

8th Season 1879-0

Taking over the reins from his brother, R.P. (Robert Paley) Wilson, youngest of the five Wilson brothers, was elected captain but he was able to serve only until January 1880 when both he and his brother Henry left the city. Henry Wilson did not appear again after the last match of the previous season but he did keep contact with the club over the years. He moved to Hull where he pursued his career as a solicitor. Robert Wilson also qualified as a solicitor but then was to enter the church. He was ordained at Lichfield Cathedral and went on to spend well over thirty years of his life as a missionary in the Solomon Islands in the Pacific which at that time were a British protectorate. He died in 1947 at Worthing.

James Hutchings, a forward of “sturdy frame”, having been elected vice-captain, took over the leadership. He also captained the Devon county team during the season and had been a player since the club’s inaugural season,

Records of only eight matches played by the club have been found so far for 1879-1880. At least one match, against Sherborne, was cancelled due to a frozen ground. Fixtures against new opponents in the guise of Plymouth were announced. Return matches were to be played at a neutral venue in Newton Abbot but these games appear not to have been played. If they did take place no press coverage has come to light as yet.

However patchy this playing season might appear the game of football was gaining in popularity within the city. Comment was made about the number of spectators assembling to watch matches with “many ladies gracing the ground by their presence, and evidently taking an interest in the play” despite the fact that little provision was being made for the comfort of onlookers. When the club had started playing no entrance fee was charged but before long money was being collected at the gate. Admission charges were only gradually followed by improvement in arrangements for the viewing public.

The season opened with a trip to Tiverton to play Blundell’s. Exeter played one man short but still managed a draw with each side scoring a try. Three victories followed – against Fulland’s School (from Taunton), Newton College and Torquay. The south Devon team arrived two players short which allowed Exeter a comfortable win. The visitors failed to reply to the home team’s goal and five tries. The fact that only one of the six tries was converted drew comment from the local press. “If the club wish to win their matches it is necessary that they should practice drop and place kicks more”.

On the day of the Torquay match a 2nd XV was despatched to play Kelly College at Tavistock. Only eleven players travelled but with the aid of two substitutes Exeter won a thirteen-a-side game by a goal and a try to a goal.

Games against Wellington again were probably the strongest fixtures on the card. Robert Wilson made his final appearance in the home game which was drawn, each side scoring a try. The Exeter try was obtained by H.B. Kindersley who played alongside his brother R.S. who was later to be capped by England whilst a student at Oxford University. Exeter’s return visit to Somerset team’s home ground again ended in a very heavy defeat. Apart from the result nothing else is known about this game.

Exeter suffered a home defeat when Blundell’s were the visitors. Playing conditions must have been very poor as the “miserable plight of the players afforded the few spectators great amusement”.

In a more pleasant environment the final recorded game was played at home against the United Services College from Westward Ho! This produced “one of the best matches of the season”. The fact that no tries were scored nor goals kicked seems not to have detracted from the enjoyment.