

Donald Hope

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By Carl Whiteley



Christchurch Rugby Club XV which played star team Cardiff at Staplecross. With them on the extreme right of the picture is Mr. Don. Hope. Back row (l. to r.) Messrs. Hunt, Hardwick, Ward, Wilson, Lawrence, Rideout, Davies, Hope; front row (l. to r.) Frost, Mess, Thompson, Cook (capt.), Bulstrode, Tyler, Gosling, Anthony.

WHEN 49-year-old Mr. Donald Hope acquired Staplecross, a large country house at Burton, he had one object in mind —the establishment of a successful rugby club for Christchurch.

It was in 1948 after coming back from overseas that Mr. Hope and his wife hit upon the idea of forming a rugby club. "We thought it would be beneficial to the youth of the town," said Mr. Hope who has had 25 years' experience as a rugby player with the top class clubs of the country.

"I wanted to put back into rugby all that I got out of it myself," he told me.

But there has been one driving force behind Mr. Hope's efforts to establish a first class club. He explained: "I wanted to see if I could pit one man against all these large clubs with their huge resources, committees and finances."

Mr. Hope has proved that this can be done. Christchurch Rugby Club is definitely a one-man, or to put it more correctly, a one-man and his wife organisation.

COMPACT

The club is compact and the facilities available have been commented upon by some of the foremost rugby clubs in the country. For they all visit Staplecross and after their first match Christchurch becomes a regular fixture on their list.

There is no doubt that Mr. Hope, his wife and nearly 50 players have put Christchurch on the map in the rugby world.

Cardiff, Llanelly, Harlequins, Wasps and Rosslyn Park are all opponents on the field at Staplecross. And to anyone who knows a little about the game of rugby these names will mean a lot. Cardiff, of course, is the Arsenal of rugby. This club, I am told, drew lots to visit Christchurch this year!

What is the attraction? The Christchurch lads put up a good fight and the facilities offered at Staplecross are equal and in many cases, better than those offered by many rugby clubs in the country.

The house itself can accommodate visiting teams for the weekend. Changing rooms adjoin the house and after the match there is dancing in a spacious hall and a bar for refreshment.

Many of the visiting teams go sight-seeing in the town and some decide that Christchurch and the surrounding villages are delightful spots for holidays.

But before all this could be offered there was a tremendous amount of work to be done at Staplecross.

Mr. Hope formed the club in 1954 and set about the task of converting the house into an

attractive club and preparing the field which can be viewed from the windows of the house. It was hard work, but Mr. Hope realised that it was an ideal spot for his project.

PLANS SECOND PITCH

To start with, the field was waterlogged, but with the help of members he has converted it into a pleasant ground. And he has plans for a second pitch. This will mean clearing his garden and orchard.

Members of the club come from all walks of life from young aircraft apprentices to a top test pilot, University students and from many trades and professions.

A keen supporter of the club is the Mayor of Christchurch, Coun. J. W. Richardson. He kicked off at this year's match against Cardiff and was described by a Cardiff visitor as the only Mayor he had seen who had been able to kick a football properly!

Another enthusiastic follower is Insp. H. N. Quiggin, of Christchurch police. He is responsible for the formation of the Hampshire police ruby team, the seeds for which were germinated at Staplecross.

Mr. Hope has found that rugby commands a good following in this district. A good deal depends on the visiting club but its popularity is increasing. Spectators travel from such places as Ringwood, Bournemouth and Lyndhurst.

Club colours are pale blue and dark blue—the colours of Cardiff. "I picked them," said Mr. Hope, "with the desire that we would eventually play like Cardiff." He hopes next to design a club crest.

What of the club's playing record? Said Mr. Hope: "We have always won more matches than we have lost. This year we have two very good teams and the only occasions recently when we have been beaten was because we were weakened by injuries."

Mr. Hope has no rigid rules about training or fitness. "I leave it to each player to keep himself fit in his own interests," he said.

A man who always likes to battle against odds, Mr. Hope can be assured that his lone attempt to provide Christchurch with something new and worthwhile is a great tribute to him, and he is first to praise the efforts of his wife. "Without her untiring help it would not have been done."

SILVER TANKARD

In the bar at Staplecross is a silver tankard. It is inscribed: "To Don and Mary Hope in appreciation of their kindness from Bromsgrove R.F.C., Easter, 1958."

This is only one of the many tributes paid to Mr. and Mrs. Hope. One comment, which Mr. Hope must surely consider as highly encouraging, sums up the feeling of all who have visited the Staplecross sports centre.

It was made by the chairman of the Cardiff club. "He said: "It is the most ideal set-up for a rugby club that I have ever seen".