

This newsletter is the idea of the officers of the Halifax RL Heritage Lunch Club, and club historian Andrew Hardcastle. All correspondence should be sent to, Chris Mitchell c/o Halifax Panthers RLFC The Shay Stadium, Shay Syke, Halifax HX1 2YT

The Fax Time Machine



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Cup Final 1903 –style Part 2

Last month we saw how Halifax had reached their first ever Challenge Cup Final in season 1902-3, and how the fans travelled there. Now we look at the match itself, the way the players and fans celebrated, and how they recovered to also win the league title just a couple of days later. What a fabulous time it must have been.

The players travelled to the Cup Final on the 11.16 train from Halifax railway station, to find the Salford players already on board from Manchester. There followed a pre-arranged lunch for both teams at The Great Northern Hotel in Leeds at noon, then a char-a-banc to Headingley, where a record crowd of 32,507 awaited. For fans unable to travel there was an anxious wait. With no television or radio, they had to rely on telegrams posted every now and then at Thrum Hall and other locations in the town.



The toss-up before the game.

The two captains are Archie Rigg (Halifax) and Jim Lomas (Salford).

Parts of the Final were filmed by Mitchell and Kenyon, a pioneering motion picture company based in Blackburn, from among the crowd behind the posts. They covered other matches too, including Halifax v Salford at Thrum Hall in 1901, but the films were not known of by modern audiences until the hoard of negatives were rediscovered in 1994. They were restored, the rugby league ones re-assembled and shown to an audience at the National Museum of Photography, Film and Television in Bradford in September 2005. The stills in this issue are from that film.

Halifax were pleased to win the toss and play with the wind behind them and the sun in Salford eyes, only to reach half-time with the score still 0-0. A try to Ike Bartle, who was first to reach a kick through, broke the deadlock early in the second half though, Herbert Hadwen added a couple of goals and Halifax held on to win 7-0. Archie Rigg could be presented with the trophy, already filled with champagne, before it was quickly passed to George Kitson, who would have been captain had he not been out injured. Boisterous Halifax fans, present in large numbers, drowned out the speeches of the officials.



The players changed at Headingley after the Cup Final and were taken back to Leeds by char-a-banc, for the train to Halifax, already well filled with fans. Meanwhile crowds were gathering in Halifax town centre, on the route from the station to the Town Hall, where they were soon joined by the crowds of supporters returning on trains from Leeds. At 8pm Archie Rigg was seen running out of the station with the Cup to the waiting four-in-hand char-a-banc, which was quickly packed with players and friends.

There was consternation when the char-a-banc broke down, forcing the occupants to alight. George Kitson got a lift in the mayor's carriage with the cup, but most players ended up walking. In all other respects it was clearly a joyous occasion, not unlike modern-day home-comings, with packed streets of cheering crowds. Dinner at the White Swan Hotel for the team and officials followed at 8.45.

For the players, celebrations had to be kept in check, as on the Monday they were due at Leigh for the season's final league match, though that was not until after a Sunday char-a-banc trip through Greetland to Nont Sarah's at Scamonden for Dinner, thence to The Junction (Ripponden?), and finally to The Derby Inn (Rishworth), for Tea. Each of them had been presented earlier in the week with a four page card, outlining the time-table for the Cup Final, the Sunday excursion, now with the Cup on show, and the Monday evening match, so fully understood the importance of what would be their final outing of the season. Being top of the league mattered just as much as the Challenge Cup; there were no play-offs or Grand Finals in those early days, though they weren't too long in coming

Despite everyone having a time-table, the team was delayed in arriving at Leigh for the 5.30pm kick off, being subsequently fined 10 shillings for a late start, but for the record Halifax, fielding 13 of the 15 who had played in the Cup Final, won by 11 points to Nil, watched by "a good number" of Fax fans. For those not there, a special late edition of the Halifax Courier was on sale soon after the final whistle to let supporters know the news, a flag being raised above the Courier Office when the result came in. After the return from Leigh there was another procession through the town, this time on an "illuminated car", for by then it was getting late. Nearest rivals Salford had in the meantime lost their final game 16-0 at Hull KR, so Halifax had won the title by a clear 4 points. Bizarrely the official presentation of the Championship trophy was made at Halifax's Grand Theatre on the following Thursday evening, at the close of the second performance! Supporters were welcome, if they paid to watch the show..



Hadwen goal



Crowd scene,



Bartle try,



Team photo with trophies, Back row Jones, Hammond, Bulmer, Swinbank, Summerskill. 3rd row Dickinson, Mallinson, Langhorn, Ricketts (Secretary), Winskill, Williams, Morton. 2nd row Midgley (trainer), Wilson, Joe Riley, Rigg, Kitson, Wedgwood, Little, Morris (trainer). Front Brown, Morley, Hadwen, Nettleton.

Finally on this, the club had made a healthy profit on the season and in May the players were presented with a bonus of £150 (approximately £20,000 in today's money) to share, divided out according to the number of games each had played during the season.