

“JIMMY” BOUGHTON

By Malc King

The father and elder brother of Hubert James Boughton played for the Club in its very first match against the College (King’s School) in 1873. It is possible that Jimmy himself played in this match, because he was then a schoolboy at the College, but we have no record of individual players in the College side. However, it was not long before he played for the Club.

Jimmy proved a gifted sportsman, who became involved as player and administrator for many sports clubs in the City, and was later referred to as “the father of sport in the City”. However, his principle loves were football (as rugby was then known) and cricket. He was captain of Gloucester rugby for 2 seasons, 1883-85, when the Club lost only 9 matches out of 39 played. He was also captain of the Gloucester Cricket Club, enjoyed the distinction of playing for the County alongside W G Grace, and was responsible for the County playing first one, and later two matches each season at Gloucester.

Whilst still playing rugby, he became Treasurer of the Club in 1879. In this capacity, he led the defence of the club against criticism following the damage done to the Spa by spectators attending the floodlit match against Rockleaze.

When he gave up playing, Jimmy expanded his role in encouraging and organising sport in Gloucester. In 1891, Rowland Hill, Secretary of the RFU, commented on the upward-looking and supportive relationship that officials of the Club, notably H J Boughton, had with the RFU. By this time, Jimmy was referee rather than player, and refereed at county level in 1891. He became the first president of Gloucester Rugby Club in 1892, but resigned in 1896 in order to avoid a conflict of interest with his duties at county level; he resumed as President for a couple of seasons before he died.

He was central to the initial organisation of rugby at county level – in 1878, the Gloucester County Football Club was formed by members of the Gloucester club, led by Jimmy, and he became the first Chairman. When this was superseded by the County Union in 1890, Jimmy was unanimously elected as the first President, and was re-elected every year until 1900, when he resigned and again became President of the Gloucester club. In 1897, he also became the first county representative on the RFU committee, a position he retained up to the time of his death in 1902.

Jimmy had strong views on how the game should be played, and went on record as believing that “to play for the love of the game should be the desire of any footballer”. He opposed the creation of a Cup Competition on the grounds that it would lead to rough play, ill temper and partisanship.

He reported to the 1889 AGM of the Club on attempts to procure their own ground, presenting various options, although none were then thought to be affordable. Later in 1889, he identified a possible site at Kingsholm, but it too was regarded as prohibitively expensive at an estimated cost of £4,000.

On 1st January 1891, following the death of Mr Bretherton sen, Jimmy became a partner in the firm of solicitors, which henceforward carried on business as Bretherton and Boughton. If Commodore Vears had the vision for the club to acquire its own ground at Kingsholm, then it was Jimmy Boughton who was the facilitator. In March 1891, he persuaded Hatton, a local brewer and a fellow Freemason, to buy the Castle Grim estate, with a view to selling it on to the (Rugby) Football Club. In May 1891, he engaged in a public exchange of letters with Vears about the need to find the Club a separate ground away from the Spa (although he did not advertise that this was well in hand). He was instrumental in setting up the Gloucester Football and Athletic Ground Co Ltd, which then purchased the Kingsholm ground from Hatton (who made a tidy profit), and in arranging the mortgage to cover part of the purchase price. Jimmy himself bought 100 shares in the company, and this stake facilitated his appointment as one of the first directors of the company. Unsurprisingly, he also acted as solicitor for the company.

Jimmy was recognised by his contemporaries as “a wonderful organiser, and a man tremendously keen on the advancement of the game”. “What he did for Rugby Football in the West cannot be measured in mere words, but it would not be too much to say that this Gloucester sportsman, more than anyone else, “made” the game in a centre that was honoured by his activities.” He died suddenly in 1902, at age 43, of heart failure brought on by whooping cough.