

### 3rd Season 1874-5

Optimism was high for the season with C.B. Sanders as captain once more. Whereas Exeter had twenty members on its inauguration two years previously, the club could now boast some 50 members for the start of the 1874-5 season. Another full programme of matches had been arranged and for the first time there is mention of an Exeter 2<sup>nd</sup> XV. Come the end of the season, the senior side had lost only one match outright, thereby justifying that optimism.

Some later sources quote 1873 and this season as seeing the inauguration of Exeter Football Club but this is not borne out by press reports of the time. What may have happened possibly some time before the season began was an amalgamation of Exeter Football Club and that of the Wilson brothers' A.N.Y. club which might partly explain the increase in playing membership. Some fifty years later Robert Wilson recalled that the "City F.C. was in a bad way" and "A.N.Y. members formed the nucleus of a new Exeter Football Club". In all probability it was these statements that caused confusion over the formation date of the current club.

That there was some form amalgamation in 1873 or 1874 is highly likely but the new E.F.C. to all intents and purposes was the same club that was formed in October 1872. Wilson prefaced his remarks with "If I remember right". He may not have recalled the true events correctly. During its first two seasons (1872-3 and 1873-4) the press did not refer to the new football organisation as the "City Football Club". Reference later may have been made to the "city team" to distinguish it from the Exeter Training College team or "the club from the city of Exeter" but there is no reference as yet discovered to an Exeter City Football Club at that time.

Moreover there is a continuity of personnel, including captain Charles Sanders, from the foundation date to this current season. To say that A.N.Y. formed the nucleus of a "new" club is maybe an exaggeration. The Wilson brothers' team played very few recorded matches. Only three games against Exeter and one against the Training College were reported and in one of these games A.N.Y. could field only twelve men. However, it would be true to say they had some talented players who were to bolster E.F.C. teams for several seasons to come, not the least of whom were Robert Wilson and his brother Henry.

It was also recalled that the colours of the club were now white and black hoops instead of brown.

A practice match was played at Victoria Park on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of October and the first game of the season took place at Tiverton against a local Club & School Combined XV. Blundell's School had only recently adopted the Rugby Union rules, a fact that was reflected in the result, Exeter winning by three goals and 12 touch-downs to nil.

Next came the now traditional fixture with the Training College. A comment that Exeter "included several players of note from other clubs" may be a reference to the recent amalgamation. The game was declared to be a draw after a dispute when the two umpires could not agree on the legitimacy of a College touch-down. The two clubs did not meet again for two years.

Before Christmas two games were played against teams from Taunton. One was styled Church College Taunton (away) and the other Mr. Reed's Taunton team (home). The latter team may have represented Fulland's School. These two fixtures sandwiched one against Teignmouth at Shaldon. All of these three games resulted in victories for Exeter. There followed an away game at Sherborne which ended, for the visitors, in a surprise draw. For this trip the South Western Railway Company had agreed that Exeter players and supporters could travel at single fare rate for a return trip. The train departed Queen Street station at 12.55 p.m. but not everyone had taken advantage of the offer as the team travelled two players short, thus making the draw all the more creditable. One report states that the game "commenced at 3.15 with a good scrimmage that lasted 6 or 7 minutes".

The Boxing Day match between the Residents and Non-Residents appears also to have ended in a draw. At the start of the New Year the expansion of the Club's horizons was evidenced by the arrangement of a home fixture with Wimbledon from London (Wimbledon Hornets being a founder member of the Rugby Football Union in 1871) and return games against Clifton (founded 1871) who could claim to be the strongest team in the west of England.

As yet no record of the Wimbledon fixture has come to light but there are reports of snow and floods in the Exeter area over the weekend of January 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> 1875 so it is possible that the game did not take place. The following weekend conditions had improved to allow the home fixture with Clifton to go ahead. The visitors inflicted the only outright defeat on the club for the season. A fortnight later the return fixture was declared a draw in favour of Clifton. For this away match Exeter fielded a full complement though one of the team was the ubiquitous "A.N. Other".

A win against Blundell's (in their own right) and three draws in favour of Exeter, one against Newton and two against Budleigh Salterton completed the season. In the fixture against Newton, Exeter fielded twelve against fourteen and at Budleigh twelve against fifteen. The return fixture against the latter opponent was played on a neutral ground at Exmouth and Exeter this time was able to field a full side.

The senior team played 13 games of which six were won, six left drawn and only one lost. At least one second team game was played which resulted in a victory over Cullompton.