

A GLOUCESTER RUGBY DYNASTY

This summer Eric Stephens took over from Allan Townsend as President of Gloucester Rugby. He comes from a family which has done grand service on behalf of the Club since its earliest days.



Eric in his playing days (1966-67)

ERIC STEPHENS

Eric himself played 221 games for Gloucester, 1961-74. He was a versatile three-quarter, perhaps best remembered for his prolific place kicking. He racked up an impressive 1559 points for the Club (22 tries, 249 conversions, 320 penalties and 10 drop goals).

His best seasons were 1970-71 and 1971-2, during which he played 90 games and scored 751 points. Being a stalwart club man, he captained the United XV in his final season.

His appearances for Gloucestershire included two County Championship Finals, including one on the wing when Warwickshire were defeated at Coventry.

After he stopped playing, he acted as selector and coach for the County team. He also went onto the Club committee for more than

twenty years, and was the Club's last fixture secretary, before the advent of professional rugby did away with these appointments.

ERIC'S FATHER

"Jim" Stephens, played for Gloucester's second team in the 1920s, before going to Birmingham to play professionally.

He returned to Gloucester in 1935 and became the secretary of the Gloucester Wagon Works RFC.

He married Ivy Keys, who came from another family with excellent Gloucester Rugby pedigree.

ERIC'S MATERNAL GRANDFATHER

Frank Keys, a half-back, made 27 appearances for Gloucester, 1902-04, scoring 32 points, before moving to South Wales and playing for Bridgend, where he tragically died aged 24 as a result of an injury playing rugby, in the same year that his daughter, Ivy, was born.



Frank Keys (1902-03)

ERIC'S MATERNAL GREAT UNCLE

Eric Keys, was headmaster of Linden Road School, and lots of boys who later became stars for Gloucester started their careers

under Eric's enthusiastic tutelage.

He played one game for Gloucester against Coventry in 1903, but also served on the Gloucester Club committee for many years, and represented them on the County Schools Union from its foundation in 1908, a post he held for 45 years.

Thanks largely to his efforts, the RFU referred to Gloucester as "the nerve-centre of schoolboy rugby in England", and he organised in exemplary fashion the first schoolboy international at Kingsholm in 1927.



Eric Keys (1929-30)

ERIC'S PATERNAL GRANDFATHER

Jimmy "Jummer" Stephens, played mostly at centre but later in his career at outside-half.

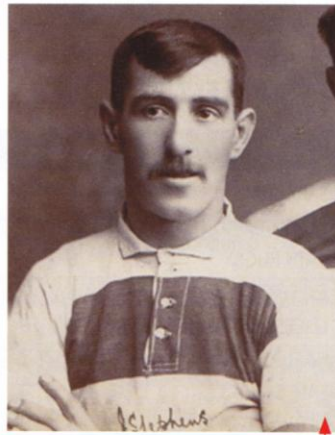
He was a wonderfully versatile player, who could read the game exceptionally well, and had a fine reputation that he could be relied on to perform at a high standard week-in and week-out, which of course endeared him to the Kingsholm faithful.

He played against the 1905 All Blacks at Kingsholm, and in his last season, aged 34, The Citizen reported "the veteran keeps up his form wonderfully, and Anno Domini plays very lightly with him."

Indeed he helped Gloucestershire to win their first County Championship title that season,

beating Yorkshire 23-0 in the final at Kingsholm.

In a long career, 1894-1911, he made 321 appearances for Gloucester, scored 34 tries, and earned 28 county caps with Gloucestershire, and was thought very unlucky not to win international honours.



"Jummer" Stephens (1904-05)

His half-back partner, Dai Gent wrote: "Never was a scrum half more fortunate. I was a very young player ("Jimmy" was eight years my senior), and "Jimmy" proceeded to teach me all he knew and to shield me all he could. Thanks to him, I was lucky enough to play first for the County, and then for England."

ERIC'S PATERNAL GREAT UNCLE

Arthur Stephens (Jummer's brother), also enjoyed a long



Arthur Stephens (1897-98)

and distinguished career with Gloucester – he played at half-back and full-back in 144 games for the Club, 1890-99. Arthur played in the famous victory at Kingsholm in April 1897, when Llanelly's colours were lowered for the first time that season.

ERIC'S OTHER PATERNAL GREAT UNCLE

Sidney Stephens, 12 years younger than his brother, Jummer, played 4 games at half-back for Gloucester in 1910, in addition to a number of appearances for the A team.

ERIC'S COUSINS (ONCE REMOVED)

Eric James "Dick" Stephens, son of Arthur, played 54 matches at outside-half and centre for Gloucester, 1926-31; his first appearance was against Cheltenham on 27th November 1926, and his last against Moseley on 25th October 1931.

He also played 216 matches as an all-rounder for Gloucestershire County Cricket Club.

Jack Stephens, another of Jummer's nephews, made 92 appearances for Gloucester at outside-half and back, 1926-29, before he went off to join Oldham Rugby League Club.

OTHER RELATIONS?

There were two other Stephens who played for Gloucester, but neither we, nor Eric, are sure whether they are related to him.

Tom Stephens made 53 appearances for Gloucester at fullback and centre, 1927-40; and W Stephens made one appearance on the wing for Gloucester in 1939.

If any of our readers are either related to one of these, or a family history expert, and can resolve the question, we, and Eric, would be interested to know – please contact us on www.gloucester rugby heritage.org.uk