

St Margaret's United – Leicester's first rugby club

The meeting between Argentina and Tonga at the Leicester City Stadium on 4 October, the first of three matches to be held in Leicester as part of the 2015 Rugby Union World Cup, will cap yet another significant moment in the East Midlands city's long and illustrious relationship with the sport.

Leicester is home to Rugby Union's most successful league team – the Leicester Tigers. This world-famous club has brought unprecedented sporting success to the city having won a record 10 English championships since 1987.

The Tigers' popularity dates back to the Victorian era when the club became a symbol of economic success following a surge in the city's population and industry. At the same time Leicester's renowned hosiery, textiles and footwear factories became a centre for manufacturing sportswear and teams from across the globe, including the mighty New Zealand All Blacks, wore items made in Leicester.

Many factories developed their own amateur rugby teams and the game united employers and employees, men and women, young and old alike.

A new exhibition exploring the history of rugby in Leicester opens today at Newarke Houses Museum to coincide with the big World Cup kick off at Twickenham.

With the help of more than 30 artefacts and some fascinating rugby ephemera, 140 years of rugby history has been brought to life. You can see Martin Johnson's England shirt, a photograph of the first rugby team in Leicester, and some

1920s rugby-inspired cigarette cards as well as hear audio clips of players and fans.

We have awarded the Leicester Literary and Philosophical Society and Leicester City Council a £40,000 grant to stage the exhibition which is part of a larger project to explore the city's enduring passion for the sport.

Our Head of HLF East Midlands, Vanessa Harbar, said: "Rugby has provided many memorable sporting successes and has fascinating links to the story of Leicester's economic development. Now, as the whole country gears up to welcome the World Cup, it's a fitting moment to explore and celebrate this history with the opening of this new exhibition. Thank you to National Lottery players whose money has made this possible."

Leicester Rugby, Leicester People: A Community History runs until 10 April 2016 and a number of free rugby-themed events will be taking place including family activity days and history talks.



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A rugby poster from 1903

Rugby exhibition ready for scrums of visitors