

GLOUCESTER RUGBY HERITAGE

31 DECEMBER 2022

GLOUCESTER V LONDON IRISH

London Irish has given the opportunity to Irish exiles living in the London area to get together and play rugby since 1898. The team always provide Gloucester with the stoutest of challenges.

The London Irish rugby club was founded in 1898, as it was felt: "There is a need for a sporting club in London for Irishmen." The newly formed club's first game was played on 1 October 1898 against Hammersmith, and Irish won 8-3. London Irish soon found their feet and fixtures against Blackheath, Rosslyn Park, Saracens and Wasps were soon established. The First World War and the subsequent troubles impacted negatively on London Irish, and it was not until the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922, that an influx of Irish players began to turn the fortunes of the club around. In the late 20s the commencement of fixtures against Leicester and Cardiff reflected the club's return to competitiveness.



John Dix

Bob White

Dick Smith

London Irish did not have a proper home ground until they settled at Avenue Road, Sunbury-on-Thames. The first game there was on 5 December 1931 against London Welsh, and the result was an 8-8 draw. During the Second World War the ground was requisitioned for food production. As a consequence, when the war ended the ground was in no condition to be used for rugby. Home games were played at the Rectory Field, Blackheath. Playing numbers fell, and apart from an excellent 1947-48 season, the exiles struggled. The Club did not return to Sunbury until 1959, and coming home must have been inspirational, because the 1959-60 season resulted in only two defeats. Sunbury remained home until 1999.

For one season (1999-2000) Irish shared the Stoop Memorial Ground with Harlequins, and from 2000 to 2020 their home games were played at the Madejski Stadium, Reading. From 2020 London Irish have found a new home, sharing with Brentford FC.

In 2002 Irish won the Powergen Cup, beating Northampton 38-7 in the final. In 2007-08, the exiles had a good run in the Heineken Cup, making it to the semi-final where they lost 15-21 to Toulouse. In 2006, Gloucester and Irish fought out a thrilling European Challenge Cup Final, which went to extra-time, before the Cherry & Whites prevailed 36-34. In 2009 London Irish made it to the Premiership Final, only to lose 10-9 to Leicester.

London Irish were comparative newcomers to Gloucester's fixture list, the first game being played in 1973 at Kingsholm, when Gloucester won 27-9. John Dix, Bob White and Dick Smith scored tries. Eric Stephens kicked three conversions and three penalties.

So far, the teams have met 79 times, with Gloucester winning 49, London Irish 29, with a single drawn game.

20 May 2000: London Irish 40 Gloucester 42

Gloucester team: Chris Catling; Joe Ewens, Terry Fanolua, Chris Yates, Rob Jewell; Simon Mannix, Elton Moncrieff; Adey Powles, Jawad Djoudi, Andy Deacon, Rob Fidler, Ian Jones, Adam Eustace, Kingsley Jones (captain), Ed Pearce.

Replacements: Brian Johnson, Neil McCarthy, Ian Sanders, Mark Cornwell, Byron Hayward, Stefan Sanchez.



Tries: Powles (2), Catling (2), Jewell, Eustace, Cornwell; Conversions: Mannix, Hayward; Penalty: Mannix.

This was the last game of the season, and played at the Stoop, which Irish were sharing with Harlequins that season. It was an amazing contest of 13 tries. Gloucester played a quarter of the game with 14 men, having Deacon and Powles yellow carded. From the start it was apparent that both teams were determined to throw the ball about. After 18 minutes a wonderful Gloucester move, which involved nearly every player, resulted in a penalty. Adey Powles took a quick one and burrowed over. It was his 74th appearance, and his first try! Although Catling scored before the interval, Irish had also been scoring tries, in fact three of them, and they turned round 25-13 to the good.

Replacements: Ludovic Mercier, Olivier Azam, Adam Eustace, Gary Powell, Luke Narryway, James Bailey.

Tries: Foster, Hazell, Simpson-Daniel, Forrester; Conversions: Lamb, Mercier; Penalties: Lamb (2), Mercier (2).

In the second half Gloucester produced exhilarating rugby. After 46 minutes Mannix and Yates combined to put Jewell over. Two minutes later Ian Jones stormed up the middle, and eventually Catling crossed. Not to be outdone, Irish responded with three tries of their own, and led 40-25. Yet again the pendulum swung and Eustace scored after selling a dummy, and a length of the field move resulted in a try for Cornwell. Finally, Ian Jones hacked on, Powles gathered and burrowed in again for his second try.

This was another exciting game that went down to the wire. Irish were first on the board with two Barry Everitt penalties, before Foster, following up a Tindall kick ahead, won the race to the touchdown. Lamb having a good game until injured, converted from the touch-line, and added a penalty before Hazell burst through from a line-out to score. Delon Armitage pulled back a try for Irish, before Lamb and Everitt exchanged penalties before half-time, at which point the score was 18-13 to Gloucester.

Even then Irish could have won, but kicker Jarrod Cunningham missed a penalty from half-way. The final whistle resulted in a pitch invasion from the visiting Cherry & Whites supporters.

21 May 2006: European Challenge Cup Final: Gloucester 36 London Irish 34 (after extra time)

Soon after the start of the second half, Everitt dropped a goal. Everitt and Mercier with two, exchanged penalties, before Simpson-Daniel intercepted and ran in from 70 yards, with Mercier converting. Gloucester were 12 points ahead, but Irish then set up siege in the Cherry & Whites' 22, scoring two close range tries to square the score at 31-31. Everitt only had to kick the conversion and Irish were home, but he missed, and that meant extra-time.

Gloucester team: Rob Thirlby; James Simpson-Daniel, Mike Tindall, Anthony Allen, Mark Foster; Ryan Lamb, Peter Richards; Patrice Collazo, Mefin Davies, Jack Forster, Jonathan Pendlebury, Alex Brown, Peter Buxton, Andy Hazell, James Forrester.

Irish dominated that period but could only score from an Everitt penalty. Then Forrester kicked ahead, but appeared to have overdone it. He followed up with remarkable speed to touch down perilously close to the dead-ball line. Reference was needed to the video to confirm the score. Even then Irish could have won, first by a missed dropped goal from Leguizamón, and then at the very death when Everitt missed with a penalty chance.