

**Letterkenny
R.F.C.**



Rugby Viterbo

OUR ... 28th Sept to 6th Oct '79

There's a place on the hill, a town with a spire,
Where Charley arose from the stench of a byre,
Joined forces with Donnelly, Louis and Keogh,
And made approaches in Ulster their credentials to show,
All for the game and Union of Rugby.

McMahon president, the captain was Trevor,
They entered the league and expected no favour,
When the silage was cut they changed at the college,
Played on Kings field and drank at the Cottage,
All for the game and Union of Rugby.

Big Peter, then Ernan came on from Strabane,
And as for the rest we did'nt give a damn,
We had P. P. and Barry and John McElwaine,
And our hearts were full of the love of the game,
All for the game and Union of Rugby.

Charley and Derek provided the fun,
Abuse from the sideline and the smell of the dung,
With O'Sullivan, Sweeney, Ollie and Durkin,
It was try and be damned with no room for shirking,
All for the game and Union of Rugby.

Late at night in the wee small hours,
When we're all far from the spray of the showers,
With sweat and beer our brows glisten,
And the only word from Frankie is "listen"
All for the game and Union of Rugby.

The Northern press labelled us worse than vandals,
After a skirmish at a town known as Randals,
But at fighting and Rugby we were more than game,
Till we trial against Ards for Junior Cup fame,
All for the game and Union of Rugby.

From Gaelic and soccer and judo we crossed them,
Big Alec came out from Derry and coached them,
And still from the line you'd hear the cry—"Don't run solo",
And without looking round you'd know it was Dodo,
All for the game and Union of Rugby.

We bought jerseys and pitches and lights,
And did our best to keep Sean out of fights,
But he and Charley brought disgrace from Antrim and hockey,
One was sent off and one judged too cocky,
All for the game and Union of Rugby.

LETTERKENNY RUGBY FOOTBALL CLUB

—A UNIQUE ORGANISATION

MR. IAN SMITH, CLUB PRESIDENT

HISTORY

In 1973 Strabane R.F.C. were unable to continue, and some of their members asked a few Rugby enthusiasts in Letterkenny if they could form a club, and take the place of Strabane in the Ulster Branch of the Irish Rugby Union. The misfortune of Strabane became the good luck of Letterkenny.

The early games were played in a field opposite the Regional College loaned by the Robinson family. As I recall, the posts were of roughly hewn pines, doubtless the gift of some forestry authority. The drainage of the pitch, whilst adequate for summer grazing, left much to be desired when asked to cope with the downpours of a Donegal winter. In fact, the first match the writer saw was during one of these downpours, and the ball kicked to an unmarked corner of the pitch never really touched the ground, it floated, this is a situation not perhaps covered by the more conventional Rules of Rugby. It seemed to the casual observer that the players were not so much in danger from the assaults of their opponents but rather from drowning, however, the rumour that the ref and linesmen had to have instructions in the art of giving the kiss of life is denied by the club officials of that time.

In the first flush of enthusiasm all went well for the club, perhaps too well. The records show that then we had a handsome surplus of cash, that the dances and discos were well attended. Flushed by such success, the club bought a field off the Port Road for a tidy sum, and not content with this, proceeded to buy a further field, this time fronting the road. After-match activities were in the Cottage, and we ate at the Dolphin Restaurant.

Inevitably, some of the early enthusiasm wore off, and with interest on loans and other debts the club was in a poorish way. One of our fields was quickly and satisfactorily disposed of, and the hunt was on for club premises. The reader may well be surprised as to how many people do not want to have a Rugby Club next door to them, rather like trying to locate a prison or sewage treatment works, everybody knows that they are desirable, even essential, but they are much more desirable in someone else's backyard. Eventually we found a disused classroom in the North, and after wildly under-estimating the cost and time of removal and erection, our club house is one year old. Thus we have a ground, a clubhouse, and thanks to Donegal County Council sufficient funds to build changing rooms. These will be complete by Christmas.

If the club's fortunes in a monetary sense have had their ups and downs, then in the opinion of the writer at least, the standard of Rugby in the club has shown a steady improvement. When one recalls the earlier matches and compare the performance then with even the worst efforts of the seconds this season, the improvement is very apparent. This may be hard to reconcile with the regularity with which we have been demoted at the end of each season. This could be for three reasons—firstly, we are not losing matches by the same large margin as in the past, many this season were lost by a single point. Secondly, because of our geographical position it is necessary to do a round trip of 240 miles or more, and some of our players simply could not get off in time to make the trip, thus we did not always have the best team. Thirdly, the general standard of rugby is improving everywhere and perhaps we have not improved as much as some, especially those which can avail themselves of immense government subsidised facilities. Don't worry, we shall soon start to climb up the ladder, it will be a very new sensation.

UNIQUE POSITION OF THE CLUB

So much for the history and the ability or otherwise of the club, so what, the reader may well say, many a club has started from more humble origins and done better in a shorter time; but the clubhouse, ground, and playing record does not reveal the uniqueness, originality and quality of the Letterkenny Club. This lies as follows. To begin with, we play all our matches in what is officially another country, all our matches are with teams from the North. On our visits to these Northern Clubs we are made most welcome, and have a most enjoyable time. In their turn our visitors from the North, who in the earlier days were inclined to make a quick dash across the border, now stay certainly for the Saturday, and frequently for the week-end. A casual stroller passing the Clubhouse on a Saturday evening, and hearing the party songs of all persuasions wafted into the night air, may well wonder where in Ireland he was exactly. As one important politician has said—Letterkenny R.F.C. does as much to foster cross-border co-operation as any other body or person. About this aspect of the club's activities, we are very proud.

From time to time the club has organised tours to London and Edinburgh. All I think need be said is that some of these tours have been memorable indeed. These events are a story on their own, suffice to say we still enjoy excellent relations with most pubs, hotels, night-spots and certainly with all the forces of law and order in both Capitals. But it is not only in cross-border and cross-channel relations that the Club has made a name for itself, just listen to this—last Christmas some youthful Italian visitors were in Letterkenny and took part in some of the seasonal festivities at the clubhouse. They were so impressed with what went on, that they said then, and repeated at subsequent late night gatherings, that they would bring over a team from their home town, Viterbo, next

Easter to play Letterkenny. Of course no one took this announcement seriously, largely because so many improbable ideas are expressed in the clubhouse late at night. Then a short while later letters and post cards started to arrive and even dates were mentioned. In Letterkenny, probably as in Viterbo, maps of both countries were produced and thus we found that Viterbo was there, North of Rome and apparently, if we are to believe our history books, it is a place where some of the earlier Popes were known to relax. The Italians no doubt were astonished to find that Letterkenny, though in the South of Ireland was indeed very near the Northernmost point, their history books would probably not be able to tell them who relaxed at Letterkenny, though they were to find out soon enough it was a great place in which to relax. When our Secretary came back from the Italian Embassy with the Italian Flag, then we in Donegal knew it was for real. At Easter this year 80 plus Italians duly arrived from Viterbo, complete if you please with their own T.V. crews, and what charming people they were. Letterkenny took them to their hearts and many friendships were formed, and not a few hearts broken. What a good time we all had—we played Rugby—quite well as it happened, we ate Italian prepared Spaghetti, drank Italian wine, sang Italian songs, admired and even bought the samples of Italian crafts and industry which these excellent ambassadors had brought with them. Now we are to go back to Italy on the 28th September, officially for seven days, though many will be staying on for a further week. Our party will be about 70, and as in Donegal, some of us will be staying with Italian families; we shall be taking with us samples of goods from local and national industries. The tour has the blessing of Bord Failte, I.D.A., Donegal Development Team, the Donegal County Council and Letterkenny U.D.C. Indeed, from the latter we shall be taking very special greetings, one recalls with pleasure the noble gift of a bronze lion which the Town of Viterbo gave to the Council and Town of Letterkenny. The club will be taking gifts as a token of their respect and friendship for our hosts.

Thus you can see that we are not an ordinary sort of Rugby Club, and in our short and eventful history have achieved quite a lot.

What we have achieved and what we will achieve is due to the generous and whole-hearted support of the County Council, the U.D.C. and other official bodies, and also the business community—from the big established names, to the smallest businesses—and of course, to the people of Letterkenny. Without their goodwill and help we could never have achieved as much as we have, and we are grateful that they have expressed total agreement with the aims of the Club. We thank all of them sincerely.



Greetings from Letterkenny

It is with great sincerity that I extend heartfelt greetings to the Mayor and members of Viterbo Rugby Club from the people of Letterkenny.

We retain warm memories of your visit to our town during the past year and we hope that the links then established between the two communities will be strengthened and widened by the return visit of Letterkenny Rugby Club. The members here have been looking forward to the occasion and to the opportunity of renewing friendships formed at their first meeting.

We in a community such as Letterkenny with an eventful historic past, are appreciative of the opportunity of continuing a friendly international relationship built so firmly on the brotherhood of sport.

I wish you in Viterbo all that is best for your future, and assure you of a Cead Mile Failte when you return again to Letterkenny.

With every good wish.

Sincerely,

ANTHONY GALLAGHER,

Chairman, Letterkenny Urban District Council.





LETTERKENNY R.F.C. 1979/80

The future of Letterkenny R.F.C.

The successful establishment of a Rugby Club, in a small provincial town, is an exhilarating experience. And even the attendant dissappointments and frustrations, of demoralising defeats, of unfulfilled fixtures, of endless committee meetings and of seemingly unobtainable finances are all but forgotten in the heady realisation that so much has been achieved in such a short period.

Letterkenny R.F.C. now field three teams (Firsts, Seconds, and Colts), have purchased their own grounds, have erected a modest Clubhouse, which is in the process of being extended and can cope with all commitments (financial and otherwise). But, though all this represents considerable achievement and indicates a satisfactory state of Club affairs, one must pose the question "Whither now, Letterkenny".

Obviously, the normal ongoing objectives of any Club, in any organisation, spring readily to mind. These include:-

- a. The improvement of playing standards.
- b. The fielding of more teams.
- c. The improvement of Club facilities.
- d. The increased involvement of local people in Club activities.

The means to achieve these objectives are also immediately apparent, and include:-

- a. Success and promotion within the Ulster Leagues.
- b. The winning of Branch Trophies/Competitions.
- c. The implementation of a recognised coaching policy.
- d. Recognition, at representative level, for Club Players.

All of which will result in increased interest, leading to the acquisition of more players and the fielding of further teams, and :

- a. The extension of Changing/Shower facilities.
- b. The streamlining of Bar/Catering facilities.
- c. The increased involvement of members' friends/wives/girl-friends within the Club.

All of which will undoubtedly assist in popularising the game further in the Letterkenny area and provide an additional social amenity, open to all. But, will the attainment of such ongoing, and therefore short term objectives be sufficient to ensure the continued success and a healthy future for Letterkenny R.F.C.?

As these objectives are purely short term, then the answer must be "No". This being so, Letterkenny R.F.C. must therefore take stock, decide upon and initiate, without delay, clearly defined Club aims to which all the resources of the Club are fully committed.

Finally, what are these aims? The strength and continued well-being of any Club lies in its success on the playing field. Consequently, the long-term aims of Letterkenny R.F.C. must be directed to ensuring that success and I would define these aims as follows: firstly, the expansion of the Club to Senior status, and secondly, the provision of facilities to complement such expansion.

At present, the attainment of these aims must seem extremely unlikely, but one must remember that the rules and structures of the Ulster Branch allow and encourage elevation to Senior status, of any Club within its ranks. Bearing in mind the healthy and prospering state of Rugby, not alone in Letterkenny, but also throughout Co. Donegal, can anyone seriously doubt that given the proper dedication, courage, and initiative, that some of us will be fortunate enough to watch Letterkenny R.F.C. taking the field, proudly, as a Senior Side.

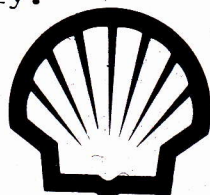
THE PRESIDENT AND MEMBERS OF LETTERKENNY RUGBY FOOTBALL CLUB WISH TO EXPRESS THEIR MOST SINCERE THANKS AND GRATITUDE TO THE FAMILIES WHO ACCOMMODATED MEMBERS OF VITERBO R.F.C. WHILE ON THEIR TOUR TO LETTERKENNY LAST EASTER.

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YOUTH RUGBY

U-11 AND U-12 SCHOOLBOY LEAGUES 1975—79

In April 1975 it was decided to initiate the youth of Letterkenny in the art of manipulating an oval ball, following numerous requests from them to be allowed to "have a go" with it. When a group of 35 U-12 boys were coached in some of the basics it was decided to run a mini-rugby 7-a-side tournament consisting of 5 teams. Ten matches in all were played and the President of the Club, Mr. Stan Boyle, who presented the medals to the winners, and Captain of the First XV, Mr. John McCarroll were both present. Such was the enthusiasm of the players in this first ever youth rugby tournament in Letterkenny that two periods of extra time had to be played to decide the winners and at the final whistle the losers wept, but some well chosen words by the President helped to "drown their sorrows". Mr. Boyle very kindly invited both teams to his premises for a "free round".

Since then, an Inter-class League has been run off each year, with the Club putting up medals for winners and runners-up. The names of the first ever boys to participate in a Rugby tournament in Letterkenny were:- P. McDaid, J. McLoughlin, B. McCafferty, P. Duggan, C. Cullen, D. Quinn, S. McCallion, J. McClintock, H. Walsh, P. O'Donnell, Padraic McDaid, G. Blake, J. McFadden, C. McCauley, K. O'Neill, M. Cox, D. Duffy, D. Crumlish, M. McGlynn. The majority of these are currently pursuing their studies at 2nd level education in fourth or fifth year.

Each year since then a similar league was run off, but not until last year was a team entered for the Community Games. They were knocked out in the first round. This year, forty-five U-12 boys participated in the Inter-class League. They got the same training as previous teams, but are making history in that they are the first ever to qualify for the Semi-finals in Butlins on Saturday, 8th September. They achieved this by an extraordinary spell of good luck, coupled with grit, determination and a "never say die" attitude. On the road to Butlins they disposed of a gallant Churchill side, a well drilled Fanad team and a sporting Glenties combination. Tremendous credit is due to the trainers of the three teams mentioned, Fr. Crossan, Fr. Cunningham, M. Jameson and Mr. McDyer. The latter had to scour an area of twenty miles to get 12 players. All three have asked for friendlies with Letterkenny, which we will be only too glad to play as soon as holidays are over. A special word of credit is due to Fr. Crossan who obtained and lined the Churchill field for the Glenties v Letterkenny game. He also went to great trouble to obtain the Community Games medals for Letterkenny on their winning the Co. Donegal final.

As the school field was not suitable right up to last term—Easter, to Summer—all the above Inter-class Leagues were played in a field owned by Glencar Residents Association. Mr. Ed Dunne, Glencar, got the necessary permission for the use of the field each year. On behalf of the Club I express my sincere thanks to him and them for their co-operation.

At a meeting of the Management Committee in May this year it was decided to invite the parents along to the Clubhouse for the presentation of three sets of medals, i.e. the winners of the Co. Donegal Community Games final; the winners and runners-up of the Inter-class League. A Social was organised and a most enjoyable night was had by all. Our thanks to the Management Committee, the Ladies Committee and all the members who were present to help make it a truly memorable night. A special word of thanks to our President, Mr. Ian Smith, who acted as host and made all feel at home. Music was supplied by Michael Blake of Ard O'Donnell.

The Community Games U-11 team travelled to Castleblaney on Saturday, 28th July and scraped home by four points against a well drilled, strong and very sporting Cavan side to qualify for the trip to Butlins on Friday, 7th September.

U—18 SCHOOLBOY TOURNAMENT :

In conjunction with the above an Under 18 7-a-side League was run off each year on the Sundays after Easter with a view to spotting talent for the Colts team. This would not have been possible were it not for the co-operation of the Management Committee and other members. Trojan work was done by such members as A. Delap, A. McCrea, C. Robinson, L. McCarroll, to mention but a few. Many of these players graduated not alone to the Colts but to the 2nd and some even to the First. The Management Committee supplied the trophies each year.

Our thanks to the Community Centre Committee for the use of the field for the above games. Because of construction work it was not available last year and the players were ferried to the Port Road by Club members, a gesture we appreciate very much.

An interesting experiment in terms of a one day Inter-Schools tournament was held last Autumn. Three schools participated, i.e. Raphoe Royal, St. Columba's, Stranorlar, and St. Eunan's, Letterkenny. It was successful and the winners were Letterkenny; and the runners-up St. Columba's. Raphoe were narrowly beaten in the semi-final. Our thanks to the teachers concerned—Mr. E. Chesser, Raphoe Royal; Mr. Aodan O'Shea, St. Columba's; and Mr. O'Connor, Letterkenny.



SALUTI DA LETTERKENNY

Al Sindaco ed ai Cittadini di Viterbo.

In occasione della nostra visita a Viterbo voglio spedire i migliori auguri dai cittadini di Letterkenny, nella Contea di Donegal, Irlanda al Sindaco ed ai cittadini di Viterbo. Speriamo che i rapporti amichevoli tra i due paesi crescano ancora questa volta. Vi invitiamo a visitare il nostro paese. Voi siete gente dell'arte, della musica e della cultura e avrete sempre—come diciamo noi in Irlanda—Cento Mille Benvenuti!

I migliori auguri,

L'Onorevole Antonio Gallagher,

Presidente del Consiglio Municipale,

LETTERKENNY.



Il Rugby Club di Letterkenny - un vero fenomeno

Fondato nel 1973, quando quello del Strabane non poteva continuare, oggi gode uno sviluppo di gran merito. Bisogna dire all' inizio che il borgo di Letterkenny è assai vicino alla frontiera, e che la brava gente di Strabane sono i nostri amici da tanti anni. Quindi era la nostra fortuna di partecipare nel Ulster Branch del Unione Irlandese di Rugby.

Le prime partite avevano luogo nel campo della famiglia Robinson davanti al Collegio Regionale. Non so come descrivere quei giorni! Me ne ricordo che il drenaggio non esisteva—non c'erano canaletti sotterranei—e durante l'inverno sembrava un pantano! L'arte di nuotare era più preziosa che giocare. Però nessuno s'annega. Gli ufficiali del club a quel tempo avevano grandi problemi.

Nei primi tempi l'entusiasmo era tremendo. Non mancava la grana—ed il club comprava altri due campi, uno dei quali era assai vicino alla via principale, che si chiama Via del Porto. Le attività fuori campo erano al Cottage—e tutti mangiarono al Ristorante Delfino.

Con lo sviluppo dello sport c'erano anche dei problemi. Bisogna trovare stabili convenienti e quello che è raro è difficile trovare. Nessuno vuole accomodare i seguaci del Rugby—sono bravi—ma c'è il rumore. Nessuno vuol abitare troppo vicino a quello che lascia un tintinnio nelle orecchie! Finalmente siamo stabiliti—con campo, clubhouse, e grazie alle autorità locali tutto sarà pronto a Natale.

Lo standard del Rugby al Club è migliorato. Nei primi tempi i risultati non erano favorevoli, ma ora la squadra è in gamba. C'è tanto da fare ancora per vincere lo scudetto—ma non vogliamo scendere in Serie B. L'anno scorso eravamo sfortunati in alcune partite. Poi c'è il lungo viaggio (Letterkenny è situato al Nord Ovest) di 400 chilometri, andato e ritorno, ed è difficile trovare una piena squadra. Quelle altre squadre hanno fatto un gran miglioramento. Ma coraggio, Letterkenny e la squadra del futuro!

Ma la situazione a Letterkenny è ben diversa da quella che esiste altrove. Per lo più bisogna dire che le partite sono contro squadre dall'Irlanda del Nord. Ma lo sport non conosce divisioni. Siamo amici sul campo, senza frenare lo slancio, ed anche fuori campo. Sono occasioni per lo scambio delle idee, ed anche di buon divertimento. Per il Rugby Club di Letterkenny la frontiera non esiste.

Abbiamo fatto dei giri fuori casa—a Londra ed Edinburgo in Scozia. Poi Natale scorso, alcuni bravi giovani Italiani arrivarono a Letterkenny e durante le vacanze hanno partecipato nelle festività del Rugby Club. Durante vari discorsi trattavano d'un incontro tra la squadra Viterbese e quella di Letterkenny. Avrebbe luogo a Pasqua! Che stupenda idea! Ma era possibile?

Poco dopo, per dire la verità, lettere e cartoline da Viterbo arrivarono a Letterkenny. Ma dove è Viterbo? È vicino a Roma? Sì, e assai vicino. E Gli Italiani sanno che Letterkenny è nella Repubblica Irlandese, a Nord-Ovest da Dublino—assai vicino alla frontiera—però tranquillo. A Pasqua un gruppo di ottanta persone arrivarono a Letterkenny—con colleghi dalla T.V. Gli Italiani—che brava gente! ora siamo amici. Abbiamo visto una gente simpatica e molto gentile. Grazie tante per la loro cortesia.

Allora, il nostro viaggio di ritorno comincia il 28 Settembre. Siamo un gruppo di 70 persone. La nostra vacanza dura una settimana, e portiamo i migliori auguri dall'Ente Nazionale per Turismo, dalle Autorità Industriali Irlandesi, dalle Autorità a Donegal e naturalmente dalle Autorità a Letterkenny. Ricordiamo che la gente di Viterbo ha regalato un leone di bronzo che resta al palazzo municipale. Noi portiamo anche regali ed gli auguri del nostro popolo. Allora, si vede che il nostro Rugby Club è ben differente da tutti gli altri. Il nostro successo è dovuto alla generosità di tutta la gente di Donegal, ma soprattutto alla Municipalità di Letterkenny. Li ringraziamo tutti e speriamo che la nostra visita a Viterbo rinforzasse i rapporti amichevoli di Pasqua.

Finalmente, speriamo che le partite di Rugby siano molto test e vivacissime, e che il gioco sia un'autentica battaglia condotta dagli opposti pacchetti di avanti, e con le due avversarie intente a spezzare ogni iniziativa più che a costruire qualcosa di positivo. Forza Letterkenny!

L'Onorevole Ian Smith,
Presidente del Club.



PRESENTATION TO VITERBO R.F.C.—EASTER, 1979

It must be stressed that the Management Committee each year gave me complete freedom and even help in running off all the above-mentioned tournamnts. Where schoolboys are concerned "no expense spared" is their motto, and this is bound to pay off dividends in the future. A club which displays such interest in youth is to be highly commended and deserves our support. Finally, no words of mine would be adequate to thank and praise our dynamic President, Mr. Ian Smith, who has literally transformed the Club. Despite his many other duties he attended all the above and has succeeded in erecting a Clubhouse which would do credit to many of the big clubs in the Rugby world. Long may he be with us.

B. R. BLACK

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9-a-side Rugby

Since 1975, the Letterkenny Rugby season has been ushered in with the running of a 9-a-side Competition. This competition, which was, and still is, restricted to 16 teams, drawn chiefly from the Letterkenny area, has proved extremely popular and has more than achieved its objectives of firstly, introducing new players to the game of Rugby, and secondly, of commencing training gradually, for the coming season.

Initially when the competition began, it was decided on a League basis and the first winners of the Dr. Varma Trophy were St. Eunan's G.F.C.—there's obviously a moral there somewhere. But, in 1977, chiefly to generate more interest in the weaker sides, the format was changed to Cup and Plate Competitions. And the change proved successful, providing all the excitement and thrills of a knock-out competition, particularly in the early stages.

And so, the competition has gone from strength to strength. At present, though it needs tightening in some aspects, it is difficult to see how the competition can be drastically improved, and hopefully, it will continue to provide early season excitement, argument and pleasure to all those interested in Letterkenny R.F.C.

Finally, to keep the record straight, the following are the winners of 9-a-side competitions:

	Dr. Varma Trophy	The Milford Plate
1975	St. Eunan's G.F.C.	
1976	St. Eunan's G.F.C.	
1977	Rockhill House	Charlie's Angels
1978	Lions (Carn.)	Charlie's Angels
1979	St. Eunan's G.F.C.	Rockhill House



Football in yet another Code

Stepping from a Qantas Jet at Perth Airport, Australia, I thought "how our Earth has shrunk in the past couple of decades". Only nineteen hours before, we boarded our Aer Lingus plane at Dublin on a typical wet May morning—now we were in the glorious sunshine of an Autumn morning over 12,000 miles away. In between, we passed over the Alps and Jura ranges of Southern Germany, across Yugoslavia heading for Constantinople. From the port window, as we passed over the Bosphorous the Black Sea shone like a jewel. From my luxurious seat it was hard to realise that the Dardanelles and Gallipoli beaches, now so peaceful, on the starboard side, were the last resting places for some thousands of Irish soldiers, mainly men of the Munsters and the famous "Dublin Fuzileers" who were part of that ill-fated 1915 campaign of the First World War.

As we winged over Iran dusk was falling, and not an Ayahatullah was in sight. The flames of waste gases from the oil fields below, for mile after mile lighted up the desert sands. How hard it was to believe that a few days before I had toured the garages of Letterkenny with my cap in hand, seeking a gallon or two of Petroleum.

A few duty-free Brandies and Ginger Ales later, we were descending on Bombay. Going down the gangway, someone said "Why is it so hot", and a knowing one replied in a good Irish accent "Tis the heat from the engines". When we entered the Airport we saw the temperature was 92 degrees F., and the hour was midnight. "Oh to be at Bonagee" said I, "with a Swilly wind blowing".

Resuming our journey we tried to sleep fitfully, at one stage someone announced that we were over the Cocos Islands and I dreamed of Pirates' Treasure of Long John Silver, Jim Hawkins and even Captain Bligh of the Bounty. Dawn came quickly since our plane was journeying East. Seven hours were being gained on the clock or lost to our lives, whichever way one looks at it.

At Perth we were met by friends and relations to take us to our first stop. Asking was it far to go, my nephew said in his best Australian accent "Tis just down the Coast", which proved to be 160 miles, about the distance from Letterkenny to Dublin. In all that journey there were only 5 or 6 towns, none bigger than Ballybofey, and a seaside resort on the Bunrana pattern.

During my tour there, the vastness of the region and the smallness of the population were always on my mind. So was the silence of the countryside and the huge still uncleaned areas were all around. I felt that all the Boat People could easily be settled there, given the will and the way.

It is time I feel, to get to the subject of my title—Australian Rules Football, or as it is called by the locals "Footie". Basically the game appeared to me to be a mixture of the Gaelic and Rugby Codes. It is played on an Oval Pitch with an Oval Ball. The game is started by the "Umpire" bouncing the ball at midfield between four players. The duration of play is four periods of 25 minutes actual playing time, in each. Ends change after each period and there is a longish break at half-time. Scoring is done by kicking or fisting the ball between four uprights posts at either end of the pitch. A goal is scored by sending the ball between the inner posts and a point by a ball through the outer posts. A goal equals six points.

It is said that the game was brought from Ireland by the settlers and convicts of the early 1800's, and it bears a close resemblance to the older Gaelic football, when four upright posts were in use and there were 17—20 players in each side and an oval ball was used. However, the game was tidied up and rules framed in 1858 by two Englishmen and we are all aware that Englishmen were famous for tidying up and rule making.

Teams consisted of 18 a side, placed in 6 rows of 3 each. It is a free flowing game of catch and kick mainly. There is no offside, nor scrums, or line-outs. A mark is given for a clean catch over one's head. The ball may be held for any length if a player is not moving, but must be bounced every ten yards if a player is running. Tackling, above the waist only, is allowed and the ball may be picked from the ground by hand.

Frees are given for jersey pulling, grabbing an opponent about the neck, charging with the ball or holding on to the ball when tackled. A free is taken by kicking the ball from the hands or a Drop Kick. Scoring is very high by our standards. 6—10 goals plus 12—20 points by each side being common. The Australians like a high scoring game and even when a weaker side plays, they have a chance of totting up a few goals and points against stronger opponents. A score-board is a must for all games. Most games are professional or semi-professional. The bigger cities have first class sides and play on Saturdays. Local Leagues are played on Sundays. I was much impressed by the splendid facilities available at each Club. Even the smaller ones had fine pitches, leased

from the local authorities. The Clubhouses were large and spacious with dining and bar facilities. These bars are closed at 10 p.m. and on Sundays at 7 p.m.—hours perhaps not suited to our style. Win, lose or draw, the teams and their closest supporters return to the Clubhouse after a game to discuss and make awards to players for such things as Highest Scorer, Fittest Player, Best Defender, etc. This helped to maintain a good club spirit. Players are very dedicated and practice every evening during the playing season. The town of Bunbury, where my brother lives (population 25,000), had three top teams, and rivalry is intense with local Derbies fast and furious.

Before leaving Australia I visited the Kings Park Stadium, Perth, where the Irish team had played. It was a magnificent one, built some years ago to house the Commonwealth Games.

Except in Perth, Rugby, in either Code, is not widely played in Western Australia. All the big Clubs are on the other side of the Continent, in New South Wales, Victoria and in South Australia.

My greatest experience was to walk the streets of Fremantle, past the Jail (which is still in use); for this was the place where so many from the U.K. and Ireland were landed as convicts and felons. Many were guilty of only minor offences, for which today only suspended sentences are given, and others, particularly the Fenians, were found guilty of political offences. It was from these streets that the last six Fenian prisoners were rescued in 1880 and put aboard a Whaler, the Catalpa, an American vessel, fitted out specially for this job at New Bedford, Connecticut, U.S.A.

Some years ago I stood on the quay-side in New Bedford, from whence the vessel sailed. Twelve weeks later she arrived off Rockingham Beach, Australia, where the prisoners went aboard.

Now I stood there on the other side of the earth—a wonderful experience for anyone interested in Irish history. It was now possible to make such a journey not in 12 weeks but in 12 hours. Surely these days I thought, must be the age of the common man, when despite its many shortcomings, the ordinary man in the street may travel from end to end of the earth without having to own an Oil Well or even 100 acres in the Lagan. Let's hope that we of the Letterkenny Rugby Club, who are about to make our first trip on foreign soil to Viterbo in Northern Italy, may, before many seasons pass, make a tour of Western Australia and make further history by being the first Ulster Club to do so.

