

**Member Profile – John Robson**

**Club Captain for 3 Seasons 1958-59 to 1960-61, Club President 1977-79.**

*(1<sup>st</sup> XV Caps – approx.350)*

**EDUCATION & INTRODUCTION TO RUGBY;**

Whalton School 1939-1943, Barnard Castle School 1943-1950.

Whilst at School rugby was not for me. I can remember getting 6 of the “very best” from the Headmaster for skipping rugby, this experience converted me to football I played football for Belsay in a cup final against Morpeth Villa at Grange House field, in those days you changed behind the dyke, no changing rooms or showers, you played the game and it was see you next week boys!

National Service 1952 -1954 Royal Northumberland Fusiliers.

My conversion to rugby happened in Kenya in 1954 when after a football match in the morning for the Company I was drafted into the battalion rugby team v Kenya Regiment in Nairobi. After the game I found myself in this magnificent clubhouse with a pint of Tusker Ale in my hand and said to myself “Robson this is the game for you”, bye football hello Morpeth Old Edwardians.



**EMPLOYMENT;**

1950-1961 - self-employed market gardener, Heighley Gate bought my greenhouse when I changed career.

1961-1987 - various sales roles with Mars, Campbells Soups and Smiths Crisps.

**RUGBY JOURNEY;**

Joined Morpeth Old Edwardians in January 1955 and played first game for the club in the second team v Northern Gypsies in the second row.

1955-1956 - Jim Bewick and Rusty Mackay converted me to an open side wing forward with Peter Armstrong (Police Inspector) on the blind side.

1957-58 - played for Northumberland v Yorkshire at County Ground in a reconstructed back row due to the injury of England No 8 WDG Morgan. I was picked to play on the blind side where I had never played before and we were hammered by some 30 odd points with England No 10 Phil Horrocks-Taylor dropping 3 goals, one with Northumberland's open side hanging onto one of his legs!

1958 - played in Morpeth's first ever Senior Cup Final and we lost 5-13 to Percy Park.

1958-59 - elected 1<sup>st</sup> XV Captain and handed a 16-year-old Bill Hewitt his debut at fly half, unfortunately Bill was injured during the game, making me not too popular with KEVI School!

I played most of my career at No 8 and played until 1969 when I lost the sight in one eye, some of my fellow players suggested I continue to play but on the blind side...

**FAVOURITE ALICKADOO TRIPS;**

1975 - Morpeth victory away to Bath in John Player Cup.

1980 - Northumberland Rugby Union Centenary Tour to Canada accompanied by Alan Gordon.

1986 - Hong Kong 7s.

1995 - World Cup in South Africa with Alan Gordon and spent a day on the ale with Alan and Barry John in Cape Town.

**FAVOURITE POSITION;**

No 8, despite being told by Alnwick's Bobby Robinson "John, back row forwards have not got the skill to be a back or the guts to be a forward!"

**IF YOU WEREN'T A NO 8 WHAT POSITION WOULD YOU LIKE TO HAVE PLAYED;**

Full back - spent 20 minutes playing there once and enjoyed it.

**MOST DIFFICULT OPPONENT/S ENCOUNTERED;**

Gordon Blackett – fly half for Gosforth and Northumberland and he also played Rugby League for Huddersfield.

**BEST PLAYER TO HAVE PLAYED WITH;**

Too numerous to mention but there were many who excelled in the third half in the bar, we may not have won all the games we played but always won the singing afterwards, largely courtesy of Lynn Foreman.

If pushed would have to say the best player I played with was the same young man who made his debut with me as Captain....one Bill Hewitt!



**Photo above – John with Harry Little in The Joiners Arms, Morpeth 1960-61 Season, having a little drink...from the traditional welly boot.**

### **JOHNS 2 x MORPETH CLUB QUIZ QUESTIONS;**

Q. Since its inception, 1995-96, who has won 1<sup>st</sup> XV Player of the Season most?

A. 3 players have currently each won it twice – Duncan Hutton 1998-99 & 2002-03, Barry Hills 2000-01 & 2001-02, Jo Forsythe 2011-12 & 2013-14.

Q. How many players have currently achieved their 1<sup>st</sup> XV Ties?

*(To gain a 1<sup>st</sup> XV tie a player must have played 25 games for the 1<sup>st</sup> XV, or 80% of the competitive fixtures but a minimum of 20 games in 1 season)*

A. 153.

*(The 1<sup>st</sup> XV tie was introduced in 1980 and Bill Hewitt then backdated the tie to those who had played 25 games or more in a season that he had records for. Bill's full Club records are from 1959-60. Bill thinks there will be approx. 20 players who would have achieved their 1<sup>st</sup> XV tie from 1947-48 to 1958-59 (12 seasons) that he doesn't have full records for but has included players that he does have a record for e.g. Ted Laidlaw. Also, to note in the early years there wouldn't be as many games played while the Club established itself)*

Club notes for John Robson and the 1955-56 Season;

*John Robson was born in March 1934 and is one of the elder statesmen of our Club – he is a link between the present-day players and the players who helped form the Club in 1947. Today John still rarely misses a match at Mitford Road and during his time he must have seen hundreds of games that the Club have played.*

*John joined the Morpeth Old Edwardians in 1955 and began his 1<sup>st</sup> XV career in 1956. We have no team records when John first started playing but from 1956 to 1959 the Club played more than 30 games each season and John probably played in most of them. From 1959 to 1968 he played 208 games playing 25 games or more each season between 1959 and 1966. He played his last game on the 25<sup>th</sup> Jan. 1968 at Hartlepool Rovers. He was a regular 1<sup>st</sup> XV player between 1956 to 1966 and he must therefore have played the best part of 350 games for the 1<sup>st</sup> XV.*

*Johns final game at Hartlepool Rovers was the first time we had beaten the strong Durham side - we won 13-8 with 2 Bobby Thompson tries and a Ray Lee try with John Wilson converting 2. The Morpeth XV that afternoon at Hartlepool was - J Wilson, R Thompson, K Lister, D Jeffries, M Bullen, W Hewitt, R Lee, M Stoney, F Hall, L Foreman, J Robson, B Garnett, D Scott, D Pringle, R Stansfield.*

*John captained the 1<sup>st</sup> XV for 3 seasons from 1958/9 season to 1961/2 season and he played for the Northumberland Senior County XV in 1959. He was Club President for 2 years at the end of the 1970's.*

*John played in a very good Morpeth XV in the early to mid-1960s and in a particularly good back row of 3 Johns - Elliott, Bates, and Robson. The 1961 side only lost 4 games out of 33, the 3 Johns back row scored 30 tries while the 2 wingers score 34 tries, the 1964 side lost 5 out of 29 and the following year once again we only lost 4 out of 29.*

*John played in 3 Senior Cup finals for the Club, playing in our first Cup final in 1958 against Percy Park and again in the 1963 and 1966 cup finals against Gosforth. The 1<sup>st</sup> XV by the mid 1960's had won 3 Northumberland County Sevens Tournaments and Morpeth Cup Final side of 1966 included 9 Senior Northumberland County Championship players – 5 backs and 4 forwards.*

*The number 8's job in the 1960's was completely different to today's. They were told to corner flag from set pieces – the laws then allowed you to kick directly into touch from anywhere on the field and therefore there was a lot of kicking from full backs and fly halves – John's job was to help our full back deal with all the kicking. John was a very thoughtful number 8 = he was always in the right place at the right time and rarely if ever dropped the ball - he would have been a very good player in the modern game.*

*Johns son David, a scrum half, played 15 games for the 1<sup>st</sup> XV between 1984 and 1993 and scored 1 try.*

### The 1955 /56 Season

*Our Club was formed in 1947 and until the 1953/54 season we were a Junior Northumberland Club. Several of our players played for a Northumberland Junior County XV. In the 1953/54 season we reached the final of the Northumberland Senior Shield – losing 3-5 to Gosforth 2<sup>nd</sup> XV, but because of reaching the final we gained Senior Club status. At the same time the Club moved to Grange House Field, Mitford Road to play having previously been playing on the Morpeth Grammar School pitches.*

*When John Robson began playing in 1955, we had only recently become a Senior Northumberland Club. The fixture list included several clubs that have since ceased to exist - Newcastle City Police XV, Seaside Rovers, College of Commerce, North Durham , Darlington Railways, Vickers Armstrong, Tynemouth Rovers – but the fixture list included Scottish sides Kelso, Peebles, Hawick Harlequins and Selkirk as well as local sides Tynedale, Ashington, Seghill, Old Novos, and Gosforth while we travelled to Wigton and Aspatria.*

*Morpeth Grammar School Headmaster – Walter L Elsworth was President and his Deputy Headmaster Fred Galbraith was Vice President. Ted Laidlaw was Hon. Sec. and Fixture Sec, Keith Cazaly Assistant Sec, Billy Morgan was Team Sec, Ralph Appleby was Hon. Treasurer and County Rep., Stan Driver Assistant Treasurer, and John Hall Club Chairman. We had a General Committee including Alan Gordon and John Whaley, a Selection Committee, and Entertainments Committee and a Ground Committee.*

*1<sup>st</sup> XV captained by J” Rusty” Mackay with R G Clough vice-captain won 17 of their 31 game and John Robson scored a try at Selkirk in a 10-14 defeat.*

*The Second XV captained by Jimmy Bewick with Barrass Robson as vice-captain had a good season winning 20 of their 28 games - losing only 6.*

*The recently formed third XV captained by J J Turner won 9 of their 19 games.*

*Alan Gordon won the John Hall kicking competition – to note John Robson did win this competition in approx. 1961 beating Bill Hewitt in a kick-off!*

*The notes at the back of the 1955/56 season Fixture card make interesting reading – Suggestions for Playing Members;*

*“Do’s” - Do read the Rules of Rugby Football, Do clean Shirt and shorts at least once a fortnight, Do listen to the captains instructions and Do inform your skipper or Team Sec. if you are not available.*

*“Don’ts” - Do not argue with the referee – he is doing his job. Do not shout on the field, Do not lose your temper, Do not forget to tell the team Sec. if you are unavailable and Do not forget to pay your subscription.*