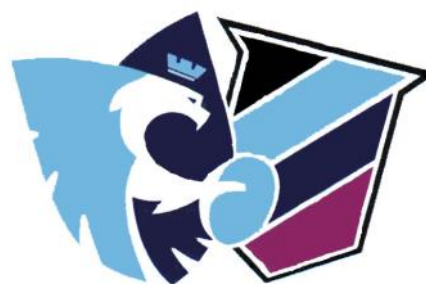


Bedford Rugby Followers

Feb 2021
Volume 2, Issue 1



Followers' News

Editorial

Last year has been a very trying time for all and we have missed our visits to Goldington Road and our visits to the away games.

Realistically I cannot see us getting to home games before next season and away games are something we can hope will happen next season. What limits will be placed of crowd sizes? The club are asking for crowd funding to raise £50k to cover the cost of testing. They will also be charging £10 per match to watch live games to cover other costs of staging the games. At the current time they have raised over £48k so if you have not yet donated please look at the club website. They will have to up the target so the fund is progressing well.

[Bedford Blues launch Crowdfunding campaign : Bedford Blues RFC \(bedfordrugby.co.uk\)](https://www.bedfordrugby.co.uk)

The Followers Committee have decided to donate £2,000 to the crowd funding which will bring the total over the initial target. The great thing about crowd funding is, that if enough people donate, then all the small donations soon add up.

It will be great to see some action at last. All of us have surely seen our expenditure decrease certainly in our budgets for attending matches so please consider a contribution. Some fans of working age may be having some financial problems but give what you can.

For any of you that have not been members of the Followers before I have put together a guide to the followers on page 4.

Our Chairman has also been busy putting together a new quiz for you. The next issue will have a further House of Games quiz which I am told will be our first prize competition. He has also put together some of the history of rugby from its inceptions and the development of the rugby ball.

On a brighter note we do have the 6 nations Championship with all matches on terrestrial TV. I booked the sofa for 4:45 on Feb 6th to see Scotland beat England. Not quite what I wanted to see, England gave away far too many penalties and seemed to kick away possession at every opportunity. Only the England defence kept the score down.

Lastly the fixtures for the revised championship league have been published meaning we play everyone once either at home or away but with London Scottish declining to play. Matches for Bedford will be the Blues website, on page 16 and on the Followers website (once I have finished sending this out). Full listings of all matches can be found on [championshiprugby.co.uk](https://www.championshiprugby.co.uk).

Mel Grover

Inside this issue

Editorial.....	1
COVID-19 Health Champion Scheme	2
A few words from Andy Cobley	3
Who are the Followers	4
House of Games	5/9
Jackie's Quiz-Answers	10
Mick's Quiz Answers	10
History of Rugby	11-15
Members Forum -	16
Our aims	16

Ed: Here is an article from our president with no rugby content unfortunately but nevertheless the message is very important to all of us at the moment.

COVID-19 HEALTH CHAMPION SCHEME.

The COVID-19 Health Champion Scheme has been put together by the Bedford Borough Council, Public Health England, the NHS, The CCG (Care Commissioning Group) and a number of other organisations with the aim of ensuring that as many people as possible can be kept informed about issues connected to the COVID-19 Pandemic and can help get the right advice to people.

It is also designed to allow ordinary people to ask questions about all aspects of the pandemic and get those questions answered by a qualified person.

Unfortunately, there have been many 'stories' posted about the contents of vaccines, etc. that are, being blunt, complete garbage and posted by people who are in no way qualified to comment on any aspect of the crisis. These false stories and a liberal sprinkling of criminal scams trying to extract money from people have been causing significant levels of stress to many people thereby magnifying the mental health problems of the pandemic.

The group formed a couple of months ago from officials of the relevant organisations and volunteers from the Bedford community. I am one of those volunteers. The group is chaired by the Mayor Dave Hodgson.

We receive regular briefings on the latest information from all areas such as the Council and have had a number of presentations on specific issues with one being by the person on the CCG who has overall responsibility for the vaccination programme in the borough. All these meetings are done via zoom so we are socially distanced. These meetings are joint with a group of Faith Leaders from the area.

At various times we also receive an E-Mail that contains a series of posts that we are asked to circulate as widely as possible. It is up to us how we distribute them. I post the information to the Followers Facebook page and E-Mail them to people on my contacts list that may find the information of use.

The Official statement of the role is:

We will send regular emails to COVID-19 Health Champions updating them on the latest COVID-19 messages and health and wellbeing information.

It is the role of the COVID-19 Health Champion to share this information with friends, family, colleagues, groups and community, however they choose.

By sharing clear information you, your friends, family and community can make sense of the latest facts, make informed choices, and help minimise the risk of the virus spreading.

COVID-19 Health Champions are not required to give advice but any requests for advice can be sent through to us via our dedicated email address.

COVID-19 Health Champions will be invited to attend informal, virtual drop-in sessions where they have the opportunity to feed back from the community about the positive things that are happening and ask questions.

Please look at the Followers Facebook page to see the postings I put up there and E-Mail me any questions you have so I can ask the questions for you at one of our zoom meetings. My E-Mail address is phil.novis@sky.com

There is a strong desire to get as much information as possible to as many people as possible so anybody else who would like to join the scheme would be most welcome. There are very few requirements apart from you must be 18 of age or over.

To join, just use the following link:

<https://www.bedford.gov.uk/social-care-health-and-community/public-health/coronavirus/covid-19-health-champions/>

Unfortunately, I do not see our lives returning to anything close to what used to be our 'normal' for a long time yet so the need to get accurate information out there is going to remain an important task. This is particularly important where more elderly or less tech savvy people are concerned as they are precisely the types of people that have, and still are, being targeted by criminals or plain evil people. I would see this scheme continuing for at least the remainder of 2021.

Phil Novis

A few words from the Vice Chairman - Andy Cobley

As I write this article we remain in national lockdown, and most people I know are understandably keeping a close eye on how the vaccine roll out is going, and when the country can start to ease the restrictions. I am a "glass half full" person so you can probably imagine my thoughts at the moment. Anyway, I thought it would be fun to take a look at the current squad, rumours with respect to new players, and the tie up with Northampton.

Listed on the Club Website are details of:- *Ed: I have added numbers of the Saints Players. It seems like we need a fly half and possibly a full back? For information on Alex Penny retiring and our new prop replacement see the Blues website.*

Prop -	4 + 2	Hooker -	1 + 1
Second Row -	3 + 1	Back Row -	2 + 2
Scrum Half -	2 + 1	Fly Half -	1.
Centre -	2 + 2	Wing -	1 + 2
Full Back -	1		

These numbers include Matt Worley as a centre, and Rich Lane as a full back.

17 players retained, and what super quality we have, in my humble opinion.

The addition of Tommy Bell from Ealing as recently detailed on the Club Website adds to the options at Full Back or Fly Half. The matches he played against the Blues last season showed him to be a top quality back that could be used in several positions as required.

The other possible new addition is also a back, Elijah Niko, also from Ealing. He played on the wing against us for Ealing and looks top quality. I must stress that this info came from the Rugby Paper so who knows how accurate it is.

Also, the detailed recent statement from our Board of Directors mentions 4 exciting new players to be announced soon, so let's keep an eye on the Website. The two above could well be included in those 4.

Last but not least is the new tie-up with Northampton Saints. In my opinion this is a great move under the circumstances. Giving regular Championship match time to Saints squad members, in addition to the 21 quality Blues players discussed/detailed above makes sense. I can't wait for the resumption of playing in whatever league format the powers that be decide to proceed with.

I will try to avoid giving my full opinion on the Premiership/Championship promotion/relegation debate. However, PRL seem desperate to get Sarries back in the fold ASAP, and I also believe the chequebook of Mike Gooley at Ealing may have some significant bearing going forward. I have probably said too much on the subject!

For your information the Followers Twitter account is @BRFA_1949. Also, I find the www.rolling-maul.com Website is very entertaining, with a huge variation of information and opinion.

Just one more thing to say - COYB. 😊

Andy Cobley

Editor: I am sure that Andy's glass does not remain half full very long!



Now is the time to get to know the Followers. To find out more visit our website where you can join for free for the rest of the season.

Who are the Followers?

The Followers aim to support and assist Bedford Rugby in various ways as determined by the Committee and by member proposals carried at an AGM or suggestions made through the season.

Away Trips

We run coaches to mainland away games to provide support for the Blues. Coaches used to leave from the club car park or from Goldington Road outside the club entrance. With the fire in the old hospital block, it is not possible to get coaches through the current diversion, so we have been leaving from the Gilbert Hitchcock car park area. Private cars can still park in the club on away game days but will need to display a notice to avoid car parking charges. We usually leave Bedford to arrive at the host club to arrive around 12:30 to 13:00 in plenty of time to get a meal and a drink before the game. The cost of the coach is dependent on the distance to the away ground. In the 2019/2020 season costs started around £10 for close encounters with Ampthill rising to £24 to Doncaster. A discount is given to junior members. The coach trip back means nobody has to drive especially if you can get a lift or walk to the ground!

Longer trips to Cornish Pirates usually involve overnight stays with the coach only at £90 with a two night package costing £170. Costs rise because we have the coach and driver for the whole time and pay for his accommodation. The coach is available for transfers to the rugby ground. We also run a raffle on the coaches which provides some beer and goodies to help pass the time. The profits help to cover any losses on the coach or go into Followers funds. In addition we do an away man of the match and provide a bottle of champagne to the winner. The champagne is paid for by volunteers.

Our Offices

We have an office at Goldington road located to the right of the main entrance. There we can take advance bookings for away trips and administer the Jackpot. Outside is a board which announces future away trips and where we write up the jackpot ticket winning numbers. The winners are also given on the Followers website.

The Jackpot

We run a Jackpot at home games to provide funds for the club and provide the cash prizes. The Committee and some volunteers help sell tickets at most of the home matches. Michael R Peters provide a prize at every home game and a proportion of the money taken is given out in prize money. The rest is put into Followers funds and at the end of the season excess funds are presented to the club.

Assisting the Club

We often assist with ground maintenance each summer and support when necessary to clear snow and the debris left behind after our fireworks displays. Tasks have involved painting of the offices, and the various buildings around the ground. painting the steps and handrails. We also have weeded and tidied the grounds and paved surfaces and cut back hedges.

Social Events

We have organised social events and help promote events held by the club. We have in the past run social events such as a May Ball and New Year's Eve party. We also have organised trips to the east coast in June. Unfortunately, these events do not now attract the numbers required to allow us to cover the costs, so we have decided to help support any larger events organised by the Blues. We will be trying to organise some lower key events such as a referee evening and a quiz. We are open to suggestions once we are over the current troubles.

Website


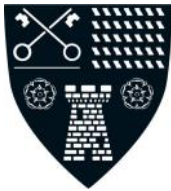



The Followers website has several pages of information regarding the Followers and Blues. We have details of away trips, jackpot winners, back issues of our newsletters, committee minutes and the constitution of the Followers, , away man of the match photos, application forms and upcoming events. We publish a bimonthly newsletter and have a Twitter and Facebook presence.

Mel Grover

Quiz Pages

We introduce a new quiz based on Richard Osman's House of Games "Answer smash". Basically there is a word clue and a picture clue and you smash the answers, the last part of the word clue is the first part of the picture clue. The answers are all teams we have played against from the eighties onwards. **Next months Answer Smash will be a prize version!**

EXAMPLE

<p>To hit a golf ball too far through poor selection of wood or iron.</p>	
	<p>ANSWER: OVERCLUBBEDFORD BLUES</p>
<p>A British television game show on ITV that ran between 1 July 1967 and 13 April 1975. Had the catchphrase "BERNIE THE BOLT".</p>	
	<p>ANSWER:</p>
<p>England International Rugby player "Nobby", born 5 October 1967 in Wrexham. Before professionalism, was a police officer with Leicestershire Constabulary's armed response unit.</p>	
	<p>ANSWER:</p>
<p>Singer and actress was part of the 1960s pop/soul trio the Supremes. Also starring in such films as 'Lady Sings the Blues' and 'The Wiz.'</p>	
	<p>ANSWER:</p>
<p>The vacuum flask designed and invented by Scottish scientist Sir James Dewar in 1892 is also known as this.</p>	
	<p>ANSWER:</p>

American singer-songwriter who co-wrote and sang the main theme for the 1981 film Arthur starring Dudley Moore and Liza Minnelli.



ANSWER:

British aircraft manufacturer. Its designs include the Lancaster.

(PS – yes the Italian club should really have the word 'RUGBY' first – quiz setters' licence)



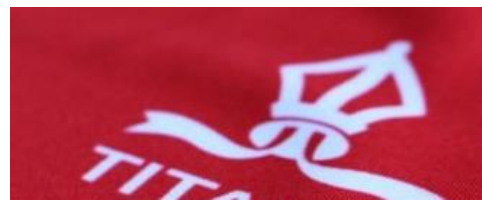
ANSWER:

Donald Malcolm Campbell died during a water speed record attempt at this place in the Lake District, England.



ANSWER:

He starred as FIFA President Sepp Blatter in United Passions, a film about football's governing body, and as Jack in Tin Star (Sky Atlantic).



ANSWER:

Best friend of Mr Tidy, this Mr has a black hat, black hair, a white coat, he has a white shirt he has a white tie he has white trousers he has black shoes.



ANSWER:

British multinational groceries and general merchandise retailer headquartered in Welwyn Garden City, England.



ANSWER:

He was the drummer and co-lead vocalist for the Eagles from 1971 until the band broke up in 1980.



ANSWER:

Dhaka is its capital and largest city.



ANSWER:

She married actor-writer-director Bryan Forbes in 1955. She acted with Forbes in The League of Gentlemen (1960).



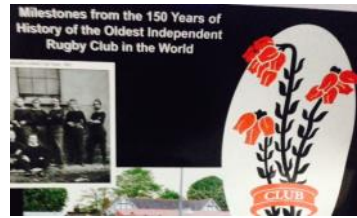
ANSWER:

Type of push-up underwire brassiere that gained worldwide prominence in the 1990s.



ANSWER:

The Rolling Stones wanted to do this to a red door in the song.



ANSWER:

Achieved independence from the United Kingdom on 27 April 1961, and Milton Margai became the country's first Prime Minister.



ANSWER:

Grampy Rabbit in Peppa Pig and PC "Fancy" Smith in Z-Cars.



ANSWER:

A song by American singer Katy Perry from Teenage Dream: The Complete Confection in 2012. Includes the lines "Gravity hurts, you made it so sweet 'til I woke up on, on the concrete".



ANSWER:

Sometimes called R2R, was a British television series shown on Channel 4 from 1982 until 2001, which allowed viewers to voice their complaints or concerns about TV programmes.



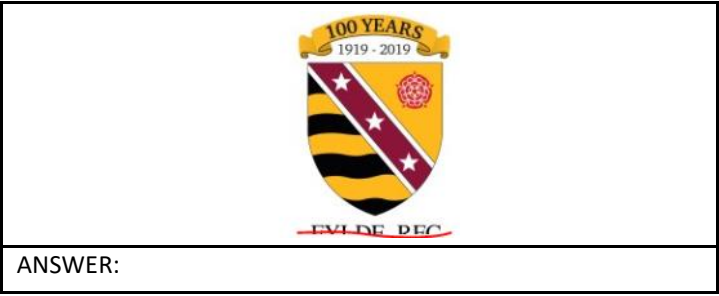
ANSWER:

Located near Eastbourne this cliff is the highest chalk sea cliff in Britain, rising to 162 metres (531 ft) above sea level.



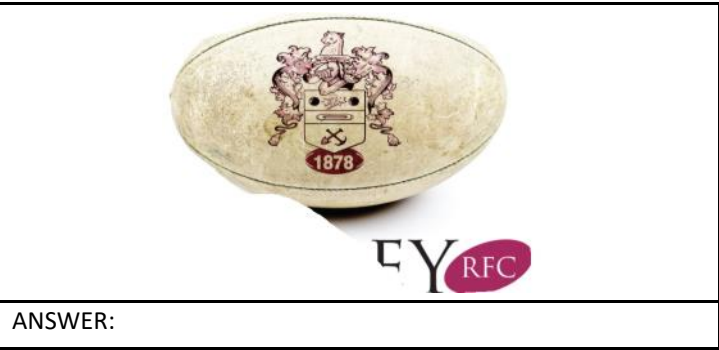
ANSWER:

Cartoon Duck and nickname of Philip DeFreitas, the only player in the history of the County Championship to take a five-wicket haul against each of the 18 first-class counties.



ANSWER:

The two-word nickname of Sir Mohamed Muktar Jama Farah CBE OLY, the British long-distance runner and the most successful British track athlete in modern Olympic Games history.



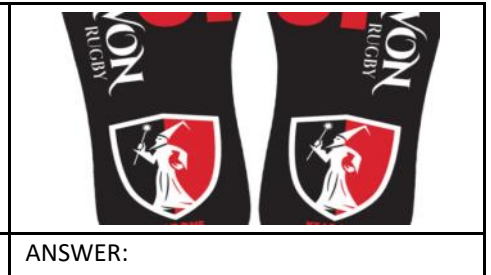
ANSWER:

A mute, highly aggressive arm-length puppet modelled on the Australian flightless bird. This bird, on the arm of Rod Hull will be remembered for its attack on Sir Michael Parkinson.



ANSWER:

This orphaned piglet is chosen for a "guess the weight" contest at a county fair. The winning farmer, Arthur Hoggett, brings him home and allows him to stay with a Border Collie named Fly in this 1995 family comedy-drama film directed by Chris Noonan.



ANSWER:

JACKIE'S SPORTSQUIZ 2019



1. Who scored a hat trick in the first 30 mins v France?
2. Which woman won the Australian Open to top the rankings?
3. Which golfer was disqualified in Saudi Arabia for damaging greens?
4. How many days did Paul Scholes last as manager of Oldham Athletic?
5. One was Brighton. Which team was the other?
6. Which jockey retired after 24 years which included 59 Cheltenham winners?
7. Who were the openers for Sunrise Hyderabad setting the IPL record?
8. Who hit a record 17 sixes in an innings at the cricket World Cup?
9. Who crashed when he blew his nose?
10. Which 15 year old beat Venus Williams at Wimbledon?
11. Which country won the Netball World Cup in Liverpool?
12. What did Egan Bernal win?
13. Which club did Wayne Rooney join?
14. Whose departure from Sky Sports "implied ageism"?
15. Where did Elind Kipchoge break the two hour marathon mark?
16. Which individual medals did Dina Asher Smith win in Doha?
17. Which double Olympic winning boxer retired in November?
18. How many points were Saracens deducted originally?
19. Why did Fallon Sherrock make the sports news?
20. Who did England women play in the sell-out match at Wembley?

[Mick Meadows' BRFA End of season quiz 2020](#)

1. How many tries have Bedford Players scored in internationals for the British Lions?
2. In total how many international appearances have Bedford players made for the British Lions?
3. When Bedford beat Rosslyn Park at Twickenham in 1975 who scored the Bedford Tries?
4. Which player has made the most international appearances while playing for Bedford?
5. What was unique about Budge Rogers being awarded the OBE?
6. On 4th November 1996 Bedford lost 41-27 to South Africa A what historically event in Rugby Union took place that evening?
7. Who is the most capped English Rugby player?
8. Who has captained England on most occasions ?
9. Who was the last Bedford Player to captain England?
10. How many tries for Wales Did Mike Rayer score?
11. Prior to the game turning professional what was unique about the shirts worn by a Bristol and Leicester?
12. Likewise what was unique about the shirts worn by Richmond and Bath?
13. Final question on Shirts what did Harlequins introduce that was subsequently banned? They had squad numbers
14. Who won the 1st European champions cup?
15. 2 Players who played for Bedford played in that final Mike Rayer was one who was the other?
16. 6 of the Northampton Saints winning side of 2000 subsequently went on to play for Bedford Matt Stewart, Jon Phillips, Matt Allen, Craig Moir and Ali Hepher who was the 6th...
17. Which Bedford player played in 2019 World Cup?
18. How many times have England played Ireland in the Rugby World Cup?
19. Which side have England played most in Rugby World Cup?
20. Who is the most capped Rugby player?

Ed: I know it's a long time but here are the answers at last.

Jonny May
Naomi Osaka
Sergo Garcia
31
Wolves
Ruby Walsh
David Warner & Jonny Bairstow
Eoin Morgan
Chris Froome
Coco Gauff
New Zealand
Tour de France
Derby County
David Gower
Vienna
100m silver, 200m gold
Nicola Adams
35
First woman to beat a man at the World Darts Championship
Germany

1 Beef Dancer V South Africa at Johannesburg 1938

7 = 3 Beef Dancer 1938, 2 Budge Rogers 1962, 2 Billy Steele 1974

Bob Demming (2) Derek Wyatt Chris Baliward Brian Keen

James Pritchard 48

First Englishman to receive the award for services to Rugby

Sean Cassidy replaced Jubb Marshall as the 1st tactical replacement in Rugby

Jason Leonard 114

Will Carling 57

John Orwin 1988

4

The wore letters and not numbers albeit Leicester's full back worn O and Bristol's A

They had no number 13 Full backs wore 16

Toulouse

Derwyn Jones

Dom Malone

Will Hooley

0 The only major nations not to have met in 9 world cups

Australia 7 England 4 wins

Richie McCaw

A Load of Old Ball

In the Beginning

We have all heard the story of William Webb Ellis in 1823, picking the ball up during a game of football at Rugby School and running with it. What you may not know is that at Rugby School, football was already played a little bit differently to other games of football. For a start, a goal was scored by kicking the ball over the crossbar and not through the goal posts.



The origin of rugby actually goes back a bit before Webb Ellis picked the ball up and ran with it. In 1820 in Rugby School players were allowed to catch the ball and kick it out of their hands. There were also no limits to the number of players on each side. To score a 'try' would not score points but allow a team to take a 'drop at goal'. Depending on the size of the teams, games could last up to 5 days. In 1839 Queen Adelaide visited Rugby School and witnessed the 75 players from School House taking on the 225 players representing the Rest of the School. Although Webb Ellis picked the ball up and ran with it in 1823, the rule (weren't laws back then) was not adopted straight away - running with the ball was not accepted into 'normal play' until 1830.

Because the game was born of this early version of football, the ball started life as round and varied in size depending on the pig's bladder it was made from. The Bedford Blue's kit sponsor GILBERTS were back then a local boot maker, and they took on the challenge of making balls to supply the school.

In 1930 there was a book published entitled 'Football Records of Rugby School, 1823-1929 and in it there is the following passage:

'Though the ball was never round, it was much less than an airship than at present. How the School originally came to play with an oval ball is unknown.'

James Gilbert did his own research into the origin and learned through an account written by a Mr E. F. T. Bennett, O.R., who was at Rugby School in the 1860's and who said in a letter to the Morning Post of April 22nd, 1930:

"As I am more than eighty-two years of age and my last football on Big Side was in 1864, I can say something about the ball we used in those days before the India rubber bladder had taken the place of the animal bladders, which Jim Gilbert used to blow tight with his great lungs.

'The shape of our ball came from the bladder and was a perfect ball for long drop-kicking, or placing, and for dribbling too.



Big Side Ball

'The modern plum-stone is good for none of these, but seems meant for carrying and throwing or passing between players.'

Mr Bennett wrote an article for The Badminton Magazine describing the balls used at Rugby in the 1860s. He wrote:

'The Big Side balls were half an inch larger every way than the ordinary ball (and this is a very vast difference); the ends were well rounded, and seventy yards was not at all an impossible kick: how few now think of trying a goal even from thirty yards.'

There is no record as to when the Rugby ball first began to assume its oval shape; probably some years before 1823. In Tom Brown's Schooldays in the description of the Big Side Game will be found these words: *'the new ball you may see lies there, quite by itself, in the middle, pointing towards the School goal.'* The ball had therefore become oval by 1835, when this game was supposed to have taken place.

Early Balls

Rugby footballs in the early days were made of four pieces of cowhide stitched together in the same way as they are today, and were inflated with pigs' bladders.

Inflation of the bladder was an unpopular and very unhealthy task and in those early days it was



Match and Puntabout Ball

necessary to ask for volunteers to inflate the ball for it was not a job that was sought after. The pig's bladder would be blown up while still in its very smelly 'green state' solely by lung power down the snapped stem of a clay pipe which was inserted into the opening of the bladder.

Originally the balls were just these pigs' bladders and unfortunately for both the players and the pigs alike, they did not last long and required replacing frequently. The solution to the problem was for the bladder to be covered with leather and it is that reason that the local shoemaker's were called in to solve the problem, not just GILBERTS but also a company called LINDON.



19 High Street

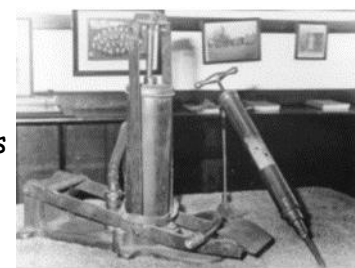
Originally, Gilbert's business was located at 19 High Street and Lindon lived next door as a young man at number 20. The High street led directly to Rugby schools quad entrance which is where the boys played their version of football - which was locally known as quad ball. This was before Rugby school gained its now famous playing fields. By 1800, leather casings surrounded the bladder, which is naturally oval in shape, to prolong the life of the ball. By the 1840s cobblers William Gilbert and Richard Lindon, were both supplying balls, boots and other equipment to the masters and boys of Rugby School.

In 1839 things changed. US Inventor Charles Goodyear discovered the process to vulcanise rubber. Vulcanization is a chemical process by which the physical properties of natural or synthetic rubber are improved. The finished rubber has higher tensile strength and resistance to swelling and abrasion, and is elastic over a greater range of temperatures. In its simplest form, vulcanization is brought about by heating rubber with sulphur.

Richard Lindon (1816 - 1887) applied this 'vulcanised rubber' method to the manufacture of bladders for his footballs but failed to patent the process. Others soon caught on and by the 1880s there were several manufacturers of 'balls' in England all using the same process. Lindon is also credited with inventing the adaptor with which to blow up the ball. He had good reason to invent this, his wife had contracted a lung disease and died, thought to have come from years of blowing up the pig's bladders using the clay stem pipe. She had 17 children!!

Richard Lindon had been Gilberts apprentice and on completing his shoe making apprenticeship had set up shop just down the road from Gilbert, and by 1849 was so inundated with requests for balls from the boys at the school, that he and his wife were producing more than they did shoes. Indeed, by 1861, he had become such a success, he was the main supplier of balls to Oxford, Cambridge, and Dublin Universities. He created the first four panelled rugby ball and was part of the growing standardisation of ball sizes through the 1860s and 70s.

One problem with using rubber however, was that it was incredibly tough to inflate, but inspired by a medical ear syringe, he created a large brass pump to inflate the balls. He presented his balls, as well as his brass inflator, at an exhibition in London where he won great acclaim. Despite his genius however, he didn't patent his ideas, which left him without the riches.



Richard Lindon's 1875 brass hand pump (right).

And Then Came the RFU

The leather rugby football ball below was made by William Gilbert (1799-1877) and exhibited at the 1851 Great Exhibition. As it was still such a new sport William Gilbert on stand 187 became the first major commercial producer with this template ball as his product.

Leather rugby balls continued, according to Mr Bennett's sketches in his magazine article, to still be this shape at the time the RFU was founded in 1871. The Rugby Football Union, however, did not move to standardise the dimensions of the ball until 1892.



In 1892 in 1892, the Rule that a Rugby ball should be oval in shape and as far as possible (or words to that effect) should measure 25.5 inches to 26

inches, in width circumference and 30 inches to 31 inches in the length circumference remained until 1931. In summary the ball was:

- Length 11 to 11 1/4 inches
- Circumference (end on) 30 to 31 inches
- Circumference (in width) 25 1/2 to 26 inches
- Weight: 12 to 13 ounces
- Hand sewn with not less than 8 stitches to the inch

A year later the weight was reduced.

Standardisation of rugby ball sizes was made possible by Charles Macintosh & Co. Yes- the same guys who brought us the 'Mac' that we wear to watch rugby were also the first manufacturer to supply rubber bladders in sufficient quantities to make standardization possible.

The Gilberts

When William Gilbert died, his nephew James Gilbert (1831-1906) succeeded him. James was reputed to be "a wonder of lung strength and blew even the big match balls up tight".

In 1906 on the death of James, his son James John Gilbert (1857-1917) took over the family business. As well as his involvement in manufacturing the balls, James John was also an enthusiastic player for the Rugby Club and a keen follower of the game in general.

The last Gilbert involved in the company, James, was serving in the army in France when his father died in 1917. After the war he returned to run the firm being the fourth generation of his family to be involved in the business. James Gilbert was meticulous and it was largely through his efforts that the Gilbert ball was exported to the major Rugby playing countries of the world particularly New Zealand, South Africa and Australia. He checked and stamped every Match ball personally to make sure it was of the highest quality.

By the early 20th Century each nation had it's own preference to shape of ball. Australia and New Zealand favouring the pointed (Torpedo) shape and South Africa the 8-panel which offered better grip. In Britain, Ireland and France, most balls were now of 4-panel construction but 6 panels were still in use. All nations were unanimous in wanting smaller balls and in 1932 the rules were changed and the length reduced by one inch to 24 to 25 1/2 inches and the weight was increased to 13 1/2 to 15 ounces.



UK Rugby Ball Circa 1900



You can clearly see that this South African 'Zug' ball from 1906 is less round.



The South Africans favoured the 8 panel ball. This ball dates back to the 1930s.



The Rugby Rules have always stated that the ball should be as far as possible certain dimensions and this qualification no doubt accounts for the slight variation in the shape of the ball to suit the ideas of the different Rugby Unions throughout the world. New Zealand, for instance, has always favoured a ball measuring 1 inch less in the width circumference than the ball used here in UK.

In 1961 the IRB decreed that 4 panels per ball should be the standard. This effectively outlawed the 8 panel balls used in South Africa (Rule 4 in the R.U; Laws of the Game now states that the ball shall be of four panels.) The Gilbert 'Match' ball soon became the preferred choice of most international teams and by 1970 the company began to manufacture the balls in white as well as the traditional leather colour previously used.

Eventually, in 1980 leather casings were replaced with synthetic materials in times of poor weather conditions. This spelled the end for leather rugby balls.

The Old Ways and the New Ways

This account is from the early part of the 20th Century and is a visitor's description of the Gilbert Factory.

My guide, a worker at Gilbert's, took me to the room where the first process was in full swing. I made my way across the leather-strewn floor towards a bench where a man had a large sheet of cowhide, out of which he was cutting roughly measured panels. These were weighed (for a complete rigger ball must weigh between 13 ozs. and 15 ozs.) and the panels that weighed too much were then put through a splitting machine to make the leather the right thickness.

We followed the leather along the noisy work-shop until the next stage was performed. The leather was thoroughly soaked in warm water, gripped by pliers and stretched. You will notice that there are quite a lot of stretching processes: for unless the leather is fully stretched, the ball is easily pulled out of shape after two or three games. The same leather is stretched again by a stretching iron, which was shaped something like an axe, only with its head turned the other way, and then it was put through some large iron rollers and hung up to dry.

The dried leather was then rolled by hand to soften it and put through some rollers to be passed out on to a stamping machine. Here the rough panels were cut to the correct sizes, which may be for a four, six, or eight-panelled ball, according to the country for which the balls are required. Yes! These balls are of the highest quality and are ex-ported to Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and so on, and are always used for international matches.

However, the panels were taken next to be greased with dubbin (a mixture of cod oil and tallow), then they were rolled by hand to rub in the grease, dried and rolled again. (This was a very unpleasant process because of the awful smell.)

Then my guide led me out of the noisy workshop, up some steps and into the rooms where the sewing was done. The men who worked in these rooms were skilled workers who have made thousands of balls each. However—to continue—the only bit of machine sewing was that done to stitch the mouth-piece on to some panels. I learnt that hand-sewing was preferred because each stitch was independent and if one stitch broke the others would still hold firm. Then the panels were sewn together by a double-handed stitch (with two needles or pig's bristles) and with a six-stranded thread of hemp and wax. First of all the panels were sewn to make halves and then the seams were rubbed down on a clencher with an iron bar, to make the seams flat.

After this the halves were sewn together and an opening was left three inches from the mouthpiece. This seam was rubbed down in a similar fashion and the ball was turned inside out. This looked very simple when done by an expert, but I assure you that the leather was not as soft as it looked, and it was a very hard task for me when I tried to pull the case inside out through a three-inch opening.

The ball was now nearly finished. The three-inch opening was very cleverly sewn up, a tongue was sewn in, and the seams were rubbed to put a finish on them. Then a bladder was put in and blown up, the case laced, and a ball was born. Well, nearly born, for it was not ready for sale until it had been weighed and tested.

This is a far cry from this more modern process described below -

Layers of cotton and polyester material are bonded together using glue. This is then covered with a layer of rubber to produce the laminate sheets that the ball panels are cut from. The sheets are printed with the desired panel design and then cut into panel shapes using a knife. The knife is a specially designed metal tool used to cut the exact shape of each panel. The cutting process uses a hydraulic press and templates to ensure accuracy.

The panels are hand stitched using Polyester thread, that is coated with a man made wax which makes the thread stronger, waterproof and helps to lock the stitches together. Two needles are used to form double lock stitches.





A Stitcher's HORSE

The Stitcher sits on a "horse", which has a tool for clamping the balls in the correct position (oh er missus) and leaves the hands free for stitching. Initially, two halves of the ball are stitched together inside out. The Stitcher then starts on the third seam of the ball at the midpoint of its length, and stitches around the end of the ball, to the midpoint of the fourth seam. At this point, the ball is turned the



right way out, and the bladder is glued into position.

The Stitcher then continues around the other half of the ball to complete the fourth seam, and almost complete the third seam.



As the thread is pulled the stitches tighten and the ball is completed

The Stitcher then makes 10 or so large loop stitches, which allows them to finish the ball. The ball is finished by pushing the needles through the end of the ball, and then tightening the loop stitches - rather like lacing a shoe, which creates extra thread in the middle of the ball. This thread is then removed by pulling the needles, and the end of the ball is then pushed towards its centre, a knot is tied into the threads and the remaining thread is cut. The ball is then pulled into shape, and the knot goes inside the ball.



To close

in 1893 Scotland played England and the old plum shape ball can clearly be seen.



Slightly different to the Louis Vuitton being advertised by Dan Carter, New Zealand All Black.

Martin Clark

Ed: Many thanks for this marathon effort from our Chairman.

Help fill this space for our April Issue

Members Forum

We would like to include articles submitted by members on this page. Please send any contributions by email to:- bedfordrugbyfollowers@gmail.com

We reserve the right to edit any contribution to make it suitable for publication.

Full Bedford Blues fixture list

(all dates and kick-offs to be confirmed):

Coventry	v	Bedford Blues	W/E of 6th	March	2021
Bedford Blues	v	Hartpury University	W/E of 13th	March	2021
Cornish Pirates	v	Bedford Blues	W/E of 20th	March	2021
Bedford Blues	v	Jersey Reds	W/E of 27th	March	2021
Saracens	v	Bedford Blues	W/E of 10th	April	2021
Bedford Blues	v	Richmond	W/E of 17th	April	2021
Doncaster Knights	v	Bedford Blues	W/E of 1st	May	2021
Bedford Blues	v	Ealing Trailfinders	W/E of 15th	May	2021
Nottingham	v	Bedford Blues	W/E of 22nd	May	2021
Bedford Blues	v	Amphill	W/E of 29th	May	2021

Rugby Coming up on TV

Round 2:

England vs Italy, 2.15pm on 13 February – ITV

Scotland vs Wales, 4.45pm on 13 February –BBC and S4C

Ireland vs France, 3pm on 14 February – ITV

Round 3:

Italy vs Ireland, 2.15pm on 27 February – ITV

Wales vs England, 4.45pm on 27 February – BBC and S4C

France vs Scotland, 3pm on 28 February – BBC

The Followers aim to support and assist Bedford Rugby in various ways as determined by the Committee and by proposals carried at an AGM.

- We run coaches to mainland away games to provide support unequalled in our division.
- We run a Jackpot at home games to provide funds for the club and as cash prizes.
- We assist with ground maintenance each summer and support when necessary to clear snow and the debris left behind after our fireworks displays.
- We organise social events and help promote events held by the club.

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