

# HOW IT STARTED

*By Hugh McLean*



*A group of H. F. McLean's XV team outside the Junction Hotel, Thames 1937.*

During the latter part of the 1937 Rugby Season I had a visit from a rugby enthusiast who lived in Thames.

At that stage of my life I was employed by Smith and Caughey Ltd and Bill Arbury walked in off the street and told me his sad story. Thames Sub Union were in a bad way financially and could not attract crowds to their games.

He suggested the possibility of me getting a team together with enough names in it to attract a crowd, I rang Ron Bush and we decided to have a go. We rang various people and in all cases we got a good reception.

I got hold of Bill Arbury who had a shop in Thames, and he, with the help of Ernie Brownlee the Union Secretary and Arch Dovell, the owner of the Junction Hotel got cracking on arranging a game.

Arch Dovell's contribution was to provide free accommodation and meals on the Saturday night, Ernie Brownlee's to organise the actual game, and ours to provide the team.

The A.R.U. lent us a set of jerseys and we all provided the rest of the gear ourselves. The more affluent members provided the cars and we took off on a Saturday morning.

For want of a better name the team was called H. F. McLeans XV and consisted of most of the prominent players in or near retirement at that time in Auckland.

The team was A. Finlayson, J. P. McNeile, G. A. H. Bullock-Douglas, S. Hadley, F. Solomon, D. Solomon, R. G. McWilliams, C. Webb, M. Fraser, W. E. Hadley, A. Knight, T. H. C. Caughey, R. G. Bush, H. F. McLean, C. E. Cammick, M. M. N. Corner, G. F. Hart and D. Flett.

It was a beautiful day and when we arrived at the ground we found that they had a crowd which was much greater than their expectations.

The Thames team was captained by Alby Storey, who is a long time member of our club, and the game was fast and entertaining, ending with a comfortable win for our team.

The crowd loved it, as did the officials of the Thames Union, and the gate was sufficient to restore their finances to a great degree.

It was a very happy weekend aided, I might state by the fact that Bubs Knight struck a decent double that day, and as everybody who knows Bubs is aware, he was not afraid to spend it.

We all enjoyed ourselves so much so that the seed was sown as far as forming some sort of club to enable us to play on a more regular basis.

I am pretty sure that any decisions on naming the club was not made at the time but was left to later meetings when we could discuss the implications of non competitive rugby.