

FORMER BLUES PLAYERS

ALWAYS REMEMBERED

by Marie Davies

PARIS AIR DISASTER 50 YEARS ON

2014 MEMORIAL
UNVEILED IN FP BAR



BRIAN ARTHUR



PETER GREEN

At tonight's game, the Former Players Association is remembering two of the club's most respected and popular players - Brian Arthur and Peter Green - who tragically lost their lives in the Paris Air Disaster on 3rd March 1974.

Brian Arthur, a loosehead prop, joined Bedford in 1966 from his home club in Bury St. Edmunds. He made 125 appearances, scoring 17 tries, and also played for and captained both Eastern Counties and Suffolk. In 1972, he returned to play for Bury. Brian was 31 when he lost his life. He left his wife Sandra and two sons Jules, 7 and Nick, 4.

Peter Green, a centre, joined the club in 1967 and made 166 appearances, scoring 72 tries before his untimely death at the age of 27. Peter, a farmer in Bottisham, also played for Eastern Counties. Peter left his wife Julia, son Jamie, 4 and daughter Joanna, 2. At the time of the disaster Julia was pregnant and son Ben was born two months after the crash.

Three weeks prior to the tragedy, Peter had pulled a hamstring scoring a try in the BBC2 Rugby Special televised game at Headingley so, unavailable for the Blues, jumped at the chance to join his former teammate Brian and the Bury St Edmunds rugby team on their weekend tour to Paris for the Five Nations, France-England international. On the Sunday, a last-minute cancellation of their arranged friendly fixture - because of fears that a B.E.A. strike at Heathrow would leave them stranded in France - meant they dashed to Orly Airport and boarded the fated Turkish Airlines Flight 981 bound for London. Three members of the party remained in France to visit an agricultural show, returning by ferry the following day.

Minutes after its 12.30pm take-off, a distorted transmission warned that the aircraft was in trouble, and it quickly disappeared from radar. Its wreckage was found in Ermenonville Forest. The aircraft had disintegrated and immediate investigation suggested a bomb was on board. However, having retrieved the flight data and cockpit voice recorders, investigators determined that a rear cargo hold hatch had failed in flight causing decompression. All 346 on board lost their lives. Among them was the party of 18 rugby players from Bury St. Edmunds.

More than 2,000 mourners gathered at St. Edmundsbury Cathedral on March 17th and also at the nearby St. Mary's Church, where the service was relayed on close circuit television. The scheduled Blues game vs Streatham and Croydon was postponed to allow teammates and friends from Bedford to attend. Two matches were later played in honour of the rugby players, one at Bury and one at Goldington Road when a Bedford XV, captained by Budge Rogers, played an Invitation XV.

Two months after the crash, 80 mourners from Suffolk were among the 1,200 who attended the mass burial at Thiais Cemetery, near Orly.



THE MEMORIAL AT BURY ST. EDMUNDS

In 2014, to commemorate the 40-year anniversary of the disaster, a memorial plaque was unveiled in our Former Players Bar in memory of the loss of two of Bedford's finest. Members of both Brian and Peter's families were present for the ceremony conducted by Budge Rogers. Brian and Peter are remembered by their families and teammates at regular functions organised by former player, Jeremy Janion in Cambridge and Granchester. Family members often return to watch games at Goldington Road or attend



THE MEMORIAL AT ERMENONVILLE

Former Players' functions. Julia, Joanna and family were here this season in October for our game vs Ealing Trailfinders and Ben was in attendance when we hosted Cambridge.

Rugby has always played an important part in both families with grandsons who have enjoyed playing mini & juniors rugby. Peter's grandson Jack always seems to manage a photo with one of his rugby heroes! At Bedford... it's always Deano!



JACK AND DEANO

Bury St. Edmunds R.F.C. has dedicated the 2023-24 season to remembering the tragic loss of life their club suffered in 1974. The air crash victims will be remembered and honoured throughout the season. Both 1st XV's will wear commemorative black playing jerseys throughout 2023-24.

A video has been produced telling the story of the tragic events which can be seen on the club's website. Our former player, Ben Cooper (2011-14) has been a player coach at Bury since 2019 and features on the video.



FORMER PLAYER
BEN COOPER - NOW
PLAYER- COACH AT BURY

In 2014, 95 riders cycled from the memorial in France to England - 355 miles and raised over £150,000. There will once again be a Charity Memorial Cycle Ride in 2024, following the same route.

Next weekend, on Saturday 9th March, a Memorial Lunch will be held at Bury St. Edmunds prior to the game vs Dorking. Gareth and I will be attending with other former Bedford teammates, so that we can join the club in remembering the tragic loss of life.

Always Remembered