

FORMER BLUES PLAYERS

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?



Marie Davies

On the 20th August 2021 W.H. 'Bill' Whiting celebrated his 94th birthday. We believe Bill is now our oldest living player. We can never be certain, especially as a few years ago when we were convinced Ron Rogers, who was in his late 90s, was our oldest former player, we were notified in June 2015 by the family of former player George Jenkins in June, 2015, that George had died at his home in Cardiff at the age of 99 years 6 months.

George had made 128 appearances for Bedford from 1946-53 and was captain for the 1950-51 season. John, George's nephew, sent his uncle's Bedford cap and other memorabilia to the club.

We are belatedly celebrating Bill's birthday by sharing some of his life and rugby career reminiscences.

Happy Birthday Bill!

W.H. (BILL) WHITING

Wing three-quarter. 1948-58. 163 Appearances. 65 Tries

Bedford Record and Circular

28th December 1948

Bedford RUFC v
Old Paulines
32-0

'Queen's Works Winger scores twice in the first ten minutes.'

'On this performance Bill Whiting warrants a chance against stronger opposition.'

'Always a lively handful for the opposition.'

1953-54
Scored most tries, 18 and most points, 54.

1954-55
Scored the most tries, 8.

Bill writes:

'I was born in Bedford in August 1927 in a house built by my maternal grandfather. I first played rugby at the age of eleven at the Harpur Central School. At the end of the school year in July 1939 I was fortunate to pass a Scholarship to the Bedford Modern School where I continued to play rugby, but it was not my best sport and I only represented the school twice, in the 3rd 'B' XV. At that time my most successful sport was rowing and I rowed at bow in my House IV and in the School 1st VIII. On leaving school in July 1944 I joined Queens Works as a Senior Engineering Student and remained with the Company until I retired as the Chief Defence Contracts Engineer on my 65th birthday in August 1992. I joined the Institution of Mechanical Engineers in 1944 and was made an Honorary Life Member in 1994.

I continued with rowing after I left school and rowed for Bedford Rowing Club in various provincial regattas and in the Thames Cup at Henley Regatta in 1948 as a bow in the Eight. I was a member of the Bedford & County Athletic Club in 1954 and was the Club sprint champion, winning both the 100 yards and 220 yards and third place in the 440 yards.

It was at Queens Works that I improved as a rugby player and in October 1948 after playing against Bedford Wanderers and winning 16-9 I was asked if I would like to play for Bedford. Following an interview with the then Chairman Peter Perkins, I played my first game on Boxing Day 1948 against the Old Paulines, and with Peter Ralphs as my centre I managed to score two tries in the first ten minutes! On Boxing Day 1951, when John Bance was captain, I was awarded my Bedford Colours of which I was and still am very proud. I was in the team when Budge Rogers played his first game for Bedford and I seem to remember that after a bit of inter-passing we scored a try but I cannot recall which one of us actually touched the ball down!



1951-52. BILL, MIDDLE OF BACK ROW

I played a number of times for the East Midlands, including Mobbs Memorial Matches against the Barbarians, and I was awarded my East Midlands Cap at the conclusion of the 1954/5 season.

After I finished playing for the Blues, I was persuaded by a colleague in my office to turn out for the Queens Works A Team and later on for the First XV. On one Saturday afternoon when I had played for the First XV, the "A" Team had a match immediately afterwards but were two players short. Dennis 'Percy' Pack who was an ex-Harlequins forward and who had also played in the earlier game suggested that he and I make up the numbers, he playing at left centre, with me on the left wing. I agreed and the match was won 28-0 with Percy and I scoring all the points, 2 tries for him and 6 tries and 2 conversions for me. I was then 35 years old! My last game of rugby was for Queens one Saturday early in 1966 when they were short of players and although I had not played for well over a year I agreed to play. Needless to say it was a bit stupid as I tore the cartilage in my left knee and five years later required a meniscotomy operation.'



BILL AT A FORMER PLAYERS' LUNCH

On a personal note Bill met his wife Joan at the Bedford Table Tennis Club. They had a long and happy marriage sharing their mutual love of sport. They had two sons, who both attended Bedford Modern School and who both gained their degrees in Electronics at Reading University.

'I am a member of the Former Players Association and have been delighted to meet contemporaries of mine at the reunion luncheons I have attended in the past. Visits to several of the Former Players' London Lunches have also been a highlight of my social calendar. There's no better place to enjoy a Saturday afternoon than Goldington Road.'

Congratulations on your 94th birthday Bill!



BILL WHITING ON 14TH FEBRUARY, 2020 AT THE FORMER PLAYERS LONDON LUNCH AT THE R.A.F. CLUB