

ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO

ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO THIS WEEK, ON 10TH MARCH 1921, A TEAM FROM LEICESTER CAME TO KINGSHOLM TO CONTEST THE BIGGEST MATCH OF THE SEASON BAR INTERNATIONALS. THE OCCASION WAS THE COUNTY CHAMPIONSHIP FINAL BETWEEN GLOUCESTERSHIRE AND LEICESTERSHIRE. GLOUCESTERSHIRE WERE THE DEFENDING CHAMPIONS, HAVING DEFEATED YORKSHIRE 27-3 AT BRADFORD TO WIN THE TITLE A YEAR EARLIER, WITH NINE GLOUCESTER PLAYERS IN THE SIDE.

They had started the defence of their title with comfortable wins against Devon at Kingsholm and Somerset at Bath, before a last gasp try at Camborne won the south-west group with a hard fought 9-6 defeat of Cornwall. The semi-final was more comfortable, winning 21-3 against Surrey at Kingsholm. Much satisfaction was taken from Gloucestershire being very much home grown, including nine Gloucester players, whereas their opponents were packed with internationals drawn from all four home nations, none of them born in Surrey.



Kingsholm with the new stand which had been opened for the 1920-21 season

Granted home advantage, Gloucestershire chose to return to fortress Kingsholm for the final. The match attracted tremendous interest, all the seats in the grandstand being snapped up within a day of going on sale, and the takings of over £1,000 being a record for the ground. Before kick-off the crowd of well over 10,000, not all of whom were in possession of a ticket, were entertained by the Wagon Works Silver Band.

The home side boasted nine players from Gloucester, who provided the half backs and most of the pack, with Bristol providing most of the backs. The visitors were drawn entirely from the Leicester club, and included six internationals, against three in the home side.

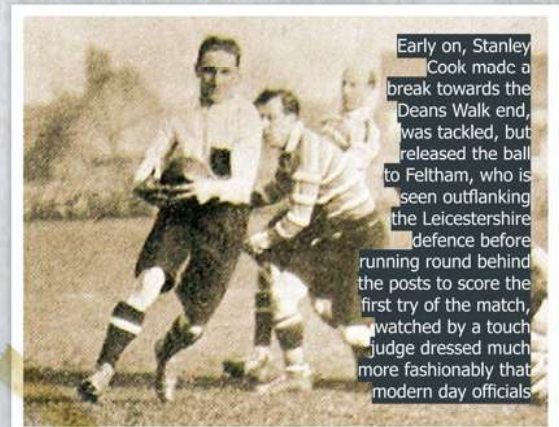
The teams were (* England internationals):

Gloucestershire: R C W Pickles (captain); T Spoons, L J Corbett (Bristol), S Cook (Gloucester and Cambridge University), H Feltham (Bristol); W Dix, T Millington; G Halford*, T Voyce*, S Smart*, F W Ayliffe, A Hall, J Harris (Gloucester), J S Tucker, P J Williams (Bristol)

Leicestershire: J Wilkinson; E Haselmere, N Coates, P W Lawrie*, A M Smallwood*; G W Wood*, F M Taylor*; G Ward*, F Taylor*, W J Allen, C W Cross, D J Norman, Walter Buckler, J Wickson, William Buckler (all Leicester)

A Williams try allowed Gloucestershire to turn round 10-0 ahead, and the second half almost started in sensational fashion, Frank Ayliffe running straight up the centre of the field, with Tom Voyce alongside, but the scoring pass was dropped.

Gloucestershire started to run amok, Stanley Cook running it in behind the posts, before Tom Voyce seized on a loose ball to put Feltham in for his second try. Stanley Cook soon added a second of his own and Gloucestershire's fifth.



Early on, Stanley Cook made a break towards the Deans Walk end, was tackled, but released the ball to Feltham, who is seen outflanking the Leicestershire defence before running round behind the posts to score the first try of the match, watched by a touch judge dressed much more fashionably than modern day officials

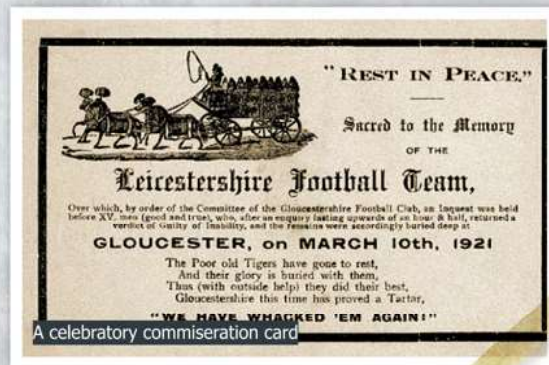


The Gloucestershire pack on the rampage; from the left in white jerseys are Harris, Tucker, Williams, Smart, Ayliffe and Voyce

Leicestershire finally managed to get on the board with a dropped goal, but tries from Corbett and Spoors rounded off a resounding 31-4 victory. An ecstatic Kingsholm was definitely the place to be that afternoon.

A week or so later, there were further celebrations at Kingsholm, when Gloucester entertained Llanelli. Behind at half-time, Gloucester came back to win 11-8, and thus repeat their triumph of 1898-99 when they registered victories over all four leading Welsh clubs – Newport, Cardiff, Llanelli and Swansea – in one season. Devon Albion were the only other English club to achieve this.

The following season, Gloucestershire won the south-west group of the County Championship with a massive 34-3 win over Cornwall at Kingsholm in their final match. They again met Surrey in the semi-final at Kingsholm. As before the visitors were strengthened by internationals from all over the place, including two brought in late on, who played for Blackheath and were deemed to qualify on residence grounds because they lived in an adjoining county! It did them no good as Gloucestershire romped home 30-0, and went on to complete a fine hat trick of County Championship titles with a 19-0 win against North Midlands at Villa Park.



A celebratory commiseration card

“ THE MATCH ATTRACTED TREMENDOUS INTEREST, ALL THE SEATS IN THE GRANDSTAND BEING SNAPPED UP WITHIN A DAY OF GOING ON SALE ”



Stanley Cook standing on his head as he completes a somersault after touching the ball down at the Worcester Street end