

“COMMODORE” VEARS

By Malc King

A W Vears served in the Royal Navy for 12 years, reaching the rank of Assistant Paymaster. In 1876, retirement brought him to Gloucester, where he established himself as a successful grain merchant at Llanthony.

He was sports mad and quickly became involved in a wide range of sports clubs in the City, serving on the committees of the rugby, cricket and athletics clubs in the City. He later went on to make his mark on the County committees for rugby and cricket, and was instrumental in organising the county cricket week in Gloucester.

He was Chairman of the rugby club at an important time in the club's development, and the policies which he instituted served to turn Gloucester into one of the leading clubs in the land. His visionary leadership led to the Club acquiring its own ground from the Castle Grim Estate, his entrepreneurial skills promoted the development of the Club as a gate-taking commercial entertainment business, and his belief in the inclusion of working men bolstered the playing strength of the Club.

His naval background led to him acquiring the nickname “Commodore”, and probably caused him to promote the adoption by the club of the motto “Palman Qui Meruit Ferat” (Let him bear the palm who deserves it), previously adopted by Admiral Nelson – it certainly encapsulates Vears' strongly held view that merit should be the principle factor governing the recruitment of players. His paymaster background enabled him to help put the finances of the Club on a sound footing.

He pushed for the admission of working class men into the Club, and as Chairman in 1890, he proposed Tommy Bagwell as the first working class captain. This would have been unlikely to happen without Vears' active support, but Bagwell went on to lead Gloucester to 2 very successful seasons (when they lost only 8 matches out of 60 played), and to be an inspiration and servant to the club for a further 60 years. The Commodore's pursuit of a wider player base proved crucial in the Gloucester club achieving standards of play which brought the club to national prominence, and this established Gloucester as a rugby rather than soccer city.

His paymaster background enabled him to help put the finances of the Club on a sound footing. In the early days he proved a benefactor willing to put his hand in his pocket to make up financial deficits – for example he made good the loss which the Club suffered in their 1886-7 accounts. He was keen that the Club funds should allow a “no cost to play” policy for the players, and was concerned to “cultivate local talent”. Likewise, he consistently challenged policy recommendations regarding gate admission prices and memberships that he felt disadvantaged working-class spectators.

He worked closely with Jimmy Boughton to plan the purchase of the Kingsholm ground, chaired the meeting at which that was approved, and signed the contract for the purchase. He bought 100 shares in the Ground Company, and served on the Board of the Company until his death in 1917, and was its first Chairman. He is on record as being determined that Kingsholm should be “the finest football ground in the West”, an ambition which he worked hard to achieve. He also enjoyed the pleasure of seeing his sons, Lionel & Gordon, playing rugby for Gloucester.