done by Blacktown Council with a lot of help from club members.

Ron said one friend he did want to give special thanks to was Russell Magennis - a mate who was always there to lend a hand. He has coached and managed teams, marked the fields, became club president, was the club's best seller of raffle tickets, you name it, he's done it.

Ron Bates was Secretary of the Riverstone club from 1968 to 1982 and was rewarded with Life Membership. He was also made Life Member of the Penrith District J.R.L. for his years of service to that club.

His best memories of the club include - the presentation days for the kids at the end of the season, the trips away with the kids teams, selling raffle tickets at the Tourmaline Hotel, the selling of doubles on the Commonwealth Bank corner on Friday afternoon and Saturday morning. He also has good memories of the Bowls days and socials held at the Bowling Club, the barbecues after the home games and the many celebrations held in the footballers hall.

The backbone of any successful club is the committee, Riverstone has always been fortunate to have many members who have been prepared to give a lot of their time to the club. The club has recognised many of these members with Life Membership and they are - Charlie Harris, Basil Andrews, Bill McNamara, Frank Crowley, Bobby Parkes, Eric Gunton, Geoff Binks, Ron Bates, Eric Crouch, Barry Crouch, Alan Drayton, Des Cartwright, Eric Martin, Johnny Judge and Bill Denman.

The Riverstone Club changed its name to the Riverstone Razorbacks in the year 2000.

When the Penrith Panthers defeated the highly fancied Sydney Roosters in the 2003 Grand Final, the team comprised two players who had played all of their Junior football with the Riverstone Club. They were Shane Rodney and Joel Clinton; Joel continued his outstanding season by being selected to tour with the 2003 Kangaroos to England.

*Compiled by Clarrie Neal from information and photos provided by Bobby Parkes, Ronnie Bates and Des Cartwright in February 2000. Later details have been added as they eventuated. Many of the old programs on display at the museum were provided by Geoff Binks, another grand supporter of the club from the late 1940s to the 1980s.*

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Donipier Farrell going for line with Cyril Dobson N.S.W. J. O'Brien in close support.

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**A GRADE and RESERVE GRADE**

3.15 p.m.  
1.30 p.m.

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DONATION: 1/6 Official Programme

1955