

DINNER FOR BILLY JOHNS

By Malc King

Billy Johns

Billy Johns was a forward, renowned for his dribbling abilities. He played 265 games for Gloucester between 1902 and 1913; he was captain 1904-06; he made 22 appearances for Gloucestershire; and he won 7 caps for England. At the end of the 1908-09 season, when he had won his first four caps, playing in all four of England's International matches - on 16th January 1909 v Wales at Cardiff, on 30th January 1909 v France at Leicester, on 13th February 1909 v Ireland at Lansdowne Road, Dublin, and on 20th March 1909 v Scotland at Richmond - he was honoured with a celebratory dinner in Gloucester on 22nd April 1909. The following day, the Citizen published a report on the event:

GLOUCESTER FOOTBALLER HONOURED

COMPLIMENTARY DINNER TO W JOHNS

W Johns, the popular Gloucester and County forward, was entertained to a complimentary dinner at the New Inn Hotel, Gloucester, on Thursday evening, in recognition of his being selected to play for England in four successive International matches. Last year, it will be remembered, A Hudson and A E Wood were similarly entertained. Mr E S Bostock Smith, President of the County Union, was the prime mover in arranging the function, and his endeavour to make the gathering representative of county football was in every way successful. The President occupied the chair, and on his left was the guest of the evening. Others present included Messrs F N Cowlin (Bristol), C E Brown, Guest Holman, J H Tratt (Stroud), C J Wolff (Lydney), S Carter, R A Roberts, F J Hannan (Clifton), J Hanman, A Fielding, H M Taynton, F Fielding, W Rasbach, A Hudson, D R Gent, J T Brookes, Alex Johns, Victor Rowles, J G Washbourn, J Oates (Bristol), Sidney S Starr, T L Carter, etc. The table decorations (provided by the President) were again a special feature, red roses, charmingly arranged, predominating. At the top table were miniature goal posts, with flags, tastefully decorated.

The Chairman announced a number of apologies regretting inability to be present. The President of the Rugby Union (Mr T C Pring) wrote: "Everyone connected with rugby must realise that the game is passing through a critical time, and it is essential that everyone interested should do what he can to keep the game alive, and the clubs and players together. We are going back here (Exeter), losing ground fast, whilst Association is making great strides, and I fear it is the same in a great many places. It is certainly no time for deserting amongst our clubs." Mr W S Donne (Somerset, and a member of the English Selection Committee) wrote: "No player was ever more deserving of his cap than Johns, and no player ever justified his selection better than he did. He was a most useful acquisition to the English side." Other apologies were from Messrs T Graves Smith, M J Waters (Surrey), A W Vears, L Vears, J W Jarman (Bristol), W Sawyer (Cheltenham), A J Gardner, John Fielding, M Barry Lewis, etc.

Following the toast of "The King", the Chairman submitted "Our Guest" in complimentary terms. After detailing Johns' football career, Mr Bostock Smith congratulated the Gloucesterian on the honour conferred on him, and said he had won his cap fairly and squarely. He only hoped his example would be followed by other Gloucestershire players, for Johns has shown by his perseverance and sticking to his game that the highest honours could be obtained. Mr Bostock Smith asked Mr Johns' acceptance of a small token (a model football) as a souvenir of his International honours, and as an incentive to his son, when he came along, to follow in his father's footsteps. Mr J H Tratt (who was down to propose the English Rugby Union, but which toast had to be deleted owing to the absence of the Rugby Union officials) supplemented the remarks of the Chairman, and said Sir Thomas Rich's School and St Catharine's Rovers, with whom Johns first learnt his football, were to be congratulated on turning out one of the finest forwards who ever donned an English jersey. The toast was received with great enthusiasm and musical honours. In response, the International said that a year ago when he attended a similar function given to his old colleagues, Hudson and Wood, he little thought that he would gain his cap. He must say the honour came upon him as a surprise, for he recognised that with such a big field to select from a player was somewhat lucky to get in the English fifteen. His only regret was that H Berry was not also selected, but he had little doubt his turn would come another season. He should like to say that one of the first to congratulate him was Berry. Mr Johns in conclusion, thanked Mr Bostock Smith for what he had done for him, for he attributed the honours he had gained entirely to the President of the County Union.

Mr Tratt next proposed "The health of Mr Alex Johns and Miss Johns" (father and sister of the International), which was enthusiastically received, and suitably acknowledged by Mr Johns, senior.

Mr C E Brown submitted "The Chairman", and spoke of the President's splendid and enthusiastic work on behalf of Rugby football in the county, noting many kindly actions to players who had been injured and other things of which outsiders knew very little. Mr Brown added his congratulations to Johns on gaining his cap, and also to the President on being elected the county's representative on the Rugby Union Committee. He was sure Gloucestershire's interest and football generally would be well looked after by Mr Bostock Smith. The toast was received with musical honours and repeated rounds of cheering. The President, in the course of his reply, spoke of the necessity for good fellowship amongst the clubs in the county, and remarked that when a club was down through ill-luck it should not be ignored but given a helping hand. After referring to his advocacy for junior and old boys' clubs – combinations which he was certain were absolutely necessary for the future of the good old game – Mr Bostock Smith acknowledged the hearty sympathy and loyal support he had received from everyone during his two years in office as President, and promised all the help he could give to his successor, Mr C E Brown. The Chairman further paid tribute to the splendid assistance he had received from Mr K A Roberts, the County Secretary, who had proved all through his right hand. With regard to his election as representative of the County on the Rugby Union Committee, Mr Bostock Smith said it would always be his endeavour to uphold the interests of Gloucestershire and Gloucestershire players.

The other toast was “Old Internationals”, proposed by Mr F N Cowlin, and responded to by Messrs Gent and Hudson.

During the evening an excellent musical programme was contributed by the following: Messrs D R Gent, G Romans, C J Knight, J Welshman, S Clarke, A Purton, Gues Holman, and C Shaw.