

### 13<sup>th</sup> Season 1884-5

Variouly referred to as Higher Matford-field, Matford Mount Radford and Matford-field Heavitree, Exeter's new home soon became known simply as Matford. The site was near where the Coaver club stands to-day. At first the ground condition was poor for drop and place kicking but gradual improvements were made during the years of the club's tenancy making it a popular venue, particularly as it was nearer to the city centre. By the end of the season Exeter had lost only one of nine home games which helped add to its popularity.

An Exonian and a former pupil of the Cathedral School, the new captain, Charles Mudge, was a solicitor's confidential clerk whose introduction to football literally came by accident. A keen cyclist, he once came to grief on his machine and whilst walking home encountered some friends. On seeing his somewhat dishevelled appearance, assumed him to be a footballer. Mudge had been a regular spectator at the Topsham Barracks field but to his surprise just after the chance encounter one of his friends, an Exeter player named "Handsome" Harris, informed him that he had been elected a member and had been selected to play the following Saturday. Mudge did not look back. A sturdy forward he was a stalwart for the club and for Devon over several seasons. He was later elected secretary and served until 1907 when he emigrated. British Columbia was his destination where he secured a Government post at Grand Forks.

A popular figure in local football, his forward play was much admired but on the one occasion during the season that he decided to play in the backs his play was described as "worse than useless"!

By the end of the season the playing record read won 10, drawn 1 with 9 defeats. Dawlish and newly-formed Sidmouth featured among the fixtures with both home games being won and both away games lost. St. Thomas, the city based club, was defeated twice and two games against Keyham Engineering Students were both lost.

The familiar problem of team selection was again evident. For a mid-week game against Sidmouth, Exeter turned up four short and the team was two short at Tiverton. Although substitutes were recruited both games ended in defeat. In early season Newton Rifles arrived at their local railway station with thirteen men and decided not to travel whilst later in the season Tiverton cried off at the last minute being unable to raise a team, a fact that caused considerable surprise. In contrast Exeter's away game with Dawlish was played with sixteen players on each side.

Exeter cancelled an away game at Barnstaple because they had five players playing for Devon on the same day. Earlier in the season Barnstaple had alleged that, instead of playing "their own men as agreed", Exeter had "brought in county men against them". For the home game against Keyham four players were "borrowed" causing the local columnist "Spec." to comment "it is a pity the club will not rely on its own members".

Two players used by Exeter in the first half of the season were Goss and Bailey (on one occasion using pseudonyms) from the Training College. However in December their actions had come to the attention of College authorities who then took the

decision to rusticate both students for the remainder of the term. This was not the first time that the college had banned the playing of football by its students.

In contrast United Services College was still playing football without recourse to referee and umpires which drew the comment “the childlike confidence in each other is so touching and unusual”. In contrast games against Dawlish and Tiverton were spoiled by much wrangling.

The season began in promising fashion with four consecutive victories but then four straight defeats followed. The latter sequence included a game at Wellington where Exeter turned up late. Kick-off did not take place until four o'clock and only fifty minutes play was possible. By the end of the year five matches had been won and five lost. In addressing what was seen as inconsistency a press report commented “It is a pity that there is such a constant changing about in the Exeter team. Why not pick a good XV and stick to it....?”

Having lost at Bridgwater in the last game played in December, Exeter then defeated the Somerset club at Matford to start the New Year but three defeats were to follow. The first of these came at Tiverton when the home side won by a disputed try to nil. “It is to be regretted that a game of this kind cannot be carried on without so much noise and disagreeable contentions” commented the Western Times.

Playing only the eighth game of its inaugural season, Sidmouth defeated Exeter at Blackmore Field in front of 500 spectators by two goals and a try to a goal. Despite recruiting three players from other clubs to meet the Keyham Engineering Students at Devonport, Exeter managed to lose heavily being unable to reply to the two goals and three tries scored by the opposition.

A draw at home with Wellington stemmed the sequence of losses. At one point in this game the club secretary was heard to call out “Do play quiet, Exeter”. Defeat returned with a visit by the Engineering Students. This time Exeter did register a goal but Keyham dominated with a tally of a goal and five tries.

During the next game, against Blundell's, A.E. (Bert) Ellis, one of the Exeter three-quarters, broke a bone in his right leg which effectively put an end to a long career with both club and county. Regularly he played alongside his brother, F.J. (Joey), a forward. They were both Chartered Surveyors practicing in the city. Both teams finished with fourteen men, Exeter winning by a try to nil.

Three home victories brought the season to a close. The match with Dawlish at Matford was another marred by “a good deal of wrangling”. The game against United Services College from Westward Ho! was played in its usual much quieter atmosphere. For the final game, the return match with St, Thomas, Exeter fielded a weakened team and the victory was not as convincing as that of the opening game.

1885 saw the second of three disastrous Exeter theatre fires. On February 14 in support of the many sufferers of the fire it was arranged for a combined city team to play Tiverton at St. Thomas. The Exeter club was due to play Chard Rovers on that day but this game was cancelled. What must be one of the most appalling puns ever to

see print was penned by a local scribe who suggested the combined team could be named, not Chard Rovers, but Charred Rovers!