

## SHEDDING LIGHT ON GLOUCESTER RUGBY

Gloucester Rugby first held a match under floodlights on 30th January 1879, when the Club played its home games on the Council-owned ground at the Spa. It was against Rockleaze of Bristol. Four electric floodlights were erected, but one failed and another flickered on and off. Nevertheless the match went ahead with 16 players on each side, and Gloucester managed a good win by four goals and four tries to nil, including a hat trick for Frank Brown, the Club captain.



Frank Brown

This novel event attracted over two thousand spectators, who stumbled around the park in the dark, doing substantial damage to the shrubbery as they tried to find their way to the pitch. Although the Club regarded the occasion as a great success at the time, the horticultural consequences were taken very seriously by the Corporation's Park Committee.

Not wishing to exacerbate the situation, the Club played their last home fixture of the season on the King's School ground at Deans Walk, at the western end of what is now the Kingsholm ground. The Park Committee decided in April that tennis, cricket and bowls could continue on the Spa, but that football was banned, which had no immediate effect because the rugby season had ended.

The Club adopted a carrot and stick approach, offering to pay for repairs whilst also stirring up public opinion in their favour. They promoted the health benefits of the sport, and enlisted the support of the Crypt School, whose pupils also used the Spa for football. The Club proposed new crowd control measures, such as putting up canvas screens, and charging entry to the popular side (which would also have the effect of consolidating the Club's income from gate money).

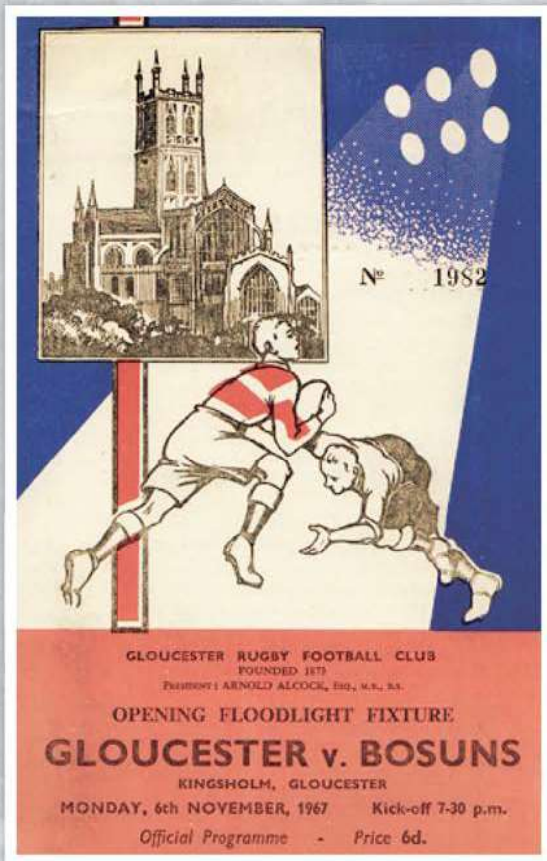
A strong delegation from the Club and Crypt School presented petitions with thousands of signatures, and argued their case at a meeting of the full Town Council. The Park Committee ban was overturned unanimously, and two weeks later the Club played the first match of the 1879-80 season on the Spa. But they had agreed not to play any more night-time matches.

Although the Club stopped playing on the Spa in 1891, the best part of a century passed before the next night-time match, when floodlights were installed at Kingsholm in 1967. They were formally switched on for a charity match to raise money for the Star Centre. The opposition were the Bosuns, an invitational side composed of internationals, trialists and county players.

A determined, energetic and well organised Gloucester team, led by Don Rutherford, giving his usual cultured performance at full-back, outplayed them. Mickey Booth and Terry Hopson showed their mastery at half-back, whilst John Bayliss and Ron Pitt exuded a bristling threat in the centre. Dick Smith, Gary White, Alan Brinn and Dave



Kingsholm in the 1960s



Owen gained control in the loose, Jim Jarrett ruled the line-outs, and Mike Burton and Jack Fowke dominated their opponents in the scrums.

Mickey Booth opened the scoring with a trademark

try scuttling round the blind side of a scrum, before Foice ran one in behind the posts; Rutherford converted both. The Bosuns fought back to score a try in the corner, but Booth dropped a goal from 35 yards to give Gloucester a comfortable cushion at half-time.

Gloucester added to their lead with tries from Booth and Hopson, and any remote prospect of a Bosuns revival was scotched as they lost two players to injury. In the last 15 minutes, White kicked through to score, John Groves went over from a tapped penalty, and Bayliss from a slick passing move, although the Bosuns had the last word with a converted try.

Gloucester thus enjoyed a comfortable win, 34-8, scoring seven tries to two, the lights worked well, a considerable feather in the Club's cap, and led to an expansion of the fixture list in subsequent seasons as more midweek games could be played.

The expansion of rugby coverage on television contributed to a new and better set of floodlights being installed in 1994, and they in turn were replaced when the new stadium was built in 2007. Kingsholm having been selected as a venue for RWC 2015, various improvements to the ground were funded by the tournament organisers, which were afterwards left in place if the Club so wished. Amongst these were new bulbs for the floodlights with twice the previous luminosity. These are quite acceptable at reduced power but can be turned up fully as required for televised matches, which certainly adds to the sense of theatre at a night time match.



Kingsholm during the 2015 Rugby World Cup