

GLOUCESTER RUGBY
HERITAGE

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1931-32 SAXBY'S GLORIOUS YEAR

Les Saxby played 169 games for Gloucester between 1924 and 1932, scoring 30 tries. He had started his career as a centre but moved to the back row and became pack leader.

He was a hugely popular and influential captain of the club for four seasons (1927-30 and 1931-32) and was on the winning side in three successive County Championship Finals for Gloucestershire.

He will always be remembered though for his final season of

1931-32 in which he had a truly remarkable year.

In that season he captained Gloucester, captained Gloucestershire to their third successive County Championship, captained Gloucestershire and Somerset against South Africa, captained The Rest to victory against England in the final trial, made his international debut at the age of 31, leading the England pack against South Africa and Wales, and toured South Wales with the Barbarians.

Leslie Eric Saxby was born on May 19, 1900 at Bradfield, Berkshire. After leaving Reading College, he farmed on the Gloucestershire-Herefordshire border.

He played for Hereford from 1921-26, captaining the club and while with Hereford played county rugby for North Midlands in the centre.

He'd played occasionally for Gloucester in 1923-24 and 1924-25 and had taken part in the 1924 Easter tour, but it was in 1925-26 that he left Hereford and attempted unsuccessfully to break into the Gloucester side.

Finally, in November 1926 it was decided to try Saxby out in the back row. The Citizen said "Saxby

was introduced into the pack..... With a better knowledge of the finer points of forward play the old Hereford player should prove a useful acquisition."

The experiment was an immediate success and within four months Saxby made his debut for Gloucestershire against Monmouth.

Les Saxby captained Gloucester for the next three seasons, 1927-1930 and also played regularly



Les Saxby



Saxby's Gloucester cap for his first year of captaincy 1927-28, donated by his son John Saxby

for Gloucestershire, appearing in the victory over Lancashire at Blundellsands in the final of March 1930 and scoring the winning try in a nail-biting 10-9 victory over Warwickshire at Kingsholm the following season.

It was a period of success for both club and county. Saxby proved himself an outstanding leader and became an iconic figure in the club.

Although 1931-32 was to be Les Saxby's great season, it started badly. Chosen to captain both Gloucester and Gloucestershire, after stepping down from the club captaincy in 1930, he was unable to play in the opening South West group game at Exeter in October.

To the astonishment of press and public, the defending County Champions were soundly beaten by Devon who scored six tries in the process.

Under Saxby's captaincy the situation was turned round, however, and Gloucestershire went on to take the Championship for the third successive season, beating Durham at Blaydon in the final.

Saxby captained Gloucestershire and Somerset against the touring Springboks at Bristol in the first match of their 1931-32 tour. Although the Counties lost 14-3 the South Africans failed to score a try and were held by the Counties' pack for most of the game.

He impressed the England selectors who were looking for an experienced pack leader and they chose Saxby to captain the Rest



Teek cartoon of Gloucester v Leicester Tigers Kingsholm 12 January 1929

victory and, as a result, he was selected to make his international debut as pack leader against South Africa at Twickenham.

Saxby held his place against Wales at Swansea and went on to play for the Barbarians on their Easter tour of South Wales. He played in wins against Penarth and Swansea on the four match tour in which the Barbarians were undefeated. He retired at the end of his triumphant final season.

At the time of Les Saxby's selection The Times reported that





The England team meet the Prince of Wales at Twickenham, 2 January 1932

very end of his career..." and the rumour persists today that he was close to 40 when he made his debut although in fact he was not yet 32! Saxby enjoyed the joke.

At an end of season dinner to celebrate the County Championship victory, his teammates presented him with a beer tankard engraved with the signatures of the 1932 Gloucestershire Championship-winning team and affectionately inscribed "To Old Man Sax".

Les Saxby joined the RAF at the start of the 1939-45 war and was posted to South Africa, where he was attached to the South African Air Force.

He returned briefly to England before going back to make his home there. He died in Pietermaritzburg aged 58.

 L. E. SAXBY <small>(Captain of Gloucester and Somerset)</small>		<small>Referee: F. G. STEPHENS (Horsingham), Liaison: W. H. BROWN (Somerset), Liaison: T. B. PEARCE.</small>		 B. L. OSLER <small>(Captain South Africa)</small>	
Gloucestershire and Somersetshire <small>CHURCHILL-SWAIN.</small>			South Africans <small>COLLENS—Cross and Gold; Springbok on left breast.</small>		
Full Back— (1) T. W. BROWN <small>(Striker)</small>			Full Back— (28) G. BRAND <small>(Western Frontiers)</small>		
Threequarters— (2) K. DOWLING (L. Wing) <small>(Striker)</small> (3) M. A. McCANLIS (L.C.) <small>(Striker)</small> (4) H. A. GERHARD (R.C.) <small>(Striker)</small> (5) A. V. TOWSE (R. Wing) <small>(Striker)</small>			Threequarters— (29) M. ZIMMERMAN (H.W.) <small>(Western Frontiers)</small> (30) J. G. V. & WESTHUIZEN (H. Centre) <small>(Western Frontiers)</small> (26) B. G. GRAY (L. Centre) <small>(Western Frontiers)</small> (27) F. D. VENTER (L. Wing) <small>(Striker)</small>		
Half-Backs— (6) H. J. M. BARRINGTON <small>(Striker)</small> (7) C. B. CARTER (Scrum) <small>(Striker)</small>			Half-Backs— (31) B. L. OSLER—Capt. (Fly Half) <small>(Western Frontiers)</small> (32) P. DE VILJERS (Scrum) <small>(Western Frontiers)</small>		
Forwards— (8) F. WADLEY <small>(Striker)</small> (9) G. G. GREGORY <small>(Striker)</small> (10) A. CARPENTER <small>(Striker)</small> (11) K. SALMON <small>(Striker)</small> (12) H. MATTHEWS <small>(Striker)</small> (13) H. MASTERS <small>(Striker)</small> (14) L. E. SAXBY—Capt. <small>(Striker)</small> (15) C. FRY <small>(Striker)</small>			Forwards— (7) F. BERGH <small>(Striker)</small> (8) J. BIERMAN <small>(Striker)</small> (9) J. DOLD <small>(Striker)</small> (10) H. KIPPLING <small>(Striker)</small> (11) BOY—LOUW <small>(Striker)</small> (12) A. MACDONALD <small>(Striker)</small> (13) P. MOSTERT <small>(Striker)</small> (14) B. STRACHAN <small>(Striker)</small>		

against England in the final trial. The Rest had a convincing 16-6

"...he is one of the oldest forwards who ever received a cap towards the