

GLOUCESTER FOOTBALL CLUB

OPENING OF THE NEW GROUND

THE DINNER

On Saturday evening the Directors of the Gloucester Athletic Ground Company, Limited, entertained the Gloucester and Burton teams, the Committee of the Club, and one or two others, to dinner at the Spread Eagle Hotel. Mr. A.W. Vears (the Chairman of the Directors) presided, and those supporting him at the head of the table were Mr. T. Robinson, M.P., Mr. G. Rowland Hill (hon. Sec. of the Rugby Union), and Messrs. H.J. Boughton, G. Cummings, C.H. Dauncey, T. Gurney, T.G. Smith, S.S. Starr, W.S. Lowe (captain of the Burton team), T. Bagwell (the Gloucester captain), and S. Davis. Among others present were Messrs. H. Mousell, John Fielding, Conway Jones and C.E. Brown.

The loyal toast of "The Queen and the Royal Family," having been honoured amid enthusiastic cheering.

Mr. Vears said he ventured to predict that that day would stand in the annals of Gloucester as a red-letter day. (Applause). When the new ground was completed it would stand second to none as the finest football and recreation ground in the West of England. (Applause). He had heard it said that the promoters of the scheme - the directors of the Company - must be men of great faith, and to a certain extent he hoped it was true, for they would always strive to make it a substantial success. Their best thoughts and their best efforts would be given to deal with it in a thoroughly comprehensive manner, and to popularise the ground. He was quite sure that every person in that room hoped that it should be the centre of all kinds of out-door sports and recreation. (Applause). It was not in their power to command success, but they could - and they would - do their best to earn it. They were honoured by having the presence of the member for the city, Mr. Robinson. (Loud applause). He was quite sure that they were all pleased to see him there that evening. They were also honoured with the presence of Mr. Rowland Hill (loud and continued applause) than whom no greater authority upon football existed. They were thankful in having had for their opposing team such exponents of the [game] as the Burton team. (Applause). There were also several other gentlemen in the room who deserved their thanks. He should now propose the toast, which he supposed was the toast of the evening, namely, "Success to the new football ground, " and he should ask Mr. Robinson to speak to that toast, and afterwards, any of his brother directors who wished to do so.

Mr. Robinson, whose rising was the signal for loud and continued cheering, said he rose in obedience to their call to say a few words in support of the toast. He was not much of a football man himself, but still

he always took an interest in anything which his fellow citizens took an interest in. They were now celebrating the opening of the new ground, and he could not help thinking how popular the game of football had become. He remembered playing football when he was a boy, but it was vastly different football to what was played now. Football in Gloucester had become so popular that the ground at the Spa had become too small for the club, and it was owing to the energy of their fellow citizens - the Directors of the Football Ground Company - that the scheme was formed for the new ground. He was very much surprised to see what the directors had accomplished during so short a period as they had been in possession. He thought what had been done was due to their pluck and energy, and they deserved success, and he felt convinced that the public would support them in every way to promote the prosperity of the new ground. The weather that day had been most unfortunate, but he believed, altogether, they might say that they would finish up a very successful day. He wished the club every success, for they deserved it. He also hoped that they would have as good a record as for the previous year, for on them they were relying to keep up the popularity of the game. They were very glad to welcome their friends from Burton. (Hear, hear.) They had not been successful, and although he could not criticise the game, yet he believed they played pluckily, and he hoped they would not be discouraged, but pay a visit to the city again, for they would always meet with a hearty welcome. He congratulated his friends, the members of the Gloucester Club, upon their success that day. As he had said before he was not much of a football man himself, but what struck him during the time he watched the game that afternoon was the avoidance of any serious accidents, and he should like the game of football played so as, if possible, to avoid accidents. He should like to impress on all football players to manage things so as not to injure themselves or anyone else. He took a deep interest in the club, and he wished them every success, and he trusted they would do as well, if not better, in the future than they had done in the past. He thought the ground which had just been opened was equal to any other in this part of the country. (Applause.)

Mr. H.J. Boughton said that ever since the club had been started he had played an active part in what he considered the noble pastime of football. He had only to express the hope that the ground opened so favourably would prove a great success, and he would say that it rested chiefly with the public of Gloucester to make it such a success. He had been very anxious to see the club leave the cricket field on the Spa, and for two reasons. In the first place he had long been of opinion that the two games could not be played on the Spa, but a very much stronger reason was that he believed it to be in the interests of the Football Club to have a home of its own. Perhaps his part had been a very humble one, but he believed their efforts would redound to the interests of football in Gloucester - that their finances would improve and that their play would

improve. They would not be content with being one of the best clubs in the West of England, but they would not rest till they saw Gloucester county the champion county in England. They were within an ace of being so last year, and he believed that if the match with Lancashire had taken place on their own ground they would have made a good fight. The result was chiefly owing to the state of the ground and to the demoralised condition in which the Gloucester men went on the ground. He believed that the county team, and that meant the city team, would yet make Gloucester the premier county in football. If they would stick to the captain he believed success would attend their efforts. Another reason why he hoped to see Gloucestershire to the fore was because he should like to see some of their men playing in representative matches. He would not say that they had three or four men worth playing for England, but he would say that for the last two years they had a man good enough to play, in the person of Mr. G.J. Witcomb. (Applause and a Voice : "The finest forward in England.") He was not complaining of the way in which the teams were selected because with Mr. Rowland Hill as secretary they knew that the teams would be selected in the best possible way. It was Mr. Witcomb's own fault inasmuch as he did not go up to London to play in the trial match. Mr. Boughton concluded by expressing the hope that the new ground would be the headquarters of Gloucester Football for very many years to come. (Applause.)

Mr. Woodward, in also speaking to the toast, said that as an Englishman he admired all English sports, and it was in that respect that he took a great interest in the Gloucester Club. He mentioned that he had been a member of both the Football and Cricket Clubs from their formation, and while joining in the congratulations attending the opening of the new football ground he hoped the cricketers would not lose their old cricket field on the Spa. Treating the notice to quit in ignorance of its withdrawal, Mr. Woodward expressed the hope that the city member, taking as he did a great interest in everything that pertained to the welfare of the city, would guard their interests in this matter, and would keep the Park and Spa grounds, so to speak, on equal poise, because the boys and men wanting to play rounders and cricket had already three-parts of the ground in the Park, and they who wanted to take their children out, not necessarily to play, had only a small portion of the ground to walk round in decent comfort. He congratulated them on the very successful debut made that day, and trusted that they would go on and be as successful in the future as in the past. He congratulated Captain Bagwell on having won the opening match, the team generally on their success, and the Burton team on the very excellent manner in which they tried to win, trusting they might welcome the team again on some future occasion. (Applause.)

Mr. Vears assured Mr. Woodward that the notice had been withdrawn , and that there would be nothing to fear.

Mr. C.H. Dauncey and Mr. A.V. Hatton also spoke to the toast. The latter alluded to the great share which Mr. Boughton had had in starting the new company. Had it not been that Mr. Boughton kept the secret of the negotiations, which he (Mr. Hatton) had carried out in the purchase of the ground, in a manner and for a length of time which would have been beyond anyone else, those negotiations must have failed. During the 27 years he had been in Gloucester, Mr. Hatton proceeded to remark, there had always been the cry for attractions on the bank holidays in Gloucester, and the directors hoped to arrange for some big fetes on the ground on those days.

Mr. Vears said he would mention what he had hoped some other director would have alluded to, and that was that they fully hoped that the Company would prove a remunerative investment to the shareholders. He then asked those present to drink to "Success to the new ground," and this was done amid much enthusiasm.

Captain Bagwell then proposed the toast of the visiting team. He said that they had had a very pleasant match, which he attributed to the presence of a good referee, which the club did not often get, especially in Wales.

The drinking to the toast was followed with the singing of "For they are jolly good fellows."

Captain Lowe, in response, Thanked the directors for the magnificent way in which the Burton team had been entertained, expressing great pleasure at their first visit to Gloucester, congratulating the club on the possession of such a good ground, and wishing it greater success in the future than in the past.

The Burton team then joined their captain in drinking to the toast of the Gloucester team.

Mr. T.G.Smith then proposed the toast of the referee, the submission of Mr. Rowland Hill's name being received with prolonged cheering. So long, said Mr. Smith, as he remained hon. secretary of the Rugby Union, and he hoped that would be for very many years to come, so long, they might rest assured, the honour and integrity of the game would be maintained. Now that Mr. Rowland Hill had seen the new ground he hoped he would inform the authorities of its suitability, and that they might have a North and South match played on it.

The company having voted Mr. Rowland Hill a jolly good fellow in the usual chorus, that gentleman, in response, thanked them most heartily for the very kind manner in which they had received his name. He took it that they had confidence in the body with which he had the honour of being connected, and to find in these troublous days of football that they inspired confidence in the West of England was a very great satisfaction

and assistance to them. He was not quite a stranger to Gloucester. It had previously been his fortunate lot to see the enthusiasm of the Gloucester people in the game and the high standard of play of the Gloucester team. Some years ago his friend on the right (Mr. Boughton) pressed him to come to Gloucester, and it had been a great delight to him to see some of the old faces. Nothing was more likely to lead to success than a courteous and kindly consideration for old servants. He had been delighted to see the worthy member for the city taking part in his first football match, and he must congratulate him on being a very fine place-kick. (Laughter.) He strongly reciprocated one remark he had made to the effect that nothing was more likely to damage the game in the eyes of parents than the fact that they were able to say there were accidents in the game. Accidents were bound to arise in a game which called forth the highest quality of physical athletics, but the Union did everything possible to minimise those accidents. (Hear, hear.) They had passed the most stringent regulations to put down rough play, and they had a body of referees who were determined whenever they saw rough play to interpose and turn the player off the field. (Applause.) If that were done he thought there could not be any serious accidents. Rough and brutal play would always have their most determined opposition. He was delighted to say that in the match that day they did not see the slightest sign of rough play. The game was played in accordance with the best traditions of English sport. Both sides were extremely anxious to win, but the side that lost recognised that rough play would not help them to win, showing that they could accept defeat properly. (Applause.) He most heartily congratulated the Gloucester Club, on the play of the day, and he had confidence that they would carry on their best traditions and, if possible, be more successful in the future than in the past. Referring to Mr. Witcomb's inclusion in the greater teams, Mr. Hill said his name had been brought before the Union Committee, but it was extremely difficult to actually choose a man whose play they had not seen. They were continually hearing of wonderful players in this village and that town, and they had travelled a good deal over England to find out who were really the good players, but if these did not come up to play in the trial matches they (the Union officials) were placed in a very difficult position in selecting their teams. (Applause.) In three week's time an important match would be played in Gloucester between Western and Midland Counties. Several members of the Rugby Union would make a point of coming down, and it was for those in authority in the Midlands and West to do the utmost they could to get representative teams. He thanked them once more for the very kind manner in which he had been treated. He was inclined sometimes to say that his work in connection with football was over, but the evidence of kindness and courtesy which he met with in all parts of England made him cling to a game to which he was passionately attached. (Loud applause.)

The Chairman here intimated that the Burton team had to leave to catch their train, and three cheers were given for them as they left the room.

Mr. Gurney next proposed the health of Mr. Starr, the treasurer of the Gloucester Football Club. He thought Mr. Starr had done a deal of good work for the club and for the new ground, and he knew they would drink with hearty acclamation the health of an energetic and hard-working man like Mr. Starr.

Mr. Starr, in response to the toast, expressed thanks for the kind way in which he had been spoken of. He should like to mention that at the gate that afternoon they had taken £46 7s. 3d., and he believed they would have taken a much larger amount had the weather been favourable. £22 7s. 3d. was received at the 3d. entrance, which represented 1,789 persons; to the enclosure and pavilion £4 10s. 6d. was taken; £19 9s. 6d. was taken at the 6d. entrance, which represented 679 persons, and making a total inside the gate of 3,168 which was very satisfactory considering the weather. There was one thing, however, that he regretted and that was the way in which the tickets were sold and taken, for where there was such rushes and crowds it was a great trouble. He thought the time was not far distant when they would have turnstiles, and he should like it to go forward to the public that the Gloucester Football Club intended to have them at the earliest possible date, at least when they could find some which were thoroughly reliable, for he hoped in time they would be constantly in use. He thanked them very much for the manner in which they had received the toast.

Mr. Boughton then rose for the purpose, he said, of proposing the toast of several gentlemen in the room. He referred first to their friend, Mr. Kilminster, who had provided his band free of any charge whatever. On behalf of the directors, he also expressed thanks to Mr. Symonds for the providing of the brake, to Mr. Conway Jones and Mr. Pickford for decorations, and to Mr. Wood for giving the football. He had great pleasure in proposing the toasts.

Mr. Kilminster, in response, said that if at any time he could be of any service to the club he should only be too pleased.

Mr. Conway Jones and Mr. Pickford also briefly responded.

The Chairman next proposed "The Press"; and Mr. Starr the health of Mr. Boughton, and shortly afterwards the company separated.

NOTES ON THE OCCASION

Owing to the length at which the opening ceremony, the match itself, and the proceedings at the dinner are reported in our columns, our notes on this auspicious occasion must be extremely brief. Those who had been

looking forward to the match with so much interest must have hailed last Tuesday's deluge as a great blessing, for it was surely to be expected after such a grand display of their forces, the watery elements would have left us completely alone for a season. But it was not to be so. Following up the stormy days which had succeeded the great deluge of Tuesday, Saturday bid fair to rival even that well-nigh unprecedentedly wet day, and gloomy indeed was the outlook for the day's proceedings. There had been considerable doubt as to the effect of playing on the turf so recently laid, but it was confidently said that if it was only fine no damage could possibly be done, the turf being on a sandy, quickly-drying soil. The hopes of the greatest optimist must, however, have gone down to zero when he awoke and saw the pitiless downpour of the morning. Doubts were generally entertained both in Gloucester and in Cheltenham as to whether the match would be played. But, of course, such a thought could not be entertained by the management. The match was played rather as a matter of necessity than of choice, but the result, so far as the ground itself was concerned, was such as to scatter the fears of the most extreme pessimist, and to justify more faith in its properties than was entertained by the most hopeful. We never saw such an open and a fast match played under such meteorological conditions, and the turf did not appear to be damaged in the slightest. Let it be thoroughly rolled this week, and the ground will be quite equal to the heavy strain which will be put upon it in the coming six months. Had the match been played on the Spa on Saturday the turf would have been spoiled for the season.

As for the match itself, while it may be said that Gloucester outplayed their opponents at all points, yet it cannot be said that the home team made any rings round the Burton men. Each point had to be fought for, whilst the city men had themselves to act on the defensive on more than one occasion. Gloucester began to press from the start, and the Burton men were on the defensive for almost the whole of the first half, and any hope which might have been entertained by the Burton men prior to the match must have been relinquished entirely after the first quarter of an hour's play. The visitors, however, played very pluckily during the second half, and though they did not succeed in making any points they prevented what at one time seemed possible - the adverse score reaching outrageously heavy proportions. The feature of the Gloucester forward play was the grand dribbling. Page and Healing were far ahead of their confreres in this department, the judgement shown (especially by Page) being exceptionally good. It would be well if the other Gloucester forwards would take a lesson from these two in this respect. They all have an idea of propelling the ball with their feet but very little notion of guiding it to their fellow forwards, and away from their opponents. Once or twice, too, the effect of beautiful passes by Page was quite lost on account of his fellows not quite knowing where to place themselves when he was on the dribble. Ball played a very fair game on his re-appearance on Saturday. He and George played well together, but the heeling out of

the forwards and the extraction of the ball from the scrums by the halves was not so conspicuous as usual. Bagwell and Powell played very well together, but Jackson and Taylor have yet to adapt themselves to one another. But very few opportunities presented themselves to the flyer, and those that did were lost through the passing going wrong, greater judgement in the use of Taylor's great speed being necessary. Hughes hardly ever played a better game, his saving on more than one occasion being A 1. The two Eversheds and A. Gorton were most prominent in the opposing pack, Marsden was the pick of the three-quarters, whilst Ward, who showed sterling qualities as a full-back, somewhat nullified the good impression which he created at times, by a number of mistakes.

The feature at the dinner in the evening was the admirable speech of Mr. Rowland Hill. A great authority on Rugby football, the Union has in him the ablest defender of the game. A little soreness has at times been felt in these quarters at the apparent oversight of this district by the Union in the selection of representative teams. It was well that this should be ventilated in Mr. Rowland Hill's presence. His answer shows completely that, if there is anyone who should be played in international matches, who is left out, the Union cannot be blamed. In less than three week's time a match is to be played in Gloucester under the auspices of the Union with a special view to finding international merit, and the authorities cannot do more than this. Mr. Starr was able to report a very good attendance at the match, taking the unfavourable conditions into consideration. More remarkable is the growth of membership which has taken place this year. On Friday Mr. Starr disposed of no less than 177 tickets, over 100 being got out in 75 minutes, and there were a large number of applications on Saturday. The number purchased up to Friday night was 665, or 113 more than were sold in any previous season. The extent to which Mr. Starr has pushed the interests of the club is evident in the following figures, it being borne in mind that Mr. Starr's first season was 1889-90. In 1885-6 there were 273 members; in 1886-7, 276; in 1887-8, 320; in 1888-9, 318; in 1889-90, 428; in 1990-1, 570; in the present season, 685.

An incident, which was more than regrettable occurred at the end of the evening's proceedings. Two individuals, well-known on the football ground, came to strong words over an incident of the past, in which the personal honour of one of the disputants was involved. Epithets of a far from complimentary character were bandied about, and an invitation to "come outside" was acted upon. Here reputations and persons were alike treated to indignity, and it is rumoured that legal proceedings are to follow. A further rumour, however, states that mutual sorrow at the occurrence prevails.