

FORMER BLUES PLAYERS

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Marie Davies

THE WELSH CONNECTION



If 2020 wasn't a Leap Year the Welsh would be enjoying St David's Day today, so hopefully you will allow me to celebrate prematurely and treat myself to an investigation into the 'Welsh connection' at Bedford Rugby Club.

'Where are they now?' started in 2005 so we are celebrating its 15th Anniversary. My personal target of featuring 200 former players including many Welsh players was reached earlier this season, so I hope you will allow me to indulge myself.

A question we frequently get asked is, 'Why are there so many Welsh people 'running' your English club?' I do have a typically Welsh patriotic answer which includes the words 'passion', 'rugby' 'skill'!

But what I usually say is, 'It wasn't always the case.' The club's history proves this. **But first as it is NOW...**

Two Welsh Directors: **Dai Owen** and **Leigh Mansell**.

Dai is also on the Board of the Scarlets (Llanelli) and President of Nantgaredig RFC.

Leigh, of course, only faces up to his Welsh heritage when Wales beat England or Wales win the Grand Slam, but with paternal ancestry from Bridgend, a father named Gruffydd, the surname of Mansell, (very common in Wales) and of course, not forgetting his inherited rugby playing skills, there is no doubt in my mind!



MIKE RAYER: PLAYER AND DIRECTOR OF RUGBY

Director of Rugby **Mike Rayer** and Rugby Administrator **Debra Rayer**, 'Cardiff born and Cardiff bred'.

Chief Operating Officer **Gareth Alred**, Newport

Team Manager **Rob Crowle**, Ebbw Vale

Strength & Conditioning Coach **Jamie Bain**, Brecon

Head Physiotherapist **Mair Seal** (nee Evans). Mair's paternal grandfather was born in Rhyll, Flintshire and was bilingual.

Media Manager **Ryan Robinson**, Newport

Two fluent Welsh speakers in the playing squad are **Lewis Robling** and **Huw Worthington**. Lewis is from Caerleon and went to Ysgol Gyfun Gwynllyw, while Huw combined playing rugby with farming at Penybontfawr, before joining Bedford.

Also Welsh qualified - **Pat Tapley** whose father was born in Wales and **Ed Taylor** whose mother is Welsh from a farm in Bryncreg, Snowdonia.



OUR 4 WELSH PLAYERS

However, it has to be said that the historic presence of Welsh players and administrators at the club has, in the past, been limited.

Some examples...

Internationals: 1

Only one player capped for Wales while playing for Bedford - CR Davies 1933-34 who played for the club while stationed at RAF Henlow. Cecil, an RAF pilot was sadly shot down and killed during the Second World War.

Captains: 3

Billy Rees 1893-96

Billy, who was educated at Bedford School, was of Welsh extraction and was captain from 1893-96, which included the club's most successful season 1893-94. The team's record was played 29, won 27, lost 1, drawn 1! When Billy stopped playing he settled in Wales.

George Jenkins 1950-51

When George died at the age of 99 years 6 months in 2015 he was our then oldest living player. He was still a member of the FPA and his family sent all his Bedford memorabilia to the club.

Paul Turner 1996-98

3 Welsh caps. Paul was the club's first professional captain and his rugby skills and natural flair resulted in some scintillating play at Goldington Road.

Coaches: 3

MD Fitzgerald 1983-87

Mike's family moved to Bedford from Mountain Ash in 1966. Mike entered the 6th Form at BMS where he played in the 1st XV and later at Goldington Road. He returned to Cardiff to train as a PE teacher before returning to Bedford to teach, play and later to coach.

Paul Turner 1996-98

Director of Coaching in the 'Dream Team'. Gained promotion in his second season.

Mike Rayer 2005-present

21 Welsh caps. Mike first arrived in Bedford in 1996 as a player. He made 62 appearances in two seasons, breaking the club's points scoring record twice before returning to Cardiff to carry on his playing career and take on various coaching roles. In 2005 he returned to Bedford after accepting the invitation to be the Blues' coach and the rest is history!

Chairmen: 0

Presidents: 1

Gareth Davies 2003- 2017

It used to be difficult to establish yourself in the 1st XV unless you had the right school or university credentials - OB, OBM, Oxford or Cambridge.

After playing for three seasons at London Welsh Gareth arrived in Bedford to teach in Westfield School (formerly Harpur Central) and turned up for training at Goldington Road. The Chairman of Selectors wasn't impressed that he had been educated at Gwendraeth Grammar School despite its impressive alumni of Welsh Rugby internationals, but cheered up immensely when he learnt that he went on to study at Trinity College.

However, his excitement was short lived when Gareth enlightened him that it was Trinity College Carmarthen and not Trinity College Cambridge. Unsurprisingly, Gareth found himself in the Rovers (3rd team) the following Saturday!

In 1933 Iorwerth Evans, a Welsh rugby playing teacher from Treharris, came to teach PE in the Harpur Central School. There was little or no rugby played in Bedford's state schools, but Iori was instrumental in introducing it. He also joined Bedford RUFC, but found it so difficult to get a regular place in the 1st XV he left, travelled to London Welsh regularly to train and play and was

promptly capped for Wales. His teaching of rugby in Bedford is legendary and many of his pupils became regulars in Bedford's 1st XV like Alan Lovell, Brian McCarthy (members of the 300 club) and our 93 year old former player Bill Whiting, who started playing in the Central School before gaining a scholarship to Bedford Modern.

Back to the present!

'Dydd Gŵyl Dewi Hapus i bawb.'



END OF SEASON DINNER 2017
6 WELSH AND 2 WITH ASPIRATIONS TO BE WELSH!

Welsh Club Quiz

- 1 Name the Welsh international winger whose father played for Bedford in the 1960-61 season?
- 2 Name our Welsh full back whose father was Director of Rugby at Hartpury from 2006-2012.
- 3 In a melodious Welsh accent 'Go on-Arris' was a familiar shout from the touchline by whom?
- 4 This Welsh forward scored 33 tries in his two seasons playing for Bedford.
- 5 This Welsh hooker made the most appearances (35) in the 1998-99 season.
- 6 Who, incredibly, was the 6ft.10in. Welsh second row who played for Bedford in 1999-2000?
- 7 This Welshman's final kick won us the Powergen Shield Final in 2005.
- 8 This Welshman was known as 'Chepstow' to his teammates.
- 9 You might have seen this former player playing for Wales in the Rugby 7s at the 2014 Commonwealth Games in Glasgow.
- 10 This Welshman's try saving tackle on Newcastle's Tim Stimpson in the 'Main Gate' corner match, without doubt, be the very best seen at Goldington Road.

Answers on page 46.