

in the SPOTLIGHT

WANSTEAD RFC

IR John Heron was blessed with a genuine business acumen. His mind was quick, and he used to burrow his way like a mole to the root of any problem. There was also something - almost intangible - about his personality, which made men instinctively trust him. One of these 'men' was Henry VII, who appointed him The Treasurer of the Chamber in 1492. Heron is also reputed to have 'brought' the bird that bears his name to this part of Essex, and in 1892 when the 'father' of the present club - Leytonstone RFC - first kicked a ball in anger the bird was adopted as the club's symbol.

Only Southend predate The Herons in rugby terms in the land of the eastern Saxons (from where Essex derives its name), and by the early years of the 20th Century they were re-writing the record books by lifting the Eastern Counties Cup three years running.

Many of rugby's 'Big Guns' pitted their wits against Wanstead in the years leading up the Second World War, most notably Saracens and Wasps, and in

Handsworth 23	Ulverston 10
Veseyans 25	Vardley & District 0
Wednesday 12	Telford Hornets 3
Midlands 3 West (South)	
Coventry Welsh 15	Redditch 12
Evastian 41	Old Yardleians 16
Harbury 10	Old Leamingtonians 46
Kings Norton 14	Newbold on Avon 22
Upton-on-Severn 21	Shipton on Stour 8
Woodrush 49	Southern 15

Cannock 3	Clee Hill 7
Clebury Mortimer 21	Hatone 10
Warley 0	St Leonards 39
Midlands 4 West (South)	
Alester 12	Pinley 29
Atherstone 10	Keresley 29
Birmingham Exiles 3	Manor Park 10
Edwardians 46	Ladbury 5
Trinity Guild 10	Rugby Welsh 18

Manistfield, Newark v Leighton Buzzard, Ravens v Dunstables, Spalding v Sison.
Midlands 1 West: Leamington v Whitchurch; Nuneaton Old Edwardians v Dudley Kingswinford; Old Habesoniens v Leightfield; Old Laurentians v Camp Hill; Stratford Upon Avon v Bournville; Sutton Coldfield v Malsall; Worcester Wanderers v Banbury.

Beaumont, Birmingham v Spalding (Wolverhampton).
Midlands 3 East (North): Gimsby v Worksoop; Kesteven v Dronfield; Melbourne v Ashfield; Malish v Ashbourne; Nottingham Casuals v Amber Valley; Sleatford v Southwell.
Midlands 3 East (South): Deepings v Rushden & Higham; Long Buckby v Daventry; Northampton Casuals v Oadby Wyggestonians; Northampton Mens Own v Brackley; Queens v Bedford Swifts; Rugby St Andrews v Old Newtonians.

Northampton 4 West (North): Clee Hill v Clebury Mortimer; Harborne v Bloxwich; Market Drayton v Warley; Rugeley v Cannock; St Leonards v Barton-Under-Needwood.
Midlands 4 West (South): Keresley v Edwardians; Manor Park v Atherstone; Pinley v Birmingham Exiles; Rugby Welsh v Alester; Stoke Old Boys v Trinity Guild.
Midlands 5 West (North): Tenbury v Bromyard.

flanker Richard Davey, the club possessed a player of true international class.

Davey took his England bow in the 5-Nations Championship on January 17th 1931 against Wales. The contest itself was an 11-11 draw, with a pulsating finish during which Brian Black levelled the scores with a 50-metre penalty thereby denying Wales a first Twickenham success.

As for Davey himself, it seems he was advised to move to a more upmarket club in order to further his international career. Not a man to be coerced, he remained solidly loyal to his roots, and refused!

During the 50s and 60s, many of their players represented Eastern Counties, probably the most interesting being British and Commonwealth pole vault champion Geoff Elliott.

There has been a touch of the yo-yo about them in more recent times, with promotion being achieved in 2005, followed by relegation back into Essex 1, but last year they were on the up once more.

Chairman of this go-ahead London 3 North East outfit is 45-year-old businessman Barrie Ward, a man, who in his own words "knew nothing about rugby until 1987!"

"I went to a comprehensive school," he explained, "and we played football. I remember watching the 1987 Rugby World Cup on TV, and about the same time went for a job with a chap called Steve Good. He was involved with Wanstead, and he asked me if I liked rugby. I told him I'd never played, but

now really enjoyed the game. So, he went out and bought me a pair of boots, and said: 'When can you start?' The next thing I knew I was playing for the 5th XV."

Barrie progressed up The Herons ladder, eventually captaining the 1st XV for a season.

"I played on the wing for about ten years," he told me, "before moving to inside-centre because I could tackle a bit.

"I still play on occasions, and in fact played last Saturday when we clinched our merit table championship."

Away from his duties as chairman, Barrie is club treasurer and, in tandem with John Keyes, helps coach the under-15s. Obviously a glutton for punishment, he is also a referee.

Player-coach is 25-year-old New Zealander Jeremy Walmisley.

"He has worked wonders since he's been with us," said Barrie.

"Our captain is prop Dave Moran, and his vice-captain is scrum-half Paul Cristofoli, whose dad used to play for us. As you can tell, we're a really family orientated club from the bottom up."

Despite being on the wrong end of a 44-13 score line last week at South Woodham Ferrers, The Herons still occupy 5th slot.

"We're ambitious," said Barrie. "We know we could perform well in London 2, but promotion is out this year. Just before Christmas it looked on, but we lost a couple of key players, and we've not managed to replace them."

In this day-and-age when so many parents seem to revel in criticising the efforts of their offspring on the pitch



Captain Dave Moran (left) and Vice Captain Paul Cristofoli in their new shirts sponsored by Bulmers and O'Neills
INSET: Head player-coach Jeremy Walmisley

from the touchline, it is refreshing to find a club that actually succeeds in persuading such adults to not only shut up, but also to actually take to the field themselves.

"The whole thing was the brainchild of Paul Romano," enthused Barrie. "He asked them if they had ever played rugby, and 30 turned up for training, which led to the formation of a vets side called The Desperadoes."

A famous son of Wanstead, Sir William Penn, founder of Pennsylvania, once said: "I never knew what a father was till I had wisdom to prize him." Maybe, one or two of the rugby youngsters now feel the same way!

-GREG TESSER

