

GLoucester Rugby
Heritage

NEW ZEALAND CONNECTIONS

The first overseas tourists to the UK were the New Zealand Maoris in 1888-89. This was before Kingsholm had been acquired, so, when they came to Gloucester, they played at the Spa, against a Gloucestershire side with eleven Gloucester players, including Ron Grist who scored the home side's only try, against one goal and two tries for the visitors.



Ron Grist

Gloucester faced the might of the All Blacks at Kingsholm on their first tour in 1905. The record crowd was impressed by the size, speed and skill of the visitors, who could be identified from numbers on their jerseys, a practice only adopted later in England. New Zealand scored ten tries, whilst Gloucester were depleted by injuries. The final score was 44-0. Dai Gent who played scrum half for Gloucester, reported that "we were too light - they simply trod on us and went on!" Over the years many other opponents of the All Blacks have echoed his sentiment.



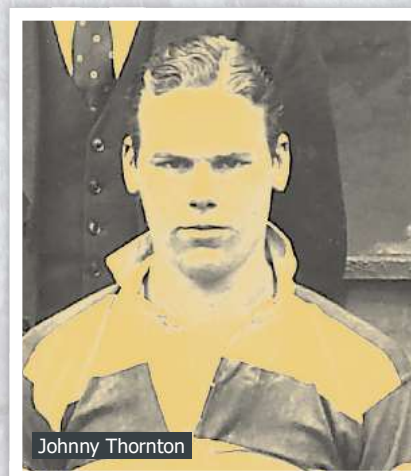
Dai Gent

At the end of the tour, three All Blacks – Duncan McGregor, Simon Mynott and Charlie Seeling - turned out for Gloucester and helped them to defeat Leicester 20-0. McGregor stayed on in Gloucester for several years, starting a sportswear business, in which Arthur Hudson became his partner and later sole owner when McGregor returned home. McGregor left his All Blacks jersey, cap and ball in Gloucester, where they were passed down to Allan Townsend, and are now displayed at the Rugby Museum in New Zealand.

On their next tour in 1924, New Zealand played at Kingsholm against Gloucestershire, who selected five Gloucester players – Tom Millington, Sid Brown, Dr Taylor, George Thomas and Stan Bayliss. They matched the All Backs formation with only seven forwards. It was a much closer contest, in part because of atrocious conditions, but it also took heroic defence by the home side to hold the visitors to 6-0.

Both World Wars brought many allied servicemen to these shores, which gave rise to New Zealand Army teams keen to play at Kingsholm. In 1919, a strong NZ side, which had previously defeated RAF and Canadian opponents, scored two late tries to overcome Gloucester 15-12. In 1946, a NZ Army XV won 31-0 against a strong Combined Services XV bristling with Welsh internationals and Johnny Thornton, Gloucester's most recent England international, who spent the whole match tackling like a dervish.

The All Blacks came to Kingsholm for the first match of their 1972 tour, and were confronted by a Western Counties side boasting seven Gloucester players – Peter Butler, John Bayliss, Mike Burton, Robin Cowling, Alan Brinn, Dick Smith and John Watkins. Butler was the busiest at full-back, confronting waves of New Zealand attacks as they romped home 39-12. The



Johnny Thornton



Peter Butler & John Watkins

Counties points came from a Burton try, which Butler converted and added two penalties.

Next up were two New Zealand clubs. Gloucester secured a memorable 18-6 victory over Taranaki in 1979. It was Gloucester at their glorious best as they dominated the forward battle. John Watkins scored three tries, Steve Boyle another, and Peter Butler converted one. In 1984, Auckland visited, but it was a case of *veni vici* (but little *vidi*). The game was heard rather than seen thanks to a thick fog blanketing Kingsholm. It would have been cancelled, but the Auckland manager insisted on the match being played, reporting that his players had all cheered when told that Kingsholm would be on their tour itinerary. Such was the fame of the ground that they all wanted to be able to say that they had played at Kingsholm, and it is believed that they won 34-3.



Paul Holford, Dave Simms & Richard West

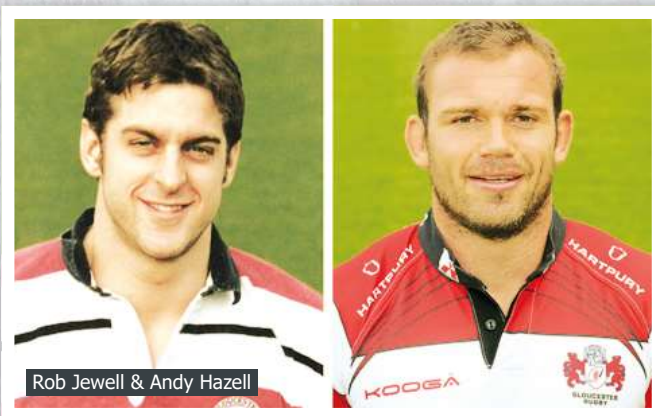
One match was played at Kingsholm in the 1991 Rugby World Cup – NZ v USA. The Shed rooted for the underdogs, and the Eagles acknowledged that they had never enjoyed such raucous support, but they went down 6-46, Terry Wright scoring a hat trick.

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On the 1993 All Blacks tour, England Emerging Players, captained by Dean Ryan, were the opponents at Kingsholm. The Gloucester representatives were Paul Holford on the wing and Dave Sims and Richard West in the second row. Despite a Sims try, the ABs won 30-19. They have not returned to Kingsholm since – they were invited to play Gloucester in 2009 in a match designed to demonstrate the suitability of Kingsholm to host matches during RWC 2015, but their financial demands were so huge that Australia were engaged instead.

NZ U-21 appeared in 1997, winning 35-6 against a South West U-21 team featuring five Gloucester players – Rob Jewell, Paul Knight, Andy Robinson, Ed Mallett and Andy Hazell.

An oddity in 2000 was a Rugby League international between New Zealand and Lebanon, all of whom were Australians of Lebanese extraction. NZ included Henry Paul and Lesley Vainikolo, both of whom later changed codes and played for Gloucester. The Volcano scored his first try at Kingsholm, and NZ won 64-0.



Rob Jewell & Andy Hazell

The Barbarians celebrated their 125th anniversary in 2015, and included several NZ players on their visit to Kingsholm, where a gale forced the closure of the Worcester St stand. Gloucester were blown away 62-14.

During the professional era, Gloucester have signed a number of New Zealanders, most of whom have made a big impression – they will be the subject of a separate article.