

THE WOMAN'S VIEW



Marie Davies



As today is Ladies' Day at Goldington Road I felt it would be appropriate to contribute a female perspective as, after all, my life has revolved around Bedford Rugby Club for over 50 years. There must be something I could write about - perhaps as a long-suffering rugby wife, maybe as an avid supporter or indeed, as an intrepid tea-lady.

The first thing Gareth did when we arrived in Bedford was to join B.R.U.F.C. The Chairman of Selectors, after being disappointed that Gareth didn't attend either Bedford School or Bedford Modern, (even though Gwendraeth Grammar School was one of the best rugby schools in Wales), cheered up when Gareth told him he went to Trinity College - his excitement evaporated quickly when he learned it was Trinity College, Carmarthen. The next question was, 'Are you married?' The affirmative answer seemed to cheer him up and Gareth was told to turn up for Bedford Rovers (the 3rd team) the following Saturday.

A few days after his first game I received a letter instructing me to report to the hut near the top pitch the following Saturday, where I was to practise the culinary art of being 'a tea lady'. Having arrived from London Welsh where I was allowed to watch my husband play rugby every week if I wanted to, and only 'ladies of a certain age' worked in the kitchen I was somewhat taken aback by the lack of democratic choice I was offered. I nevertheless reported as requested and there together with Mrs. Barker (Norman), Mrs. Philbrook (Jim) and Mrs. Fletcher (Bob), met the diminutive but formidable Mrs Brown, who supervised the post match 'teas' every Saturday. So began my '25 years before the sink' (with time off for maternity leave). The tea hut was fairly primitive, with no actual cooking facilities, so meals were always the same - cold beef and salad and slices of bread, thinly spread with margarine. It certainly made washing-up easy!

The extension to the Scrum Hall in 1968 included a kitchen with an ancient gas cooker. Health and safety were not given a high profile and mice were frequent visitors. On one occasion, the help of prop 'Dumper' Bailward and second row Clive Hooker was enlisted and with the speed and dexterity typical of Bedford's forwards they succeeded in drowning the

two escaping rodents with well-directed ammunition from soda syphons. The lighting of the gas cooker proved a death-defying act, but when Mrs Briggs (the Captain's wife) and her team were blown across the kitchen and singed eyelashes rescued from sausage and mash we demanded a new cooker which duly arrived - three seasons later!

Mrs Briggs proceeded to devise schemes to involve the wives more fully in the club. These schemes usually left us collapsing with exhaustion. For example - at last - an event in a marquee to which women were invited - the Summer Ball of 1969, organised and catered for by six of us, after work on a Friday. My task during my school teaching day was to produce 20 table floral arrangements. With the help of my fifth form we managed it during lunch hour in the school library. As the first guests were arriving we were still in our aprons, putting the finishing touches to 200 prawn cocktails!

An afternoon to forget was when we played Barkers Butts in the Cup in 1984. Their over exuberant supporters invaded the tea room, trampled over the tables, smashed china and finally started pelting us with bread rolls. We were relieved they weren't celebrating a win!

Despite the 'moans, groans and tired feet' there were advantages to being a 'tea lady'. In 1966 it immediately involved me in the club, provided us with a great social life and started a long line of friendships which have stood the test of time and span the length and breadth of the U.K. and much further afield. Of course, there is the added bonus of meeting the stars. Our team fell over each other in the rush to serve Gavin Hastings - a perfect gentleman - who captivated us with his mellifluous Scottish tones and our own Richard Greed, who charmed us into serving our first vegetarian meal. Then, of course, there were the visiting teams.



V. SAN ISIDRO 1972

On a Sunday afternoon in 1972 we jostled each other to gain a good view of the Argentinian Club Champions - the good-looking, 'moustachioed', tanned, athletic players of San Isidro run out onto the pitch. However, it was Bedford and our husbands who triumphed on the field with a drop goal sealing a 18-15 victory in the dying minutes.

The role of women seemed the same in most rugby clubs we visited, but when we played an away Cup game in Morley, despite the disappointment of losing by one point we were impressed by their clubhouse and their hospitality. While being shown around by a friendly Yorkshire lady, I was proudly told that they had their own Lady President and Ladies Committee. I was suitably impressed by such a forward-looking attitude and asked what they did. Visions of selection committees, high-powered financial meetings, golf days and 'ladies only' dinners flashed before my eyes.

'Oh,' she replied cheerfully, 'we organise and do all the catering.' 'C'est la vie!'

When towards the end of the 1990/91 season, at 6.30pm, after serving over ninety meals (3 teams at home) and almost finishing a mountain of washing-up, one of our Antipodean friends appeared (very late) for his meal. When handed his chicken curry, he looked at it with distaste and asked, 'Is this it?' Perhaps, at last, it was time to hang up my pinny!

Fortunately, times have changed! Men now love cooking! 'Nos' ran the kitchen for over 20 years and his signature dish - Chicken Marengo is still talked about worldwide! We have several women with important roles at the club to make sure the rugby and the club's commercial side runs efficiently.

END OF SEASON DINNER FOR ALL



LADIES DAY



No longer do women drop off their husbands, partners, boyfriends at Goldington Road for the End of Season Club Dinner and stroll to town in search of a restaurant, returning very late to pick them up - hopefully not literally! They can now join them in the marquee (thank you M.R.).

Bedford Rugby Followers have had a female President and Chairman and several female committee members, who have done and are doing a great job! The club has a very successful Women's Rugby Team. Finally, we have the special Ladies 'Pink' Day which we are celebrating today.

Of course, I have had many proud days at Bedford Rugby Club - mostly connected to Gareth, but my proudest has to be when, in 2009, I became the first female Honorary Life Member. I don't think I'll be the last!

Ladies- enjoy today!

ALL ABOUT THE LADIES

