

GLOUCESTER RUGBY HERITAGE

THROUGHOUT THE GREAT WAR FROM RECRUITMENT, TO ACTIVE SERVICE AND HOME FRONT MORALE, THE GLOUCESTER RUGBY CLUB AND ITS PLAYERS ACTIVELY 'PLAYED THEIR PART' WITHIN THE CITY.

By August the 1914-15 fixture list had been finalised and both players and spectators alike were eagerly awaiting the new season. Although war was predicted, its impact was unexpected as the Gloucester Rugby Club announced on 2 September that the season was cancelled as it was unable to field any sort of XV.

Those players who had previously served in the Army had, as Reservists, been immediately recalled to the Colours and many were now in France. The remainder – both former and current players – had volunteered en masse with their local 'celebrity' providing an inspiration to join the Colours as the Citizen urged all eligible men to follow the lead of the players. Most enlisted in the infantry, particularly in the 1/5th and 8th Battalions of the Gloucestershire Regiment.

Very quickly intensive and probably inadequate training began at camps with the majority of players billeted at Chelmsford



(Essex) or Perham Down (Wiltshire) by the end of September.

As the fighting intensified the progress of the Reservists was followed in the newspapers but soon casualties were reported as before Christmas the first players, William Hancock and Peter Roach had been killed in action.

On 9 May 1915 the Club's most celebrated player, Henry ('Harry') Berry, a former England International, was killed in action at Aubers Ridge with the 2nd Gloucesters. A flurry of letters from Gloucester men published in the Citizen, described the charge towards the German line which after an advance of 200 yards into No Man's Land was halted as machine gun batteries supported by rifle fire decimated the British troops.

The survivors and wounded lay in No Man's Land until darkness arrived. Private Thomas Friday, a friend of Harry Berry, described how the two of them immediately before the charge, had shook hands and kissed the photographs of their wives and families. Harry Berry's body was never found and he is amongst the Missing of the Great War.

As the volunteer players became soldiers, the 1/5th Gloucesters



XV gained a reputation amongst British and Canadian Army units and challenges were soon issued. With the team sheet of the 1/5th Gloucesters XV reading like the Gloucester Rugby XV, all challengers were vanquished.

Once at the front they continued to be challenged with the games taking place behind the front although sometimes within range of the German artillery! Despite casualties, the 1/5th Gloucesters XV always fielded a core of Gloucester players and went undefeated throughout the war.

In 1915 the front line became populated with the newly trained rugby players who had anticipated facing opponents such as Llanelli, Newport and Bath and not the German Army.

Although a relatively quiet year as they acclimatised to trench warfare, there were still casualties. Ernest Cummings, a scrum half and son of Gloucester legend Car Cummings, was shot in the head by a sniper within 6 weeks of landing in France.

The casualty numbers were

