



Public Record Office
of Northern Ireland

INTRODUCTION

IRISH RUGBY FOOTBALL UNION (ULSTER BRANCH) PAPERS

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Irish Rugby Football Union (Ulster Branch) Papers (D3867)

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Introduction



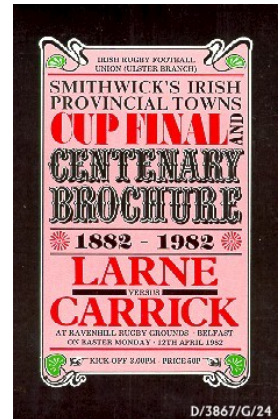
The Irish Rugby Football Union (Ulster Branch) papers comprise 179 minute books, annual reports, cash books, fixture books, match programmes and photograph albums, 1886-1991, relating to the organisation and administration of rugby in Ulster. The IRFU based at Lansdowne Road, Dublin, has responsibility for all aspects of the amateur game in Ireland and through the four provincial branches directs international trials, inter-provincial tournaments, competitions, refereeing, mini-rugby and schoolboy rugby. In Ulster, the senior schools cup is probably the most high profile event of the rugby calendar culminating in the final on St Patrick's Day at Ravenhill Park. At present there are

64 schools affiliated to the Ulster Branch.



Formation of the Ulster Branch of the IRFU

The Ulster branch of the Irish Rugby Football Union was formed c.1876, though the earliest surviving record is a 1886-1889 minute book, D3867/A/1. Curiously, the subsequent volume for the years 1899-1902 is labelled 'No 1', and the 1886-1889 book has at some time been altered to read 'No 0'. The labelling was therefore probably completed at a later date, leaving open the possibility that earlier records may predate those deposited in PRONI. References for the date of formation of the IRFU are misleading. In the minutes of 26 November 1900, at Ye Olde Castle Restaurant, Belfast (D3867/A/2), the President reminds the meeting that the next Annual General Meeting would be the 25th in the Branch's history, and suggests that past presidents might consider marking the silver jubilee by presenting a cup for the senior league competition. This cup was indeed presented by the Past Presidents at a smoking concert held at Ye Olde Castle Restaurant on 20 March 1901. The cup would later be later lost during the Belfast Blitz. The Past Players cup is also engraved with the statement 'Presented by the Past Players to the Northern Branch Junior League to commemorate the 25th Anniversary of the Branch 1901'.



Centenary brochure of the IRFU.



The Early Years to the Present

It therefore can be concluded that an administrative body of some description was set up in 1876, and was responsible for selecting the Ulster team, under the auspices of its first president, H.C. Kelly of the NIFC. The first Inter-provincial was played against Leinster during the 1875-76 season. The first recorded tour was in 1887 when a team representing Ulster played a Yorkshire side at Wakefield (outside Leeds). This particular fixture has continued on an annual basis to the current day. It was not until 1977 that a senior Ulster side undertook a foreign tour. This was to Bordeaux, France, for the 70th anniversary celebrations of the Club Athletique Belgais, at the invitation of the club president, Andre Moga who at that time was Vice President of the French Federation. The short tour proved a success and a further tour was arranged of Romania in 1985.



The Papers



Action Shot

The papers include 38 volumes of minute books, 1886-1967, relating to the Ulster Branch of the Irish Rugby Football Union (Ulster branch); 7 minute books relating to the Irish Provincial Towns Rugby Football, 1897-1902, Magee College Rugby Club, 1921-1933 and Ravenhill Grounds, 1941-1959; 66 IRFU (Ulster branch) annual reports, 1901-1991; 8 IRFU cash books, 1918-1979; 8 gate books for Ravenhill Park, Belfast, 1932-1983; 3 ledgers of the IRFU (Ulster branch) and Ravenhill Park, 1937-1968; 3 volumes of

IRFU (Ulster branch) payment books, 1957-1973; a miscellaneous sundry expense books, cash books and receipt books of the Ulster Branch, 1938-1984; 12 fixture books, 1947-1976; 72 match programmes at Ravenhill Park, 1972-1989; and 26 disparate items, 1902-1985, including 2 photograph albums, 1909-1969 and 1929-1935, (D3867/G/2, D3867/G/6) of inter-provincial and Irish teams, action shots and changing rooms.



Related Collections

Further material relating to the IRFU (Ulster Branch) can be found in D3812 comprising 4 minute books, 1921-1981, and 1 account book, 1926-1931, of the City of Belfast YMCA Rugby Football Club, and also in D3802, the Irish Provincial Town's Rugby Football Union Papers, 1899-1985.

