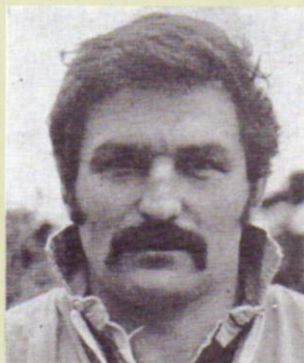


GLOUCESTER PROPS PART 3

THROUGHOUT THE HISTORY OF THE CLUB, GLOUCESTER BUILT AND MAINTAINED A FINE AND DESERVED REPUTATION FOR HARD UNCOMPROMISING PROP FORWARDS - OTHER CLUBS, INCLUDING THE WELSH, ALWAYS KNEW THAT THEY WERE IN FOR A TOUGH ENCOUNTER UP FRONT WHEN THEY FACED THE CHERRY AND WHITES.

This third of what will now be five articles on great Gloucester props takes us from the sixties into the eighties.

ROBIN COWLING
LOOSE-HEAD prop Robin Cowling, a nephew of the great Gloucester captain John A'Bear, played 216 games for Gloucester, appearing in the first knock-out cup final in 1971-72. 5ft 10in and only 14½ stone at his peak, he was a fierce competitor, a powerful scrummager and quick around the field.



He also played for Western Counties against the All Blacks in 1972-73 and in four County Championship finals (1971-72-73-74), before moving to Leicester where he won eight England caps.

Robin Cowling was born in 1944 in Ipswich, but the family moved back to Gloucester when he was a small boy and Robin was educated at Sidcot

School, Somerset and the Royal Agricultural College Cirencester.

On leaving college, he joined Gloucester as a hooker but quickly moved to prop. He made his debut in 1967 but it was not until 1970-71 that he established himself at both club and county level. In 1971-72 he propped alongside Mike Burton in both the Knockout Cup and County Championship victories and that summer was chosen as a reserve for the England tour of South Africa.

In 1973-74, despite success with Gloucestershire, he lost favour with the Gloucester selectors and played in less than half the games. The following season he took a job as farm manager in Market Harborough and joined the Leicester club, where he went on to play with distinction until 1981.

Robin Cowling has been on the Exeter coaching staff since 1997, apart from two years with Cornish Pirates, and currently manages the Exeter Academy.

KEITH RICHARDSON

KEITH Richardson was a big mobile prop who also played No 8. He made 278 appearances for Gloucester (1968-77) and captained the club in 1974-75. He was capped by Gloucestershire and played for Southern Counties against the All Blacks.

He also played for Loughborough Colleges, Rosslyn Park and Bath and captained



Dorset and Wilts in the County Championship.

Keith Richardson was born in 1944 and educated at George Stephenson Grammar School in Newcastle and Loughborough College. On leaving Loughborough, he took a post as physical education master at Wycliffe College in autumn 1968.

He joined Gloucester as a No 8, but moved up to prop in the latter part of his first season. Established at prop, he would still play in the back row when required.

Following selection for Southern Counties against the All Blacks in 1972, his career peaked over the next three years. He was a reserve for England against Wales in 1973-74 and became Gloucester captain the following year when he led from the front, playing in 43 of the 45 games and winning 32.

In 1975-76, under Mike Burton's captaincy, he played 48 games, captaining the club in Burton's absence. To quote Phil Blakeway, "If you cut his veins you'd find red and white all the



way through. He was certainly a tremendous competitor for Gloucester."

Keith Richardson became club coach in 1987-88, a position he held until 1993-94. After leaving Gloucester, he coached Harlequins and England A, and has written widely on rugby.

PHIL BLAKEWAY

WIDELY regarded as one of the finest prop forwards ever to represent Gloucester, comfortable on either side of the scrum, Phil Blakeway played 141 games for his club between 1971 and 1985 (including the 1982 Pilkington cup final) in a career blighted by injury. He played 19 games for Gloucestershire and won 19 caps for England, touring South Africa with the 1980 British Lions. He captained South and South West against the 1981 Australians and 1983 All Blacks, and was a Barbarian.



Born on New Years Eve 1950, Phil Blakeway was a product of Kings School, Sherborne and Cheltenham Colts. He played for Cheltenham against Gloucester at Kingsholm in April 1971 before joining the Gloucester club later that year.

In May 1975, having worked his way up through the England Under 23 and England B teams, he toured Australia with England although not playing in the internationals. Then, in October 1977, on the verge of a full cap,

he broke his neck playing at Kingsholm against South Wales Police. Not realising the extent of the damage, he turned out for Gloucestershire against Cornwall three days later and exacerbated the injury.

It was thought his career was over but, within eighteen months, he had come back to make his debut for England and to keep his place throughout the 1980 Grand Slam season. This earned him a Lions tour of South Africa that summer, but a recurring rib injury forced him to leave the field during his first game of the tour – and ended his involvement.

Phil kept his England place for the next two seasons, enhancing his reputation, but following the 1982 England tour of North America he announced his retirement. Coming back once more the following year, he played throughout the Five Nations campaign and toured South Africa with England, starting in the first test alongside Steve Mills and Malcolm Preedy in an all-Gloucester front row. Now playing on borrowed time, he put in one last monumental effort to play through a final Five Nations season before retiring from all rugby in 1985.

GORDON SARGENT

GORDON Sargent made 200 appearances for Gloucester between 1976 and 1987, captaining his club in 1983-84 and playing in the 1978 and 1982 Cup finals.

He played regularly for Gloucestershire, appearing in the 1980 and 1981 County Championship Finals. A robust prop, who ran hard and straight, he represented England at Under 23 and B levels and gained one full international cap. He was a Barbarian in 1981 and 1982.

Gordon Sargent was born in Gloucester in 1949 and educated at Lydney Secondary School. He

played for Lydney RFC for nine years from the age of 16 and was club captain for two years (1974-76). He had represented England at Under 23 level and Gloucestershire in two County Championship semi-finals when he joined Gloucester at the age of 26.

Gordon played for Gloucester throughout the successful 1978 cup campaign and toured



Romania with England B that summer. Alternately in favour with either club or county, he was nonetheless chosen as the only prop on the bench for England's Grand Slam decider against Wales in 1980.

In 1980-81, again assigned to the bench, he finally came on for his only cap against Ireland at Dublin when Phil Blakeway was injured. He played for Gloucestershire in the 1981 County Championship Final and for the Barbarians in 1981 and 1982.

Limited opportunities at Gloucester caused Sargent to return to Lydney in 1982-83, but he was elected by the Gloucester players to return to captain the side the following year. This was the only time in the club's history that a player from an outside club had been invited to become captain. It was to be his last full season.

After retirement, he remained involved with the game as coach and then director of rugby at Lydney RFC.

