

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Marie Davies

THE AUSTRALIAN CONNECTION CONTINUES...



When we were sent this reunion photo in April - Ben Alexander, John Brooks and Justin Abrahams in The Dock, Kingston Foreshore, Canberra, Australia I realised that I must keep everyone up to date with the most recent former player's arrival in Australia. Dr. John Brooks, his wife Helen and daughters Maia and Isla flew from Heathrow to Sydney in September 2020.

John writes:

'Before leaving for Australia I was working predominantly as a Sports Doctor and was full-time with the England Women's Rugby Union Team during the 6 Nations in 2020.

The plan was to move to Australia in April/ May 2020 but everything was postponed because of Covid and lockdowns, so I worked in The Nightingale Hospital in London helping the discharge process and looking after some of the Covid patients.

We eventually arrived at Heathrow Airport in September, not knowing whether we were getting on a plane to Australia or going back to our flat in London. It had been so busy before we left that we were almost glad of two weeks of quarantine and rest in a Sydney hotel before continuing our journey to Melbourne'.

Firstly, before we catch up on John's current news we'll take a quick look back on his rugby career...

JOHN AND HELEN AT THE POWERGEN SHIELD REUNION IN 2015



JOHN BROOKS

Prop. 2000-2006.
133 appearances.

John was born in Bradford-on-Avon in the West Country and as a child spent Saturday afternoons watching Bath play rugby. Most of his childhood rugby was played at Bath until the Bath coach at the time told him he would never make it as a professional player because his chest wasn't big enough! Fortunately, he didn't listen!

He left school at 18 and spent a year doing a variety of jobs until he saved enough money to travel to Australia. He lived in Woolloomooloo in Sydney and played for Eastern Suburbs.

On his return he went to Loughborough University to study Sports Science, playing rugby there and also playing for the England Students team that won the Five Nations. In the summer of 2000 while visiting Martin Wallwork, the Loughborough scrum half, who had just signed for Bedford he found out that Bedford were short of props for their pre-season tour of Holland. Martin got him along to make up the numbers. On the way home on the ferry John was offered a contract by Colin Jackson for the season. He stayed for six years: Colin Jackson's four years, a year with Rudi Straeuli when we won the Powergen Shield at Twickenham and a year with Mike Rayer. He also finished a PhD in rugby injuries, setting up the England Rugby Injury and Training Audit across the Premiership.

John was keen to prove himself at a higher level and although it was a big wrench to leave he went to New Zealand to play for the Tasman Makos for a season under Todd Blackadder. When he returned he joined Northampton Saints and was also selected for England Saxons in the Churchill Cup. He then signed a two year contract with Harlequins, but in the second game of his second season a ruptured ligament in his foot required surgery to screw the foot back together. After spending the rest of the season rehabbing his foot it still was not good and he was forced to retire.

While at Harlequins he met Helen his future wife and after retirement he was scrum coach at The Stoop for nine months before he and Helen did a nine month world travel. On returning John began training as a doctor at King's College in London.

And now? From a flat in Pimlico - we caught up with John in, Melbourne.



JOHN, HELEN, MAIA AND ISLA - CHRISTMAS 2020 ON THE BEACH

John continues:

'This has taken 3-4 years to organise. The paperwork is horrendous! The children are young enough to be portable and we wanted a new challenge and experience. Maia 8 and Isla 5 have settled into school really quickly and are loving all the sports including Aussie rules and basketball.

We are living in Melbourne, twenty minutes walk from the beach and twenty minutes into the city by train. We do realise how fortunate we've been with timing and how tough it's been for everyone back in the UK with the second lockdown.

We're enjoying exploring Australia and hoping that it won't be too long before family and friends are able to visit. The camping has been great here although Helen is still less than enthusiastic about sleeping in a tent - even in Australia! It was weird celebrating Christmas in summer and Easter in autumn, but I did discover at Christmas that you can cook sprouts on a barbecue!

I am currently working in a clinic in Melbourne as a Sports Doctor and GP, plus I've been doing some work in Aussie rules and basketball.

It was great over Easter to visit Justin and his family in Canberra. Justin was at Bedford some of the time I was there. It was brilliant to see them and we had a wonderful time. The girls (Justin and Zoe also have two girls) got on well. They certainly enjoyed the swimming pool and the Easter Egg Hunt.

Justin and I went down for a drink at The Dock where Ben Alexander is co-owner. Fortunately, he was there that night. It is a very popular bar and was really busy. It was great to see him and have a mini Bedford reunion.

I do follow Bedford's results closely and am a member of the FPA. Our last visit to Goldington Road was in 2015 for the End of Season Dinner when we celebrated the 10 Year Anniversary of the Powergen Shield win. It was so good to see all my teammates and we had a great time!

We wish John and family a very happy new adventure!

I have to mention a remarkable stat:

The Dock reunion. Ben, John and Justin have 7 daughters between them.

Ben - Ivy, Emma and Anna.

John - Maia and Isla.

Justin - Josie and Alice.

Not a boy in sight! Good luck to them!