

THE PIONEERS, 1873 - 1876

*"To play at Loggets, nine holes or ten pinnes,
To try it out by footeball by the shinnes."*

(A Bard of the time of King James VI. and I.)

It is not alone our duty, but likewise that of all succeeding generations, to Pay tribute to those gallant adventurers who, little recking how they built, were yet the moulders of what has since developed into a truly magnificent Rugby heritage.

Whilst collecting the material for this book, the habit developed of referring to any Rugby matches that took place prior to October, 1876, as "The Unofficial Period."

The more we know of -the "official period," the more convinced are we that the former time should go down to history as "The Days of Delightful Inconsequence." Those who have experienced the charms of country house cricket with its camaraderie and accompanying spirit of easy abandon, will gather precisely what we wish to convey. Our pioneers took part in a winter pastime; and were in consequence freed from any hard and fast rule governing the costume required for the occasion. Trousers might be long, duly tucked into the socks, short, or even "half-mast"; this complete indifference to "kit," in contrast to cricket, gave scope to the adventurers to display their individuality.

Half a dozen enthusiasts met more or less casually and decided it would add greatly to the pleasantries of life if a game of Rugby were played against, say, their friends in Yorkshire, whom they had already encountered during those charming Easter tours undertaken by such clubs as Darlington and Sunderland.

With what authority these cheery people used the title "Durham County" we know not; maybe justification was found in the fact that the players were drawn from some half-dozen centres. It does not always follow that Rugby Clubs were already established in these towns; a player only owed his selection to the organizers having knowledge of his acquaintance With the game as then played; knowledge derived more than likely whilst at Durham or some other Rugby-playing school. For this reason we have recorded in the section devoted to tables, the players who participated in these earlier fixtures as of "Club or Town of Residence."

Picture, if you can, this charming inconsequence (which actually happened) . Four enthusiasts partaking of a sumptuous champagne luncheon, calmly proceed to select an alleged representative County XV, because one of the party had received a wire from H. W. T. Garnett, the famous Bradford, Yorkshire and England player, suggesting "you give us a contest at Rugby" ! How delightfully phrased, and yet mark well the total disregard of such presumed modern necessities as committees, secretaries, treasurers, "gates," tickets, seats, and best of all, referees. The captains

settled their own differences, more or less! Having duly selected their XV from the usual three or four clubs or centres embracing a majority of their friends, and the champagne, possibly followed by "old brandy," assisting in dispelling any ambiguity, it was discovered that the names of at least " five very desirable fellows " had been omitted. "What matters?- invite the lot; Yorkshire will not mind "and Yorkshire, always willing to oblige, did not mind. Hence the twenty-a-side match at Leeds in March, 1875.

Upon another occasion Yorkshire turned up a man short; the Durham skipper immediately dispensed with the services of one of his men, but not necessarily the same man for the full period of the game. And be it noted, this particular match was played in four periods of twenty minutes each-a not uncommon practice at the time, at least in club games. The selected of Durham all participated, but at no time were there more than fourteen men afield. Shades of Twickenham and Murrayfield ! Let us touch upon some of the outstanding personalities of these earlier years. Tom Watson, who only passed over in the Spring of 1935 at the great age of 95½, excelled at most outdoor sports. He was slipping greyhounds at 15 years of age; for 18 years he was Master of Darlington Foot Harriers, and followed this up by forming a pack of Beagles. For 10 years he captained the Darlington Cricket Club, and amongst his other achievements he shot elk in Scandinavia and landed salmon from Loch Tay for something like 35 consecutive years. Motor loungers may be interested to know that he walked 55 miles in 19½ hours in the Lake District, whilst he was one of the few people present at both the jubilee and Centenary Celebrations of the Stockton and Darlington Railway. He very kindly loaned us his most interesting scrap-book, for which we were truly grateful.

There were no less than five pairs of brothers " playing County " at this time (and of course three of the famous Kayll family, who are dealt with in greater detail in the section reserved for biographies). The "pairs " include Charles Ernest Bell and his more famous brother, John Lowthian; J. H. and F. W. Brooks; Charles and William A. Kidson; Arthur and James Laing; J. C. and S. C. Shewell.

The Bell brothers were Northumbrian born and picked up the rudiments of the game at Merchiston Castle School, Edinburgh. They were the sons of Thomas Bell (not of Sir Isaac Lowthian Bell, as has been incorrectly stated), and were cousins of that famous iron-master, the late Sir Hugh Bell. They spent most of their football life in County Durham and rendered magnificent service to the Darlington Club. However much we may dislike casting doubt upon any assertion maintained by the late William Cail, we are compelled to record that it was " C.E." and not " J.L." who scored both the first try and goal in Durham's initial County match. J. L. Bell was one of the outstanding half-backs of his time and secured international recognition against Ireland in 1878, exactly a week after Harry Kayll had played against Scotland. In addition, Bell played twice for North v. South and, in keeping with the easy-going methods of his time, he actually captained his native county, Northumberland, against Durham in 1876, and assisted them in administering a sound thrashing

to Cumberland the same season and again in 1880. He ranked as a most deceptive runner, a sound collarer, and great "dodger." Modernized, these terms have become "tackler" and "side-stepper," though of recent years our South-country friends have coined the word "jinking" as applied to elusiveness - a rose by any other name presumably there is nothing new under the sun. Though first and foremost a great half-back, Lowthian Bell also played at back (full-back in these days) for both Durham and Northumberland. He and Junor as the half-backs gave an Outstanding display against Yorkshire in 1876.

It might be as well to interpose a short comment upon team formation as then in vogue. In keeping with most other matters appertaining to Rugby, formation was of an elastic nature.

Generally, exclusive of forwards, we find quarters, halves and back; the quarters have to-day become half-backs, halves are now known as three-quarters, and the back carries the additional description "full." Nine, though upon occasion ten, forwards were customary, and the balance played in accordance with the captain's instructions. Two full-backs were frequently played, more often by our opponents, who upon numerous occasions fielded three men in this position. The quarters, of course, worked the scrum, but individual captains have been known to rely upon one quarter-back only. Two half-backs were usual, but our tabulations show three have also functioned. Summarized, nine or ten forwards-five or six "outsides."

Those would-be pioneers of 1910-14, with their alleged "new" formation of three half-backs, will most certainly have to look to their laurels. Even the so-called innovation of the All Blacks of 1905, of one rover or wing-forward, one half, two five-eighths, three three-quarters and a full-back, appears rather like an old friend in new garb, for we discovered an enterprising cup-tie team of 1882 which, possessing seven exceptionally fine forwards, took courage in hand, relied upon a single scrummage-worker, and thoroughly trounced their opponents with the then unheard of formation of seven fast-moving "outsides."

We occasionally smile at the present-day critics of the wing forward, since they persist in classifying this admitted plague as a new disease; there is abundant evidence, and to spare, of his healthy development in all four countries so long ago as the early eighties, and in actual fact both Durham and Northumberland unblushingly selected a "flying-man" in 1881, at which time really authoritative critics, writing of English, Irish, Welsh and Scottish representative Rugby, were positively rude, if not libellous, concerning the gentry in question.

J. H. Brooks, in addition to his ability as a forward, fulfilled the onerous post of Secretary for five years. Sam Shewell was dared to label thoroughly unsuitable Victorian street or terrace houses as "Scrooge's Private Academy for Young Gentlemen," together with the Board Schools of the time, also

maintained a steady flow of recruits-thus proving, if proof indeed be needed, the unchanging democratic nature of this, the greatest of all winter games.