

PHOENIX 1ST XI

1970s



The Phoenix Club House



1973

With the last senior success (The Leinster Senior League in 1956), it was Pembroke in the Leinster Senior Cup Final who stood between the cub and its first trophy for 17 years. The side had been coming together for most of the Sixties, built around David Pigot (who first played in 1946) and joined by David Ensor (1964), Hart Cox (1969), Brian Freer, Michael Halliday and Gerry Murphy (1967), Stan Mitchell (1972), Stan Oakes (1973) and the 12th man Gordon Black (1971). A seven wicket win started a domination which would run right through the rest of the 70's. The key partnership that Sunday afternoon was between Stan Mitchell and Man of the Match, wicket keeper Gerry Murphy. The previous day he had brilliantly stumped Alan Parker down the leg side, standing up to Brian Freer. Play on the Saturday only commenced at 4pm due to a waterlogged square. The squad, enjoying a very pleasant gin and tonic lunchtime session, were surprised to be summoned to Rathmines, thinking there would be no play that day.

1974

This was a disappointing year. Pembroke reversed the 1973 final result in the semi-final of that year's competition. Phoenix were never up with the clock when chasing a gettable 190. This was epitomised by Eamon Mullan being run out by short leg, explaining to a startled David Pigot when he had completed his sprint to the non-striker's end that he thought he had hit the ball on to the railway line. This year saw the introduction of the Wiggins Teape league, the first 50 overs Leinster league. It occupied the second half of the season following the usual league competition. Phoenix had finished their programme but to win the competition had to rely on a very understrength Pembroke side to beat Clontarf in Castle Avenue. This they did thanks to a fine innings from Mr Justice Michael Moriarty. Urgent SOSs were sent out to players to convene in the Shelbourne Hotel but the celebrations were muted as it was difficult to come to terms with what was unfolding, some believing that we were destined to finish second whatever happened in Clontarf.

1975

It is very hard to rationalise what happened in that season. Stan Mitchell's captaincy was definitely a factor. His carefully crafted nuggets of wisdom "gently" imparted to his minions at the many moments of crisis throughout the season seemed to always get the required response. Basically, the side operated with 12 players throughout the season. Ray Tilson was a new addition to the team. Plucked from a most unpromising career on the 3rd XI, he played in 22 games out of 23, missing out on the cup final when an extra bowler was picked. This was due to a doubt about the fitness of opening bowler Rod Young. However, Young's startling figures were 12 overs, 12 maidens, 0 runs, 3 wickets. Despite chasing a small total (85), Phoenix struggled to reach it and were grateful to an uncharacteristically whirlwind 21(5 fours) from Hart Cox to scrape over the line. Phoenix also won the Senior League for the first time since 1956 winning 8 of 10 games to finish ahead of Malahide. The highlight was a 10 wicket win over Clontarf at Phoenix. Further success followed when the Wiggins Teape League was retained. 1975 will always be known in Phoenix as the "treble year".

1976

This season was an understandable anti-climax but the Leinster Senior Cup was retained in characteristic fashion. Again Leinster CC were the cup final opponents. A brilliant innings of 142 from Jack Short seemed to have set them up to gain revenge for the 1975 cup final defeat. Chasing 228 to win and despite a swift response from David Pigot (65) and Gerry Murphy (60) and important contributions from Hart Cox and Eamon Mullan, Phoenix required 7 off the last over. With 3 balls left this had been reduced to 2 with Michael Halliday facing. The very much part time Leinster bowler, David Baxter then bowled two successive leg side long hops which Halliday missed. Baxter fell to his knees thinking that he had completed the over but there was one ball left. Leinster now brought in the field to save the 2. Baxter stuck to his successful formula, another leg side log hop, but this time Halliday struck it over mid-wicket for a boundary and victory.



1. The Phoenix 1st XI, 1973 (L-R): T.V. Neil, G.H. Black, A. Johnson, J.J. Carroll (president), M. Halliday, R.F.H. Cox, G.F. Murphy, D.R. Pigot, B.C.H. Freer (captain), D.G.G. Ensor, J.S.L. Mitchell
2. Mike Halliday and Stan Oakes

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1977

It seemed standard now that this still virtually unchanged side could be “up for the cup” but disappoint in the League and Wiggins Teape. Highlights of the cup campaign were comfortable victories over Dublin University and Merrion in the earlier rounds followed by a very satisfying triumph in the semi-final over Leinster. Hart Cox’s man-of-the-match winning 92 proved the difference between the two sides that day. In the final against the Alec O’Riordan inspired Old Belvedere, a very professional bowling and fielding performance restricted the opposition to 132 and this was knocked off with relative ease mainly due to the batting of man-of-the-match Gordon Black. His 48* and 2 for 29 deservedly won him this award and he struck the winning run in company of batting partner, David Ensor who was the non-striker at the completion of the three successful cup finals of 1975, 1976 and 1977 and also the Leinster League Final of 1983 with Michael Halliday hitting the winning runs in this game as well as the 1975 and 1976 Cup finals.

1978

The club’s determination to arrest a run of poor league performances since 1975 started unpromisingly when 12 for 4 against Dublin University in College Park. Gutsy innings from Ray Tilson and Brian Cross ensured a low three figure total which with the bowling attack probably at its peak was comfortably enough. This pattern was repeated throughout the rest of the campaign, 6 games were won, and combined with ensuring that such challengers as appeared were denied any opportunities to obtain anything other than a low point scoring draw. The side finished the league undefeated and the Leinster Senior League was regained after a gap of 2 years. The drive for 4 cups on a row looked to have come unstuck when dismissed at home in the semi-final by Malahide for 72. When the visitors reached 20 for 0 in reply it seemed all but over but a superb response from the bowlers saw Malahide dismissed for 48. This bowling was backed up by brilliant fielding and catching. The final, played at home against Merrion. A brilliant century by David Pigot and solid supporting knocks by Gerry Murphy and Stan Mitchell led to a match winning total.

1979

The last season of the decade saw both the Leinster Senior League and Senior Cup retained but again a second treble was not to be. In the league, 8 of the ten games were won to finish comfortably ahead of Railway Union. Nothing it seemed was going to stop the club in its quest for cup glory and 5 in a row. Malahide were the opponents in the semi- final for the second year in a row. Batting first they made 225 for 5, the captain Gordon Black taking 5 for 55. In response, Phoenix, were in early trouble, recovered somewhat thanks to fifties from David Ensor and Hart Cox, and in a never to be forgotten finish, Man-of-the-Match Brian Freer (30*) and Rod Young (14*) saw them into their fifth successive final. The final was dominated by probably the greatest Phoenix innings of the decade, Gerry Murphy’s 131 against Carlisle. He dealt superbly with the very quick Australian professional Doug Gott on a lightning fast wicket and inspired Phoenix to a total of 295 for 7, the club’s highest ever cup final score. This was always way out of the Kimmage side’s reach.

Thus the 60s which ended with two cup final defeats in 1967 and 1969 a distant memory and the 1975 treble, the 5 in a row and with a trophy haul of 10, the club had achieved its best ever decade. The success was due to a talented well balanced XI which remained virtually the same from 1973 to 1979. Eamon Mullan’s retirement in 1977 and Ray Tilson’s addition in 1975 were the only notable changes to the squad. The team had two experienced and classical opening batsmen in Pigot and Murphy, a very solid middle order of Cox, Mitchell, Ensor, Mullan, Black, Tilson and there was also batting in a tail of Young, Halliday, Oakes and Freer. Murphy’s wicketkeeping led him to being capped in 1980 as a wicketkeeping batsman in Ireland’s first Gillette Cup match at Lord’s against Middlesex. Tilson was a very able deputy behind the stumps. Freer and Young were fine opening bowlers, Black was a hostile medium pacer and the “spin twins” of Halliday and Oakes complemented each other perfectly, bowling off spin and slow left arm. The fielding and catching was also way above average, with Tilson at short leg, Ensor at slip, Mullan in the gully and Cox, Mitchell and Freer being brilliant outfielders. The team had five capped players, Pigot, Murphy, Mitchell, Ensor and Halliday. David Ensor holds an astonishing record in playing 250 consecutive competitive 1st XI games for Phoenix between 1973 and 1986. Mike Halliday won 93 caps for Ireland between 1970 and 1989, a record at the time.

1. Phoenix in the 1970s (L-R): C.R. Tilson, R.F.H. Cox, R. Young, B.C.H. Freer, J.S.L. Mitchell, N.C. Taylor, S.W. Oakes, D.B.B. Ensor, M. Halliday, G.H. Black, G.F. Murphy.