



HELLFIRE AWAITS

150 Years of Redruth RFC

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Chapter One

Beginnings 1875–1880

IT IS 1875 and 19 young men have gathered in a field on the edge of a mining town in West Cornwall to pose for a photographer. They are not wearing the formal clothes of the typical late Victorian studio shot, but instead the rough jerseys and leggings of the sports field, for this is the earliest known photograph of a Redruth rugby team. In the back row, holding a rugby ball, is the captain of the team, William Willimott. Sitting at the front wearing his house cap from Clifton College is Henry Grylls.

These two men had a great deal in common. Both had been to public school before returning to their homes in Cornwall and they moved in the same social circle. It was, therefore, inevitable that they had come together to discuss forming a football team. We do not know exactly when and where they met, but we do know why they were so keen. Grylls had excelled at the game when at Clifton College, while Willimott had fond memories of his playing days at Marlborough. Both wanted to find a way to continue now they were back home in Cornwall.

They could not have foreseen how rugby in general, and the Redruth club in particular, would develop over the following decades. They were probably just looking for comradeship and an opportunity for some strenuous exercise in the fresh air, an outlet for their excess energy after long hours at their desks. But someone must have felt this fledgling venture was worth recording for the future. So a photographer was invited

to capture for posterity this first Redruth side, posed near to the tall granite rubbing post that was an unusual feature of this, their earliest playing field.

The photograph is an invaluable record of this original team, the first of many generations of players who would, over the following century and a half, turn out for a club which would indelibly stamp its name on the game of rugby union in Cornwall and beyond, in a place that is still seen by many as the undisputed home of Cornish rugby.

Henry Grylls, who had been born in Redruth, was the 18-year-old son of a copper agent and banker. On leaving school in December 1874, he became an articled clerk at the office of Samuel Downing, a local solicitor. In later years, he would form his own law practice, the successor to which still bears his name. Willimott, who was three years older, was the son of the vicar of St Michael Caerhays, near St Austell, and worked for Henry's father as a bank clerk.

In 1925, Grylls sat down and wrote an account of the founding of the club for a booklet celebrating its 50th anniversary:

Redruth Football Club was started in 1875. It was the first to be formed in West Cornwall I think, with the single exception of Bodmin, in Cornwall. Mr W.M. Willimott and myself were, I believe, mainly responsible for Redruth's start.¹

Few clubs are lucky enough to have a first-hand account of their founding and Redruth is especially fortunate to have a photograph annotated with the names of the players. The only sources for the earliest dates of most Cornish sides are reports in local papers, but the press was slow to catch on to this new sport; football coverage was subject to both the whim of the editor and the dedication of the teams in sending in a letter describing the encounter.

The name 'football' is used to describe the games of this era because this was then the accepted name for the sport. The term 'rugby' was adopted in 1871 by the newly formed Rugby Football Union for no other reason than that the three men who drew up the new laws of the game had all attended Rugby School, which had first come up with a set of rules some 40 years earlier. The generic term 'football' remained in common use in Cornish newspapers well into the 20th century. In Cornwall, 'football' was rugby; the other game was 'association'.

The style of football played in the early 1870s by Grylls at Clifton and Willimott at Marlborough would seem alien to those familiar with the modern game of rugby union. Rugby football was a game of the fee-paying public schools and was played according to the laws drawn up at Rugby School, but with local variations and interpretations. The newly emerging clubs followed whichever traditions the players were familiar with and that frequently meant differences between two neighbouring sides or even within the same game.

The development of rugby as a separate sport from association football owes much to the book *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, published in 1857. It contains a detailed account of a game of the 1830s, which is when its author, Thomas Hughes, attended Rugby School. It owes very little to a certain William Webb Ellis, the fabled schoolboy instigator of the carrying game. The story of him picking up a ball and running with it at Rugby in 1823, 'contrary to the normal laws of the game', has long been discredited by most rugby historians as a myth.

Before Grylls arrived at Clifton or Willimott at Marlborough, their two schools had met on the field of play in 1864. Clifton's rules allowed hacking, the term used for deliberately kicking the shins of opposing players. The Marlborough players were unfamiliar with this tactic and reacted strongly to having been invited to what they regarded as a brawl. Unsurprisingly, a mass fight broke out and there were to be no further fixtures between the two schools for the next 27 years. It is clear from the account

written later by Henry Grylls that it was this robust style of football that he and Willimott brought home to Redruth.

It found fertile ground. The roots of rugby in Cornwall can be traced back to physical contests between teams of men as early as the 16th century, with historians such as Francis Marshall and O.L. Owen suggesting that hurling, a popular Cornish pastime for hundreds of years, was one of the forerunners of the game. The cartographer, John Norden, who surveyed Cornwall in 1584, witnessed games of hurling on his travels:

‘The Cornish-men they are stronge, hardye and nymble, so are their exercises violent, two especially, Wrastling and Hurling, sharpe and severe activities; and in neither of theis doth any COUNTRY exceede or equall them. The firste is violent, but the seconde is daungerous: The firste is acted in two sortes, by Holdster (as they called it) and by the Coller; the seconde likewise two ways, as Hurling to goales, and Hurling to the country.’²

Norden recorded the folklore surrounding three Bronze Age stone circles near Minions on Bodmin Moor, known for generations as The Hurlers. Legend claims they are local people turned to stone for hurling on a Sunday.

The historian Richard Carew also wrote an account of Cornish hurling in his *Survey of Cornwall* published in 1602:

‘Two bushes are pitched in the ground eight or 12ft asunder directly against which, at a distance of ten or 12 yards apart, two more bushes in like manner which are called goals. The hurlers to goals are bound to observe these orders or laws. In contending for the ball, if a man’s body touches the ground, and he cries “Hold” and delivers the ball he is not to be further pressed. That the hurler must deal no foreball, or throw it to

any partner standing nearer the goal than himself. In dealing the ball, if any of the adverse party can catch it flying ... the property of it is thereby transferred to the catching party; and so the assailants become defendants, and defendants, assailants.³

Carew's description is of what Norden had described as 'hurling to goals', where the game took place on a fixed piece of ground, the equivalent of a modern pitch. The similarity of his account and some of the rules of modern rugby are striking. They allude to a handling game, rather than one restricted to kicking, and describe the forerunners of the goalposts, the need to release the ball after a tackle, a prohibition on the ball being thrown forward and an interception.

Some versions of hurling had fewer, if any, rules and could take place over a wide area of the countryside. The object was to get the ball from one designated spot to another, usually the end of the parish. This game was once widespread in Cornwall, but only the hurling of the silver ball that is still played at St Columb Major and St Ives remains. This was a form of what historians describe as 'mob football', versions of which were common across the country. It was often fuelled by large quantities of drink and was usually violent, leading to bruises, broken bones and worse.

The Camborne parish registers of 1705 record the burial of William Trevarthen: 'Being distroid to a hurling with Redruth men at the high dounes the 10 day of August.' It did not help that much of the action took place on the slopes of Carn Brea, where the soil was thin and granite boulders could cause serious injury.

Cornish wrestling, described by John Norden in his survey of the duchy, can also be argued to have had an influence on the game. The two contestants face each other with the aim of taking hold of their opponent's canvas jacket and throwing him flat on his back, a skill with obvious value in rugby. Cornish wrestling's long history includes accounts of matches between

Bretons and Cornishmen dating back to the 15th century and it is claimed that Cornish archers at the Battle of Agincourt in October 1415 carried a banner depicting a wrestler's hitch. In 1602, Richard Carew wrote:

‘Wrestling is as full of manliness, more delightful and less dangerous [than hurling] ... for you shall hardly find an assembly of boys from Cornwall and Devon where the most untowardly among them will not as readily give you a muster of this exercise as you are prone to require it.’⁴

During the great revival of Cornish wrestling in the 1920s and 1930s, a number of the club's players would take part in tournaments, including one of Cornwall's greatest exponents of the sport, Francis Gregory, who played rugby for Redruth before moving north to join Wigan in the 1930s.

A variety of sports, both team and individual, were being played in Cornwall long before the first organised games of football. A game described as ‘football’ often featured as part of the many feast days held around West Cornwall and there are references to these as far back as the 1840s, with scratch teams being raised for one-off matches.

In January 1864, there was a game of football at Penzance between a side representing the town and a Rifle Corps team. Over the years, these ad hoc games became more common. Henry Grylls played in at least two such games, at Truro in January 1873 and Penzance in January 1874, when he was home for the Christmas holidays. He later recalled of the Penzance game that there were few spectators but ‘the game was not the less enjoyed by all who took part’.

This was typical of football games in early 1870s Cornwall. Clubs, as we understand them today, with a fixed ground, committees and management structure, did not exist. Players and spectators heard about games through word of mouth,

letters of invitation or bills posted to advertise a feast day event. It was not until the setting up of the Cornwall Rugby Football Union (CRFU) in late 1884 that a framework for the game began to emerge and teams began to play with a more fixed allegiance. Even then, rugby remained largely confined to its West Cornwall heartlands and sides would come and go as enthusiasm waxed and waned among the players.

There is much argument among partisan supporters about which club can claim to be the oldest in Cornwall. There were two or three Cornish clubs already in existence before Redruth was formed in 1875, but these later fell by the wayside and were re-formed at a later date, often more than once. In the absence of any firm evidence to the contrary, and discounting breaks for the two world wars, Redruth has a well-founded claim to have the longest, continuously documented history of any Cornish club.⁵

The first hurdle facing the founders of the new club was to find some players. At the time, the game in England was dominated by professional men, overwhelmingly former public school pupils. Of the 21 clubs that met in 1871 to form the Rugby Football Union, no fewer than 14 were made up of public school old boys, many from Rugby School itself. The rest drew players from the ranks of professional occupations such as barristers, doctors and civil servants. All the founding clubs were based in London or the Home Counties.

The population demographic in West Cornwall at this time was completely different, as Henry Grylls was all too well aware. ‘Professors from Marlborough’, as he wryly put it in his account, ‘were rare on the ground in Redruth’. This meant that early Cornish clubs, like many in Wales and northern England, contained men from a much wider variety of social backgrounds than the RFU’s founding members. This fact would be responsible for many tensions in the game over the ensuing decades.

Clerks and tradesmen played alongside men who toiled underground in local mines, laboured on the land or worked in

the foundries or factories of Holman, Climax or Bickford Smith. It is likely that many of the latter saw the game as a welcome release from the drudgery of their hard day jobs and those same jobs gave them a strength and stamina which equipped them well for the rugby field.

There was also another aspect of the game they enjoyed, as the Cornish author and mining historian Allen Buckley points out:

‘The Cornish took to rugby like ducks to water. To the miners and factory workers of Camborne and Redruth, rugby seemed the only game to play; it was hard, physical and frequently violent, and suited their temperament admirably.’⁶

Writing 50 years on from Redruth’s first season, and fortunately with a lawyer’s propensity for recording detail, Henry Grylls lists some of the founding members of the team. Peter Preston was the managing clerk for solicitors Downing and Paige, where Grylls was articled. A fellow clerk, Alfred Meadows, was also persuaded to sign up. Thurstan Peter worked in his family’s law practice, as well as being the registrar for births, marriages and deaths. He joined with his brother, Lewis, who later became a priest.

Edwin Bonds practised as an accountant and doubled as the town rate collector, while Martin Peters was a metal broker. John Penberthy, one of several of that name who would give sterling service to Redruth over the years, was a student who would later become a professor at the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons.

The wealth generated by mining had given Redruth a bustling town centre and its many family businesses provided more new players. These included Cornelius Beringer, the son of a German immigrant who had co-founded a jewellery business. Alfred Thomas was another jeweller’s son, whose father, John, had a shop in West End. Frank Woolf, whose playing career at

Redruth would span an amazing 29 years, ran a drapery business in Fore Street. He joined the son of a printer, Richard Tregaskis, and a music teacher, Robert Heath, who also played the organ in the local church.

Miners who took part in those early years included James Smith from Churchtown and Kit Williams, who lived at Mount Ambrose, while William Wilton and Henry Michell were sons of local farmers.

It was this disparate collection of men, some of whom had experience of football and others none at all, that Grylls and Willimott had to forge into a side capable of holding their own in a tough and largely unforgiving game. Grylls was very much aware of the challenge:

‘It was not an easy matter to drill a lot of beginners, who had had no opportunity of seeing other people play, into a respectable team, but everybody was very keen and, knowing nothing about it themselves, they took as gospel what was told them by those of us who were “professors” and it was not very long before the hang of the thing was grasped and the rules and practice mastered.

‘Some of us went in for serious training, mainly runs in the country after working hours. I remember on one occasion, a squad of us started for such a run and in Church Lane met Mr Freeman, the postman, I think at the time our only postman. He came back into the town and reported that he had met young Grylls and the football party running like mad in the dark with next to nothing on.’⁷

Redruth’s first ground was a field below Brewery Leats, then owned by the Redruth Brewery Company; the ground is now sadly buried under a Tesco supermarket. Previously it had been a venue for bouts of Cornish wrestling. Let to the club on a rent-

free basis, it had a natural grandstand by way of a raised path which allowed spectators to have a clear view of the pitch. The leat itself was a water-filled ditch that ran alongside the path and into which spectators would sometimes slip or be pushed. Given that this channel carried debris of all kinds, including dead animals, waste from the brewery and the sewage from numerous houses, immersion would not have been a pleasant experience.

Teams at the time officially comprised 20 players on each side, with 16 forwards and four backs, although many games kicked off with fewer than this if insufficient team members turned up. Grylls wrote an account of those early matches which gives a flavour of the game as it was played in the mid 1870s, almost entirely dominated by the forwards, who stood upright in the scrums, then known as scrimmages:

‘Those in the front rows stood their own height and their business was to overpower their opponents by sheer muscle and weight, keeping the ball in front of them and hacking their way through. It was not then good practice to heel the ball out to those behind the scrimmage. The forward play was forward, not backward. The scrimmage broke up of course. I have known them to last ten minutes or a quarter of an hour and steam rising on a frosty day as from a huge cauldron of hot water.

‘But you tried to break them on the opposing side and take the ball through. When a half-back got the ball, he ran with it, dodging and shoving off his opponents and sticking with the ball. Whoever, forward or half-back, got going with the ball, he stuck with it until he “died”. No tossing it about on the chance of a better man than yourself got hold of it.’⁸

It was rare for the backs, especially on a winning side, to see the ball at all. If they were lucky enough to get it, they were supposed

to kick it into touch, as far into their opponents' half as possible. Alternatively, they could, if they were close enough, attempt to drop a goal, no easy task with a heavy leather ball that was more plum-shaped than today's version. Anyone unfortunate enough to ground the ball for a try could find himself jumped on, or even throttled, to make him surrender it, in what was then termed a 'maul in goal'. Grylls wrote that this mayhem was taken in good part:

'It was marvellous that there was so little display of temper or bad feeling in those days, and I think it says a good deal for the sporting spirit that animated us all, that we very rarely had any serious evidence of anger.'⁹

The Rugby Football Union (RFU) agreed to reduce team numbers from 20 to 15 for the 1876/77 season, with most clubs playing with ten forwards, two attacking and three defensive backs. Further law changes were made over the following years to speed up the game, as interminable battles between the two scrums became increasingly tedious for the spectators.

In the early days, a try counted for nothing. If the ball was grounded over the line by an attacking player, it just provided an opportunity to kick for a goal.

From 1877, the RFU decided the number of tries could determine a game's result, but only if no goals were scored. Laws and scoring values were continually amended as the game developed.

By no means all clubs rushed to adopt the new ways of playing and the further they were from London, the more slowly they tended to make the changes. Cornish sides of the day largely played each other and, with the era of touring teams from elsewhere yet to come, it mattered little that football in Redruth was in the old style. Cornish clubs also took a long while to adapt to a faster, more mobile style of play. The sight of a strong pack inching its way forward is still much appreciated among

Cornish spectators, particularly when Redruth are driving into Hellfire Corner.

Inevitably, the new laws did, in time, produce a change in the roles of players on the field. Where there had been three or four full-backs, law changes meant that two of them needed to be closer to the scrum. At first they were called halfway backs, but this soon changed to half-backs, the modern scrum and fly-halves. With the growing tendency to pass from one player to another, something that had originally been discouraged, it was found that the space between the half-backs and the full-backs needed bridging. And so was born the role of the three-quarters. It would take the arrival of a mercurial Welsh player at Redruth, in 1892, to make the club fully embrace and take advantage of this new style of play. Until then, it was eyes down and push.

With so few teams in operation in Cornwall in 1875, it is likely that early games would have been ad hoc affairs between members of the club as the players learned their craft. The earliest mention of a Redruth game against another club is an account reporting a contest between Redruth and Truro on 22 January 1876. Truro ran out winners by one goal to nothing. The venue is not stated, but it was most likely at Truro, as the following month Redruth played the same opponents at the Brewery Field, the club's first documented home fixture. Ten days later, on 1 March, Redruth played Bodmin at Truro.

It was common for accounts of the game to be written by one of the captains or the secretary and sent to the newspaper. The tone of the report suggests this was one of those occasions:

‘FOOTBALL BODMIN v REDRUTH: A well-contested match between these clubs took place at Truro on Wednesday first inst. in the presence of a large number of spectators. A most pleasant game was won by Bodmin by a goal and two touchdowns to one touch in goal. Both teams played well. Mr G.H.

Chilcott acted as umpire and discharged his duties in a most efficient manner.¹⁰

The report indicates that Bodmin fielded 13 men to Redruth's 12, but such a disparity would not have been unusual in those early days. Games often kicked off with a shortage of players on one side or the other. It was common for teams to borrow players from their opponents to level up the numbers.

Two weeks later, Redruth had arranged to play another game against Truro:

'FOOTBALL: A return football match will be played in a field opposite the Maria Camilia School on Tuesday next the 14th March at 3.30pm against the Redruth team with rugby union rules.'¹¹

The club members met for a supper at the Bullers Arms in April 1876 to celebrate the end of their first season. Each member was allowed to take a friend along, possibly in the hope they might sign up. Several speeches were made advocating the advantages of the manly game of football and complimenting the club on its success.

Redruth played their first game against a newly formed Falmouth club on 4 November 1876. There are no details of the location in the short report, but the game ended in a draw. Redruth met Truro on 23 November, in an away game, which Truro won by two goals to nil. The contest was described as having been a hard fight and a splendid game in front of many spectators from both towns.

The next mention of a Redruth game was on 19 December 1876 when the *Royal Cornish Gazette* found room for two lines stating: 'The Redruth football club have been successful in winning the recent match against their Truro competitors.' Presumably this was the return game from the away fixture the month before. Fixtures with Truro appear to have been a

regular arrangement, with a train service making travel between the two relatively easy.

Given the small number of sides active at the time, games could be few and far between. Redruth only played an average of six games a season in their first five years. Not all games were recorded, either by the local press or the club. Eventually, as matches began to attract more spectators, newspapers began to improve their coverage and notices appeared pleading for match details.

Newspaper reports of the time often omitted the score and frequently left out the names of the players involved. If players were mentioned, it was almost always by surname only, making positive identification difficult. Football was seen as an opportunity for comradeship, exercise and fresh air, and, while teams set out to win, it was the playing of the game that was important, rather than the result. It made for rather anodyne match reports, but that would change as the rugged style of play became more contentious, local rivalries became more intense and decisions on the field were disputed.

In the early days, it was down to the team captains of the day to resolve disagreements. Mention is made at some games of an umpire, or even one for each team, but they would have been on the touchline, rather than in the role of a modern referee. It was the captains who took charge on the field, as Henry Grylls explained:

‘The captains took command and, with rare exceptions, could be depended on to keep order and discipline. The only case I remember of disagreement between captains was in a match here with Bodmin captained by Bernard Edyvean. He and I could not agree a touchdown in goal and the game was blocked for a time, but we ultimately decided it by a reference to those somewhat nearer the spot in question than ourselves. Our matches with Bodmin were always

the fiercest we played, but we won more than we lost with them.’¹²

The idea that disputes over touchdowns could be resolved by asking spectators for their opinion, or that the players could be expected to own up to a forward pass, seems strangely at odds with the undoubted passion Grylls shows for the game. In these days of television match officials, one can only imagine the referee at a modern Redruth game turning to the faithful standing in Hellfire Corner to enquire whether the Reds had grounded the ball. But it was the ethos of the game in Cornwall in the 19th century that rugby was played hard, but played fair, and the captain’s word was law.

And played hard it certainly was. Severe injuries were not uncommon and reports of broken bones appeared regularly, as did accounts of players being knocked unconscious. Those who worked in the mines and factories invariably played in their heavy iron-shod working boots. There were few laws defining what might today be considered foul play and players saw no need to hold back when attempting to halt the progress of the opposing side. A rather tongue-in-cheek account of a game in February 1877 sums up some of the perils faced by players:

‘THE PLEASURES OF FOOTBALL. A football match between nine each of Truro and Falmouth clubs against nine each of Redruth and Penzance clubs played at Redruth on Tuesday resulted in the victory of Redruth and Penzance although, unfortunately, not without accident, one young man of Penzance being severely injured in the neck and head and Mr G. Peters of Redruth, son of Mr Peters, hairdresser, having his collarbone broken.

‘One of the Truro club is said to have had a severe blow just under the ear, but still went on with the play and one of the Falmouth club had to lament over a

severe kick in the leg which, for a time, nearly lamed him. Notwithstanding these slight drawbacks the game is highly extolled as an exhilarating, delightful and healthful recreation.¹³

Later the same year, in a game between Redruth and Penzance, Redruth's John Everett, a local schoolmaster, suffered a fractured jaw after receiving a severe blow in the face. There is no evidence that his assailant suffered any sanction for the assault.

Matches with Bodmin were some of the most intense that Redruth played during this period. The rivalry eventually spilled over into the local press after William Willimott, the Redruth captain, made a speech at the club's annual dinner in which he suggested that Redruth was now seen as the 'County Club'. This produced a swift response from an individual, whose letter was published under the pseudonym 'Old Rugby':

'Now then Redruth wake up! For you cannot be said to have the belt until you have won a victory over Bodmin Rovers [sic] who conquered you at Truro in their first and last match. When are you going to play the promised return match on Bodmin Beacon?'¹⁴

There appears to have been no official response to this challenge.

In May 1877, Redruth lost the services of its co-founder and first captain William Willimott, who moved to Penryn to take up a position as a bank manager. As well as his involvement with the football club, Willimott had played cricket for Redruth and the two clubs organised a presentation evening at the Church Society rooms on Station Hill.

Willimott was presented with what was described as a 'handsome timepiece'. One of the Redruth players, Robert Heath, joked that he wished the gift had been more costly but that 'tin was down', a remark received with laughter by those present. It would not have seemed so funny a decade later. It was

not the end of Willimott's involvement in football; he continued to play for several years and went on to turn out for other sides.

By this time, the game was attracting spectators in increasing numbers. A match at Redruth against Falmouth on 20 January 1877 saw 1,500 people watch the visitors go down to a defeat and it was reported that the Redruth team seemed to carry everything before them. A game between Bodmin and Redruth on 29 November 1877 was reportedly played in front of fifteen or sixteen hundred people. The rise in the numbers watching football seemed to have persuaded the local press to increase the amount of coverage and the same edition of the paper carried a list of upcoming fixtures for December: Liskeard v Launceston, Camborne v Falmouth and two Redruth games, home to Penzance on 8 December and away to Bodmin on Boxing Day.

One of the newer clubs to appear on that list was to become Redruth's greatest local rival. In September 1877, a newspaper notice reporting a meeting of the Camborne Cricket Club ended with: 'Cannot a football club be formed instead of cricket?' In his book marking 100 years of Cornish rugby, Tom Salmon claims that one newspaper added the sentence: 'After all, Redruth have got one'.¹⁵

Whether or not this was true, it is just the sort of provocative remark to fire up enthusiasts in Camborne. It was not long before a report appeared announcing the founding of a football team in Camborne. However, the writer clearly had reservations about the code that Camborne had chosen:

'The club has adopted the rugby rules and, as a consequence, some of its members have already taken upon them the rugby game "trademark" in the shape of bruises, scratches, kicks, etc, of various designs, and one has even gone so far as to bisect his collarbone. However, the club numbers nearly 50 members, so there still remain plenty of collarbones unfractured. I doubt the wisdom of playing rugby rules in preference

to the association game. There are many who like football well enough, but who cannot afford a new “jersey” and “pair of pants” every two or three weeks, to say nothing of collarbones and sticking plaster.¹⁶

Just two months later, on Boxing Day 1877, the first reported game between Redruth and Camborne took place at Rosewarne, on the edge of Camborne, with what was described as an unusually large crowd present, on account of it being a holiday. Redruth won the game by two touchdowns to nil, hardly surprising given that Camborne had only been in existence for two months.

For many years, it was believed that this match marked the first of what was later claimed to be the longest continuous fixture in rugby. Sadly, that is not the case. After that first game in 1877, only two further Boxing Day matches between the two clubs took place before 1900. A series of rows, which often suspended fixtures in the first two decades of the 20th century, means the unbroken run only goes back to 1928.¹⁷

Camborne joined a growing list of clubs established in Cornwall in the late 1870s. Over the first five years of its existence, Redruth played games against Bodmin, Falmouth, Penzance, Truro and Camborne. Matches were usually arranged by an exchange of letters or telegrams between the two captains, who would also have picked the respective teams. Redruth did have a secretary and a small committee, but these were roles filled by members of the team. Players provided their own kit, which varied in style and colour, as can be seen from the 1875 photograph. The boots were often their everyday footwear. Redruth’s now traditional red shirts were something for the future.

There was no need for anyone to manage the club’s finances, as these were almost non-existent. The club’s accounts for 1877 showed subscriptions totalling £4 12s (£4.60), expenditure of £4 3s 9d (£4.18) and a total of 28 members. The only costs were

paying for goalposts, marking the lines and buying the match balls. Nearly 50 years later, Henry Grylls still had strong views on money coming into the game:

‘Everybody paid his own expenses, except in some cases, where a player could not manage perhaps a railway fare, when it was provided privately by some other member of the team better able to stand the outlay. So that our balance sheet, if one was ever prepared, would show an expenditure for the year of something well within £5 and this was met by a small subscription or, if this proved insufficient, by extra contributions from the two or three who could afford it. There was no gate money. I know that a gate is essential nowadays, worse luck. I am old fashioned enough to believe that the less the money element has to do with the sport, the better. The game is the game.’¹⁸

It is not difficult to guess what Henry would have made of the era of professionalism, but his views on the evils of money and the need to preserve rugby’s amateur status were shared throughout the game in the 1870s. This stance would continue to be strongly defended by the Rugby Football Union for the following 110 years – to the detriment of the development of the sport, many now feel.

Despite Henry’s remarks, part of Redruth’s longevity can be attributed to an early adoption of a hard-nosed pragmatism when it came to administration. Club minutes dating back to the 1890s show that officials quickly demonstrated their belief that, while amateurism ruled on the field, there was a desire to run the club in a professional manner and ensure the finances were in as good a shape as the team. This attitude has certainly been a major factor in the club’s success.

The first newspaper report of a Redruth club AGM appeared on 3 October 1878. John Everett, who had taken over

the captaincy following the departure of William Willimott the previous year, was re-elected. Frank Woolf was elected as secretary, with Charles Lanyon taking on the role of treasurer. A committee of five was elected to look after the administration; Henry Grylls, Thurstan Peter, William Holloway, Frank Williams and Charles Williams, all of them players.

Redruth rounded off 1878 with a home game on Boxing Day against Penzance. Played in what was described as unfavourable weather, but in front of a large crowd, the match was completely dominated by the forwards. According to the report, not one Penzance back touched the ball throughout the whole game. Neither side managed to kick a goal so, under new rules which allowed the number of touchdowns to count where no goals had been kicked, the match ended in a draw in favour of Redruth.

Two weeks later, another game at Redruth had the local press buzzing, but not about the action on the field. On the evening of Monday, 13 January 1879, the first match in Cornwall to be played under electric lights took place. The encounter came just two months after a game played in Salford between Broughton and Swinton had entered the record books as the first floodlit game played anywhere in the world under rugby rules.

The game attracted more than 3,500 spectators, keen to experience this miracle of modern technology, many of them travelling on special trains laid on for the occasion by the Great Western Railway. It was not the first use of electric light in Cornwall – the Lizard lighthouse had been powered by a generator since 1872, but this was dismissed somewhat sniffily: ‘It is true that the light has been for some time in use at the Lizard, but this is in far too remote a part of Cornwall to admit of a general inspection of it.’¹⁹

The floodlights were being toured around the country by a Manchester firm, C.W. Provis and Son. The company’s founder, Charles William Provis, had been born in Redruth in 1835, the son of John Provis, a copper agent. The game took place, not

on the Brewery Field, but on what the newspaper described as 'a large field at the end of Green Lane'.

It is possible that this may have been Hocking's Meadow which, four years later, would become Redruth's Recreation Ground, and remains the current home of the club. The match was played between two representative sides made up of players drawn from a number of other towns including Falmouth, Penzance, Camborne, Helston, Truro and Penryn. Half of the 32 players – 16 each side – came from Redruth, with one team wearing yellow badges and the other red.

Redruth took something of a risk in staging the match. Gales and heavy rain had battered the town for several days before the event and there were fears that many people would be put off attending. Just in time, the weather eased and the Redruth committee worked hard to lay down sawdust and cinders on the approach to the field and boards around the pitch on which the spectators could stand.

Those who came paid one shilling to stand in a reserved part of the ground and sixpence to stand elsewhere. The *Cornish Telegraph* article waxed lyrical:

'Redruth is to be congratulated on the public spirit which has enabled it to be the first town in the county to give to some thousands of people so excellent an opportunity, they had last evening, of witnessing public demonstration of the merits of a light about which so much is now being said.'²⁰

The reporter was fascinated by the technicalities of the lights and devoted more than half his article to explaining how everything worked. Mains electricity was unknown at the time and each of the four lights needed a separate generator, powered by a 12 horsepower stationary steam engine. The pressure of the crowd around the supports holding up one of the lights caused it to go out, but the report states that it made little difference

to the overall illumination on the ground, which was probably not that bright in the first place.

The red team, captained by Redruth's Frank Woolf, beat the yellow team, led by John Everett, also of Redruth. One of the players on the yellow side was William Willimott, Redruth's co-founder and former captain. By all accounts, it was a forward-dominated tussle, typical of the football of the day, and, in any case, the wet state of the ground would have hampered any attempt at a running game.

In his excitement, the reporter seems to have overlooked the fact that the lights echoed another significant event in the town's history. Redruth was once again pioneering a new form of power, some 80 years after William Murdoch's house in Cross Street had become the first in the world to be lit by gas.

Redruth's next scheduled game was to have been at home to Hayle at the end of January 1879. It would have been the first time they had hosted their visitors, but no one from Hayle turned up. It was not unusual for players to arrive after the start of a game, but it was less common, although not unknown, for no one to turn up at all. That month also saw the first reported appearance of a Redruth second team, a game taking place between the junior teams of Camborne and Redruth at Camborne on 29 January, with the home side winning by five tries to two. It was a sign of the growing popularity of the sport that the clubs had enough players to field two sides.

At the club's annual supper at Tabbs Hotel on 26 March 1879, the Redruth captain, John Everett, stood to respond to a toast, hailing the great progress which the club had made from the time of its formation, not only in numbers, but in thorough knowledge of the game of football. His speech was reported in the local press:

'This [progress] was shown on the previous day in their match with Truro, when they had to enlist the services of several of their juniors in consequence of

the absence of their forwards. From time to time, even with this disadvantage, they had successfully competed with some of the best clubs in the district, and seeing the large number of victories which they had scored, with scarcely an exception, he thought they were fairly entitled to be considered the county football club of Cornwall.'

Unlike the last time this claim had been made at a Redruth gathering two years previously, there was no recorded objection from Bodmin or, indeed, anywhere else.

In September 1879, the club organised what would be the first of an annual series of athletics events, held at a venue called the Golden Field. Local businesses were persuaded to donate money and prizes, and members of the football and cricket clubs took on stewarding duties. Competitors took part in a variety of events, including running and walking races over various distances, as well as long jump and high jump. The day was rounded off with what was intended to be a one-mile donkey race, but the animals refused to move more than a few yards and, following a letter they had received prior to the event from the RSPCA, the local police refused to allow riders to use any form of coercion to make their mounts go further.

The first match of the 1879/80 season to get any newspaper coverage was a game against Camborne at Roskear in which several players were reportedly injured, one sustaining a broken collarbone. Camborne won by one touchdown to nil. The club rounded off the year with December fixtures at Falmouth, in which a draw was declared after two Redruth tries were disputed, and a home match against Penzance, won by two tries to nil. A Boxing Day fixture against Bodmin had been arranged but no subsequent report appeared, so it is not clear whether this went ahead.

Redruth started 1880 with a home game against Falmouth on 16 January. The encounter was not at the Brewery Field but

a field owned by Alfred Lanyon; he lived at Tolvean House, so it was likely the field was close to the present-day Penventon Park Hotel. Alfred Lanyon's 14-year-old son, Sydney, would later play for the club and act as secretary, going on to serve as president between 1903 and 1920.

It is not explained why the club had left their original ground by the brewery, though it could have been due to flooding, and the move was to be only temporary. An account of the game comments on the slippery state of the ground and that the play was almost entirely confined to scrimmage work in which the united effort of the Redruth forwards was especially notable. Redruth won by two tries to nil.

A home fixture against Hayle on 24 January had been keenly awaited, as both sides were undefeated that season. Redruth managed the first touchdown but a later try claimed by Hayle was disputed by the Redruth captain, John Everett. The response of the Hayle captain, Hockin, was to take his team home before time was up. The paper recorded a win for Redruth. Despite the disagreement, Redruth travelled to Hayle the following week for a return contest played in front of a large and enthusiastic crowd. The game was declared a draw in favour of Hayle because Redruth were forced to touchdown twice in their own goal area.

At the end of that 1879/80 season, John Everett took stock of the Redruth club's progress, once again addressing the annual supper at Tabbs Hotel. In those five years, 29 games had been played, of which 19 were won, four lost and six tied. He went on to say that the club he had the honour of managing was composed chiefly of what would be called juniors in many towns, but they managed, somehow or other, with scarcely an exception, to give their opponents a 'downright good licking'.

The Redruth club had come a long way since 1875, establishing itself as a major force in a game that was growing in popularity throughout West Cornwall. More clubs were being formed, football was getting greater coverage in the local press

and spectators were turning out in increasing numbers. As they contemplated the start of a new decade, those involved with Redruth would have been keenly aware that the club was at the forefront of the development of the game in Cornwall.