

## 62<sup>nd</sup> Year 1933-4

Bob Rew and Tom Browning were elected for a further season as captain and vice-captain. By the end of the campaign the official report stated that the “first team came through with credit”. The number of games played had risen to 45 of which 22 had been won, five drawn and eighteen lost. The fixture list was now strengthened by the inclusion of Llanelly, Metropolitan Police, Leicester and Bradford. Also included were missionary games against Ilfracombe and Axminster.

After only one full scale practice match the opening fixture predictably ended in a heavy defeat at the hands of Torquay Athletic on The Recreation Ground. After half time Exeter did improve to hold their hosts to a single score but by then the damage had been done (0-24). A narrow win at Sidmouth may not have helped confidence (8-6) but the first home game brought a welcome turn of fortune. Victory over Exmouth was always welcome, the highlight being the outstanding play of Peter Candler in the centre (19-11).

To continue what turned out to be a topsy-turvy first half season Exeter made a mid-week trip to Paignton where the home team achieved a “brilliant victory”. Neither side was at full strength. A Sid Waller penalty goal opened the scoring but Exeter could manage no more points whilst the home team scored freely (3-27).

Three days later victory was achieved at Newton Abbot thanks to a try by “Bunny” Turner from half-way following an interception. Both teams had then scored two tries but a Sid Waller conversion settled the matter (8-6). A week later September fixtures ended with a visit from Bridgwater & Albion who adopted spoiling tactics. The game therefore developed into a vigorous forward struggle with “nothing spectacular” on view (11-5).

Another two match tour to Wales ended with two heavy defeats. The team fielded at Bridgend contained a number of unfamiliar names but Exeter held the opposition to a single score by half-time. Thereafter came a striking change the tourists being outplayed conceding seven tries in the process (0-23). The game on Monday at Neath followed a similar pattern and this time six tries were allowed by the defence. Though outplayed again Exeter showed up well in this game and captain Bob Rew ran in from half way to register a try and vice-captain Tom Browning scored another (8-25).

Back on home soil Exeter was probably still feeling the effects of their touring exertions when the team succumbed to Teignmouth who proved to be the better side and deserved their victory. Exeter failed to cross the opposition try line (7-17).

Originally a blank date on the fixture card was filled by a visit to Ilfracombe where the game proved to be a big attraction. Exeter registered eight tries (28-0). This result seemed to provide a boost for the city team who then went to the Rectory to defeat Devonport Services in atrocious conditions. Exeter tried to use their back division but made little progress in the first half. The three-quarters however did manage to score three tries, only one of which was converted. In the last minute Services scored their third try but fortunately for Exeter the conversion failed (11-9).

Visitors Weston took their chances to win a game that did not reach a high standard. Over-robust play by the heavier Weston forwards, who “used their feet indiscriminately”, received

the disapproval of home spectators. Browning had to leave the field before half time with a facial blood injury but he pluckily returned for the second period (6-11).

Two welcome home victories over local rivals were to follow. Against Exmouth fly-half "Bunny" Turner beat six opponents before handing on to Ken Wreford who touched down the only score of the game. Denton went off near the end with a sprained ankle but Exeter held out (3-0). "Turner was again the inspiring genius of the Exeter back division" in the defeat of Torquay Athletic, the much heavier team (11-5).

On the occasion of the first encounter with Metropolitan Police the roles of the previous game were reversed. "Exeter outplayed by heavier side" was the verdict (0-11). The visitors proved to be a good attraction as the game was watched by an "encouragingly large crowd" that included the Mayor, the Sheriff, the Chief Constable of Devon and the Chief Constable of Exeter. The latter two dignitaries inspected the visiting team before kick-off.

Even stronger opposition was to be faced on a trip to Wales to meet Llanelly then regarded as "undoubtedly the strongest team in the British Isles". It had been some thirty years since the two teams had met. Exeter, as ever on tour, was not at full strength but nevertheless the team "gave a good account of themselves" in front of 4,000 onlookers (5-14).

December continued with an away win against a depleted Royal Naval Engineering College side in a "spectacular game" (21-6). A surprise defeat at home to Barnstaple was the result of a "great struggle" in a "lively game". Three times Exeter took the lead but could not clinch victory (11-12). At Weston the home team was "much superior behind the scrum" and thereby achieved a double over their Devon rivals (3-13).

A Boxing Day fixture with Glamorgan Wanderers had to be cancelled due to fog but the following day Welsh Academicals saw "Exeter excel in the latter stages of the game". The visitors' enterprising back division was disrupted by injury during the game. Exeter had been forced to make late changes but still managed to field international Henry Rew who was at home on leave for the Christmas period (19-3).

At Taunton "a hard but interesting game" ended the year when both teams had been disrupted by county calls. In the first half Exeter was awarded a try that was disputed by the home team. The conversion went ahead but then the two touch-judges could not agree whether or not the kick was successful so the referee ruled this time against Exeter. In the second half the home side drew level and that is where the scoring ended (3-3).

Fog delayed the start of the first fixture in the New Year against Blundell's Squirrels. Poor visibility persisted but the game went ahead. Initially Exeter was completely outplayed but the team managed to recover and win (17-8). At home to Wellington Exeter did not falter. Attacking from the outset the opposition try line was crossed no fewer than ten times with Turner again putting in a brilliant performance (36-0).

In contrast the following week the team was engaged in "one of the most dourly contested games ever seen on the Teignmouth ground". This suggests a forward struggle but each side did manage to score two tries. Bob Rew scored one of these by handing off six opponents on the way to the try line. Following Exeter's second try the conversion attempt by Sid Waller in front of the posts was charged down thus denying his team the spoils (6-6).

Due to business commitments Exeter had to rearrange their back division when facing Neath in a mid-week match. After putting up a sterling defence for more than an hour the home team finally succumbed to three tries in the last fifteen minutes (0-9). Four days later at Beacon Park the Exeter backs were inferior to those of Plymouth Albion whose forwards had the better of the loose play. By coincidence both teams found it necessary to field a fly-half in the scrum-half position (6-23).

Expectations of fast open play were not realised at home to the Royal Naval Engineering College. Bob Rew scored two tries, the second being a dramatic last minute effort after Joey Summers had made a blind-side break from a scrum. Nevertheless it was a disappointing game (8-8). Further disappointment came at Barnstaple who obtained their second victory of the season over Exeter (8-11). According to the North Devon Journal the home side was "composed of largely reserves". Henry Rew whose regiment was shortly due to sail for India made another fleeting appearance for Exeter.

Remaining at home a comfortable win was achieved against a disjointed Devonport Services side (14-3). A mid-week unofficial game against Blundell's School at Tiverton ended in defeat. Exeter chose to field only fourteen players and by the end had only thirteen on the field (8-19). This result was not included in the final match record for the season.

The return match at Wellington produced far from the runaway victory achieved six weeks earlier as the teams this time were well matched. Phil Paul scored a try wide out which Sid Waller converted with a fine kick. This came in reply to a dropped goal scored by the home side. In the last minute Wellington thought they had scored the winning try but the referee ruled otherwise after consulting the Exeter touch-judge (5-4).

Exeter "put up a wonderful fight" against visiting Bridgend who at this point stood at the head of the unofficial Welsh Championship. In a narrow defeat Sid Waller was the outstanding performer. He landed a 40 yard penalty to register Exeter's sole score (3-6). This was the last regular game that the young fly-half cum centre Ken Wreford was to play for Exeter. A week later he was selected to play for Bristol (where he had taken up a business appointment) against Bath. He briefly returned to Exeter to play a handful of matches in 1936-7 before moving on again.

"Brilliant play" was the order of the day for the guarantee fixture against St. Thomas' Hospital. This display was all the more notable as the main orchestrator of the backs, "Bunny" Turner, broke his collar bone in the second half. Shortly after the visitors drew level. Despite the deficiency in numbers Exeter went on to score two more tries. Five home tries were registered all scored by the wingers, three by Phil Paul and two by Bob Rew (21-13).

After a mid-week win at home over the 3<sup>rd</sup> Signals Regiment from Aldershot (13-0) the team went to London to meet Woodford. "A pointless draw was a fair indication of an attractive game" was the somewhat contradictory comment by a reporter. Sid Waller gave another faultless display at full-back (0-0).

Venturing only as far as Bridgwater & Albion on the following Saturday Exeter did not do so well nor did Sid Waller. The margin of defeat was only a single point and the full back missed a conversion from in front of the posts after a brilliant try scored by scrum-half Dick

Madge. It was said that Exeter was unlucky to lose. The team contained several players who made only occasional appearances in the senior XV (3-4).

Another narrow defeat at Newton Abbot came next and Waller again failed with the conversion of a last minute try that had, this time, been scored wide out. In all other aspects the custodian “played a magnificent game throughout”. Exeter scored two tries to one by their hosts (8-10).

A full strength Plymouth Albion side came to the County Ground to face an Exeter XV that included wing-forward Colin Paul at centre. Waller was yet again singled out for brilliant play whilst the Exeter forwards “played a wonderful game” and won the majority of set scrums though this dominance could not win them the game (3-3). The now traditional pre-Easter meeting at Tiverton resulted in a comfortable win (13-5).

Easter Saturday witnessed another outstanding display as Exeter recovered to score all their points in the second half against Old Blues. “Candler was brilliant throughout” was the verdict on his vacation outing from Cambridge University (22-7). On Easter Monday Exeter scored another twenty-two points and had no difficulty in defeating Bradford (22-6).

In the final match of the Easter programme an under-strength Exeter team nearly sprung a surprise on Leicester when the two teams met for the first time since 1904. The visitors included five internationals in their line-up. The Exeter forwards surprised their heavier opponents by holding their own in both tight and loose. Exeter outscored the Midlanders by two tries to one the balance of the visitors score being made up of three dropped goals (10-15).

Exeter could have been left without a game four days later when National Provincial Bank had to cry off their visit due to an outbreak of boils. An opportunity to play a missionary match at Axminster where the rugby club had been revived was accepted (36-3). An exhibition game against the original Axminster team had been played in 1910.

The excursion to East Devon hardly provided the necessary preparation for a visit by Llanelly the following Saturday. With nine internationals facing them Exeter put up a gallant defence as their lighter forwards were beaten in the set scrums. A good crowd were encouraged by Waller landing a penalty from half-way to open the scoring but then Llanelly scored their points when the home team began to tire (3-13).

Two satisfying home victories against local opposition brought the season to a close. In constant rain Paignton went down (6-0) and finally Exmouth was defeated for the third time in the season (8-3).

The Annual General Meeting focussed mainly on financial issues. Although teams put in good displays the attendances were disappointing. Another discussion point related to the viability of guarantee matches. Despite the cost involved it was decided to continue running four teams most weeks thereby providing games for 60 players, including many juniors. There still remained a credit balance of £68 9s (£2,500).

The Senior “A” XV played 29 games of which 23 were won and one drawn. The 2<sup>nd</sup> “A” played 18 matches winning 10 and drawing one of them whilst the “B” team won 12 and drew two of 17 games played.

Thanks were recorded for the efforts of W. Yelder a second team player who was leaving the city. He made four appearances in first XV during the season and was the leader of the regular training sessions.