

The History of Gloucester RFC

This chronological history of Gloucester Rugby Football Club is taken from a manuscript written by Andrew White, Ph.D., Msc., BA., who is a lifelong supporter of Gloucester RFC and a regular stalwart of 'the Shed.'

No part of this material may be reproduced without permission from the author, who can be contacted via Gloucester RFC, Kingsholm..

If you wish to contribute to this history, or if you spot any inaccuracies, please visit the History Forum

| | |
|------|--|
| 1864 | First evidence of 'football' (as rugby was then called) games being played at the Spa ground. |
| 1873 | <p>(Sep) Gloucester Football Club, as it was then known, was formed following the following announcement in the Gloucester Journal on the 13th September 1873.</p> <p><i>"A meeting will be held at the Spread Eagle Hotel on Monday evening at half past seven for the purpose of enrolling members of a football club when a committee, captain and other officers will be appointed. Persons wishing to become members will please attend: J.P. Riddiford. Secretary pro Tem. 9th Sep. 1873"</i></p> <p>About 45 people attended and in the following week's Journal it was announced that: -</p> <p><i>"a football club has been formed in this city – the season's operations begin at the Spa on the first Tuesday in next month"</i></p> <p>Four fixtures played in first season.</p> |
| 1873 | <p>(Oct) First game. Gloucester v. College School. Captain; F. Hartley.</p> <p>Subsequent games were played at the Spa, which was owned by the Gloucester Cricket Cub and sub-let to the Gloucester Football club during winter months.</p> |

| | |
|--------|--|
| 1876 | <p>(Feb 12th)The first gate-taking fixture at the Spa, against the ‘Flamingoes’, a London invitation team brought to Gloucester by ex-captain F. Hartley.</p> <p>The post match hospitality was such that only one of the Flamingoes returned to London on Saturday night, the rest stayed in Gloucester until the next Tuesday!</p> |
| 1878 | Fifteen fixtures played this season, including the first game against Welsh opposition – Newport. |
| 1879 | <p>(Jan 30th) Gloucester play Rocklease, a Bristol club at the Spa, in an evening match under floodlights! A crowd of 2000 turned up and caused much damage to the park. The City Council then bans (rugby) football from the park, because of damage to shrubbery and bad behaviour from the dangerously large crowd.</p> <p>(September) Ban defeated following much controversy and press interest and a deputation led by the football club and the Headmaster of the Crypt School, who gathered a petition of 2,500 signatures. Many Crypt School old boys have subsequently represented the city team and gained county and international honours.</p> <p>The Crypt Schools Old Boys, Gordon League and a number of other still surviving village teams emerged in 1879.</p> |
| 1880/1 | Crowds of between three and four thousand paying spectators attend Gloucester’s games against Clifton, Moseley and Newport. |
| 1882/3 | <p>The number of spectators at games increases and Alderman Edwards commends the club for <i>‘providing an attraction for the working men and thus keeping them from public houses’</i>.</p> <p>Gloucester’s first unbeaten season.</p> |
| 1883/4 | The AGM adopts a <i>‘no cost to play for Gloucester policy’</i> and agrees to pay players travel and hotel expenses for away games. |

| | |
|--------|---|
| 1886/7 | <p>First match reports appear in the Citizen newspaper</p> <p>The '<i>no cost to play</i>' policy stops at broken time payments as the club supports the RFU's stand against professionalism.</p> |
| 1887/8 | <p>Ten of the first team born in the city of Gloucester and recruitment from outside Gloucester frowned upon.</p> |
| 1888/9 | <p>Ten of Gloucester's fixtures are against Welsh clubs, four of them against Cardiff.</p> <p>Gloucester cancels fixtures with Newport following violence from both their players and their spectators.</p> <p>Gloucester appoints its first 'trainers.'</p> <p>Attendances at Kingsholm halved because of the effects of the Boer War and a smallpox epidemic in the city.</p> |
| 1890/1 | <p>Tommy Bagwell, a labourer at the Wagon Works, becomes the first 'working man' to captain the club.</p> <p>Great Western Railways organise an 'excursion' train for Gloucester's game against Cardiff, played at Cardiff in March 1890.</p> |

| | |
|--------|--|
| 1891/2 | <p>8,000 spectators attend Gloucester game against Swansea at the Spa.</p> <p>Gloucester's population reaches 39,444.</p> <p>The Citizen publishes its first Saturday sports edition</p> <p>Gloucester FC distributes £6.2s11d to local clubs for the use of their players, when needed as replacements for injuries.</p> <p>The Gloucester Athletic and Football Ground Company Ltd formed to secure the Kingsholm site, the "Castle Grim Estate," (as it was actually named) for £4,000 by a mortgage and capital raised by a share issue (2,805 one pound shares).</p> <p>The club has 1,100 members.</p> <p>(10th October) First game at Kingsholm 'kicked off' by the Mayor of Gloucester Thomas Robinson, who was later knighted and became the city's MP. 4,000 spectators attend.</p> |
| 1894/5 | <p>(3rd Oct) First AGM held at Spread Eagle Hotel. It was reported that <i>"the club was in a prosperous condition."</i></p> <p>Walter Jackson becomes the first Gloucester born player to play for England (v. Scotland), whilst playing for Halifax.</p> <p>Gloucester suspended by the RFU for 'professionalism' as a result of the club 'recruiting' players – the 'Shewell case'. The club respond by adopting an extremely rigid adherence to the amateur regulations, and are reinstated.</p> |
| 1895/6 | <p>The Northern clubs split from the RFU to form the professional game, attracting a number of Gloucester players from the club.</p> |
| 1896/7 | <p>Frank Stout becomes the first current Gloucester player to play for England (v. Wales). Frank went on to play fourteen times for England and toured Australia and New Zealand in 1899 and South Africa in 1904. His brother Percy also played five times for England, four of them alongside Frank.</p> |

| | |
|---------|---|
| 1898/9 | Every player in the Gloucester team is 'born and bred' in the city |
| 1899/0 | <p>Club members raise subscription to pay for player's insurance against injury, following a spate of broken bones.</p> <p>New stands erected for Kingsholm's first international, England v. Wales, increasing capacity to 28,670. No Gloucester players are selected to play for England and only 15,000 spectators attend.</p> <p>Gloucester beat all four major Welsh clubs – Cardiff, Newport, Swansea and Llanelli, but gains a reputation for excessively violent play and with their team described as a 'big, lusty, vigorous lot'.</p> <p>4,000 supporters wait at the railway station until past midnight to welcome back the Gloucester team who defeated Llanelli at Stradey Park, where they had not been beaten for three seasons.</p> |
| 1900/1 | <p>Gloucester unbeaten in all English fixtures.</p> <p>The pitch is repositioned to give a better view to the spectators in the newly built Grandstand.</p> |
| 1905/6 | <p>Opening of the new "Gymnasium and Training Quarters" designed by local architect Harry. A. Dancey.</p> <p>10th Oct. Gloucester play New Zealand at Kingsholm and players have numbers on their shirts for first time. The game was recorded on "cinematograph" and shown in local cinemas.</p> <p>Two of the New Zealand team stay in the city and play for Gloucester against Leicester, thus becoming the club's first 'imported' players.</p> |
| 1906/7 | Gloucester lose to Bristol at Kingsholm in the final of the County Cup. The game was marred by crowd disorder and the referee was mobbed by spectators, struck, kicked and needed police protection. |
| 1909/10 | Four Gloucester players selected for England, with all four playing against France. |

| | |
|---------|--|
| 1911/2 | Gloucester play Stade Toulousain in France. |
| 1912/3 | Gloucester FC and some other local players organised an unofficial, but all expenses paid tour to France 'without reference to the committee', causing a crisis between players and committee. |
| 1913/4 | Opening of the 'sixpenny' stand, later to be known as the 'Shed.' The growing use of non-local players causes concern, but it is recognised that 'gates will dwindle considerably if Gloucester were to continuously be on the losing side'. Arthur Hudson retires and spends the next 25 years as Club Secretary. |
| 1914 | Virtually all of Gloucester's playing membership joins the 5 th Gloucestershire Regiment. Eighteen were to die, many were seriously injured. Three of those who returned went on to play for England and to become Club Captains (S. Smart, Tommy Voyce and George 'Biddy' Holford). |
| 1914/18 | The First World War |
| 1919/20 | 8,000 spectators turn out to watch Gloucester v. Newport, causing concern about the ability of Kingsholm to accommodate such large crowds. |
| 1920/1 | Gloucester unbeaten all season at Kingsholm. |
| 1922/3 | Gloucester's most violent season. 28 players dismissed from the field for fighting (14), obscene language (6), foul play (1), arguing with the referee (7). Leicester cancels fixtures with Gloucester, because of violence on the pitch. |

| | |
|----------|---|
| 1924/5 | Gloucester player Tommy Voyce plays twice for the British Lions in their tour of South Africa. Voice won 27 England Caps between 1920 and 1926, became President of the RFU and was awarded an OBE. |
| 1925/6 | Gloucester player, Stan Bayliss, tragically dies a week after dislocating his neck in a tackle in a game against Old Blues RFC at Kingsholm. |
| 1926/7 | <p>Sid Brown becomes the second player in consecutive seasons to die as the result of injuries sustained whilst playing for Gloucester at Kingsholm. Brown ruptured a kidney after tackling an opponent, but returned to the field after receiving treatment. He died the next day.</p> <p>These two deaths generated much concern about the role of physical violence on and off the field and fixtures against Bristol cancelled because of rough play.</p> <p>Main Grandstand erected at a cost of £2,500.</p> |
| 1932/3 | Main Grandstand catches fire, destroying all 1,750 seats and threatening the Bertram Mill's Circus erected to the rear. |
| 1933/4 | Newly constructed Grandstand and other improvements increase capacity of Kingsholm to 20,000, with seating for 7,000. |
| 1935/6/7 | Club Captain, Fred Wadley, plays in all 1 st XV fixtures for two consecutive seasons. |

| | |
|---------------|--|
| <p>1948/9</p> | <p>The committee refuse an application for the use of Kingsholm for the formation and training of a 'Ladies Rugby Football Club at Gloucester'.</p> <p>The request came from a Miss Violet Pegler who was first taken to watch Gloucester as a five year old. She subsequently played 'touch rugby' in the Army and gathered a group of eleven Gloucester ladies who wanted to play rugby, including 'mixed' games. They were coached by Gloucester player, Sidney Dangerfield.</p> <p>Club President, Dr Alcock, refuses to sanction this, arguing that it would be <i>'inadvisable from all points of view.'</i></p> |
| <p>1950/1</p> | <p>The first 'Tannoy' public address system installed and recorded music replaces the Cinderford Town Band as pre-match entertainment.</p> |
| <p>1951/2</p> | <p>The club celebrates 60 years at Kingsholm thirty wins in the season.</p> |
| <p>1954/5</p> | <p>The concrete Worcester Street terrace constructed.</p> <p>The committee notes that 'disruptive elements' were causing an erosion of team spirit, that rough play was creeping into the side and training sessions were being missed.</p> |
| <p>1961/2</p> | <p>The entire Ladies Committee resigns, but they are soon replaced by other volunteers.</p> |

| | |
|------------------|---|
| 1966/7 | <p>Don Rutherford introduces advanced tactical and skills training to the club. Don was appointed as captain and coach for the 1977/8 season and tried to introduce a more flowing and less forward dominated style of play to the club.</p> <p>Mike Burton, who captained the club in 1975/76, looking back to these days observed that: “King Canute would be an odds on favourite compared to Rutherford’s chances... there were too many old dogs sniffing around, too set in their ways to be taught a whole load of fancy tricks like running and passing” (1982).</p> <p>Rutherford plays for the British Lions against Australia</p> |
| 1967/8 | New electric floodlights installed. |
| 1968/9 and 69/70 | <p>GRFC incurs a trading loss of approximately £1,000 in consecutive seasons.</p> <p>57 first XV games played during the 1969/70 season.</p> |
| 1971/2 | <p>Gloucester win the first ever National Knock-Out Competition, beating Moseley in the final. which was marred by violence and the sending off of Nigel Horton of Moseley.</p> <p>50 consecutive victories at Kingsholm celebrated.</p> |
| 1973/4 | <p>The club’s centenary season, marked by a record 39 victories. Mick Burton plays for British Lions against South Africa.</p> |
| 1974 | <p>The Gloucester Citizen features a story about the number of fathers, sons and brothers who have played for Gloucester, including 28 sets of brothers – notably the seven Hall brothers and the six Cook brothers – and seven father and son combinations.</p> |

| | |
|---------|--|
| 1976/7 | <p>GRFC incurs trading losses over £6,000.</p> <p>First club sponsors, Adidas, provide free kit for players and reduced prices for boots. Match sponsors and perimeter advertising now generate £5,000 per season.</p> <p>Gloucester participates in the seventeen club Anglo-Welsh League, which was disbanded after 2 seasons and replaced by the RFU merit Table.</p> |
| 1977/8 | <p>Gloucester win the first ever John Player Cup, defeating Leicester in another final noted for violent play both on and off the pitch at Twickenham.</p> <p>Referee Roger Quittendon awards 15 penalties against Gloucester, compared to 4 against Leicester. Gloucester becomes the focus of national criticism for rough play in Rugby Football.</p> |
| 1980/1 | <p>Phil Blakeway plays for British Lions against South Africa.</p> |
| 1982/3 | <p>Gloucester reach the final of the John Player Cup and are placed top of the unofficial 'Merit Table' run by the Sunday telegraph and the Daily Mail.</p> |
| 1985/6 | <p>Mike Coley appointed as club's first Marketing Manager.</p> |
| 1986 | <p>The Safety of Sports Grounds Act (post Hillsborough disaster) requires over £200,00 worth of safety measures to be completed.</p> |
| 1988/9 | <p>2nd in Courage League One, Pilkington Cup semi finalists.</p> |
| 1989/90 | <p>Gloucester RFC sponsored by Bass until the end of the 1993/4 season.</p> <p>2nd in Courage League One and lose to Bath (48 – 6) in the final of the Pilkington Cup</p> |

| | |
|---------|--|
| 1990/91 | <p>Fourteen new hospitality boxes and new concrete terracing added to the 'Tump' end of Kingsholm Stadium.</p> <p>Mike Burton (Sports Management) Ltd engaged to undertake all commercial, sales, hospitality and sponsorship activities. Mike is, famously, an ex-captain of the club, an England international and British Lion, who had previously been 'professionalised' by the RFU and excluded from rugby activities.</p> <p>15 players lured to other clubs at the end of this season, including Mike Teague to Moseley. Gloucester tries to retain its traditional amateur ethos.</p> <p>Keith Richardson, Club Coach, presents a paper to the committee about the need to reorganise the playing side of the club, including the need for better fitness and coaching. His recommendations meet little response.</p> |
| 1991/2 | 4 th in Courage League One, Pilkington Cup semi-finalists |
| 1992/3 | <p>Players call a 'crisis ' meeting with Club Coach Keith Richardson about the perceived lack of player rewards, relative to other comparable clubs</p> <p>5th in Courage League One.</p> |
| 1993/4 | <p>Peter Ford, club chairman, re-states the club's traditional anti-professionalism position:-</p> <p><i>'We play by the rules.. whatever anybody else does, we'll stick by the rules. If they say we can't pay players, or offer them inducements or cars or flats.. then we won't do it.'</i></p> <p>Barry Corless appointed as the club's first full-time, paid Director of Rugby @£40,000 p.a.</p> <p>8th in Courage League One</p> |

| | |
|--------|---|
| 1994/5 | <p>(August) Mike Burton's contract ends, mainly because of his inability to give sufficient time to GRFC matters as the result of his spectacular success in corporate hospitality and other international sporting interests.</p> <p>Andy Deacon appointed Club captain and Viv Wooley appointed as 1st XV Coach.</p> <p>The International Rugby Board declare that rugby will henceforth be an 'open game' and permits the payment of players: - <i>"Rugby will become an open game and there will be no prohibition on payment or the provision of other material benefit to any person involved in the game"</i></p> <p>Barry Corless resigns in Feb 1995, following reports of acrimony between him and senior committee members. This led to criticism of the club in the local media, based on the belief that Corless had not been given a fair chance and that the members of the management committee were too parochial and inward looking.</p> <p>The situation was exacerbated by a lack of information from the club about the reasons for Corless's departure</p> <p>(Feb) Simon Deveraux jailed for nine months after breaking an opponents jaw in a 'friendly' united game against Rosslyn Park. He was convicted of grievous bodily harm.</p> <p>7th in Courage League One.</p> <p>(June) Mike Coley appointed as the club's first Chief Executive.</p> |
|--------|---|

| | |
|---------------|---|
| <p>1995/6</p> | <p>(Sep) Richard Hill appointed as Director of rugby.</p> <p>The RFU imposes a one-year moratorium on the payment of players.</p> <p>Revenue from Hospitality boxes and sponsorship drops dramatically.</p> <p>(May) The post of Chief Executive is made redundant. Coley leaves.</p> <p>All Courage League One clubs in prolonged dispute with the RFU about control of the game and the commercial potential of TV rights, etc.</p> <p>Gloucester, without a 'major investor, is distanced from other professional clubs and loses ground in terms of player recruitment and revenue acquisition.</p> <p>(May) The club transforms itself into a Limited Company – GRFC Ltd - with a Board of Directors which included two full time Executive Directors – a managing Director and a Rugby Director</p> <p>(May) David Simms, club captain, becomes GRFC's first full-time professional, signing a 2-year contract.</p> <p>Gloucester defeat Saracens in a game that both teams had to win to avoid relegation.</p> <p>8th in Courage League One, Pilkington Cup semi-finalists.</p> |
| <p>1996/7</p> | <p>Gloucester becomes the first English club to pay a transfer fee to another club, when they acquired Craig Emerson from Morley.</p> <p>Richard Hill's coaching role with the England U21 team influences seven England U21's players to join the club.</p> <p>Refurbishment of 'new' clubroom completed.</p> |

| | |
|---------------|---|
| <p>1997/8</p> | <p>Richard Tombs, Terry Fanalua and Andrew Gibbs join GRFC for start of season.</p> <p>Gloucester still contains the highest proportion of 'local' players in the Allied Premiere League One, with 43% of 1st team squad born within 20 miles of club. At the start of the season, all of the forwards were 'locals' and all of the three-quarter line were recruited from outside Gloucester.</p> <p>Electronic 'swipe cards' introduced for Season Ticket holder</p> <p>Hamish Brown seconded from Tom Walkinshaw's company TWR to act as Executive Director at GRFC</p> |
| <p>1998/9</p> | |
| <p>1999/0</p> | <p>Tom Walkinshaw purchases the final 25% of GRFC Ltd shares and appoints Ken Nottage as Managing Director</p> |
| <p>2000/1</p> | |