

# GLOUCESTER AND EXETER – THE HISTORY

## LONG LONG AGO

The Exeter Club was founded in 1871-72, but the first recorded match was against Exeter Training College, later known as St Luke's, on 26th October 1873. The Gloucester Club was founded in 1873, but the first match, also against students, was earlier in the same month, on 4th October against the College (King's School).

Seven years later, the two Clubs met for the first time, when Gloucester travelled to Exeter on in October 1890. Exeter won the forward battle, but the Gloucester backs were superior. Their two tries garnered two points, and their two conversions were worth four in the 6-3 victory. A couple of months later, Gloucester, described as "the all-conquering Spa brigade", won a lot more comfortably in the return match at the Spa. The Gloucester committee had somehow managed to select 16 players for this match, and showed a rather parochial attitude in telling the one who had travelled furthest to get to the game that he couldn't play, and kept the local lad selected in error. Their 14-0 victory came from ten tries and two conversions. It's a sign of the times that, with the scoring values of today, this would have been 54-0.

The Clubs continued to meet occasionally in the seasons up to the Great War, but not at all during the inter-war years.

## POST-WAR FIXTURES

Fixtures resumed after a gap of 35 years at Kingsholm on 5th October 1946. Sid Walter of Exeter only just made it to the game. Required that day to give evidence in court, when he finished his testimony, the police prosecutor requested that Walter be excused, so that he could dash to catch the train to Gloucester, and the magistrate let him go. Gloucester won a well-contested game 12-6, with Willie Jones controlling the game from stand-off, and kicking a conversion and a dropped goal to add to Douglas Kear's brace of



John Dix and Bob Clewes

tries. This ended Exeter's unbeaten away record, which, with the war intervening, had lasted since the 1938-39 season.

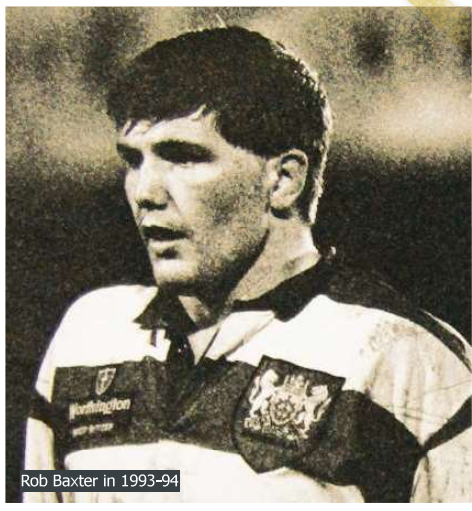
Thereafter, home and away fixtures in alternate seasons became the norm, with those in Exeter often forming part of Gloucester's end-of-season tours to the West Country, which were legendary for their popularity and lack of sobriety. On tour in April 1963, Gloucester managed to defeat Redruth, but two days later came unstuck 3-5 at Exeter, who thus recorded their first win over Gloucester in the 22nd game between the dubs, and after 73 years of trying.

Gloucester recorded their largest victory, 75-6, in November 1975, scoring 18 tries, which equalled the most ever in a Gloucester game. Bob Clewes ran in four tries, but even that was outdone by John Dix with five; only two were converted.

On 27th February 1982, the teams met in the John Player Cup. Gloucester were at the peak of their powers in a season which saw them lose only three of 41 fixtures. They powered past Exeter, 34-3, scoring seven tries, including a hat-trick by Phil Pritchard on the wing and two by Steve Mills at hooker. Gloucester went on to reach the final at Twickenham, where they shared the trophy in a 12-12 draw with Moseley.



Phil Pritchard, who scored a hat-trick in the 1982 cup match



Rob Baxter in 1993-94

In 1993-94, Rob Baxter spent a season with Gloucester, and made six appearances for the First XV, all of which were won, and included a try against Stroud. He also made at least 14 appearances for the United.

Fixtures between the Clubs continued until 1994-5, when Gloucester won 72-5, Don Caskie scoring a hat trick. This was the last encounter during the amateur era, by which time Gloucester had won 46, drawn three and lost eight of the 57 games played.

## INTO THE PROFESSIONAL ERA

With the advent of league rugby, Gloucester had taken their place in the top tier, whilst Exeter were several levels down. However, by that time, Tony Rowe had started his involvement with Exeter, initially in 1993 with his company, SW Comms, as sponsor, when John Baxter, father of Rob, was Chairman.

They won Division 4 in 1996, and Division 3 in 1997. This led to several seasons in Premiership 2, which became National Division 1. In their first season there, they only avoided relegation thanks to a reorganisation of the leagues. With the advent of professional rugby, Rowe proposed that the Club become a limited company, and this happened in 1998, with Rowe as Chairman.

For ten years, the only opportunity for fixtures between Exeter and Gloucester came in cup competitions, and that happened on 21st December 2002, when the teams were drawn together in the Powergen Cup. Exeter were captained by ex-Gloucester hero, Dave Sims, with Rob Baxter packing down behind him. Gloucester won 35-6,

and went on to win the Cup, beating Northampton 40-22 in the final. This was the season in which Gloucester won the Premiership by 15 points, but failed to be crowned champions, because play-offs were introduced for the first time, and the final was lost to Wasps.

Exeter moved from the County Ground to Sandy Park in 2006, and their form improved further, but missed out on promotion, finishing as runners-up of National Division 1 in two successive seasons, 2007-09. 2009-10 saw a change in the league structure, with the creation of the Championship, and the introduction of play-offs to determine promotion. Exeter again finished second in the league, behind Bristol, but the teams met in a two-leg final. Although Exeter won the first leg 9-6 at Sandy Park, Bristol were hot favourites back at the Memorial Stadium. However, Exeter were utterly determined to seize their chance, and were much the better team on the day, winning 29-10.

## EXETER'S RISE TO THE TOP

Their life in the Premiership started with a home game against Gloucester. Many of the Kingsholm faithful travelled down the M5 on 4th September 2010, confident of seeing their team teach the newcomers a lesson, but Exeter thoroughly deserved their 22-10 victory, and a new chapter in Exeter's history was underway. For several seasons they finished mid-table, but won the LV= Cup in 2014.

They finished second in the league in 2015-16 and 2016-17, but the play-offs saw them crowned as English Champions in 2017. They thus became the only club to have won all four top tiers of English rugby. For the last three seasons they have finished top of the league, but only last season did that result in them becoming Champions. But they were Anglo-Welsh Cup winners in 2018, and reached the top of European rugby with their triumph in the Champions Cup in 2020.

In the professional era the record between Gloucester and Exeter has been very different from the amateur era. There have been 26 fixtures, of which Gloucester have won 11, lost 14 and drawn one. Exeter gained their biggest win, 46-10 on 8th April 2018, and did the double over Gloucester for the first time in 2019-20, a mere 130 years after those first encounters back in the 19th century.



Sinbad scored one of Gloucester's two tries in September 2010