

70th 71st 72nd Years 1941-1944

Early in October the press announced that the Exeter Rugby Football Club had closed for the duration of the war and consequently only a very few games were played in the city for three years.

In March 1942, during what was termed “H.M.S. Exeter Week”, a parade to the County Ground was followed by a celebration and then by a rugby match between Exeter and the Royal Naval Engineering College. This encounter took place in front of a large crowd. No charge for admission was made but a silver collection was taken. The visitors (described elsewhere as “a famous Navy XV”) proved too strong for the local team (possible score 3-19).

Mention is made of an Exeter XV playing a Royal Air Force XV during “Wings For Victory Week” in April 1943. No further details are known.

During the course of 1944 a couple of Seven-a-Side competitions were held at Paignton with an Exeter team listed among the competitors but again no further details are known.

Notification of the deaths of former players on active service came all too frequently. In August 1942 Alfred Gostling, a Lieutenant-Colonel with Queens Own Cameron Highlanders of Canada, lost his life during the Dieppe Raid. A former Exeter Oaks player, he appeared as a forward for Exeter 2nd XV between 1921 and 1923.

Peter Davis, a Captain with the Devonshire Regiment lost his life at Cassino, Italy, in July 1943. Whilst a student at Oxford University he made over a dozen appearances for Exeter’s senior team between 1936 and 1939. He was described as a more than competent understudy to Dick Madge.

Also appearing on the club’s war memorial are the names of Albert Raddon, William McGrath and Jack Pannell, all of whom lost their lives during 1943. The last named was an Exmouth regular who also appeared for Devon. He played for Exeter in early war-time games.

Caleb Greenwood Penny, a captain in the Royal Army Medical Corps, died in India in February 1944. He had attended Exeter School making occasional appearances for the Exeter club. He was better known as a player with St. George’s Hospital and Rosslyn Park.

1944 also saw the deaths of two club stalwarts.

Fred Job was serving on attachment to the Gloucestershire Regiment as a Major when he was killed in Italy in February. He made his debut for Exeter as a winger in December 1934 and was soon appearing for the county XV. He was club captain for the very successful final season before war commenced.

George Palmer was killed in action in Normandy during July. He was a Major in an Airborne Division of the Devonshire Regiment. He had made his debut for the club in 1934 and was a very regular member of the first team pack.

More war losses were to follow