

THEME 6

HALL OF FAME

Pupil Resource Sheet 2

Ben Gronow



Ben Gronow was born in Bridgend, South Wales, on 3rd March 1887. From street rugby, Ben progressed through junior club Bridgend Harlequins to the senior team of Bridgend Rugby Union FC at the age of 16.

A stonemason, Ben was powerful and very tall. He was over six feet tall when, on average, men were almost two inches shorter in height than they are today. He also had long arms, a big advantage in firing out long passes and in tackling.

Aged 21 in the 1908-09 season he was made captain of Bridgend and played the first of his 16 matches for the Glamorgan county team.

On New Year's Day 1910 he made his international debut for Wales, scoring a try in a 49-14 win over France at Swansea. A fortnight later he kicked off the first ever international at Twickenham. Although England won 11-6, Wales finished a satisfactory season with wins over Ireland and Scotland.

They would be his only rugby union internationals. He was approached by Ebbw Vale northern union club, but signed for Huddersfield for £120 on 14th April 1910.

Ben's first trophy came in November 1911 when Huddersfield beat Hull Kingston Rovers 22-10 in the Yorkshire Cup Final. Seven days later Huddersfield's rapid improvement was clear to all when they beat the Australian tourists 21-7 before 17,066 spectators at Fartown. Earlier that autumn Ben had made his Test Match debut for the Great Britain Northern Union team against the Australasians.

Ben and the awesome Douglas Clark led a powerful and mobile forward line. They laid the foundations for Huddersfield's fabulous backs, Harold Wagstaff and Stanley Moorhouse on the left, and the Australian pair of Tommy Gleeson and Albert Rosenfeld on the right, to create and score many tries.



Ben Gronow and Douglas Clark, the world's greatest northern union forwards in 1914

Two more trophies followed in the 1911-12 season, the Yorkshire League title, followed by the League Championship when Wigan beaten 13-5 in the Championship Final.

Huddersfield were again on course for three trophies in 1912-13. The Yorkshire League was followed by the League Championship, when Wigan were trounced 29-2 in the final, leaving just the Challenge Cup Final. Opponents Warrington took an early lead, but Huddersfield recovered through three Moorhouse tries to win 9-5.



Ben moves in to stop a Warrington attack in the 1913 Challenge Cup Final

In 1913-14 this great Huddersfield side had to settle for just two trophies – the Yorkshire Cup and the Yorkshire League. Huddersfield were expected to make it three championships in a row, but were surprisingly beaten 5-3 in the final by Salford at Headingley.

Injury cost Ben a place on the 1914 Great Britain tour of Australia, but 1914-15, the season for which this Huddersfield 'Team of all Talents' is remembered, made up for his disappointment.

War was declared on Germany in August 1914, but the rugby and football seasons went ahead as the war was expected 'to be over by Christmas'. No-one had any idea how long and dreadful it would be. As casualties began to return from the western front, Huddersfield's northern union team helped to keep spirits up in the town.

The Yorkshire Cup was retained with a 31-0 defeat of Hull in the final. The Yorkshire League followed. Two one-sided finals saw Huddersfield secure the Championship with a 35-2 win over Leeds and the Challenge Cup with a 37-3 win against St Helens, Ben kicking five goals. Huddersfield had become only the second team, after Hunslet in 1908, to win all four trophies in one season. Only Swinton, in 1928, have done so since.

Ben played a huge part in this success. In four seasons at the club Ben had kicked just 20 goals, but a groin strain to regular kicker Major Holland saw Ben take over kicking duties in December 1914. He kicked 17 goals in his first two matches and never looked back. By the end of the season he had set new club records of 140 goals and 292 points in a season.



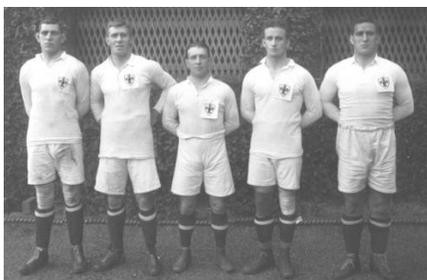
Ben's kicking came to the fore in 1914

Conscripted in 1916, Ben was assigned to the Army Service Corps based at Grove Park in South London, and served in North Africa in 1917 and 1918.

When post-war rugby started in 1919 the best years of Huddersfield's great team were behind them, but they still won the first two post-war Yorkshire Cups, and the 1919-20 Yorkshire League and Challenge Cup. Another four trophies looked likely until Hull beat them 3-2 in the Championship Final at Headingley.

Ben kicked 147 goals in the season, still the Huddersfield record, but missed the defeat against Hull as he and four Huddersfield team mates were sailing to Australia for that summer's tour.

On the tour he kicked 65 goals and scored two tries in 16 matches, setting new scoring records for a tour. Eleven of his goals came in five Test Matches, two defeats against Australia and three wins against New Zealand. He kicked five goals in the win at Auckland, and kept his nerve with a match-winning conversion as the Lions came from behind to win 11-10 at Wellington.



*Huddersfield's five Lions tourists, 1920:
Ben Gronow; Harold Wagstaff; Johnny Rogers; Gwynne Thomas; Douglas Clark*

Huddersfield won the Yorkshire League in 1921-22, but their great pre-war side was breaking up.

Ben enjoyed a benefit match against Dewsbury in March 1924, 10,099 spectators paying receipts of £493. That summer, aged 35, he went on a second Lions tour of Australia but, hampered by injury, he did not make the Test Match team.

In June 1925 he returned to Australia as player/coach of the Grenfell club in New South Wales. He was the only player from an English club to play for an Australian club between 1908 and 1958.

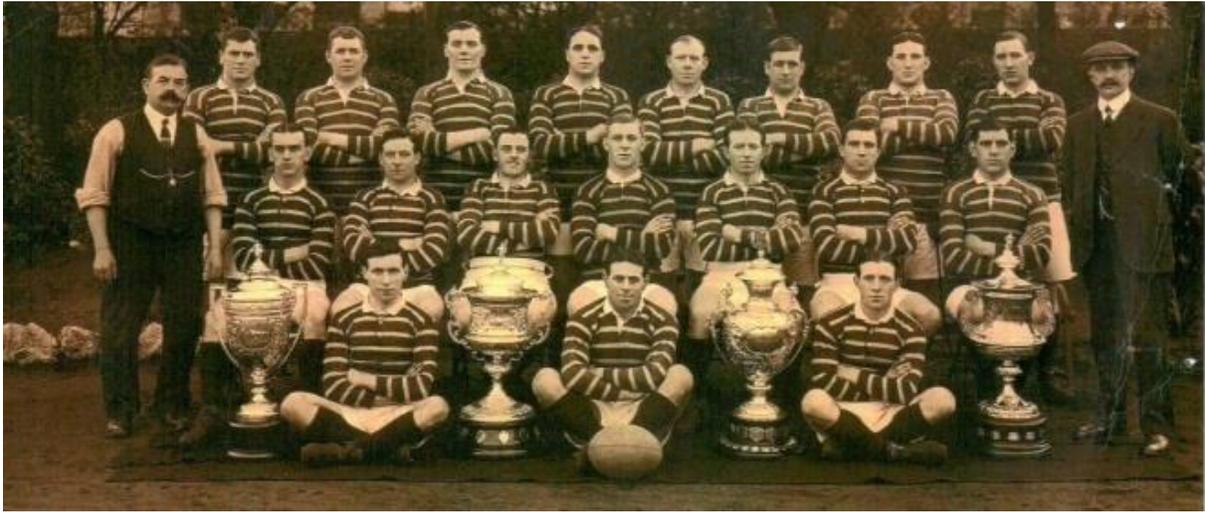
Returning to England in August 1927, Ben played mainly in Huddersfield's reserve team. His last match for the club was a 10-2 win over York in September 1928. He then played briefly for Batley and Featherstone before retiring from the game at the age of 40.

Ben served on the Huddersfield Rugby League Football Club committee for many years and, in 1967, was made an Honorary Life Member of the club. He died on 24th November of that year, aged 80.

In 1999 Ben was one of the first 21 players inducted to the Huddersfield Rugby League Hall of Fame.

Ben Gronow: Playing Record

Team	Matches	Tries	Goals	Points
Huddersfield	407	83	693	1635
Batley	16	0	22	44
Featherstone R	23	2	43	92
Lions (Tests)	7	0	11	22
Lions (Tour)	19	3	59	127
Wales	8	0	9	18
Wales & West	2	0	0	0
Other Nationalities	2	1	5	13
Tour Trials	2	0	4	8
Totals	486	89	846	1959



Huddersfield NURFC 1914-15

*Back: A Lee; JW Higson; H Banks; E Jones; E Heyes; F Longstaff; D Clark; A Swinden
Middle: A Bennett (trainer); R Habron; M Holland; S Moorhouse; H Wagstaff (captain); T
Gleeson; G Todd; **B Gronow**; H Bennett (assistant trainer)
Front: Yorkshire League Cup; WH Ganley; Northern Rugby League Cup; AA Rosenfeld; Northern
Union Challenge Cup; JH Rogers; Yorkshire Challenge Cup*