

GLOUCESTER RUGBY
HERITAGE

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TOM VOYCE GLOUCESTER'S GREATEST?

Tom Voyle played a starring role for England and the Lions, and later became President of the RFU.

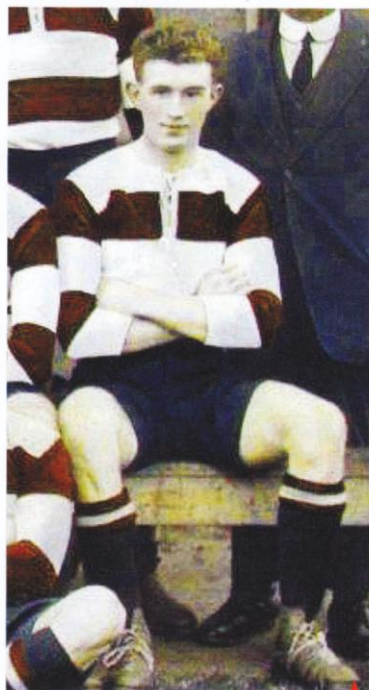
But most of all he was Gloucester through and through, born in the City in 1897, dying there in 1980, his whole life epitomising the devotion to the game which Gloucester rugby breeds.

Tom, the son of a lighter captain, grew up in the shadow of Kingsholm at Dean's Walk. He went to the Gloucester National School, where the motto was "Never Step Backwards". Tom adopted this as the principle by which to play rugby.

He came to rugby prominence as a schoolboy, earning his first England cap at fly-half with the U15s in the 1910-11 season. He had just started to play senior rugby for the Gordon League, when the Great War intervened.

Tom enlisted as a Private in the Glo'sters as soon as war broke out, but he was found to be under age and was told to go away until he was 18. He persevered and landed in France in 1916, was promoted to Sergeant, and later gained a commission as a Second Lieutenant in the Royal West Kent Regiment.

In 1917 he was wounded in



Tom at the start of his career with Gloucester in 1919

the right eye, which left him with impaired eyesight for the rest of his life, but it didn't prevent him from serving as a Major in the Signal Corps in the Second World War. Nor did he let it hold him back on

the rugby pitch.

After the war Tom joined Gloucester and they first played him on the wing, but when "Tart" Hall dropped out just before a game, Tom was switched to wing forward and there he remained.

Within months of his first-class debut, Tom had gained Club, County and International caps. He was soon famous the length and breadth of the country, and outside it too.

Especially in Wales where he quickly became the man they loved most to hate for the havoc which he wreaked amongst their vaunted back division.

"FATHER OF ALL WING FORWARDS"

An enthusiastic press bestowed a number of titles upon Tom – "King of Gloucester", "Scourge of the Welsh", and "Father of all Wing Forwards".

The last of these referred to the way in which he revolutionised the role of wing forward. Tom was not content with being just one of the pack, and turned into a predator. He broke quickly from set pieces and used his speed to chase down the opposing backs and win the ball in loose play.



o Sid Smart, George Halford and Tom Voyce, all captains of Gloucester, in their England strip

The impact he made has caused successive generations of wing forwards to copy his style.

Tom recognised that he often played on the limit of the law, and told this story about himself:

"There was the occasion when the referee was going to take some drastic action. That great tactician, George Halford, immediately shouted to me: "I'll report you to the committee next week!" and the astonished referee said: "Play on, men!"

Tom appeared in every match of England's Grand Slam winning teams of 1921, 1923 and 1924.

Wavell Wakefield, his England captain, wrote: "...the name of Tom Voyce is synonymous with that of Gloucester. Think of one and the other springs to mind, for he was a great player from a great club - a wonderful inspiration to any side. Tom had that personality and mental, competitive outlook that makes up

a great player. He was always best in adversity and there is no forward I would rather have with me in a tight corner than Tom Voyce with a grin, his sleeves rolled up, his tireless energy and his love for the game, for the hard knocks he could give and take. We must have had some 50 big games together and always I have known that where he was most wanted, there should I find him."

He also recalled a try which Tom scored: "*I passed to him some 30 yards from the line, hoping he would heave the ball out at once. But Tom was going to score himself and the whole Welsh team tried to stop him but score he did."*

THE LION WHO ROARED

Tom played for Gloucestershire, the Army and the Barbarians, and also for the British Isles team which toured South Africa in 1924; he appeared in two internationals and ended the tour as leading scorer.

By the end of his career, Tom had won 27 caps with England, and made 165 appearances for Gloucester, scoring 219 points, including 55 tries.

50 YEARS RUNNING THE GAME

He was determined to put something back into the game which he loved so much, and on his retirement as a player, Tom was immediately elected onto the Gloucester committee, and remained there in various capacities until he finally stood down as President of the Club in 1979.

He served almost as long on the County Union Executive, and was President for two seasons, 1933-35. He was appointed as Gloucester's representative on the Rugby Union committee in 1931, and remained there for 40 years, becoming President of the RFU in 1960-61, the only Gloucester man to have achieved this honour.

Tom did much good work outside rugby too. He served on Gloucester City Council, and was active in many other organisations, including Municipal Charities, Gloucester Royal Infirmary Governors, Hospital Welfare Committee, British Legion, War Pensions Committee, City Youth Committee, Boy Scouts, National Savings Committee and Road Safety Committee.

He was awarded the OBE in 1962 for his public work in Gloucestershire, particularly with the National Playing Fields Association.

He died at his home in Tewkesbury Road, Gloucester, not far from his beloved Kingsholm.

THE LAST WORD

Tom himself wrote: "*...the thrills of victory...Herculean battles against odds...the subtle change of tactics which tipped the scales...the roars which have shaken Kingsholm to signalise an outstanding feat, and above all, the grand comradeship which shines like a jewel in the history of Gloucester Rugby...these are but a few of many corners in my own particular treasure-house of memories."*



Tom in action against Wales