

THE CITIZEN

THURSDAY, JANUARY 3, 1946

GLOUCESTER'S 72 YEARS OF RUGBY

"W.B." RECALLS HIGHLIGHTS OF HISTORY

(PART I.)

PARTICULARS FOR THE RECENT B.B.C. BROADCAST OF THE HISTORY OF THE GLOUCESTER RUGBY FOOTBALL CLUB WERE SUPPLIED, BY SPECIAL REQUEST, BY "W.B.," FOOTBALL CRITIC FOR "THE CITIZEN" FOR 47 YEARS, BUT WITH THE TALK LIMITED TO FIVE MINUTES, MANY INTERESTING ITEMS HAD, NATURALLY, TO BE CUT OUT.

"W.B.," whose long experience of Gloucester Rugby dates back to the late eighties at the Spa, has placed at our disposal his original manuscript, which we have pleasure in reproducing as affording, especially to the younger generation of enthusiasts, a review of some of the features and achievements of the famous city club.

The Gloucester Football Club, started in 1873 with the small membership of 45, has long been recognised as one of the leading organisations in the country, and the remarkable achievements accomplished during the long unbroken period of its existence fully justifies the city's claim to the distinction of being regarded the Rugby centre of the West.

At the outset the handling game caught on with the public, and for the first 72 years Rugby football has reigned supreme in the realm of sport in the city and district.

There is the story of a local schoolboy who, on being asked the question: "What is Gloucester noted for?" promptly replied : "Its football team and the Cathedral." That lad must have been a keen Rugby enthusiast.

18 Years at the Spa Ground

For the first eighteen years of its existence the club's headquarters were at the Spa ground - the centre at that time for sports activities in Gloucester. Mr. Frank Hartley, who came from London, where he had captained the Flamingoes, one of the best clubs at that period, was the prime mover in introducing the game into the city, and he was chosen captain for the first three seasons.

He was succeeded by Mr. J. F. Brown who, perhaps, more than anyone else, was responsible for creating so much interest in Rugby with the sportsmen of Gloucester. For seven seasons Mr. Brown led the team, and under his inspiring leadership the club recorded some notable successes. In 1882-3 Gloucester enjoyed an unbeaten record, and among the victories was the decisive defeat of Cardiff by one goal six tries to nil.

Pioneers of the Passing Game

It is claimed for Gloucestershire they were the pioneers of the passing game, and they gave Cardiff an object lesson in this art in the match mentioned.

The Welsh Club is rightly credited as being the first team to exploit the four three-quarters in 1885-6, but two or three years previously

Gloucester had adopted the seven backs' formation, fielding one back, three threequarters, and three half-backs.

In 1878-9 Gloucester came very near losing their headquarters at the Spa. A match was arranged to be played against Rockleaze (Bristol) by electric light. There should have been four lights, but one failed entirely, and another was uncertain. The result was that the spectators, watching the game from outside the railings enclosing the ground, got out of hand and a great deal of damage was done to the shrubs and walks.

The Corporation gave the Club notice to leave, and ordered that no more matches should be played at the Spa.

But the football public protested strongly against the ban, and a petition was set up, signed by 3,000 citizens, and presented to the Corporation. As a result the Council unanimously reversed their decision and the Club was allowed to continue in possession of the playing pitch.

A Big Wrench

Fortunate in having a succession of enthusiastic officials and players of the highest class, Gloucester's reputation was well maintained and interest in the game grew apace.

But in 1890-1, with T. Bagwell as captain of one of the best teams in the history of the Club, there was an unfortunate sequel to a memorable match with Swansea. A too liberal application of salt on the frozen ground in order to make the pitch playable ruined the grass, and the Cricket Club, joint tenants of the ground, decided the footballers must find another "home."

It was a big wrench to leave the old ground with so many associations, but the inevitable was accepted, and the Club moved to the present headquarters at Kingsholm, now one of the finest and best equipped Rugby Union enclosures outside Twickenham.

The Spa Days

Among those prominently identified with the Club in the Spa days were Messrs. H. J. Boughton, T. Graves Smith, and A. W. Vears. The two former captained the team and Mr. Boughton later was the first representative for Gloucestershire on the Rugby Union Committee. Mr. Vears was chairman of the Gloucester Club for a long period. His son, Mr. Gordon Vears, well-known in Rugby circles in the Midlands, where he played for Moseley and Leicester, appeared for Gloucester before he removed to Walsall, and captained the city team in 1907-8. Major Lindsay Vears, who also played for Gloucester, was another son.

The city also had the assistance of many fine players, nearly all of whom were locally connected. These included, beside the Brothers Boughton, J. W. Baylay, H. J. Berry (a full-back of outstanding ability), H. E. Taylor, G. Coates, W. H. Taylor, and W. Jackson (three-quarters), T. Bagwell, S. A. Ball, W. George (half-backs), A. F. Hughes (back), and a host of forwards, G. J. Witcombe, A. Cromwell, A. E. Healing, A. Collins, R. C. Jenkins, T. Collins, A. C. Williams and H. V. Page, to mention only a few names.

First International Player

In the 'eighties, provincial club players, in the south, at least, were rather overlooked by the Rugby Union for international honours, and it was not until 1894 a Gloucester-born player was selected to play for England. He was Walter Jackson (a clever centre three-quarter), and he had removed to Halifax before obtaining his cap.

Later, however, honours were more freely distributed, and Gloucester players who have gained the coveted distinction include C. A. Hooper, F. O. Poole, the brothers Percy and Frank Stout, C. Smith, C. Hall, A. Hudson, D. R. Gent, A. E. Wood, W. A. Johns, H. Berry, D. Holland, S. Smart, G. Holford, A. T. Voyce, T. Coulson (who also played for Coventry), C. C. Tanner, M. A. McCanlis, A. D. Carpenter, L. E. Saxby, H. Boughton, G. W. Parker, Peter Hordern, and D. Crichton-Miller. The latter was honoured by Scotland.

Move to Kingsholm

A company was floated to purchase the Kingsholm site, and a large number of shares was taken up by keen rugby followers. Burton provided the opposition for the opening match, but though strongly represented - the brothers Frank and E. Evershed, G. A. Marsden, J. C. Gorton, W. S. Lowe and other well-known Midland players were included in the side - Gloucester made an auspicious start winning by 2 goals 3 tries (18 points) to nil.

Mr. (later Sir) Rowland Hill, honorary secretary of the Rugby Union was referee. The two teams and other guests were entertained to dinner by the Directors of the Company after the match. One of the directors (Mr. Sidney S. Starr), and treasurer of the Football Club was later secretary to the Company until his resignation last year.

THE CITIZEN

FRIDAY, JANUARY 4, 1946

GLOUCESTER'S 72 YEARS OF RUGBY

NOTABLE MEN AND GAMES AT KINGSHOLM

(CONCLUDED)

HERE IS THE SECOND AND CONCLUDING INSTALMENT OF THE HISTORY OF 72 YEARS OF RUGBY IN GLOUCESTER, COMPILED BY "W.B.," FOR 47 YEARS "THE CITIZEN'S" RUGBY SPECIALIST.

At the new ground at Kingsholm Gloucester made great headway, and many notable triumphs over the strongest teams in England and Wales have been recorded. The City earned the title of "Record Smashers," for Swansea, Cardiff, Newport and Llanelly all lost unbeaten certificates at the now famous enclosure.

In 1923 the jubilee of the Club was made a special occasion. A match was arranged between Gloucester and an international side got together by the late Mr. W. S. Donne, then president of the Rugby Union - a game won by the Club after an exciting contest. In the evening there was a banquet, at which the competing teams, old players and many invited guests attended. Altogether a grand day for Rugby in Gloucester.

The Gloucester Club's progress since the very humble start in 1873 to the jubilee celebration was emphasised by the increase in membership

from 45 to 2,504; while the receipts for the season totalled £3,296 as against £11 from all sources 50 years previously.

Since then Kingsholm has become the absolute property of the Club, and the sanguine hopes of those early pioneers was thus fully realised.

£10,000 For Service Charities

During the war period Gloucester had to surrender their ground to the Civil Defence authorities, but despite difficulties the Club carried on with a series of scratch matches, chiefly with Service teams, for two seasons, but circumstances compelled a suspension of Club games.

The Gloucester supporters, however, had some compensation in the staging of Services International and other representative games which attracted splendid "gates," and yielded well over £10,000 for Service war charities.

For this magnificent result the Gloucester Club officials and committee, Dr. Alcock, Mr. Arthur Hudson, and Mr. A. T. Voyce giving an enthusiastic lead, had every reason to be gratified. To-day the three old internationals are at the head of affairs in the resumption of the game, and are being splendidly supported by their old colleagues and sporting public. With so much enthusiasm Rugby in Gloucester should continue to remain the Rugby centre in the West.

Some Club Personalities

DR. ARNOLD ALCOCK, who was "capped" for England in 1907, is in his 22nd year as president, and takes the keenest possible interest in all that pertains to the advancement of the Club and Rugby football generally. He has accomplished wonderful work during his long term

of office, and enjoys well-deserved popularity amongst the members and supporters.

JOHN BROOKS. Late chairman of committee and vice-president, had a record of over 30 years' official association with the Club. He died in 1939.

ARTHUR F. FIELDING. Another ex-chairman and vice-president, whose valuable business experience has been a great asset, especially when set-backs had to be faced.

Forty-Three Years' Service

ARTHUR HUDSON'S record is one to be proud of. Eighteen years as a player (five times captain), and 25 years as secretary. He is now acting as hon. secretary. Mr. Hudson is record Club try-getter both for aggregate (236 in 260 matches) and for one season (41). Played eight times for England and represented Gloucestershire in 28 matches. The greatest thrill in his football career was probably watching his son Gordon playing for the England XV against the New Zealand Army touring team at Twickenham.

A. T. VOYCE present chairman of committee and vice-president. Can claim 26 years' service with the Club. His record of 27 appearances for England in international matches is easily the best for a Gloucester player. Has been president of the Gloucestershire Rugby Union, and is still a member of the Executive. Represents the county on the Rugby Union Committee.

WALTER TAYLOR, was captain for four seasons, played in 30 matches for Gloucestershire, and appeared in several International trial games. He was one of the fastest wing three-quarters of his day, and scored some wonderful tries. As a sprinter on the track he won numerous races including 100 yards Midlands championship.

Boughton's Goal-Kicking Record

HAROLD BOUGHTON (full-back), present captain at the age of 35. First played for Gloucester when only 17. Holds a remarkable goal-kicking record, having obtained an aggregate of 1,419 points up to the end of 1940-1. "Capped" for England in all three matches in 1935.

T. MILLINGTON and W. DIX. - Famous pair of half-backs who challenged comparison with England's pair - Davies and Kershaw. Dix was reserve to Kershaw on several occasions, and once, at Twickenham, when the latter was doubtful owing to an injury, the Gloucester player was told to prepare to turn out. But Kershaw put in an appearance a quarter of an hour before the kick-off and reported fit.

A. D. CARPENTER. - Gained big reputation as a hooker. Holds record for most appearances for Gloucestershire (56). Played up to the end of 1938-9 season when he was 38 years of age. Played for England against South Africa in 1932, and had the honour of being invited to join the Barbarians on tour on one occasion.

GEORGE ROMANS (full back). - Captained the team for four seasons and part of a fifth. Was reserve to H. T. Gamblin for England on seven or eight occasions but never gained his "cap."

S. SMART. - Player and committee man. Captain in season 1921-22; twelve appearances for England, and 26 for Gloucestershire.

G. HOLFORD. - Another captain of Gloucester and international. A very fine front-row forward, Played 38 matches for Gloucestershire, and captained the team which defeated North Midlands in the County Championship final 1921-22.

Many other players and officials have rendered signal service in many ways, and to their united efforts and keen enthusiasm the Gloucester

Club is greatly indebted for the proud position it holds in Rugby Union Football.

Families Of Footballers

Gloucester can boast of one rather unusual record. Thirteen players from only two families appeared for the Club at various times. Of the Hall family of seven brothers, the eldest (Charles) gained his England cap, and represented Gloucestershire on 35 occasions. Albert, George, Ernest and William also played for the county. The latter, after a period with Coventry (for which Club Ernest also joined), went to Oldham, and was selected for two Rugby League tours in Australia.

There were six brothers in the Cook family, three of whom (Jim, George and Charles) gained county distinction. The two former later went North, and did splendid service for Hull and Oldham respectively in the Rugby League. Like the Hall brothers, the Cooks were all gifted players.
