

12th Season 1883-4

This season was a significant one for the Exeter club. In September members of the Isca club received a deputation from Exeter with a proposition that the two clubs be amalgamated. Isca was one of the many football clubs operating within the city; at the peak in the years before the turn of the century there were as many as sixteen of them.

Amalgamation was agreed at the Bude Hotel meeting and it was further agreed that management would be shared between the two clubs. This resulted in joint captains and joint secretaries being appointed, one from each club. The name Exeter was retained for the revised organisation but the colours were changed from black and white to blue and white “in very small stripes”.

One of the joint captains was Cecil Robert Mainwaring Clapp who, alongside several other players with the same surname, had played regularly for a number of years. He was a solicitor and in 1894 was appointed Sheriff of Exeter. He also held office as Treasurer to both Exeter F.C. and the Devon R.F.U. Scant information has been unearthed relating to W.F. Coombe, the joint captain, other than the fact that he had played for Isca.

Two immediate effects resulted from the amalgamation. Firstly a full fixture list for two fifteens could be published before the season commenced. This included 26 first team games. Unfortunately records of only fifteen can be found but at the end of the season, for the first time, a comparative table of season records for some local clubs was published. This showed that Exeter had played 24 games of which ten had been won, ten lost and four drawn. Two matches did not take place; one due to an error by the Barnstaple secretary and the other a game against new opponents Chard Rovers.

Secondly Exeter now had eighty members. The season began earlier than usual with a trial being played on the last Saturday in September followed by another trial a week later. However, as the season progressed, the increase in numbers did not always provide the advantage expected. In November the club played two men short against Wellington, narrowly losing, and one man short against Crediton, winning convincingly. For the first game against Blundell's only 13 players turned up and the low point came in a return game against Tiverton when Exeter travelled with only nine players. In these two latter games substitutes were found but both were lost. The fact that all these games where Exeter could not field a full team were away matches may point to reluctance on the part of players to travel, a fact that dogged the club in the years up to the end of the century.

For the initial fixture against Chard Rovers in January Exeter did not turn up at all and, according to their opponents, had given no notice. However the Somerset team went on to admit that had Exeter turned up the game would not have taken place because of adverse pitch and weather conditions!

There were problems at home games as well. Following a draw in November, criticism was voiced by Tiverton about crowd control. Spectators, they said, should be restrained and not allowed to wander across the playing area at their own free will and hamper play. Clearly the St. Thomas ground was not fit for purpose as yet. A change of the Exeter home venue was to come in the following season.

Judging by the match reports available this was a season of two halves. All seven known victories occurred before Christmas, only the defeat at Wellington early in November interrupting the sequence. At the end of December against Bridgwater, Exeter suffered their first home defeat. Four more losses then followed including one against their now close city rivals, Rougemont, before managing to hold Blundell's School to a scoreless draw in March.