

A TRIBUTE TO A FORMER PLAYER

R.M. 'BOB' WILKINSON

Marie Davies

It is only fitting that we pay tribute to former player Bob Wilkinson who sadly passed away on the 1st of February after a short but aggressive illness. His death meant that the club lost one of its most illustrious players. Bob was one of the club's internationals, a Barbarian, a Cambridge Blue, captain of the 1st XV and a member of the club's prestigious '300' club.

Bob will be remembered as one of the best lineout experts and skilful ball handling second row forwards at the Blues. He attended St. Albans School, where his Bedford rugby playing teachers Peter Avery and Mike Nurton, nurtured his rugby skills and he was promoted to the 1st XV in 1966. He also featured in the school's cricket and hockey teams and when Mike Nurton introduced basketball to the school this was a very useful key to Bob's rugby development. From the 1968 season, along with another pupil and good friend Alan Towersey he travelled to Goldington Road twice a week for training. How ironic that Bob should die on the anniversary of his first game for the 'Town' which was against London Welsh in 1969 as a 17 year old!

The next day's **Sunday Times** report of the game read:

"...the second row of Else and Wilkinson, young, raw and full of spirit were prepared to take on the entire Welsh pack single-handed..."

Bob continued his education at Cambridge University where, under the rugby influence of Dr. Windsor Lewis, he won Blues in 1971, 1972 and 1973. As an uncapped player he was selected to play for the Barbarians in the famous match against the All Blacks in Cardiff in 1973 - the match which is now often referred to as 'that match with that try'. He went on to play many times for the Barbarians and is placed 8th in their Roll of Honour.



BARBARIANS V NEW ZEALAND ALL BLACKS 1973

His teammates at Bedford recall the rugby tour to Jersey in 1971 when Bob was only 19. Both games on the island were won by Bedford and the Jersey committee quickly recognised Bob's obvious potential and were very enthusiastic in their praise for Bedford's second row youngster.

His rugby career continued at the Blues, where he made 311 appearances before finally retiring in 1985. From 1976-79 he captained Bedford, one of the few to captain the 1st XV three seasons in succession and, of course, he played in the 1975 Cup winning team at Twickenham.

BOB AND HIS WIFE SALLY AT A FORMER PLAYERS' LUNCH IN THE MARQUEE



1978-79 TEAM

Bob was capped six times for England. He was selected for the England tour to Australia in the summer of 1975 and made his full England debut in the second Test in Brisbane. In 1976 he played in the 23-6 win over the Australian touring side at Twickenham and in the four Five Nations Championship games. His second row partner in all international matches was Bill Beaumont, the present Chairman of World Rugby.

Bob continued to work in the family's fruit-importing business and made sure that there was always plenty of fruit at the Club's children's Christmas parties and other social functions! As captain, he adapted to the role of a popular Father Christmas at the children's parties distributing their presents from his well laden sack.

From 1980-83 towards the end of his playing career he became the Club's Treasurer.

Bob met his wife Sally while at Cambridge and they began their married life in Putnoe, eventually moving to Haynes, where they still live. They have four sons - Ben, Jon, Matthew and Paul, three grandsons and one granddaughter. It is only fair to mention that Bob and Sally contributed to a rather remarkable statistic at the club that has nothing to do with rugby. Four regulars in the 1st XV in the 70s and early 80s were prop Chris Bailward, second row John Mawle, Bob and centre Richard Chadwick. Between 1980-82 they all became fathers of twins! Twin boys Tom and Rob for John and Jean Mawle, twin boys another Tom and Rob for Chris and Annie Bailward, twin boys, Matthew and Paul for Bob and

Sally and for Richard (the only back of the quartet) and Jenny Chadwick twin girls, Eleanor and Amy.

As you can imagine there were many explanations offered for this quite unusual stat!

Bob occasionally watched a game at Goldington Road but always made it clear he wasn't a fan of the modern game. He and Sally often attended the Former Players' social functions and had intended being present at the planned 1975 reunion last season, which of course was postponed. He enjoyed working in his garden and played golf regularly. Family life was always a priority and they enjoyed frequent family 'get-togethers' which included Bob's 98 year old father, their three grandsons and one granddaughter.

It was a privilege for fifteen of Bob's teammates to form a Guard of Honour leading to the entrance of the crematorium at Bob's funeral on the 24th February.

Our thoughts are with Sally and all the family at this very sad time.

1975 CUP FINAL AT TWICKENHAM

