

## 5<sup>th</sup> Season 1876-7

At a meeting at the Globe Hotel in September 1876 Henry Wilson was re-elected captain and former leader C.B. Sanders appointed vice-captain. Once more a list of thirteen fixtures was in prospect and this time, although the weather at times was unfavourable, all the fixtures were fulfilled.

Apart from return fixtures with the Clifton club all the opponents were Devon or Somerset based. It is also interesting to note that over half of the matches were played against teams from educational establishments.

The Training College was met on no fewer than three occasions. The first of these games, the opening fixture, resulted in "one of the best football matches that has taken place in Exeter for some time". The pitch was slightly slippery after morning rain, even so the spectators who turned out to witness the game were numerous. The match ended in "as hardly earned a victory as the Exeter club has ever accomplished". Fittingly it was Henry Wilson who scored the only try of the game.

The second meeting which took place in November was somewhat contentious. Twice the College disputed points of play that appeared to be to the advantage of Exeter and twice the club eventually conceded. The result was declared a draw with each side obtaining a try. In March the two teams met for a third time and this game was also declared to be a draw after yet another dispute. Henry Wilson crossed for what appeared to be a try but the College challenged the claim alleging that the Exeter captain had crossed the touch-line. Wilson, along with many spectators, did not agree but Exeter yet again conceded "to preserve the peace". One suspects these games were fiercely competitive.

In contrast the club travelled to Westward Ho! in November to play the United Services College team. Matches against this college were recalled with fondness by players in later years. Played without a referee and umpires, all decisions were made in agreement between the captains. Moreover the visitors were "hospitably entertained" at dinner in the College by kind permission of the Headmaster.

Unlike the previous season, no games were lost to the weather though in early December a match at Newton College was played on a ground that had been under water two days previously and on the morning of the following game at Paignton it rained so heavily that several players failed to put in an appearance and a 12-a-side match was played. Both of these games ended in Exeter's favour. Massey scored a try and kicked a goal to add to Henry Wilson's try to defeat the College whose team had been reinforced by "outsiders" after a "thoroughly harmonious match". Paignton was defeated by another Massey try.

Possibly the most rewarding of the victories this season came against Wellington at Topsham Barracks. Exeter scored a goal and three tries to a goal and one try by their opponents. Massey scored yet another a try that he converted to which captain Wilson added a hat-trick of tries.

Wins for the season totalled six and there were four drawn games. Of the three defeats, two came at the hands of the strong Clifton club. The two teams did not meet

again for seventeen years. The only other defeat came in the first ever meeting with Weston-super-Mare, a game that was played in a “drenching storm”. The home team scored four tries to one by Exeter who played one man short.

An insight into the composition of the Exeter club can be gauged from a Saturday match played in November between club players representing the Law and the World. The World fought the Law, and the Law won.

To be able to field a team representing the legal profession in the city from within its own membership suggests the club at that time recruited more from the professional than the artisan classes. This balance was eventually to change.