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Peter Arnold ...



BETTER LATE . . .

Let's start with a quotation from Ed. O' The Shed, the Shakespeare of Shedhead:

*Glaws is Glaws, an 'Barf is Barf,
An' never the twain shall meet,
'Sept at the Match,
In a stripey scarf,
Down the end o' Worcester Street.**

Which just makes it all the more regrettable that we've had to wait so long this season.

As everyone knows, this game should have been played on December 30th last, but fell victim to a spell of hard weather calculated to freeze the ballcocks off a brass cistern. Then we thought it had been rearranged for March 9th, but *that* coincided with an England training session, and several Bath players were expected to worship at the feet of Jack Rowell that weekend, so - according to the RFU - couldn't really be in two places at once. As a consequence, both sides are now required to play three hard League fixtures in eight days, which, on the face of it, is hardly ideal for anyone.

There's another sort of late, too. The only other time I can recall a game starting at such an advanced hour was the famous occasion when the opposition had transport trouble, and the game kept getting delayed in increments of 15 minutes. In those days, the bar closed half-an-hour before kick-off, and the poor stewards had to keep opening up again until the actual start time was finally established.

"Ar!" quoth one good old regular. "They shutters was goin' up and down like an whore's nightie!"

All of which I find very useful this evening, because so much has been spoken and written about this game, and the preceding Cup Semi Final that it's difficult to add anything which isn't just repetitive waffle.

Everyone is perfectly well aware that Gloucester will be out to gain two valuable League points this evening, and furthermore to avenge that frenetic defeat in the Cup, a dual ambition which the players are perfectly certain they can achieve. Bath, on the other hand, are not, I'm told, all that happy with the way they played in that Semi Final, believing themselves to be suffering from a little rustiness after a lay-off from competitive rugby. A lay off, I'm bound to add, which was no longer than the one endured by Gloucester. Be that as it may, our welcome and respected visitors believe that they have a point or two to prove, and are out to do just that.



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Anyway, a defeat, this evening, would put a severe dent in Bath's double ambitions, and would have Dean Richards' boys up at Leicester positively salivating into their isotonic drinks. Although perhaps they should remember that *they* still have to face the rejuvenated Gloucester, albeit on their own midden.

In some ways, Bath *can't* win this evening. If they win well, then it will be no more than a lot of commentators expect. Put 30 points on Gloucester, and there will be those who opine that it should have been 50. If they win narrowly, there will be mutterings to the effect that cracks are appearing in the edifice that is the finest club side this country has seen in a generation or more.

On the other hand, should Gloucester win, it will be a nine days wonder, and the home side will get all the credit.

One aspect of this evening's game - if it hasn't changed in the interim - which pleases me is that Mr. Warren is down to officiate. Should that still be the case, then this season's two vital meetings between Gloucester and Bath will have been controlled by Bristol based referees, Mr. Morrison having taken the Cup game. That seems to me to be entirely appropriate. Games between the three great West Country sides were always something special, and something of a private affair. It's nice to keep it in the family.

Which brings me nicely to the traditional words of welcome to a side whose visit to Kingsholm is always one of the most eagerly anticipated, and valued, of the season. It's also a fixture whose provenance stretches back through the mists of time, and is estimable for that fact alone.

Sincere welcome, Bath. Don't leave it so long, next time.

**Actually, he wrote quite a lot more, but as we haven't yet started to print on flame-retardant paper, I can't really bring it to your notice. Perhaps he'll reproduce it in a future Shedhead.*

KIND WORDS FOR THE SHED

I was struck by a comment or two in the Bath Cup programme. They came from the pen of the amiable Jim Clipson, my opposite number at 'The Rec'. He writes:

'Not all changes, of course. Once there was The Shed, and there is still The Shed, full of balanced, analytical commentators, always ready to appreciate the finer points of the opposition's game plan'.

So there you are, Sheddites. Someone loves you. In the same publication, the quaintly-entitled 'Pulteney Muse'* adds his own reflections:

'If you go to Gloucester, and everyone must experience that once in their lives, you will hear the notorious "Shed", surely the noisiest place in rugby. OK, some of their comments are near the knuckle; they realise that, and that's exactly why they are made, but generally, they are humorous rather than vindictive.'

The 'Muse' expands on his theme, including all Gloucester supporters, at home or travelling:

'Wherever they go, you know they are around. Sometimes, some people get a little upset with their one-eyed enthusiasm, but it has to be said, if they don't support their own team, who will? Just occasionally, I wish we were a bit more vocal.'

It's nice to see someone appreciating that fact. Apart from the Gloucester players, of course, who value the crowd contribution enormously. At one point, down at Bath, Scott Benton was actually conducting the orchestra, trying to get the last decibel out of them. And why not?

Still, it's good to receive such informed comments, from, let's say, a not entirely expected source. Just to show that we are somewhat eddicated in these parts, I'm tempted to quote Macauley. "E'en the ranks of Tuscany could scarce forbear to cheer."

**We don't have Muses at Kingsholm, of course. Nothing so classical. Just the odd broken-down scribbler or so.*

It puts me in mind of a story, quoted by the esteemed Charlie Haddock, concerning a rather esoteric joke made by a couple of Bath fans to a pair of travelling Elver Eaters. The final remark was "That's irony. I don't suppose you get much irony at Gloucester." The riposte was instantaneous "No Our Mum does the ironying in our family!"

GANGWAY!

I'd better get the Awful Warning over early. Please don't try to watch the game from aisles, steps or gangways. The Fire Officer, quite rightly, doesn't like it. I know it can be difficult, but you'll appreciate that there are very good reasons for it, especially in a packed ground.

If it's any consolation, the problem is much worse at Bath.

WASPS TOUR OFF

I don't know if you recall, but in the programme for the Cup Quarter Final against Wasps, I wrote a piece about a projected tour that Wasps had arranged to play in an international tournament in Santa Barbara, California. The reason why Malcolm Sinclair, Wasps' resident Scot, asked me to do it was that, like most clubs, the Sudbury outfit had had their season disrupted, and hadn't had much chance to promote the trip. Anyway, it was felt that one or two Gloucester supporters might like to go along.

I now have to tell you that, not only is the trip off, but the whole tournament has been cancelled as well. Apparently, the tournament was the brainchild of a local entrepreneur, who was simply in it to make a dollar to two. Somehow or other, he managed to infringe the rules, and the International Rugby Board stepped in, and banned the whole thing.

I thought we were all open and professional, these days?

FACTS AND FIGURES

When I was preparing Player Profiles for the programme for the Cup match, Andy Mitchell provided me with some vital statistics about the Gloucester squad. He did this in his capacity of Club Registration Officer, and I'm very grateful to him for taking the time and trouble to do so. Some fascinating facts came to light.

Did you know, for example, that Mark Mapletoft's middle name is Sterland? (Well, there's posh, as Barry John remarked on one memorable occasion) and that his birthday falls on Christmas Day? That might explain his electrifying pace when coming up into the line. He's probably had a lifetime of getting off the mark quickly in order to get his rightful quota of prezzies.

Pity Nel Matthews isn't fit yet, because he celebrates his 26th birthday tomorrow, as ever was.

I was also struck by the physique of some of our younger players. Consider this.

Trevor Woodman stands 5ft 11in tall, and weighs in at 18st and 2lbs. For Phil Greening, the figures are 5ft 11in. and 16st 0lbs, and for Phil Vickery, they are 6ft 3in and a slightly incredible 20st 8lbs.

That gives a combined weight of a possible future Gloucester front row of 54st, 10lbs, or just short of seven hundredweight!

When I quoted those figures to one knowledgeable local observer, he said he wasn't a bit surprised. Apparently, when the three of them were compromising the England Colts front row, the Colts pack was just 29lbs lighter than the full England eight that season.

BSE or not, there could be an awful lot of beef in the Gloucester pack next season.

SEE YOU IN THE CLOSE SEASON

It comes as an unpleasant surprise to remind you that we only have one more First XV match scheduled for Kingsholm after this evening. And that, of course, is the vital League game against Saracens on April 27th. The arid wastes of the summer beckon. However, we could all forgather at the Spartans ground on the evening of Friday, June 28th, and/or all day on Saturday June 29th. The occasion? The Gloucester Beer Festival, organised for charity by Gloucester Rotary.

I won't go into great detail now, because I gave the affair a fair old plug in last Saturday's programme, but I mention it for two reasons. First, tickets - at £4.00 - are to be available from our own office, as well as from other local rugby clubs, and second, because the organisers would like to think that some healthy minded real ale fans from Aquae Sulis, here this evening, might like to partake of this memorable event.

See you there.

COACHES TO THE STOOP

I've had a note from Bab Barge, telling me that a coach to the Harlequins game, next Saturday, will cost you £7.50, and that it will leave Kingsholm at 11.00am. As Bob Says, the lads need your support.

He also sends thanks to everyone who toddled along to Bath and Wasps, and hopes you'll keep on keeping on for the rest of the season. At least.

GARETH'S MADE IT AT LAST

Today's Match Mascot is Gareth Firth who is nine years old - fairly ancient by the standards of some recent Mascots.

Mind you, he would have been quite a bit younger if he'd done the job when he originally wanted to. Gareth was originally booked in to officiate at the Bath game scheduled for December 30th, but we all know what happened to that.

We could have slotted him in for one of the intervening games, but no. Bath he had, Bath he wanted, and Bath he was going to stick to. So here he is this evening, in all his glory.

Good on you, Gareth! That sort of determination could see you running out again in cherry-and-white. Thanks for sticking to your guns.

continued on page 20

HOW JIM CLIPSON SEES IT



It's nice to have a view from the Opposition, now and then, and in this case, it comes by way of a *quid pro quo*. For the past few seasons, Jim Clipson has been asking me to provide a short piece for the Bath Match Magazine on the occasions when Gloucester have been visiting the Rec. a request to which I have been very happy to accede.

It seems only courteous to extend the same invitation to Jim. That I have done, and he accepted with alacrity. Here it is, and I particularly draw to your attention the beginning of his final paragraph. Apparently, you don't only have to be a fair editor to do my job at Bath, you also have to be psychic.

Incidentally, Jim asks me to insert the usual disclaimer which appears in various places in Bath programmes, namely that "the views expressed on this page are those of the Author, and not necessarily those of the Bath club - or for that matter - of Gloucester RFC."

Gladly, Jim. We would never have expected anything else.

I am writing this article the day after the Cup semi-final, deadlines being difficult due to holidays and Easter. So please bear that in mind in the light of any developments and also in results that might have influenced the league positions of both teams. One thing for sure is that league or cup, friendly or competitive, tonight's match will not lack for passion and commitment whether it is title-critical for Bath or relegation-vital for Gloucester.

Viewing the Cup semi-final from the cramped and totally inadequate Bath terraces I must confess I was disappointed. The game trailed away into passion, commitment and some moderate technical execution. Thankfully the weather was kind or else standing for two hours prior to kick-off, increasingly preoccupied towards 3 o'clock with defending one's spot from drunken latecomers, might have been even less palatable. Somewhat ironic of course to write that in the Gloucester programme when Kingsholm is potentially one of the best grounds in the country. With ambitious plans in train and a team that is beginning to look like a side worthy of both its imposing surroundings and its illustrious predecessors I believe Gloucester to be a club with a serious future. Those once rather patronising Bath eyes may be a little envious in a season or two if Cherry and White plans go right, good luck to you.

With only a handful of games left in the season there is no clear plan of what will happen next year, what a shambles! Will there be three, four or five in Europe? Will there be 10 or 12 in Courage League 1? I am sure Gloucester would prefer a place in the premier league by merit and not by default, increasing the league is one thing but to do it without even a playoff system is a farce. When the bottom side can give away nearly 100 points, at home to one 7 places above them what possible justification is there in allowing that team to remain to sup at the premier league table? The English structure is in severe danger of falling into disrepute, rather like in Wales, where three or four sides dominate, three or four achieve respectability and the remainder are lucky if they only lose by fifty points to the top clubs. Well look what happens at National level!

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I wrote at the beginning of the season that I expected Gloucester to have a thin time but that they would stay up on points difference over Saracens with the last game of the season being critical. My tip was that both teams would end up with 10 points, although after yesterday's pathetic showing by West Hartlepool, maybe Saracens will have picked up some rather easier points than Gloucester at Sudbury. You will know by the time you

read this. If relegation is abandoned then there is a case for invalidating the entire season, a side fighting to achieve a specific league position is likely to put up sterner resistance than one which knows it is there next season regardless of results. We know tonight's match won't need artificial motivation and I am sure Gloucester hearts are beating confidently, we shall see!

Peter Arnold (cont.). . .

TAILPIECE

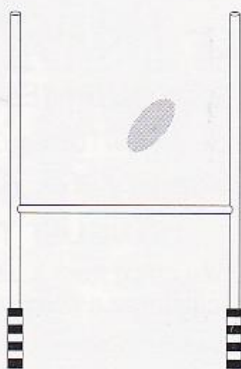
Impressed though I was by Bath's Match Magazine's special edition for the Cup Semi Final, I feel I must point out one slightly horrendous terminological inexactitude perpetrated therein.

The Editor, Jim Clipson, who graces pages elsewhere in this programme, provided two pages of match details concerning every Pilkington Cup Final which featured either Gloucester, Bath or both. Nice idea. But . . .

In his description of the memorable match which we tied with Moseley after extra time, he concludes with the phrase; "Butler scored all Gloucester's points".

Well. We all know that Pete Butler was one of the finest kickers the game has ever seen, but I didn't know he was good enough to land 'em from the Stand. Which he must have done, because he wasn't even playing!

I imagine that Jim will be hearing from Paul Ford's solicitors any day now.



Ed Martin ...

This just has to be the quote of the decade, as far as Gloucester RFC goes:

I'd rather play for Gloucester for 10p than leave home".

Anyone living in these 'ere parts knows just who spoke these 10 words. For those from the now defunct part of this land once known as Avon, you should know that it's not worth upping the ante to 20p.

You see, Mike Burton reckons that this player is worth at least £200,000 of any club's cheque book. Rob Andrew and Sir John Hall were reported to have increased their offer to more £85,000 a year to join Newcastle.

Some former Bath player called "Coochie" reported in his "America On Line" internet column that Phil Greening, "the burly 20 year old England 'A' hooker", preferred to stay "with his beloved hometown side, Gloucester."

To anyone in this area of town, that was not news. Young Phil lives near enough to this ground to be able to hear the cheers when the Cherry and Whites score (we, he would be able to if he was at home when Gloucester is at home).

This season, the hacks have been queuing up in Oxford Road to record the thoughts of Mr. Greening. And while they were rushing into print with suggestions that Phil will be the next England hooker, Sky Television did a piece in The Jockey — and Mike Burton now predicts that the 20 year-old will be one of the two hookers in next year's British Lion tour side.

Some people think that Phil is mad not to take the money and run. Fair enough, the temptation must have been very strong. But he has taken the pressure and the media hype exceptionally well. He is still almost

knocking me down as he pedals on his bike from Oxford Road to the ground (when will I learn not to walk round the side of Sherborne House when Phil's around?)

He's still the same old Phil. And this City is very fortunate to have someone like him around. As rugby goes into the professional era 100 years after "the split" and when a top club's telephone number has a "£" sign in front to signify the annual wages bill, it is refreshing to note that one of the rising stars of the England set-up wants to stay with his home town club, even if they only gave him 10p.

Finally, more on rugby on the internet. It is interesting to note that on the Bath page (unofficial) their match report is of the match Leicester won by one point (we had hoped to report on how the "reporter" saw Bath's cup win against Gloucester). Cardiff have what could end up to be the best rugby home page on the 'net'

(<http://www.cf.ac.uk/ccin/main/sport/crfc/cardiff.html>)

The page, which has just been launched, is in the process of development, but what is there so far is very good - and it is up to date!

Courage League One

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pt
Bath	13	12	0	1	421	181	24
Harlequins	15	11	0	4	455	235	22
Leicester	13	11	0	2	339	164	22
Wasps	14	8	0	6	290	276	16
Sale	14	7	0	7	255	273	14
Orrell	14	6	0	8	226	331	12
Bristol	13	5	0	8	199	312	10
Saracens	14	5	0	9	237	374	10
Gloucester	13	3	0	10	199	275	6
W Hartlepool	13	0	0	13	223	423	0

HOW VIKKI SEES IT



All sorts and conditions of Gloucester-oriented people have done us the honour of writing pieces for this page over the course of the past couple of seasons. These last few months have been so frenetic that I haven't liked to bother the club officials all that often, because it really has been the busiest period for them that I can recall, and they probably have better things to do.

The advantage of that situation has been that I've been able to open this page to a very wide variety of people, who don't normally get much of a platform, but whose interest in, and loyalty to, Gloucester RFC is nevertheless undoubted. However, there has been one sad lack. We haven't had anyone of the feminine persuasion gracing this spot. This, we are about to rectify.

Vikki Hyett is an unashamed, even proud, Sheddite, who misses very few games, home or away. So here's what she thought about Semi Final day, and hopes for this afternoon.

Well who would have thought that before Christmas Gloucester would reach the semi-finals of the Pilkington Cup and draw Bath away? I travelled down to Bath, as usual, on Andy Mitchell's coach, but beforehand our little group met in the Jockey (along with hundreds of others travelling on the club coaches) at 10.30am to have a drink or two, and the general feeling was that if one listened to one's heart Gloucester would win but if one listened to one's head Bath would win!! We arrived at the Rec (Rec by name and Rec by nature!) in plenty of time in order to get a good view. As regular visitors to the Rec will tell you — if you do not get there early the only thing you see is the ball being kicked up in the air! The atmosphere did not seem like the usual cup game, but then again there is never much atmosphere at Bath at the best of times! However, the grandstand side of the ground during most of the game seemed like The Shed revisited - 'Glawster' could be heard everywhere! I believe this helped lift the lads in the second half and at one point I thought we could win - however, it wasn't to be, and I came away from Bath very disappointed. I'm looking forward to the league game on Wednesday - and I have a feeling in my water that we can put one over them. It's about time and if we do, I'm sure there will be lots of hangovers on Thursday morning.

Now about today's game against the old enemy Bristo - this is always one of my favourite fixtures. I work at Nuclear Electric with many Bristolians and there is always plenty of friendly banter between us (especially with Paul Shone and Richard Nash - who will hopefully have made the trip up the M5 today). I am hoping for a Gloucester win in order to win a long-time bet with an old friend - every time the two teams meet we bet on a drink - if Gloucester win he coughs up and if Bristol win I cough up. We're about even at the moment.

Let's hope the RFU announces the 12-team league for next season soon so myself and my rugby companions Mike Warrior and Malcolm Ashdown can organise our trip to West Hartlepool - a trip we always look forward to. I couldn't make the trip last September, and I have been told by many people that I missed another good weekend away - so here's to the next one - I will definitely be there!

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Here's Vikki Hyett with one of those Newcastle players. Hasn't he got a brother who plays a bit, somewhere ?

Don't read too much into this picture, though. I'm told that Vikki's preferences run more towards a certain blond, hard-tackling Scottish centre. Play your cards right Donald....



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Ian Smith

Gloucester & Scotland

Peter Arnold (cont.). . .

COACHES FOR HARLEQUINS

I'm having to prepare this programme very early because of the advent of the Easter holidays. Even printers are entitled to time off now and then. As a consequence, at the time of writing, I don't have full details about coaches for the League game against the on-song Harlequins at the Stoop on Saturday next.

I am told, however, that coaches will be laid on, and I can only suggest that you enquire from the Fair Geraldine in the office.

STOP PRESS — a little bird called Bob Barge has now been in touch, and I gather that the cost of a coach ticket will be £7.50, leaving Kingsholm at 11.00am.

NICE TO SEE YOU, DOMINIC !

Our Match Mascot today is Dominic Harris, who has achieved the ripe old age of six. He attends Longlevens Infants School, which puts him well within reach of Longlevens RFC, in the fullness of time.

More to the point, he's the grandson of our own Trevor Pritchard, so the pedigree is obviously fine. Thanks for coming, Dominic ! Have a great day.

TAILPIECE

A while ago, I happened to switch on the telly, and by sheer chance, found myself watching Terry Wogan, of all people, interviewing Mickey Skinner, he of the remarkable line in waistcoats and bow ties, who is becoming a highly effective commentator, these days.

The tenor of the conversation was that Mickey Skinner, known in some circles as 'The Munch' because of his predilection for eating soft centres, was acknowledged to be something of a hard man in his playing days, and which others of similar persuasion did he respect most ?

His response was immediate and quite without any doubt at all.

"Mike Teague", he breathed, in hushed, awe-struck tones, quite unlike his usual delivery. "Oh ! Mike Teague ! The mighty man from Gloucester. Oh ! That man !"

He then proceeded to tell a couple of Mike Teague stories, one of which I'm pleased to pass on to you.

It concerns the World Cup Final at Twickenham, when England lost to Australia. I reproduce Mickey Skinner's words as closely as I can remember them.

"Mike got crunched, really crunched, in the middle of the field, by a big Australian forward, and knelt there with claret all over the place.. Will Carling ran over, very concerned. 'Mikey', he said, 'Mikey, are you all right ?'

'Ar ! said Mighty Mike. Ain't got time to bleed !' "

Sounds just like the Teaguey we know, doesn't it ?

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Ed Martin ...

Those of you that took a peek at Stuart Barnes' new organ — the December issues — will have noticed no less than two separate articles on the Cherry and Whites. The "Home Turf" section featured Gloucester's other cathedral — Kingsholm — with a description by Louis de Villiers, South Africa's Sportswriter of the Year, on watching the Harlequins match in The Shed, before widening into Kingsholm in general.

De Villiers refers to two publications — this august tome and the wonderful Shedhead, the "nasty and biased . . . funky fanzine" that Sports Pages bookshop in London is wanting to stock. The good people in what is probably the world's best sports bookshop pride themselves in stocking all the soccer club fanzines that they can get their hands on. But rugby 'zines are a rarity — word has it that Bath either have one or had one, as did a club "up north".

The second article was headlined: "Where Did We Go Wrong" in which Chris Hewett asks Richard Hill what happened at Saracens on November 4. There was a memorable line by Mr. Hewett, who I seem to remember once working the toy department of the Bristol Evening Post, *If Gloucester fail to survive the dogfight come April, they will regard the events of Bonfire weekend with the sort of relish Guy Fawkes reserved for firelighters*; he wrote. Nice one Hewett!

Two articles of Gloucester in one magazine is, to say the least, unusual. Could it be that Barnesey, who is the editor of First XV, is a closet Glawster supporter. Ever since he hung up his boots and decided that the word processor was better than a Bath strip, he has said some nice things about Gloucester in the Daily Telegraph and

on Sky. My, it's a crazy world! Next thing we know he'll be playing hooky from Sky's studio on stilts and popping over to have a chat with the supporters in the Shed.

In these 'ere parts there is the hope that Gloucester can turn Bristol over today beat Bars on Tuesday night (the moment of truth for Barnesey) and continue winning in seven day's time . . . there's no harm in dreaming.

One wonders if Katie Coker (who my spell checker tells me should be "Cooker" but I ignore it), of the Citizen's toy department, is hastily looking up what is probably the best opening to a newspaper sport report ever written in the English language, *"The million-to-one shot came in. Hell froze over. A month of Sundays hit the calendar . . ."* That was the legendary lead-in to a sports report of a shock result written by Shirley Povich (Shrilly Pivot, according to the gizmo) in the October 9, 1956 issue of the Washington Post. Ms. Coker will hopefully be able to paraphrase Mr. Povich's intro in Wednesday's Citizen after a home win against Bath!

COURAGE LEAGUE ONE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pt
Bath	13	12	0	1	421	181	24
Harlequins	15	11	0	4	455	235	22
Leicester	13	11	0	2	339	164	22
Wasps	14	8	0	6	290	276	16
Sale	14	7	0	7	255	273	14
Orrell	14	6	0	8	226	331	12
Bristol	13	5	0	8	199	312	10
Saracens	14	5	0	9	237	374	10
Gloucester	13	3	0	10	199	275	6
W Hartlepool	13	0	0	13	223	423	0