

CHRIS COLLIER'S KINGSHOLM MEMORIES



Peter Ford, the Gloucester captain leads his team out against Lydney on 10th September 1955 for a game which Gloucester won 16-6. Inset is an incident from the match. The young lad with his arm over the rail is Chris Collier, the author of this article

WHEN I was very young, I remember winter Saturday evenings after my dad and my elder brother returned from Kingsholm and relived the games that they had just witnessed.

I used to marvel at the names of those legendary Gloucester warriors, Bill Hook, Charlie Crabtree, Sid Dangerfield, Roy Sutton, Willie Jones, George Hastings, Bob Hodge, Gordon Hudson, Ernie Turner. I just couldn't wait until I was considered old enough to make my first pilgrimage to that place of rugby worship, Kingsholm.

At long last on 20 March

1954, my dad took me to watch an English Schools Trial game. Mickey Booth played for the Probables, and was unlucky not to make it into the England team. Anyway, I was immediately hooked on the game and have never missed a season since. Of course since my first visit to Kingsholm was in March, the season was drawing towards its close, but I can remember having time to see Gloucester beat Harlequins and Neath before time ran out. At that time as soon as the game ended lots of young boys would run on to the pitch to try and obtain autographs. After the Neath game I was very

pleased to get the signature of Rees Stephens the Welsh International. He wasn't smiling much, but Neath had just lost.

Kingsholm was very different in the fifties. At the Deans Walk end there was a shallow terrace topped by a mound of grass, which was known as "The Tump". A very old scoreboard was situated on the grass, and when there was a score a numbered plate would be placed on to the board. The responsibility for manning the scoreboard was inevitably taken by a youngster, who much to the amusement of the crowd often got the scores wrong. In my early years I took



position just outside the Shed, standing by the stairway down which the players took the field having come out of the old gymnasium building, now the Lions Bar. The smell of wintergreen with which the players smeared themselves was overpowering. The match programme cost 3d (older folk please translate for the young ones), and consisted of a single folded sheet of paper.

One of my early favourites was Roy Blair, a burly winger who scored plenty of tries but was a little vulnerable in defence. Then there was Derek Ibbotson, slight of build but a back rower who tackled around the ankles to devastating effect. Cyril Thomas was a hooker who, when scrums were still a thing of beauty, won countless strikes against the head through sheer skill. That 1953-54 season was record breaking, and a lot of that was down to the captaincy

had only lost one game all season and Gloucester had lost eight of their last ten. The only score was a massive Alan Holder penalty from at least 45 yards and wide out. I can still see it as clearly today as when he kicked it.

Place kicking was not a strength the club possessed through the fifties and early sixties. I recall a game against Coventry (and they were probably the strongest club in England at the time) in 1964, when we played them off the park and scored tries through Terry Hopson, "Baggy" Hudson, Nick Foice and Peter Ford. Unfortunately, no try was converted and Coventry scored a single try, but won 14-12 through the boot of George Cole.

By this time I had moved into the Shed, on the half-way line and have remained there ever since, apart from when I attended university, and even then I used

(he was no kicker) which hit the post, bounced on the cross bar and went over. He told me he remembered the game and after scoring the try and walking back with the ball, he heard someone in the crowd say, "I wonder who he's going to get to kick this one." Several kicks had been missed and Peter thought he might as well try himself!

At this time Terry Hopson arrived at Kingsholm. He was another player who had he played for a London club, I am convinced he would have been England's regular fly half. He had a magical half back partnership with Mickey Booth. His only problem was that he could be inconsistent, and Mickey used to say that he could tell, before the kick off, from the look in Terry's eye what sort of game he was going to play. But I have seen Terry score some brilliant tries, including one where he received the ball on his own try line and scored without a hand being laid on him.

One of the sad features of the modern game is that the traditional fixtures against Stroud, Lydney and Cheltenham have all disappeared. Maybe these did not produce the most flowing rugby but they were gripping affairs where Gloucester by no means always got the upper hand. It seemed to me that nearly all the players, being local, knew each other and local bragging rights were up for renewal each season. The games were nearly always close, until in later years Gloucester just became too powerful and the series ended.

However, professionalism has been a great success and the crowds now seen at Kingsholm dwarf the amateur era. I have to say that when the team does its run in front of the shed before the game, the hairs stand up on the back of my neck every time. I firmly believe there is no better atmosphere in which to experience rugby than at Kingsholm.

C'mon Glaws!



The Gloucester team against Lydney in 1955 (L-R): back row: Rev M Hughes (chairman), R Parry, P Meadows, D A Jones, B Green, R Hodge, C Thomas, L Morgan, J Willis; front row: I Sheen, G Hastings, D Ibbotson, P Ford (capt), R Sutton, M Baker, R Blair

of John Taylor. He then moved away from Gloucester, but played several more seasons for Leicester.

A lot of the players from that record breaking season promptly retired, including Gordon Hudson, Charlie Crabtree, John Gwilliam, Ernie Turner, John Hobbs and the following season under the captaincy of George Hastings was not a good one, at one point Gloucester lost 14 out of 15 games. I still remember the long walks home in utter despair. In fact the club went through a difficult time, but we always seemed to produce one or two great performances in each season. One I remember in particular was against Cardiff just after Christmas 1957. Cardiff

to time home weekends for the big games. Crowds were not so big in those days, one of 3,000 was reckoned to be good and you could find your favourite spot by arriving 10 or 15 minutes before kick-off. Now I'm on the half way line at least an hour in advance.

Peter Ford captained the team for five seasons out of six from 1955 to 1961. What a player, who deserved far more than the four England caps he actually obtained. Only a few weeks ago I was talking to him and recalled a game against Plymouth Albion in December 1960 when he had scored a try close to full time to level the scores. Much to everybody's astonishment Peter took the conversion himself