



GLOUCESTER SECOND ROW FORWARDS PART 1

IN THE EARLY DAYS OF RUGBY THERE WERE NO SPECIALISTS IN THE FORWARDS. WHEN A SCRUM FORMED, THE FIRST TO ARRIVE MADE UP THE FRONT ROW AND SO ON. IT WAS MANY YEARS BEFORE PLAYERS WOULD BECOME ASSOCIATED WITH PARTICULAR POSITIONS.

GEORGE "BIDDY" HALFORD
GEORGE Halford was an early example of a true second row forward. He was born in 1886 and played his first game for Gloucester in December 1907 against Exeter. He was an immediate success and was a regular in the first team until 1923, playing 326 games, and scoring 32 tries.



George made his first appearance for Gloucestershire, for whom he was destined to play 35 times, in a baptism of fire against Cornwall at Redruth in February 1910, scoring a try. He retained his place in the team which went on to win the County Championship for the first time, beating Yorkshire 23-0 at Kingsholm. George captained Gloucester in the 1913-14 season when 25 of the 37 games were won. That season saw a famous win at

Twickenham against Harlequins who at the time were reckoned to be one of, if not the best, club side in the land. He would have been captain again in 1914-15 if WW1 had not intervened. He was mobilised, but wounded in France in February 1916 and discharged from the army. However, he was back at Kingsholm for the 1919-20 season, and resumed the captaincy.

He was then part of an outstanding county team which won a hat-trick of titles from 1920 to 1922, and captained them in the 1921-22 season, when they won the final 19-0 against North Midlands at Villa Park. In addition he won two England caps in 1920 against Wales and France.

JOHN A'BEAR
John was born on 16 July 1913 and played his first rugby at the Crypt Grammar School, Gloucester. He was a player with a fair turn of pace for a forward, who made the first of his 211 appearances in a famous win at Swansea in November 1933. It was Gloucester's first ever win at St.Helen's.

His partner in the second row in this game was "Digger" Morris. Their partnership became legendary, and they were firm friends off the field. John was Digger's best man at his wedding in 1936. They were famous



for their rendition of "The Pig Song", a part of which can be heard on our Heritage website. John became the club's youngest captain in 1937, at the age of 24, and remained in that role until war intervened in 1939. He also played 14 times for the county and was a member of the championship winning team of 1937 which defeated East Midlands 5-0 in the final at Bristol. International recognition eluded him, although he did tour Argentina in 1936 with a "British Team", and was reserve for an English trial game in the same year.

ROY "DIGGER" MORRIS
John A'Bear's second row partner "Digger" Morris was educated at Hatherley Road School, Gloucester, and played his early rugby for Gloucester Old Boys, before making his first appearance for Gloucester on 19 December 1931 against Northampton. He only



played one more game that season, but broke through to a regular place in the following campaign.

That 1932-33 season was memorable in that the double over Newport was achieved for the first time in 50 years. Digger was present for both games.

Like John A'Bear, international honours were not to be for Digger, although he captained the Possibles to a win over the Probables in the England trial game of 1938. Had he played for Harlequins, who knows.....

After the war in 1946-47 Digger captained both Gloucester and the county. Gloucestershire drew with Lancashire in the Championship final, but lost the replay at Kingsholm. In all he played 317 times for Gloucester and 19 for the county.

Digger was a man of many parts, and it is not widely known that at times he was a professional boxer, trainer of greyhounds and bookmaker. Digger was a real character who, long after his playing days were over, acted as a mentor to the young Mike Burton, a debt Mike appreciates to this day.

Digger was once asked what his most enjoyable game had been. He replied, "I think it was when that Kiwi outfit came to Kingsholm just after the war." "That Kiwi outfit" was the New Zealand Services team, which was in all but name a full All Blacks side.

Digger continued, "I got kicked in the yud in the first half and don't remember much about it. After the break, I dropped one of their blokes on his yud and I 'ad four of 'em onto me after that. It was a bloody smashing game."

JOHN GWILLIAM

John was a Welshman, born in Pontypridd in 1923. He

won 23 caps for Wales from 1947 to 1954, and captained his country in 13 of them. He was in the Wales team which famously defeated the All Blacks 13-8 in 1953. He played the majority of his internationals as a number 8 but was invariably in the second row for Gloucester.



As a young man in WW2 John was an officer in the Royal Tank Regiment, and was involved in fighting in Europe. He appeared for Newport in the early post war seasons, and won Blues at Cambridge in 1947 and 1948.

He became a teacher and played for Edinburgh Wanderers from 1949 to 1952. He then moved to another school in Bromsgrove and joined Gloucester for the start of the 1952-53 season.

John won five of his caps whilst at Kingsholm and was the first Gloucester player to captain his country.

John played two seasons at Kingsholm from 1952 to 1954 and made 49 appearances. The 1953-54 season was at the time the best in the club's history, winning 31 out of 42 games played, and John was vice-captain to John Taylor.

ROY LONG

Another product of Crypt Grammar School, Roy was an expert line out jumper

who served Gloucester well for 13 years, making 339 appearances for the club. He was another in the long line of Gloucester players who learnt their rugby with Gloucester Old Boys.



He made his first fifteen debut at Easter 1956 against the touring Bradford team. Soon he was called up to do his National Service and played for the RAF in two successful Inter-Services Championships. Cpl. R.G.Long played alongside S.A.C Don Rutherford in the 1958 campaign.

On his return to club rugby he forged successful second row partnerships with "Baggy" Hudson and a young Alan Brinn, the latter combination becoming permanent for most of the sixties.

Roy played ten times for the county, and perhaps his slight lack of pace told against him at that level, although his line out ability was never questioned.

Roy had intended to retire at the end of the 1966-67 season, but an injury crisis halfway through the 1968-69 season saw him being hauled back out of retirement to play another 25 games, before finally hanging up his boots after the traditional end of season tour.

Roy went on to be Club Secretary, and held that post in the Centenary season of 1973-74. Following a long illness he died in February 1992.

