

The Blind Eye of the Rhondda Connection

by DEWI GRIFFITHS, Television Producer, BBC Outside Broadcasts

I think I owe the secretary of Cardiff R.F.C. about £3..6s..9d. It is a debt built up during the post-war years up until the time I was conscripted in 1950! I didn't come from the richest family in the Rhondda (at least not from a ready cash point of view), and so my father developed in me a healthy enthusiasm for rustling the occasional sheep, sneaking rides on Ocean Coal wagons on their way from the valley to the docks and, worst sin of all, getting into Cardiff Arms Park for nothing.

I suppose it was the closed-in, Shangri-la atmosphere of the Rhondda that made us show a suspiciously unhealthy interest in famous rugby players who were spawned alongside the upper reaches of that smelly, coal-black river which, twenty miles downstream, carried lost rugby balls and dead cats reverently past the Arms Park.

It was my cousin Mavis who, with swinging hips and Celtic guile, distracted the gate-keeper and the law (see footnote 1) as we slipped into the ground to see for ourselves the brilliance of Bleddyn, Jackie and Haydn Tanner. But, more importantly, I was there to see our local Rhondda boy wonder Billy Cleaver in action. I knew during my latter school days whenever I failed to clear the vaulting horse that I would never be involved with other than coarse rugby, but if I could just kick-on-the-run like Billy then at least I could boast about something. About that time I was delighted to discover that Gwyn (Jolson) Evans, the singing policeman, was a Treherbert lad, but after watching him for a few weeks it took me the rest of the season to re-learn the offside laws.

Then the time came for the Punter from Pentre to retire, to give way to another Rhondda prodigy, born in the perpetual mists on the heights of Trebanog; a birthplace shared by a thousand sheep. Having to tread very carefully during his early tender years developed in Cliff Morgan the amazing skills which he demonstrated to the world and Maggie-Well-Done (see footnote 2). Meanwhile, halfway up Penrhys mountain, a budding scrumhalf from Ystrad was learning how to put it in properly (see footnote 3). And the multitude in the North Stand did sing out wonderously at the shrug of Rex Willis's shoulders whilst holding it midway between the knee and the ankle. (Law 20, Sect. 9, Sub-para. 'b', W.R.U. Handbook).

Because I was a late developer and even a later finisher (footnote 4), I was still in school when Eddie (Sailor) Thomas arrived at Pentre Sec. to teach us Physics and the finer points of being a forward. In between his appearances for Neath we used to make him more cross than a Maltese when he tried, without success, to convince us that dribbling was an art form. He did, however, persuade me that I should take my glasses off whenever we played against Porth Sec. I was a prop you see and Pandy at that time had a potential world-class stalker in the front row. Who would have thought then that the youthful, slender Howie Norris was eventually to hold the record for appearances with the famous Cardiff club.

I disappeared into the vast plains of Northern Germany while doing my R.A.F. bit in the early fifties and so I didn't see Eddie, Cliffie and Rex beat New Zealand in 1953 with the help of a few others. But I was home in time to see Cardiff hammered 40-nil by the Baabaas when Cliffie, Gordon Wells and Gareth Griffiths weren't available. In fairness it must be said that Eddie Thomas who played in that match really had his mind on the tenor solo competition of the National Eisteddfod. I suppose I shouldn't rub it in that when Gordon later became skipper Cardiff won 39 matches out of 41 that season. Mind you he had another Rhondda prop as vice-captain in 'J. D.'.

My Rhondda Mafia heart was still beating its biased rhythm when I started directing B.B.C. TV camera coverage of Cardiff matches in 1962, producing slightly larger and longer close-ups of Howie, Gary Davies, Maurice Richards, John Bevan, Steve 'Lovely Boy' Hughes and Lyn Baxter than most others, except perhaps for Dai Hayward who obligingly scored a try for Wales in my very first TV international. It was his first cap and he did his famous impression of Sonja Henie as he crossed the line on the ice against England; the last time 'HQ' beat us at Cardiff incidentally.

Yes, I confess, we tend to wear blinkers in the Rhondda. We even tried to have Taffs Well included within the Borough boundary because of that blasted Williams family. My late night prayer for years was, 'Dear Lord and Cliff Jones (Porth) please could we have another Rhondda genius in the Welsh team. And . . . Oh yes! Why oh Lord couldn't Colin Howe have been born in Gelli'?

A Black and Blue in 'Bok Land

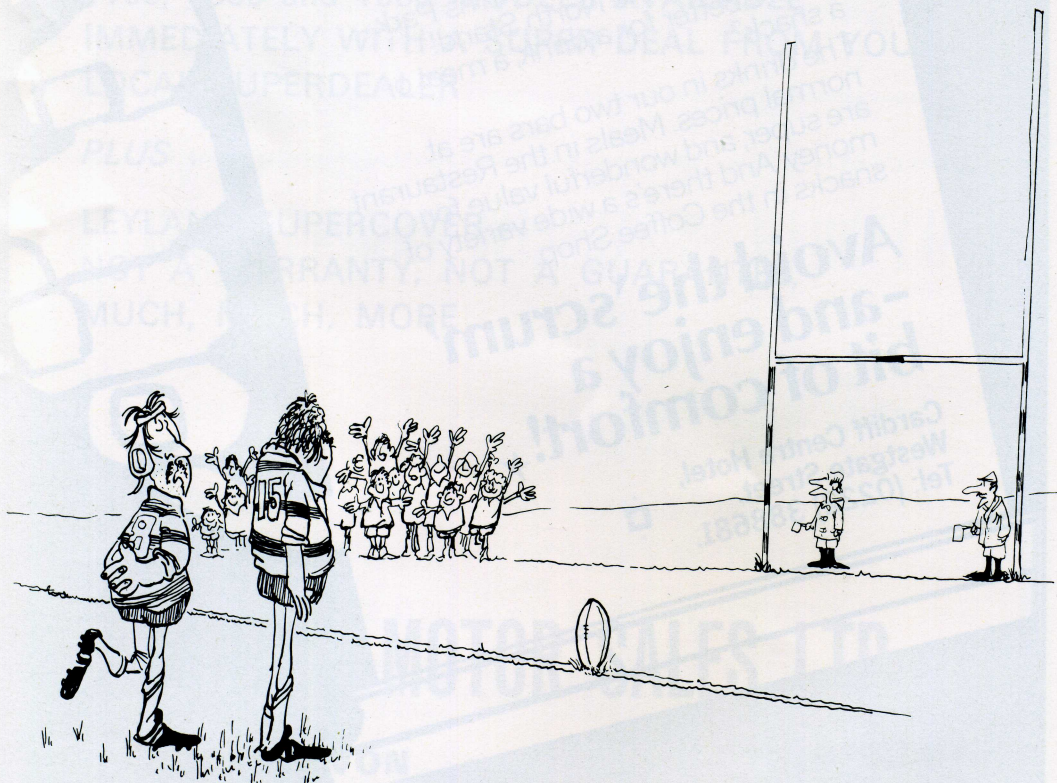
by CHRIS PADFIELD (Coach to Cardiff R.F.C.)

'I am sorry Sir but magazines like this are not allowed here. I will have to take it away from you'.

The young customs official was polite, but most insistent that my 'Playboy', which had helped to pass away some of the fifteen hours aboard a British Airways Jumbo should not be seen by the inhabitants of his country.

As he asked me to sign the Confiscation Papers, which made me feel like a naughty little schoolboy, he said in a very broad accent 'Welcome to South Africa'!

The six weeks in front of me were something one only dreams about but which



Ignore them, they're just trying to put you off, they've seen you kick before

never becomes a reality. This dream was made real about two months before when my telephone rang and a very familiar voice at the other end said, 'Tell me Chris, what are you doing for your summer holidays this year'?

My reply was 'Nothing in particular because after spending Easter in Paris with my family my Bank Manager feels that his Bank couldn't afford for me to take another holiday'.

The voice at the other end of the 'phone which was that of Ray Williams, the Welsh Rugby Coaching Organiser said. 'How would you like to spend your school holidays coaching in South Africa'? I have received a letter from the President of the University of Natal Rugby Club inviting one of our coaches out to the southern hemisphere to undertake coaching at the University and at various schools throughout the Province.

At first, I was too stunned and delighted to reply, but soon regained enough composure to ask, 'When do I leave'? It was Ray himself who taught me to think positively at all times.

I arrived in Durban on the eve of the First Test Match between South Africa and New Zealand. I was met at the Airport by the man who felt that Natal rugby should be injected with a few Welsh ideas. James-de-JAGER had not quite made the Springbok side of the '60's, but nevertheless was a big name in Natal rugby. My first impressions of him were to be confirmed over and over again; he was an absolute rugby fanatic who not only thought very deeply about the game, but transferred his enthusiasm to everyone about him. The familiarity of his wife and four sons with the finer points of the game, enabled them to hold intelligent conversation with any rugby expert.

I was taken to Pietermaritzburg, fifty miles from Durban, which was going to be my home for the next one and a half months. There I was given my itinerary which was to start the following day; watching the First Test Match at King's Park in Durban.

I could not believe that in a few hours I would be witnessing a Rugby International clad only in a pair of shorts. I had been used to watching such games wearing my sheepskin coat with a brandy flask in my pocket for extra warmth. Now I was to watch a game played in a temperature of up in the middle 80's and before a crowd of 50,000.

My seat was in the Main Stand, surrounded by very sober fanatical Springbok supporters, who had been in their places since 11.00 a.m. watching various 'Curtain Raisers'. I mentioned the word 'sober', because alcoholic drink can only be taken into the ground at a risk of a £20 fine. The position of my seat was a relief; I had feared it might have been among the 15,000 in the 'temporary stands', a frightening thought to someone used to the privilege of the North Stand at Cardiff Arms Park.

The game itself resulted in a lucky victory for my hosts who, in my opinion, did not deserve to win. Looking at a game as a neutral is a beneficial experience

for all rugby supporters. As a detached observer, one sees a very different game to those shouting encouragement to their own particular side.

The All Blacks showed all the ideas while the Boks revealed very few. New Zealand's downfall was going into such an important game without a recognised kicker in their side. How they must have yearned for a Don Clarke or a Fergy McCormack!

The referee, who incidentally was a South African, didn't help matters. Some of his interpretations of the International Board's Laws were very strange, not only to New Zealanders on the field, but also to this Welshman. The sooner neutral referees are appointed for Test Matches south of the Equator the better for everyone concerned. In defence of the South African Board the All Blacks were given the offer of neutral referees but declined. One of the reasons given was that if they had them in South Africa then next year's Lions in New Zealand would expect the same treatment.

The stars of this match were undoubtedly the 'old firm' of KIRKPATRICK, LESLIE and GOING. If these three players are not available during the Lions tour of New Zealand next year, then I am sure that the British Lions will be just as rampant and successful as they were in 1971.

My hosts celebrated the South African victory with a 'BRAIL'. For the uninitiated a braai is a barbecue; and this was to be the first of many during my stay in Natal.

Despite all this eating and drinking I managed to do some of the work for which I was invited; coaching at schools as well as at the University. On the whole I was amazed to discover that, while South Africa is such a great rugby orientated nation her attitude to rugby coaching is very backward. I was appalled to find that almost every coaching session I observed was boring, with little or no thought to make this essential training interesting and lively. This is a tragedy in a country where players are only too eager to learn, and discipline is of a very high standard. Even Primary Schools field their 'mini-rugby' sides while the fanaticism of the Secondary School boys is demonstrated by the ability of even a school of 1,200 boys to field 34 sides on a Saturday afternoon.

The hospitality I received during my stay was second to none. Natal known affectionately as the Banana Province, is the Cinderella of the rugby Provinces in South Africa. Although not the strongest on the rugby field, it must surely be the most beautiful. My hosts took me to such places as Zululand in the north, the Wild Coast in the south and to the backbone of the country—the glorious Drakensburg mountain range. In each of these places I spent a few days exploring. I visited such places as the Umfolosi Game Reserve and Richard's Bay which is fast becoming the largest port in the southern hemisphere.

What a pity that such a beautiful country is disturbed by racial and political differences.

Bleddyn Williams

The age of the Jet Plane has certainly reduced the size of the World in terms of time and it is because of this aeronautical triumph that Rugby Football is rapidly gaining a foothold as clubs of strength regularly seek to show the flag in far off Rugby aspiring nations.

It was 26 years ago that the last British Lions side travelled by sea to take on overseas opposition and with so many Commonwealth and other overseas visitors gracing the Arms Park in this Centenary year. I am reminded of that journey as a member of Dr. Carl Mullen's 1950 team to New Zealand and Australia.

The 24,000 mile journey to and from the Antipodes which circumnavigated the World via the Panama Canal on the outward journey, returning through the Suez Canal was for me a truly wonderful experience and those players having to travel by Air these days, in my opinion, lose out by comparison.

The 1950 tour starting from Liverpool Docks on the *Ceramic* in early April did not end before the P. & O. liner *Strathnaver* docked at Tilbury in mid-October.

Having missed the entire 1949-50 home International series due to a leg injury, the five-week journey out to New Zealand provided a heaven sent opportunity for me to strengthen my wasted leg muscles. But more so it gave the 14 Welshmen, 3 Englishmen, 5 Scots and 9 Irishmen, who comprised the team under the managership of Surgeon Captain and later Rear Admiral 'Ginger' Osborne, ample time to develop a tremendous team spirit, as New Zealand's chief rugby writer Terry McLean, who reported our every on on that tour will concur.

With so many Welshmen in the party the formation of a choir was a natural and who better to lead it than the old maestro, the late Clifton Davies and what a remarkable job he made of it. That choir was to become as formidable a unit off the field as the team was to prove on the field. Dai Davies of hooking fame and Billy 'The Coal' Cleaver were ideal soloists who with the choir's backing captivated New Zealand and Australian audiences. On the other hand Irelands Tom Clifford regularly provided a most unmusical rendering of O'Rielly's Daughter, which none the less met with equal acclaim. Clifford, one of Ireland's great characters, although not blessed musically, more than made up for it around the ship's dining tables; where on one occasion, to win an odd Bob or two over a bet, he saw off 13 courses which comprised the entire lunch menu. The food afloat made our eyes boggle after so many years of rationing following World War II and it was little wonder that so many rolly polly's tumbled ashore at Wellington. After the ship had docked amidst brilliant sunshine, which showed up that wonderful harbour in it's true magnificence.

To return briefly to the journey out, one of our number, a Scot now residing in Canada, soon after leaving Liverpool sought the confines of his cabin, shared by his bosom friend Cliff Davies, not to reappear for some 3 weeks. While the rest of us struggled to maintain some sort of fitness by labouring the decks and taking physical excercises, the Scot, reclined in his pit, stored up a wealth of outrageous stories for telling to a willing and captivated audience of fellow players, who crammed his cabin on most late evenings.

Panama City which over the years has achieved a notorious reputation was one of only two Ports of call on the outward journey. With money in extremely short supply we saw little of the town until Cliff Davies, reduced to his last quarter (25 cent piece) placed it in a one Armed Bandit, and emerged with the princely sum of 25 Dollars.

A most marvellous tour of New Zealand where we lost the Test series by three matches to one, climaxed by a fantastic last Test against the All Blacks at Auckland, was followed by a 4 week stay in Australia where both Tests were won before we set foot once again aboard ship, this time to Melbourne. A cruise around the Southern Australian coast line calling at Adelaide, where we met the immortal Don Bradman and Freemantle was a fascination. Then on to Ceylon or Sri Lanka as it is now known for one game in steaming heat. That game gave Dai Davies an opportunity to revenge himself on our skipper Carl Mullen. The Somerset Policeman played in 3 Tests (two in New Zealand and one in Australia) without once seeing his name in a programme. This because the skipper was a late casualty in all three games and had to cry off. Davies was selected to play in Ceylon but with a twinkle in his eye he reported unfit an hour before kick off. It was all taken in fun and reflected the tremendous spirit that existed in that team, which even to this day still is revered by New Zealanders, as being the finest ambassadors ever to visit their shores. Bombay was the next port of call, which we found beautiful if a little smelly in places, before we experienced the intense heat of the Old City of Eden. Then through the Suez Canal to Port Said to see man eating sharks swimming around the ship as it lay at anchor.

A trip through the blue Mediterranean took us to Marseilles for a short stop over before arriving at Tilbury, putting an end to what had been a most memorable experience.

Howard Norris

"The Rhondda Connection"

'When the coal comes from the Rhondda down that Taff Vale Railway line, when the coal comes from the Rhondda I'll be there'—how many times have these words echoed forth from Cardiff Rugby Club coaches and bars?

The rich coal seams appear to be either uneconomical to work or simply played out. Let's hope the other Rhondda product—the 'Bionic rugby players' are still there to be tapped. Over the years many Sons of the Rhondda have worn the world famous 'Blue and Black', proudly and with distinction. I also wonder if the recent drought indicates a drying up of resources, the stop taps tightly cutting off supplies from the Valleys and hills to the Capital City. Is Pontypridd R.F.C. too strategically placed these days, aiming to dam the Rhondda flow of players. In recent years with the acquisition of a new field and headquarters, a Championship Year and one hundred years already behind them, there appears to be a backflow upstream. Tom David, Gary Samuels, Robin Morgan, Stuart Lewis and Mike Alexander are but a few to strengthen Ponty's resources. I only hope their reservoir doesn't hold back all the best fish!

Over the past twenty-five years or so Rhondda born players that have served Cardiff include such names as Lyn Baxter (290 appearances with the 1st XV), John Bevan (35), Gary Davies (281), Billy Darch (68), Billy Clever (141), Gareth Griffiths (140), Ray Cheney (69), Danny Harris (51), Steve Hughes (162), Arthur Hull (30), Eddie Thomas (217), Ian Lewis (45), Dong 'D. H.' Jones (30), Kingsley Jones (190), Cliff Morgan (202), Myself (413), Maurice Richards (171), Gwyn Thomas (33), Gordon Wells (254) plus apologies to others.

Together these players have represented Cardiff on no fewer than 2,822 occasions. Working on a basis of forty games a season these players have played 70 years. At thirty-five games a season 80 years and thirty games would mean Rhondda players have played for the whole 100 years of Cardiff's existence—not a bad record for a valley with only five second class rugby teams. These players also gained over 100 Welsh Caps, 7 Lions players, 4 Cardiff Captains and 5 Vice-Captains—all since the Second World War. How proud I feel to be associated with players of such calibre and the Club they served.

Where can I start to even think of my involvement over the years—the memories come flooding back. My first game at Usk with the Rags in 1953. (Even Danny Davies might have forgotten that) with my old friend Stan Bowes packing in the front row complete with ginger beard and quiet dulcet tones exhorting me to greater efforts—'Let's feel you Norris—get up my A . . . you bastard!' God I realised I'd arrived in Kardiff. Trips all over the world—experiences that would never have happened without Rugby Football.

Appearing at a Lord Mayors dinner in Coventry Town Hall in a suit of armour. Borrowing a 10 ft. python from a belly dancer at the Angel Hotel the night before a rugby international against Australia and helping her act—never was selected as reserve again—The Welsh Rugby Union probably didn't like my underpants!! The games have been played, the years have passed, my only regret being too old to be able to have even one more game for Cardiff in its Centenary Year. Duw it's hard.

Peter Robbins

It is true to say that my conversion to rugby was due directly to the Cardiff Club. The exact date I do not recall but it was the occasion Cardiff came to Coventry in the late forties with a back line containing Haydn Tanner, Billy Cleaver, Bleddyn Williams and Jack Matthews. It was indeed a battle of the colossi and just as Paul knew on the way to Damascus, so I knew that I wanted to play rugby *one day* for Coventry. So thank you Cardiff for that *inspiration*.

The very name Cardiff signifies the mecca of Welsh rugby not just to British clubs but *clubs* and *International* teams the world over. Thus the Cardiff club starts with an even greater advantage than the AVERAGE home sides. The phrase 'Cardiff next week boys', is tantamount to 'off to the Front next week'. That is not meant in any bellicose fashion, but written to signify the awe in which the club is held. Similarly the prize on any English clubs fixture list is a game against Cardiff, and is warmly appreciated by *treasurers* for where ever the major Welsh club plays, the expatriates flock. It is as though they are living abroad, and the visiting team represents *home* and Welsh culture. Its very understandable.

To those of us no longer playing, the game is (and has to be), full of memories. I personally do not believe in expressing *mine*, except in the company of those with whom I share these memories.

However, if a little nostalgia is permissible, how well I recall the chilling but educating effect of Cardiff on Oxford University in my first season (1956) when we were beaten 0-23 and there was some talk of the fixture being dropped, according to Roy Allaway our captain. The following season however with Onllwyn Brace and M. J. K. Smith in great form there was a great victory for us 23-6.

Allaways hint about fixture dropping was totally false.

It was on the way to Cardiff two years later, that I convinced a South African that he needed a passport to get into Wales, and so the poor chap travelled hidden in the boot of the bus from Chepstow to the Welsh Border.

But the point about playing against Cardiff either at home or away was that you learned something. As young players we would listen to the likes of Gordon Wells, Gareth Griffiths, Stanley Bowes, Colin Howe and even Dai Hayward!!

The evenings spent at Vincents (the Oxford Univ. clubrooms) or at the Royal Hotel in Oxford afterwards were remarkable, not just because of the extraordinary gastronomic and beer drinking feats, but because as undergraduates we learned the game off the field as well as on it. Then in turn as seasoned players we were able and possibly qualified to pass on to other people.

Thus the influence of Cardiff is World wide. Paul Johnson (later to play for South Africa), for example, will never forget trying to beat Gordon Wells on the outside, and failing every time.

When one thinks very briefly of all the legends that Cardiff has produced, Cliff, Bleddyn (no surnames needed) Jack Matthews, Hadyn Tanner, Billy Cleaver, Gerald Davies—the finest wing I have ever seen—Barry John and of course Gareth. Well, they and others like Lloyd Williams, Gordon Wells the great Sid Judd were legends in their lifetime. But Stanley Bowes now, he is a legend in his lunchtime! What a character—literally and metaphorically. Self styled 'Reckitt Blue', he used to pillory the delicately aesthetic Alan Barter by saying in that unmistakable Cardiff accent with its hardened 'A's' 'Hello there Barter—you college bastard's are on holidays then?' He and those like him were lesser stars perhaps in a great firmament are just as much responsible for Cardiff's unique contribution to World rugby. The game has been as enriched by Cardiff and its many players. To have played against them, was, is, and ever shall be one of the game's privileges.

PETER ROBBINS
England and Barbarians
Financial Times Rugby Writer

Some Messages of Congratulation

From the Welsh Rugby Union

As President of the Welsh Rugby Union I deem it a great pleasure and privilege to offer you our sincere greetings and best wishes, on behalf of the Committee and myself, for your Centenary Year.

Words almost inadequate when congratulating one of the foremost Rugby Clubs in the World. The great traditions of the Cardiff R.F.C. are well known throughout the Rugby World, and it is the ambition of every club to try and emulate your great and illustrious Club.

All the Clubs in the Principality, and indeed Rugby followers everywhere, must have appreciated the generous gesture made by the Cardiff Club when they decided to vacate their Home Ground, so that the National Ground could be brought into being. The transformation could never have been achieved had the Cardiff Club and their astute administrators not been so far-seeing as to recognise the needs of the Welsh Rugby Union to have a Ground second to none, and the facilities to entertain the Home Countries and our Rugby Friends from overseas.

Cardiff R.F.C. have been pioneers of many ventures, and Clubs in Wales have benefitted by your experience and example. Your sponsorships, both on and off the field of play, is World renowned, and may you continue, inspired by your Centenary Celebrations to even greater achievements; and may you long continue to give the exemplary service to our great game that we have now come to expect from the Cardiff Rugby Football Club.

HANDEL ROGERS,
President 1975-76.

From the Rugby Football Union

I am delighted to have the opportunity, on behalf of the Committee and Members of the Rugby Football Union, of writing this message of congratulation in the Centenary brochure of the Cardiff Rugby Football Club.

Not only has your club existed for 100 years, no mean achievement in itself, but throughout this long period, it has reached peaks in Rugby Union Football which few other clubs could possibly ever hope to emulate. These achievements, both individual and team, reflect the enthusiasm of your members in our game and their ability to produce high standards of play which have delighted a large number of people over many years.

Memorable occasions in your long and unique history are almost too numerous to recall, in fact one is embarrassed by the numbers of your club who deserve special mention both as players and administrators. Nor must we forget those others behind the great names, countless others at all levels who form the backbone of any club and who have been proud to wear the Cardiff jersey and tie and above all remain loyal to your great club.

Your club can be justly proud of its contribution to Rugby Union Football not only in Wales but throughout the British Isles and indeed worldwide.

May I wish your club continued happiness and enjoyment in our game in the century ahead.

G. TARN BAINBRIDGE,
President R.F.U. 1975-76

Watching the Game!

by J. B. G. THOMAS (Sports Editor, Western Mail)

A rugby writer's life in South Wales is not without excitement and interest. One has not, possibly, to attain the standards of a Charles Lamb, a Leigh Hunt or a Richard Steele but it is to one's advantage to have read the writings of such illustrious men in literature, even though it does not protect you from the rugby official or supporter in full cry.

At a tender age, one walks and writes, in the shadow of the great critics of the day, and in fear of the leading officials. Then, in later years, one finds the unapproachable mellowing and life becomes even more pleasant. There are still 'slings and arrows' to torment one and, as one can never know it all, there is always something new each day, in each match, to maintain the appetite.

In the 1920's and 30's, senior rugby officials were autocratic and all powerful. It was their game, and the players rarely got to know them. In fifty years, the world has changed and, if not for the better all over, it has improved the lot of the rugby player and the game. The player is now much more a part of the scene, and they are even allowed to talk to the Press, except on certain weeks of the year when they take their international 'vows'.

On the whole, rugby administrators are much more understanding, and enjoy talking about their clubs and unions, and like to see headlines in the papers that help to publicise the game, which is rapidly becoming 'big money' as its attractions and delights hurry round the world to capture the imagination of young and old alike. The late William Webb Ellis, buried in a comfortable grave in France, must wonder about it all when he looks down from the sporting Valhalla.

The 'Perils of Pauline' do not compare with the dangers associated with rugby criticism in Wales. Talking about the game in clubhouse or bar and propounding after a match why Dai didn't score or why the referee had one eye or needed glasses, or why the English, Scottish or Irish players were better at the lineout, is an enjoyable task. In these hours I have heard golden opinions of all sorts of people and fearsome slurs cast upon others.

Yet these are words that perish in the darkness of the night, even if some are carried on the lips of a 'well-wisher' to the one that has been cursed by the rival club not more than 15 miles away. Easy, yes, for the watcher who is there for pleasure only but so much harder for the man with the pen, typewriter and telephone, since what he dictates across the wires from the chill ground that only minutes before was heated by thousands of excited bodies giving vent to their feelings upon the unfortunate parents of the referee, will appear in cold, black print in the morning.

If it has been scathing, then it is not long before a voice may be heard, on answering the phone, 'I haven't read the paper, but they tell me you have been having a go at us! What have we done to upset you? Dai was only trying to heel the ball from the ruck . . . you are wrong to say he was scraping . . .'. Then, when you praise one side for a fine performance, the other club will argue that you were 'laying it on a bit heavy'. So you cannot win, but you can enjoy it all.

In Wales, the folk who watch, know so much about it. They rarely miss a trick and can counter with the most scorching of questions. They know all about the members of the Press Box and if you write about a certain player more than three times he becomes a 'favourite' and is accused of receiving special treatment. Nothing better, indeed, for keeping one's feet firmly on the ground.

A rugby writer living in Wales, has to return to the scene of his observations all too quickly. There is no escape. Write what you see and hear. Check and counter check . . . and still, you will not please everyone!

The Press boxes in Wales are quite happy places, if you can manage to get in on big match days. There exists a friendly atmosphere and one is so near the spectators that the exchange of views is free and eager, if sometimes unprintable. Advice for the press is free, loudly vocal and often disenchanting. Some clubs have their own experts, and few can compare with Mrs. Mainwaring of Aberavon, but Cardiff's own North stand enclosure commentator needs no radio or TV to carry his message, which is loud and clear and to the point.

So when you move away to a warm bar, after a cold floodlit match, think of those 'heroes' of the press box (and the Arms Park Club press box is a cold one), sending off their messages of the 'match you didn't see'.

Yet thank you, on behalf of all my colleagues for reading the papers. After all, it is a living, if a dangerous one!



Those were the days

WILFRED WOOLLER

There is a tradition and discipline inherent in belonging to a great Club akin to serving in a crack regiment. There is none of this purile socialist dogma of levelling down to the mediocre, a diffusing of precious talent among the many like yeast in flour to raise the whole to edible proportions. It is precisely the reverse. Great Clubs earn their reputation on the cult of excellence. The best only is good enough for them and sports' players by instinct want to be the best. To gain a cap for Cardiff is to gain esteem throughout the rugby world.

Cardiff is of course not unique in this respect. Great Welsh clubs have their fine traditions like Newport, Swansea or Llanelli or in England the Harlequins, Coventry and Northampton. But with due respect to my friends in those quarters there is something a little different about Cardiff. Maybe it is because the club has been so closely allied with the National Fifteen at Cardiff Arms' Park or perhaps because it played such an important part in the development of the game but whatever the cause it does have a special niche in the Halls of Rugby Fame.

It is a fact that for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness or in health the glamour of the Cardiff Club brought me to South Wales in September 1936. There are no doubt those among us who regret that but I am catholic in my taste and will brook no divorce. It is however a pleasant reflection on the less exacting times of my youth that one married a game rather than a career. Today no doubt I would first join the public sector in a department with an inflation free pension, but still I hope play for Cardiff.

Memory is oft a lying jade, but one looks back not on a string of victories recorded so meticulously by Danny Davies, in those halycon leading up to World War II but rather to a vast array of friends, acquaintances, and incidents.

Etched deep in my memory is a victory over Llanelli at Stradey by a round 20 points, a very rare occurrence, indeed I recall chipping a ball over my opposing centre's head and gathering a kindly bounce right out of the arms of a very surprised full-back to score a try between the posts.

I recall Llanelli returning to the Cardiff Arms' Park, reduced by injury to twelve players and coming as near as a whisker to winning the day. There was another day at St. Helen's when we were under pressure from a magnificent Swansea pack on a very wet day and with a minute to go were losing by six points to four. I dropped desperately for goal and watched the ball hit the upright, bounce sideways on to the cross-bar, and roll over for victory. We needed a police escort to our bus.

There was a last game of the season that we needed to win to clinch the unofficial Championship up on the hill on the old Pontypool ground. I put Gwyn Porter away on my wing and he ran behind the posts where horror of horrors he dropped the ball. From then on we were hounded all over the Park and as local M.P. Major Clement Atlee observed in our dressing room afterwards were lucky to scramble home.

Battles against Newport had their own epic flavour but the bright highlights were unquestionably the games against the Barbarians before nothing less than 20,000 spectators. I recall two sparkling victories and a draw in successive years. There is a superb feeling of well-being, a sense of fulfilment as one walks off a field tired, slightly battered but victorious. A tumble into a soaking hot bath, a leisurely change and a short trip to your pals at the Bar where the inimitable Babs Filer drew a long, cool pint of beer. Bitter beer was bitter beer in those days at around 7 pence a pint, and I had many a Sunday morning headache to prove it.

And that remarkable visit to the Twickenham Sevens as the first ever Welsh guest team in 1939, by the kind permission of the W.R.U., who had hitherto been unshakable in the belief that any rugby game played with less than fifteen a side, unless arrived at by legitimate injury, was a half-way stage to the professional north. Graham Hale got us through the first round with the only drop goal of his life and thereafter I sat with my team in the stand planning the tactics as they saw how the game should be played. We won the competition comfortably in the end, celebrated right royally, and brought a cheque back for the Cardiff Royal Infirmary.

Gone are some of the old familiar faces and they are no doubt side-stepping brilliantly on the Elysian fields above. Arthur Jones for example, my second captain. Les Spence was the first and a very skilful leader he was. Many contemporaries remain, older, wiser perchance and certainly more garrulous. The bones may creak but the spirit is there, some of the best tries I ever did score I got sitting in the stand. We all like to reminisce from time to time. What a wonderful strong running wing was Arthur Bassett. Duncan Brown was emerging as a powerful full-back and Graham Hale was a coming Welsh centre, sad for those two the war came. Arthur Porter was fleet foot on the wing and Lyn Williams a delightful link at out-half, the total opposite to the mercurial Cliff Jones. There was my pal Wendy Davies at prop, who stamped hard on any swinging hooker's foot, and scrum half Shorty Morgan who lost his front teeth to an over enthusiastic handoff by Ivor Jones. There was Jim Regan our Irish hooker always calling for more weight and we traced his last child to a very rough night one Easter with the boys. There was Harry Rees, Eddie Watkins, and the sleek moving Selby Davies at wing forward and that irresponsible character and utility player Ianto Jones the story teller. They came from off the beat, up from the pit, from the building-site, the office, the universities and the professions and they put on the blue and black jersey and they were one. That is the spirit which makes a great Club, and which makes a Club great.

Some Messages of Congratulation

Cable and Telegraphic Address:
"RUGUNION" SYDNEY.



Telephone: 27-5594, 27-5595.

Australian Rugby

Football Union

RUGBY UNION HOUSE, CRANE PLACE, SYDNEY, N.S.W. 2000.

Congratulations from the Australian Rugby Football Union to Cardiff on your Centenary Season, 1976/77.

Congratulations on your excellent winning record and valuable contribution to Rugby.

Best wishes for a successful and memorable Centenary with continued future success but please, stop beating the Wallabies!.

JOHN DEDRICK,
Secretary

From the

Rhodesia Rugby Football Union

It is with sincere pride and affection that we offer our salutations to Cardiff R.F.C. on their Centenary celebrations.

How fortunate Rhodesia was to strike up this friendship towards the end of Cardiff's first century. Cardiff, on their 1972 tour, inspired the revival of Rhodesian rugby, and for this alone we shall be eternally grateful. Since then, our friendship has blossomed, and we sincerely hope that, during Cardiff's next century, we shall have many reciprocal visits.

Rhodesia will really come of age when our green and white hooped jerseys run on to the lush turf on the banks of the River Taff.

We join Rugger Fans from all parts of the world in wishing Cardiff R.F.C. congratulations on the past 100 years, and we are sure that their illustrious name will remain in pride of place for ever and a day. My Union is thrilled and honoured to participate in your celebrations.

Best wishes,

Iechyd-da,

Cofion Cynnes,

REG STEWART,
President