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GLOUCESTER'S RUGBY VETERAN

TOM BAGWELL'S 70th BIRTHDAY

WONDERFUL PLAYER AND CAPTAIN

A Few Reminiscences by "W.B."

Tom Bagwell, who has been associated with the Gloucester Rugby team as player and baggage man for over 45 years' celebrated his 70th birthday this week. A few admirers presented the veteran with a substantial gift in recognition of the interesting event.

Seventy years and still going strong! I wonder how many followers of the Gloucester Rugby team realised that Tom Bagwell had reached the allotted span of three-score years and ten until they read the paragraphs in the popular Day by Day column in "The Citizen" this week. But there were a few old admirers of Gloucester's veteran who had not forgotten his brilliant play for the City and his subsequent service, and it was a happy little gathering that took place at Headquarters, Kingsholm, on Tuesday night, when Bagwell received a surprise birthday gift.

Bagwell's connection with the Gloucester Club dates back to 1883, when he was drafted into the team from St. Luke's Red Cross, a local club which turned out a number of useful players. It was no easy matter for a working man player to get into the City team in those days, but George Coates and Bagwell, bosom chums, forced themselves by sheer merit into the ranks and they worthily upheld the reputation of the Club.

A Wonderful Try

Bagwell's first year was in 1883, and after a period at centre three-quarter he took up the outside half position, where he performed brilliantly. I followed the City Team very closely in my school days and Bagwell's achievements were a positive delight. One match is indelibly imprinted on my mind, the first game between Gloucester and a London team which included the famous A. E. Stoddart, the Blackheath and International three-quarter. The City were terribly hard pressed at times, and Stoddart's runs were a revelation, but he could not beat the heroic defence. **The only score of the match was a try by Bagwell – a marvellous individual effort, in which he zig-zagged practically through the whole opposition.**

Bagwell accomplished many other big things during his career for Gloucester and the county, but I always regarded that try as the best he ever scored. He was a most difficult player to check when on the run, for he possessed remarkable dodging powers, and was up to every move in the game.

A stickler for training, Bagwell made great sacrifices to keep fit, and what success the veteran achieved on the field he attributed largely to this fact. Players to-day, I am afraid, have too many other attractions, and they do not study the points in the game and practice movements as in the old days.

Great Ambition Fulfilled

Bagwell's greatest ambition was fulfilled when he was elected captain of the City team in 1890-1 – the last season at the Spa. It was a distinct honour for the “little un,” following as he did such experienced leaders as J. F. Brown, H. J. Boughton and T. Graves Smith. But Bagwell was fully equal to the task. The side under his command proved one of the strongest in the history of the club, and were only beaten twice. The full record is interesting:

P	W	L	D	For		Agst	
				Goals	Tries	Goals	Tries
26	21	2	3	27	47	5	12

In that season Cardiff were defeated in both games, other notable victories being gained over Llanelly and Hull, and a draw was played with Llanelly at Stradey Park, when S. A. Ball was badly injured. But the greatest triumph was gained over Swansea, who lost their unbeaten record by 1 goal, 1 try to nil in a memorable game. **To bring off that match the Spa ground had to be given a liberal application of salt in order to make the pitch playable. The grass was ruined, and the footballers had notice to quit at the end of the season.**

The group photograph of Bagwell's famous team will bring back interesting reminiscences to the older members of the Club.

Bagwell had a second term of captaincy – the opening season at Kingsholm – and though not so successful as the previous year the team only lost six matches, three by the narrowest of margins – a solitary try. The biggest wins were over London Scottish (twice), the Barbarians, Leicester (twice), Swansea and Cardiff, and a draw was made with Oxford University.

A Great Combination

Gloucester had one of the heaviest packs of forwards ever possessed by the Club at that period, and the combination behind was well nigh perfect, with Ball and George at half-back, and Taylor, Jackson, Bagwell and Ward (or Powell) at three-quarter. Of the forwards, A. Collins a clever exponent of the loose game, could deputise efficiently at scrum half, and Witcomb, Cromwell and Jenkins had all had experience in some position behind the scrum. And in A. F. Hughes, the City had a custodian who figured in International trials, but just missed the distinction of representing England. Gloucester have turned out some splendid teams since the Bagwell regime, but if asked to express an opinion I should place the 1890-1 side as the strongest all round combination during my long experience.

Over 45 Years' Service

Bagwell had twelve seasons as a player with Gloucester, and no individual gave more loyal or signal service. He was appointed baggage man in 1895-6, and still holds the position, so that his active association with the premier City team extends over 45 years. His interest in the grand old game in which he has played such a notable part is as keen as ever and he enjoys a well-deserved popularity.

I have had the pleasant companionship of Bagwell in many outings with the team, and always found him one of the best. “Here's health to you Tommy, and all good wishes,” a toast which I am sure thousands of “Citizen” readers will cordially join.