

**EchoSports THE BIG INTERVIEW**

**ONE day eight years ago, Mary Tait told her husband she had received a phone call from Midleton RFC.**

The club wanted him to become its president, she said. He was reluctant, but as the day went on Mary proved persuasive.

Later that night, five members of the club came knocking on the door of the couple's house in Aghada.

Before you meet the oldest rugby club president in the world, anyone you care to ask will tell you that he is a gentleman.

That is the word you will hear again and again. It is a word not used often enough these days, and is now mostly found in speeches or nailed on a lavatory door.

Bill Tait is in the Mill Wheel Pub, a place that is steeped in the history of Midleton rugby, and where he can sometimes be seen drinking a glass of scotch with ginger.

He is sprightly for his age and he has a cheerful demeanour.

A few years after Bill was elected as president of the club, Mary died. It was tough after that, but he says he found an outlet in the club.

"It became a bit like an extended family," he says.

And in a way it was, because Bill had been one of its founding fathers.

Bill tells the story: "The original club broke up in 1938. Then in 1967 a few of us were going up on the train to Dublin for an international match and we were talking rugby and about how it was a shame that there wasn't a club in Midleton. Well, we decided there and then to re-form the club.

"We held our first meeting in Cuddy's out near Ahanesk just outside Midleton. Dr Con Cunneen was elected president and I was the chairman.

"We were a minor club without any grounds, so I approached Jim Smith, the headmaster of Midleton College and he gave us permission to use the college grounds for training and our home matches."

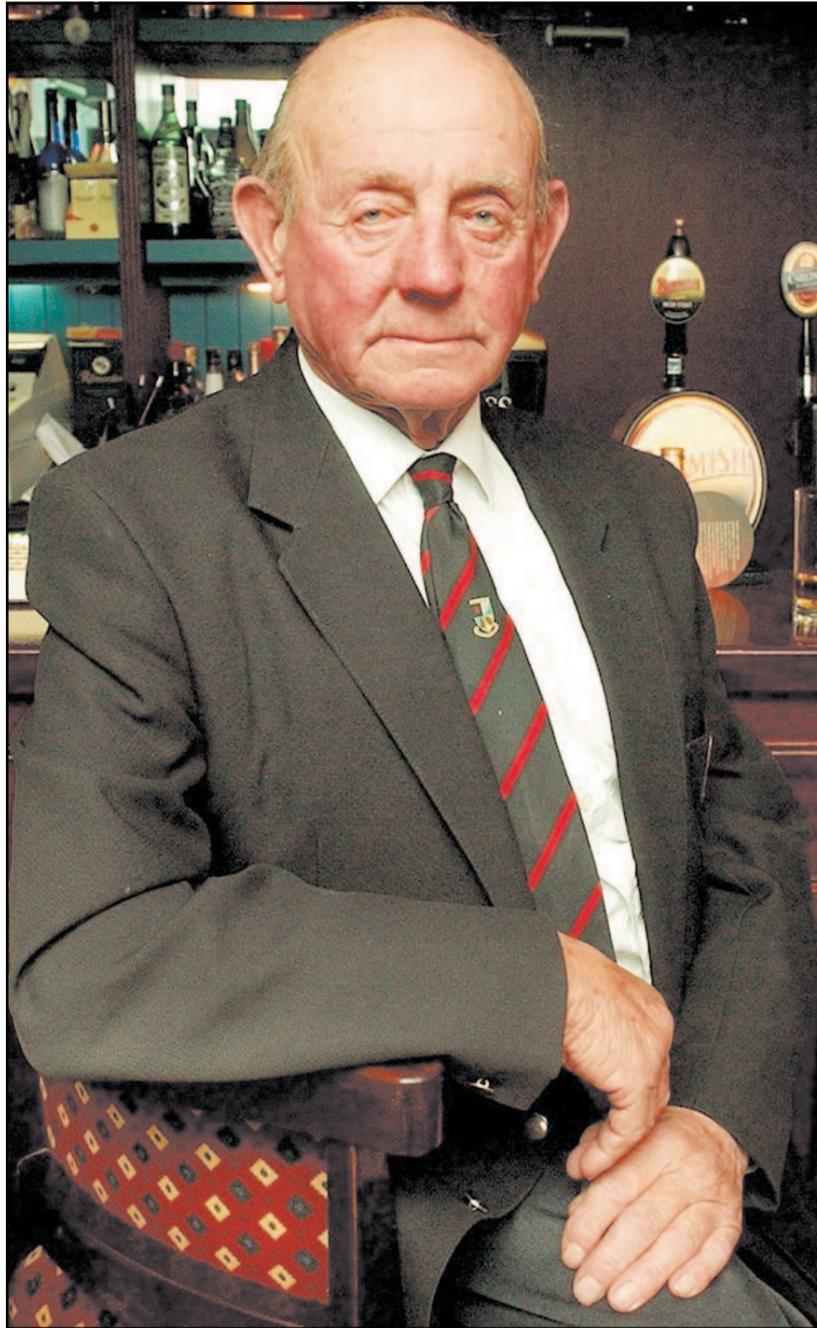
Midleton College have always been a great help to the club. It is Bill's old school and also the place where he grew to love rugby.

"I never played past schools rugby. Every year though, the College used to play against the town of Midleton and we'd always have a tough game. I was hooker. My son actually went to a GAA school and never played until he left.

"But then he joined Midleton and went on to play for Munster counties, hooking. And then his son, when he was in Midleton College, got picked for Munster B, also hooking. So we're three hookers in the family."



**Jason Holland is a great influence on younger players at the club.**



# Tait fits the Bill

Bill is a cornerstone of Midleton Rugby club. Everyone looks up to him, everyone admires what he has done. He's been there since the start and he's been an inspiration to all of us, including myself. His interest in the club is phenomenal. Bill is the club. He comes into the dressing room before and after every game and whether it be a friendly match or a cup final, he'll be there wishing us the best. The silence he gets every time he comes into the dressing room is respect; that silence says everything' — **Tom Mulcahy, coach of Midleton Rugby Club.**

"John Williams, who was the same age as me, was a great player here in the town who went on to play for Dolphin. We were always feeding Cork city clubs with our players then. But I guess that we have benefited from movement in the other direction more recently. Before our games against Midleton, our headmaster when I was in the College, Tim West, would simply say: 'Watch John Williams.' John would have made the Irish team but the war years happened just when he was prospering."

Thirty years later, the club was setting off on a long road.

"We were lucky when Larry McGovern and Dan Lynch, who owned the Mill Wheel here, joined us. They were senior players with Cork Con and they helped us on our feet. We had a lot of local lads who didn't know one end of the ball from the other and Dan and Larry were great for coaching them the skills of the game."

"We were minor then for a few years before we got up to junior. We were lucky too because John and Des Hurley came down from Rockwell college and they were two fine

players."

John, who owns SuperValu in the town, is now the main sponsor of the club. He is also the most exciting player Bill says he saw play in a Midleton jersey.

"He was a full-back and he was worth 12 points before any game because he was a great place-kicker and had a great punt of a ball and always had the opposition under pressure with it."

Youghal, Cobh, Bandon, Clonakilty, Skibbreen and Fermoy were regular opponents in those days. "Bandon were really the team to beat at the time. There was also great rivalry between us and Youghal, but we always seemed to be able to hold them off by a point or

two."

Midleton were the first of the above teams to make the breakthrough to senior.

But it didn't come easy.

"Cork Con were Midleton's bogey team, always winning by a few points, like we did against Youghal. We always maintained that the day we could beat Cork Con at junior level, we were entitled to go senior."

In the mid-90s they were to beat Con in the Junior Cup in two successive years.

"I have a lot of proud moments with the club," says Bill, "but that first win against Con is probably the proudest."

In 1998, after beating Con a second time in the cup, the club was pro-

moted to senior rugby.

When Midleton triumphed over Sligo in a play-off on a wintry Easter day in Portlaoise, it was the end of a long journey and the beginning of a new one; one that would see them promoted two years running at senior. They now play in division two of the All-Ireland League.

"We had great players who helped us get there and who helped us push on to better things in the senior divisions. Niall Murphy, a fabulous centre came in from Sunday's Well, while Andrew McCarthy and Piersie Hurley were great prop-forwards through the years. We had Paul Daly and Don Lynch who were naturally-talented and never gave less than their all for the team when we

1927 - Midleton Rugby Football Club was initially founded. The first match played by the club, captained by Jerry Coffey, was against Youghal.

1934 - Club is disbanded. A new club called Midletonettes founded. It was that club team that was

the predecessor of the current club.

1938 - the club claim the County Cup, but are forced to disband due to lack of players.

1967 - Midleton RFC was re-formed on March 4, following a discussion on a train en route to an inter-

## Midleton Rugby

national match in Dublin. First league match is played against Bandon on October 1, 1967.

1978 - Midleton's finest year of the decade, defeated in the final of the

Munster Junior Cup by Garryowen (17-15). Midleton defeat Old Christians in the final of the County Cup, having lost to the same side in the O'Neill Cup the previous evening.