History of Gosforth Rugby Football Club.

GOSFORTH FOOTBALL CLUB was formed in 1877.
Playing in the green and white hoops of Durham School as many members were ex-pupils. In the early days the club led a nomadic existence hence the name Gosforth Nomads which was adopted in the 1890’s through the early 1900’s and which in recent times was the name given to the Veteran’s XV.

For many years Gosforth shared the Northumberland County Ground (which has now been replaced by a supermarket!) with Northern Rugby Club until, in 1951, land was bought next to the Great North Road. The club chairman, Leslie Baty laid the foundation stone in 1954 and in September 1955 Joe Brunton, President of the RFU, opened the ground and clubhouse. The New Ground, as it was called, was to be Gosforth’s home for the next 35 years.

In the early 1900’s Gosforth held junior club status and were raised to senior status in 1906 by winning the Northumberland and Durham Second Teams Competition. During the early part of the 20th century Gosforth did not enjoy much success although the County Cup Competitions were the only trophies at stake. Percy Park & Rockcliff dominated the Northumberland Senior Cup with the odd success by Northern, Tynedale and Seghill and it was not until 1928 that Gosforth won the cup beating Percy Park 5-3 in the final. Despite further final appearances in 1932, 1936, 1950 and 1951, a second cup win was not forthcoming until 1956 when a side containing brothers Doug, Johnnie & Norman Smith beat Northern 6-3. Although Gosforth lost the 1957 final they were about to make the cup their own. In the 35 years from 1960 to 1994, the cup was won 27 times and shared once.

In the late 1950’s Gosforth were joined by Arthur Smith, who captained Scotland and the 1962 British Lions and in the early 60’s by Irish International Ray McLoughlin who toured with the Lions in 1966 and 1971. It must be remembered that there were no national leagues or cups at this time but Gosforth’s ability not only to attract international players but also fixtures against the major national sides of the times such as Coventry, Blackheath, Rosslyn Park, Harlequins and Richmond meant the club was developing a national reputation. In 1971-72, Gosforth won the Sunday Telegraph Northern Merit Table for the first time and then the John Player Cup in 1975/76, retaining it the following season.

During the 70’s players were provided to the County sides of Northumberland, Durham, Yorkshire, Cumberland & Westmoreland (as Cumbria was then known) and Notts, Lincs & Derby as well as North East Counties (against South Africa and New Zealand), North of England, England (Roger Uttley, Malcolm Young, Peter Dixon and Dave Robinson), Scotland (Duncan Madsen) and the British Lions (Uttley & Dixon).

A further John Player cup final appearance came in 1980/81 but Gosforth lost 15-22 to Leicester. Steve Bainbridge won England and Lions caps during the 1980’s and Colin White also gained caps for England while Richard Breakey & Jim Pollock played for Scotland. In 1985/86 season National Merit Tables (the forerunners of leagues) came into being and Gosforth were in Division A. Unfortunately, relegation at the end of that first season meant that when league rugby finally arrived in 1987/88, Gosforth started in Division 2.

The end of the 1980’s saw the decision to sell the New Ground and re-locate to Kingston Park. The decision was based on financial considerations but almost cost the club dearly in playing terms as Gosforth finished bottom of Division 2 having to play all their homes games away at Percy Park, while Kingston Park was built. Fortunately, due to re-organisation of the leagues, relegation was averted. RFU President, Mike Pearey, an ex-player at Gosforth, officially opened the Kingston Park ground in September 1990, which was followed by a match against an England XV captained by Will Carling and bound for the World Cup final the following year. Another former player and coach, Mike Mahoney, was appointed the newly named Newcastle Gosforth’s first Director of Rugby and in a brand new facility a determined attempt was made to secure promotion to Division 1 (now the Premiership) of the National Leagues. In 1992/93, this was attained but success was short-lived as Newcastle Gosforth was relegated the following season. A youthful Martin Corry who later captained England served his apprenticeship in the Club as did Garath Archer, while Paddy Johns of Ireland played for a brief period.

In August 1995, following the World Cup in South Africa, the IRB announced that rugby was open (professionalism was now allowed) and in September 1995, after talks with Sir John Hall, the Chairman of Newcastle United F.C., Newcastle Gosforth effectively became part of his ‘Sporting Club’ dream and Wasps & England fly-half, Rob Andrew became Director of Rugby. A further name change to Newcastle Rugby Club (later Newcastle Falcons) and during that first season it was deemed that Professional and Amateur rugby could not co-exist and the junior (adult) players at Newcastle Gosforth were given notice to quit.

While most members were disappointed and angry with this decision, 2 individuals, in particular, decided to do something about it. Neil Jamieson had recently retired from playing having spent his whole career at Gosforth. A lock forward, he played mainly in the junior sides, captaining the 2nd XV for a number of years. Jonathan Lill started his rugby life in the back row before converting to prop and had represented all the club’s sides from First XV downwards. Still playing, Jonny was not happy to look for another club and, along with Neil, campaigned to have the decision to banish the junior sides overturned. When this failed, they decided on the next best option – form a ‘new’ club!

In 1996, GOSFORTH RUGBY FOOTBALL CLUB was founded. Mirroring the events of 119 years earlier, there was a new rugby club playing in green and white hoops. Newcastle Gosforth had literally split in two. A professional club called Newcastle and an amateur club called Gosforth.

In addition to generous sponsorship, finance was sought by offering Founder Membership to those willing to commit £250. The response was overwhelming and a plaque listing 70 Founder Members is displayed in the clubhouse.

Another member of the Smith clan, Simon – son of Johnnie – became the first Chairman with Trevor Hogg as Secretary and Jonathan Storey as Treasurer. Neil Jamieson & Jonathan Lill, the leading protagonists and ‘founders’ of the club joined the committee along with Ian Elvin and Guy Taylor representing the University of Northumbria, who allowed the new club the use of facilities at its Bullocksteads Sports Ground – directly behind Kingston Park – and persuaded students to join to augment the players who had migrated from Newcastle Gosforth. On the playing side, Colin White became the first Chairman of Rugby with Tommy Cleghorn as Coach and Tony Mullarkey as Captain. Graeme Jamieson was mainly responsible for the first year’s fixtures, Tony Elliott became 1st XV Manager with Dave Weaver 2nd XV Manager and Membership Secretary and Ged Allison as 3rd XV Manager, with Christian Short now of Brive and ex-Northampton Saints and Connacht starting his adult rugby in the green and white as a schoolboy.

Gosforth joined the league structure (at the bottom) in Durham & Northumberland Division 4 (level 13) and won the league at the first attempt and achieved a ‘double’ by also winning the Northumberland Senior Shield. Further league championships were won in 1997/98 (D&N 3), 1999/2000 (D&N 2) and 2000/01 (D&N 2), the latter at level 8 after reorganisation of the leagues in 2000. The club struggled in D&N 1 and was relegated in 2003 but regained its place with promotion in 2005/06.

In 2003 125 years of rugby at Gosforth was celebrated and the club took the lead by holding a number of events to mark the occasion. The final event – a 125 Dinner at the Newcastle Civic Centre followed the tradition of the 70th and centenary dinners by hosting players both current and past, wives and friends of Gosforth. We were delighted to have Alan Black and Rob Andrew as our main speakers. In 2007 Gosforth also celebrated its first 10 years in its new format by holding a Dinner Dance at the Holiday Inn.

In 2012-13, Gosforth are playing in Durham & Northumberland Division 1. Just as in 1996, it is an amateur side, with CASC status, based upon the traditional values of rugby union. The aim of the club is to continue to provide rugby at all levels with a strong social backing to bind club members together and to again be recognised as a force in North East rugby – on and off the field.

The 2007/08 season marked a new chapter in the history of Gosforth RFC. Whilst we had an enjoyable 11 years at Bullocksteads, we were able to move to a new ground that has given us the basis to expand rugby-wise and commercially. Dave Thompson, the major shareholder of the Newcastle Falcons, invited Gosforth to be the main player at Druid Park after he took a 25 year lease on the former Blue Star FC ground at the Wheatsheaf in Woolsington beside Newcastle Airport by sub-leasing it to us. Under the guidance of Honorary Life Members Chairman Neil Jamieson, President Mal Stokoe and Past President and Past Chairman John Short who have all had many years of association with Gosforth, these were exciting times for members old and new.

The club travelled to British Columbia in 2010 continuing its tradition of touring which has always been a feature of Gosforth’s history. The “old” Gosforth ventured to Cognac in France, three times to the New York and Boston areas of the USA and also to Canada, Portugal and Italy while the “new” Gosforth have ventured to the west of Ireland, Prague, Amsterdam and Cyprus.

Unfortunately after 7 years of broken promises at Druid Park, Gosforth Rugby Football Club once again found themselves homeless as in August 2014 we were giving notice to leave but thanks to Northumbria University we were once again back playing at Bullockstead Sports Ground for the 2014/15 season. The Following season after a tremendous amount of hard work behind the scenes during the BiG campaign (Back in Gosforth). Gosforth RFC finally secured a new home at Broadway West Playing Fields and after a lot of work renovating the old clubhouse the club have finally planted roots just around the corner where it all began in 1877.
Forth to the Field