

By Jenni Silver
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IF Francis Hartley had not taken a job in Gloucester in 1873, the city's history could have turned out very differently.

Originally from London, the young solicitor was a keen rugby player and was at the first meeting of the Rugby Football Union at Pall Mall. He was also the founder of Gloucester Football Club, as it was then known.

The history of Francis and the players who followed his footsteps in cherry and white is the focus of a major heritage project which has been launched at Kingsholm and online at www.gloucester rugby heritage.org.uk.

Gloucestershire County Council's archives service and the Friends of Gloucestershire Archives have worked with the club to develop the website.

Gloucester Rugby played its first games in the cricket club in Spa Road before moving to Kingsholm in 1891.

They suffered heartbreak in 1933, their Jubilee year, when their 1,750 seat stand was burnt to the ground.

The stand which replaced it was only pulled down two years ago, sparking the beginning of the heritage project.

Gary Little, Gloucester Rugby's community manager, said: "I found that more and more things were turning up in the cupboard where I stored my rugby balls and kit.

"They were being put to one side as the stand was cleared. There were documents and notes and eventually it became my project."

Gary worked closely with Gloucester Archives in Alvin Street and the Friends of the Archives - and soon the heritage project, which includes displays at the club as well as the website, took shape.

Funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund was secured last year and the hard work of cataloguing all the documents has continued.

Malcolm King, from the Friends of the Archives, has been one of those working on the project.

He said: "It was 31 boxes we took to the archives. Some of it nearly went in the skip."

Now the website, which contains an online archive of the history of the club, has gone live.

Gary said the current squad had all been up to look at the displays, which run the length of the new stand on the first floor and include player profiles on the top floor.

New web archive is scrum-thing unique



■ 1972: The Gloucester team which became national knockout competition winners.



■ STARS: Peter Ford played 1951-67, right. Above: Terry Hopson in action.

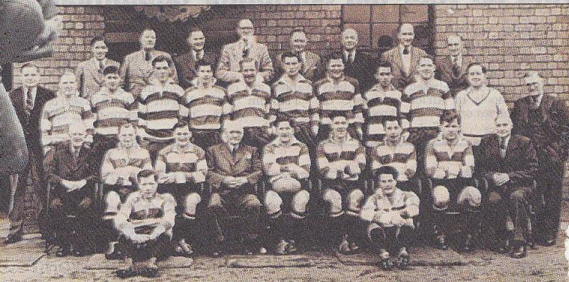


He said: "They all want to know when they get to go on it. Some of them were taking pictures of James Forrester's display and texting them to him in Singapore. Mike Teague has also been up."

Gary and Jill Shonk, from Gloucestershire Archives, have been working on educational resources for the project

along with two teachers, Andy Theedom, from Charlton Kings Primary and Stuart Allen from Central Technology College. They have produced more than 100 lesson plans based on the club's history, and these are now being trialled.

Councillor Antonia Noble, Gloucestershire County Council's cabinet member for



■ 1954/55: The Gloucester squad.

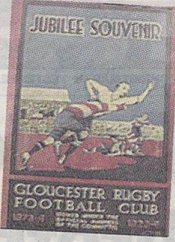
archives, said: "I think it is fantastic how this project has taken off since it was conceived.

"It has been led by volunteers who have put in hundreds of hours of work.

"There is scope for much more community involvement through the website and the roadshows that will start in the spring."



■ 1910/11: H. Berry, A. Hudson, D. Gent, W. Johns.



■ **ICONIC:** Above: cover of the club's jubilee souvenir, publication of the 1923/24 season. Below: programme from November 6, 1967, celebrating the first match to be played under floodlights since a less than successful attempt in 1879.

