

## **A Match which took place at Nieppe near Armentieres on the Franco-Belgian border on 13<sup>th</sup> April, 1915.**

*(With acknowledgement to James Corsan author of "For Poulton and England" who did much of the research and to the Soldiers of Gloucestershire Museum)*

On 13<sup>th</sup> April 1915 a rugby match took place behind the lines at Nieppe between the 48<sup>th</sup> (South Midland) Division and the 4<sup>th</sup> Division. Ten players from Gloucester RFC played for the 48<sup>th</sup> Division XV who won the match 17-0. In fairness to the opposition, the 4<sup>th</sup> Division, although they contained some very famous names, were a scratch XV and had come straight from the trenches. As a result the match was played 25 minutes each way.

### **The 48<sup>th</sup> (South Midland) Division XV**



The 48<sup>th</sup> Division was captained by **Lieutenant R W Poulton-Palmer** of the 1/4<sup>th</sup> Royal Berkshire Regiment. Ronald Poulton (*left*) was the England captain in the 1913-14 season and at 25 had already played 17 times for England.

It was to be Poulton's last game of rugby. He was killed by a sniper's bullet during fighting in Ploegsteert Wood on May 4<sup>th</sup>, just three weeks after the match.

Other members of the Royal Berkshires who played in the match were:

**Captain F. H. Deakin** - the captain of Moseley and Midland Counties.

**Lieutenant C.R.M.F. Cruttwell** - an Oxford University trialist.

No less than 11 members of the 1/5<sup>th</sup> Gloucesters played for the 48<sup>th</sup> Division in that match, 10 of whom had played rugby for Gloucester. The 10 were:

**Private Charles Cook** - the regular Gloucester full back in the years leading up to the war. A local man, he played for St Marks RFC before joining the club. He played 156 games for Gloucester and also played for Gloucestershire.

**Private F Webb** - a threequarter who played at least 21 games for Gloucester in the season before the war.

**Private William Washbourne** - a threequarter who played over 100 games for Gloucester between 1910 and 1914. He played for Gloucestershire against the 1912-13 Springboks and in the County Championship Final that year.

**Private Lionel Hamblin** – a threequarter who played 89 games for Gloucester between 1910 and 1914. He played for Gloucestershire against the 1912-13 Springboks.

**Lance-Corporal Alec Lewis** – played half back – primarily a threequarter who played 87 games for Gloucester between 1908 and 1919. He played originally for Gloucester Old Boys and also played for Gloucestershire. He ended the war as a commissioned captain with MC and bar.

**Private Sydney Sysum** - played half back - primarily a threequarter who played 26 games for Gloucester in the season before the war, his only season for the club. He was killed in 1916 and his name appears on the Club Honours Board and on the Thiepval Memorial to the Missing on the Somme.



**Private Sidney Smart** - a forward who played 195 games for Gloucester between 1910 and 1923.

Born in Gloucester, Smart played originally for Gordon League. He captained Gloucester in 1921-22. He was capped 26 times by Gloucestershire and 12 times by England. He retained an association with the Gloucester club all his life and died at Kingsholm while serving as a match attendant in the grandstand, aged 81.

In the photograph of the England v Scotland match at Twickenham in March 1913, Smart (left) and **Ronald Poulton** are coming up in support of a break by England.

**Private Joseph Harris** - a forward who played 102 games for Gloucester between 1910 and 1923, his best season being 1920-21. He was capped by Gloucestershire after the war.

**Lance-Corporal Sydney Millard** - a forward who played 78 games for Gloucester between 1909 and 1914. He played originally for Gloucester Old Boys and was capped by Gloucestershire. Sydney Millard was promoted to Sergeant and killed later in the war. His name appears on the Club Honours Board.

**Private A Cook** – a forward who played 55 games for Gloucester between 1911 and 1914.

*(The player from the 1/5<sup>th</sup> Gloucesters who had not played for Gloucester RFC was **Lieutenant Lionel R C Sumner** who ended the war as an acting major and won the MC. The last team member has not been identified).*

## The 4<sup>th</sup> Division XV

**Lieutenant William Hinton** – a full back who played 16 times for Ireland and 7 times for Barbarians. President of the IRFU in 1920-21

**Captain Harold James Storrs Morton** – a prop forward from Blackheath and Cambridge University (blue 1908) who played 4 times for England and 4 times for Barbarians. He played in the Barbarians 9-3 victory over Cheltenham in 1909. He was a medical officer in the RAMC.

**Lieutenant Rowland Fraser** – a hooker or prop forward from Edinburgh and Cambridge Universities (blues 1908-10; Cambridge captain 1910) who played 4 times for Scotland. He was later promoted to captain and was killed on the Somme on 1 July 1916. His name is on the Thiepval Memorial.

**Captain William J Tyrrell** – a forward who played 9 times for Ireland and toured South Africa on the first British Lions tour of 1910. He was a medical officer from Ulster who won the DSO and bar, MC and Belgian Croix de Guerre for his war service. He transferred to the RAF at the end of the war attaining the rank of Air Vice Marshal. He was made honorary surgeon to King George VI and was knighted in 1944. He was President of the IRFU in 1950-51. His portrait hangs in the National Gallery.

**J N Thompson** - position unknown – London Scottish

**J G Keppell** – position unknown – Irish trialist

*(9 players not known)*

*(In his journal Ronald Poulton writes “Several of the Liverpool Scottish from Ypres came over including Dum Cunningham and Dick Lloyd. It was splendid to see so many rucker players about.” **Lieutenant Richard Averil “Dickie” Lloyd** was an outside half who played for Liverpool and 19 times for Ireland. He refereed two Scottish internationals in 1922 and also played cricket for Ireland. He was an officer in the 1/10<sup>th</sup> (Liverpool Scottish) battalion, the King’s (Liverpool) Regiment. It is possible, though not likely, that he played in the match as his regiment were not part of the 4<sup>th</sup> Division.)*

## Referee

The referee was **Captain Basil Maclear** of the Royal Dublin Fusiliers. He had played 10 times for Ireland between 1905 and 1907. He was killed a few weeks later.

## Touch Judge

One of the touch judges was **Lieutenant Colonel G.F. Collett DSO** who had played for Cambridge and Gloucestershire.

The following report appeared in the first edition of "the Fifth Gloucester Gazette" of April 1915. The newspaper was one of the first produced at the front for serving soldiers.

## **SPORT**

### ***Rugby Football***

*On Wednesday, the 14<sup>th</sup> April, the South Midland Division played the Fourth Division. The battalion was well represented – no less than 11 of its players appearing. The team was captained by Lt. Poulton-Palmer and the Fourth Division also included several internationals.*

*The Fourth kicked off with the wind and immediately began to press, their forwards doing splendid work. Then Sysum broke away and scored after a bout of passing. The goal-kick failed.*

*The Fourth returned to the attack and almost scored, but after some loose play our forwards broke away and "got over." Hamblin converted. Soon after, Washbourne intercepted and a combined movement with Hamblin resulted in the ball being taken over the line by J. Harris. The score at half-time was 11 points to nil.*

*The South Midlands continued to keep the upper hand and Harris again scored. Five minutes before time Washbourne scored a brilliant try, leaving us victors by 17 points.*

*Despite the difference in the scoring the game was most interesting and was thoroughly enjoyed by all the spectators, especially the Welshmen who had turned out to see a football match after many months in the trenches.*