

## 100<sup>th</sup> Year 1971-2

This season saw the Exeter club enter its 100<sup>th</sup> year of playing rugby. Andy Cole was re-elected captain for the fourth time in succession. The Annual Report, regarded by the club as the 99<sup>th</sup>, was deemed to be “a most successful one for the Club, although the playing record was not as good as the previous season”. Of the 42 games played 26 were won and two drawn. The number of points scored (951) represented a record for the club but this season the value of a try had been increased from three to four points. The Devon Cup was retained but much to the disappointment of players, officials and supporters, the club failed at an early stage in the R.F.U. Knock-Out Cup Competition on a technicality and at the end of the season lost the so called Championship of the South-West. The opposition on both of these occasions was Penryn.

Off the field, the club embarked on a lengthy project to renovate the changing rooms, hot water system and shower facilities under the main stand. The cost was estimated at £6,000 (£84,500)

On the field, the season began in unpromising fashion with four straight defeats. A Thursday home encounter with the scratch touring team, Public School Wanderers, was lost by a narrow margin (17-19) but on the following Saturday the difference against Moseley at The Reddings was nearer to fifty points. “Exeter, with forwards in lively form, had rather the better of earlier play” said one report but this form was not to last. With John Snell, normally a back row player, at full back and Bob Staddon at fly-half, the backs lacked thrust. By half time the home side had registered fourteen points but in the second period they let loose with a salvo of scoring. “Losing is a far more painful business in these days of the four point try”, wrote Michael Blair. He continued, “Exeter took a fearful beating at The Reddings on Saturday, ten tries were scored against them and downright ignominy was piled on top of the pain, and that’s progress” (8-54).

Two defeats on two consecutive days then came at the County Ground against touring sides. On a Friday, Rosslyn Park won a tight game (6-13) whilst on the Saturday Esher defeated Exeter for the first time in five years by an even smaller margin (6-9). The first victory of the season came in a mid-week home match against Newton Abbot (18-3). Still not into its stride, the Exeter team managed a draw at Torquay Athletic (16-16).

It was then the turn of Bath to visit the County Ground where the visitors, on their own admission “were again in lethargic mood”. Exeter scored through Paul Baxter in the first minute after which Bath had to play catch-up. They came close but not close enough (26-21). Two much easier victories were to follow. The first came at The Rectory where, once again, Devonport Services conceded over fifty points (59-0) before, somewhat surprisingly, Redruth gave away more than forty points and “were never really in the match with a chance” (43-13).

“In view of their recent performance, the Exeter players have proved that they are returning to the form we knew last season” ran the programme notes for a home game with Saracens. Unfortunately the recent upturn in form was not maintained and the London team won with ease (10-32). Three days later Exeter played at home in the first round of the R.F.U. Cup Competition against St. Ives. Form on this occasion did not desert the team. The team from Cornwall contained six reserves was out-powered on the heavy ground even when Exeter had to play with fourteen men because of an injury to Neil Diment (31-0).

A victory at home against Clifton was not so convincing (19-10). This game saw the debut of prop Chris Mills and a young John Scott in the second row. Travelling to Abertillery without the services of five first choice players was not going to be an easy task and so it proved (9-53). This was the second game so far in the season where the team had conceded over fifty points. Exeter made amends with a home win over Taunton but they did not make matters easy for themselves. Firstly prop Noel Bradford was late arriving due to transport problems and took the field ten minutes after kick-off. During this time Holman went down with an injured knee but carried on. To add to the team’s plight

Maynard missed two penalty goal attempts. Play was scrappy and it was not until Taunton had lost a man to injury in the second half that Exeter took command (30-13).

At the Imperial Ground, Exeter faced Exmouth without five regulars whose services were required by Devon in a Championship match against Gloucestershire at the County Ground. Exeter only just overcame their doughty rivals (14-10). Another local derby at the County Ground was spoilt by rain and a bitterly cold wind. Referee Terry Foley awarded nineteen penalties in the first thirty minutes of play. Even when St. Luke's lost hooker John Pyne early in the second half, Exeter struggled against the elements and determined opponents. Only one try and a penalty goad were added in the second period (13-4).

Still not playing to its full potential the team then lost the next two games. Cheltenham, at home, won by fifteen points (10-25). The next home fixture was played on the ground of Withycombe R.F.C. as an England trial was being staged at the County Ground. The visitors, Torquay Athletic, went one better than the draw achieved earlier in the season by winning a closely fought game (21-26). Given recent form the next scheduled home game was not going to be easy. This was a Devon Cup tie against Barnstaple. Whereas Exeter's form had been inconsistent, the North Devonians could boast an impressive unbeaten record for the season to date. It was as predicted a doughty encounter and Exeter came out on top by eight points (24-16). Exeter had now started a run of eight games in which they remained unbeaten until mid-February. The team that brought the run to an end was Barnstaple!

The week before Christmas a narrow win against Glamorgan Wanderers was recorded courtesy of four Mike Maynard penalties (12-10). The traditional post-Christmas game at home to Exmouth found Exeter "taking a very long time in settling down and producing the form of last season". The programme notes went on "The potential is there and we hope that shortly everything will click into place". A more or less full strength side did find some reasonable form (52-7).

On New Year's Day at Priory Park, Exeter had to withstand continuous early pressure from Taunton yet by the half hour mark were twenty four points ahead. Another ten points eased Exeter home (34-9). Next up, St. Ives came to the County Ground and went away clearly defeated again (23-0). A cancellation at Teignmouth was not good preparation for a trip to Wales but unexpectedly Exeter found success at Cross Keys (9-6).

Penryn came to Exeter for the next round tie in the R.F.U. Knock-out Competition. The match was to be regarded with some notoriety in Exeter circles. The visitors made a furious start that seemed to knock Exeter off its stride and the Cornishmen were soon seven points to the good. Exeter fought back to reduce the lead to three points by half time through a Fisher try and Maynard penalty. For virtually all of the second half neither side could produce another score and it appeared that Penryn would be the clear winners, but in injury time Bob Staddon dropped a goal to level the scores. Many Exeter supporters thought the game had been saved but they were wrong. Knock-out competitions were still in their relative infancy and no provision had yet been made in the regulations for extra-time. Instead, because the number of tries and conversions scored by each side were equal, it was deemed that the away team should progress to the next round. Undefeated on the field of play but defeated by a technicality, Exeter was left to ponder on what might have been (10-10).

If Exeter felt like taking some form of revenge then it was London Hospital that suffered the consequences of Exeter's frustrations. The forwards had a field day and with Staddon attacking whenever possible the backs outclassed their opponents (32-0). A fixture with Weston super Mare had to be cancelled before Exeter were required to make the short journey to Barnstaple where the local team would be looking for revenge for the Devon Cup defeat in December. The Pottington Road faithful turned up in large numbers. The home side was not at full strength whereas Exeter fielded a team that was only two men short of its best XV. The early attacking came from the visitors but at

half time Barnstaple held the lead six points. Towards the end of the game Exeter snatched a try back but it was not enough (7-9).

The back-lash from this defeat fell on another hospital team. Guy's Hospital came to the County ground and suffered a heavy defeat (45-12). Next to suffer was the Devonport Services team who went down at the County Ground (24-0). Exeter's topsy-turvy form was then exposed by Bridgend who, on their own ground, passed the 1,000 points mark for the season with ease (13-38).

Only three days remained before Exeter had to face Plymouth Albion at Beacon Park in the Devon Cup. Exeter did manage a recovery but it was a close call considering that the home team was unlucky to lose a winger through injury just before half time. Although Exeter had scored three tries Plymouth were six points to the good at the interval. Exeter's goal kickers had an off-day, nine attempts at goal being missed throughout the game. With Exeter trailing by a point in injury time, "a dazzling mid-field break" by full-back Staddon set up a try for centre Maynard which saw the visitors ahead for the first time in the game. There was still time left for Albion to draw level with one of two penalty goals attempts but they too lacked a reliable kicker on the day (25-22).

Four days later visiting Bedford brought Exeter back to reality by registering a comfortable victory (14-29). On Easter Saturday Woodford proved to be no match for a full strength Exeter team (69-8). On Easter Monday Exeter went down again to the touring Moseley side but this time the margin of defeat was more than halved following the game between the two teams in September. Indeed the Birmingham Daily Post reported "Moseley made to fight for record 33<sup>rd</sup> win". On this occasion it was Exeter who had to play a man short for three-quarters of the game. After more than holding its own in the first half the seven man pack then tired and Moseley took full advantage (10-32). A Thursday evening Devon Cup semi-final against Bideford was to follow. Exeter did not take the opposition lightly and the men from North Devon put on a courageous performance to worry the cup holders (11-7).

Two days later Exeter again faced Devon opposition but on this occasion it was far less strong. Paignton had experienced a few lean seasons but had made progress in the current campaign, however fortune did not smile on the team when as many as six late changes had to be made to their line-up. Exeter ran in eleven tries, eight of which were scored by players outside the scrum (60-3). A Friday-Saturday excursion to Cornwall was enjoyed both on and off the field as both games played were won. Penryn succumbed on Friday more easily than expected, Exeter scoring three tries to nil (17-3). On the Saturday Penzance & Newlyn put up a brave display with the home pack gaining a lot of loose possession but the strong Exeter team came out on top (22-7).

Four consecutive victories, whatever the quality of the opposition, put Exeter in good stead for the meeting with Torquay Athletic in the final of the Devon Cup at The Recreation Ground. The location of the match was said to be about the only factor in Torquay's favour before the match. Exeter was able to field twelve of the players who had appeared in the final the previous season. Exeter duly won but the game was not so open and the score a lot closer. Exeter's forwards dominated and of three tries, one was scored by scrum-half Graham Milford and the other two by forwards, Andy Cole and John Snell, all from close range (25-9).

Exeter finished the last home game of the season's programme with an easy win over Redruth. The home side took the field with fourteen men when hooker John Lockyer failed to arrive due to a mechanical break-down. After ten minutes play John Pyne, of St. Luke's College, who had come to the game as a spectator, took the field. Exeter had nearly all the play, running in seven tries (49-3).

After a season of mixed fortunes, Exeter, with a run of six victories behind them seemed to be heading for a successful end to the season but it was not to be. The remaining two games proved to be an anti-climax after retaining the Devon Cup. Having defeated Penryn in Cornwall not two weeks before, Exeter returned for the South-West Cup Winners Play-Off. This time Exeter were rather

surprisingly pipped at the post for the Westward TV Trophy by the determined Cornish opposition who had withstood a lot of early pressure (7-10). Finally at The Memorial Ground, Bristol, fifty points were conceded for the third time in the season (4-54).

The "A" XV won 23 games out of 34 but the "B" XV won only six of 19 played. Rather oddly the Extra "B" played more game than the "B" but won only seven and drew one of 27 games played. The Colts had a good season and two fixtures were arranged for an Under 16 Group team to foster interest in the game amongst younger players.