



Castleford Tigers

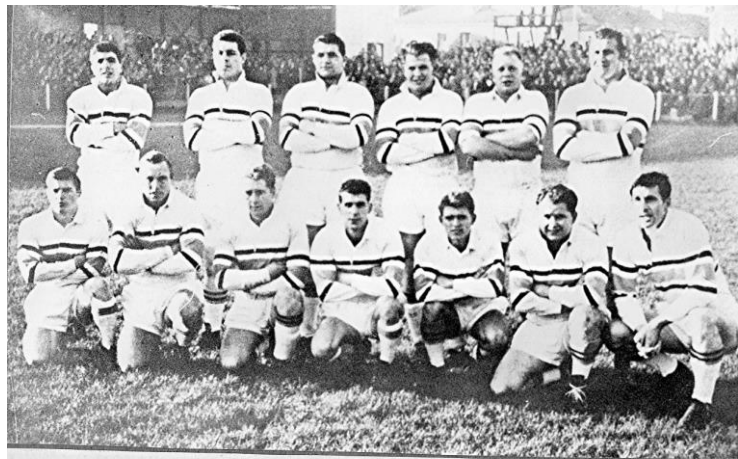
Heritage Project

Cas v Australia 1963

Researched and written by Allan Humphries

The visit of the Australian touring team in November 1963 was eagerly anticipated by Castleford's officials and supporters. The club was just emerging from the doldrums of the 1950s with a crop of young, local players who were beginning to play a style of rugby which earned the team the nickname of 'Classy Cas' as the decade progressed. Having finished no higher than 25th in the league table between 1955/56 and 1958/59, the club's fortunes had improved so significantly that they finished 4th in 1962/63 - only the second Top 4 finish in the club's history. In 1962 Peter Small became the club's first international tourist since Arthur Atkinson in 1936, and he was to be followed into the Great Britain team over the next few years by several team-mates who became household names to rugby league followers across the world (including Edwards, Hardisty, Hepworth, Ward and Bryant who played alongside him in this match).

However, the Australians were quite a good team themselves. The Saturday before they came to Castleford they had beaten Great Britain by 50 points to 12 to become the first all-Australian touring team ever to win a three match test series on English soil. Although the team that faced Cas was not the full test



Versus Australia - Wednesday 13th. November 1963 - won 13 - 12
Tries - J. Ward (2) F. Smith (1) ; Goals - J. Clark (2)
Back Row - Keith Howe (2) Denis Jones (12) Jack Hirst (8) John Clark (10) John Walker (13)
Bill Bryant (11)
Front Row - Keith Hepworth (7) Peter Small (3) John Ward (9) Alan Hardisty (Capt) (6)
Derek Edwards (1) Roy Bell (3) Frank Smith (5)

side it still included a number of legendary names such as Graeme Langlands, Les Johns, Ken Irvine and Johnny Raper, whose son Stuart is well remembered by Cas fans following his successful spell as club coach between 1997 and 2001.

Despite the club's recent improvement, the 1963/64 season had not started well. Albert Lunn, the club's record points scorer, had retired earlier in the year on medical advice and he was proving difficult to replace, either as a full back or, more importantly, as a goal kicker. The Pontefract and Castleford Express had reported that pre-season training had included a competition to find a new goal kicker with the front runners being Alan Hardisty, GG Ward, Jack Hirst and Trevor Bedford, who had been signed from Dewsbury as Lunn's replacement at full back. John Clark, who was to be given the goal kicking responsibility for the match against the tourists, was at that stage rated an "unlikely outsider". Despite Hardisty kicking six goals in a spectacular 33-7 win over Challenge Cup holders Wakefield Trinity on the opening day of the season, the lack of a reliable kicker became a major concern. The team lost five of the next seven games, using four different kickers who only managed

five goals between them. The player regarded as the club's best goalkicker was Frank Dickinson, also a full back. However, the team selectors were not convinced about his all-round game and he struggled to keep his place in the team, resulting in a succession of players being asked to fill the position vacated by Lunn. So when reserve half-back Derek Edwards played full back against Keighley on 19th October, he became the fifth player to wear the number 1 shirt, just eleven games into the season. At the time he was a bit of an emergency selection as Frank Dickinson had been working late and had been unable to train and another potential selection Eric Nowell was unavailable as he was getting married!

So the period leading up to the match against the tourists was an unsettling one for the club. League results had not been good and both Johnny Ward and Peter Small were, for a short period, transfer listed at their own request, with a third request from Keith Hepworth being refused. At the time of the match against the tourists the omens were not good with Cas lying 14th in the 16 team First Division.

However, the team came good on the day. The facts and figures show that Cas won the match 13-12 in front of 7,887 spectators, generating gate receipts of £1,103. The Cas try scorers were Johnny Ward, who scored twice, and Frank Smith with two goals from John Clark. Australia's try scorers



Johnny Ward scores against Australia

were Langlands and Irvine with Langlands kicking two goals and Johns one. But this doesn't do justice to the drama surrounding a number of decisive moments.

Australia had taken an early lead through a Langlands penalty before Ward scored the first of his tries, goaled by Clark, to put Cas in front. The visitors drew level when Johns passed to Langlands for him to score in the corner to level the scores. However, there was some doubt about the final pass, which many observers felt had drifted forwards. Then, on the stroke

of half-time, Cas went back in front with a second try but there was some confusion about who scored it. Newspaper reports initially awarded an obstruction try to Keith Hepworth after he had kicked through. However, despite the conversion being taken in line with the alleged obstruction, Mr Davies the referee confirmed after the match that he had awarded the try to Ward. There was more controversy surrounding John Clark's conversion attempt. One touch judge signalled no goal as he felt the ball had not cleared the cross-bar, but he was over-ruled by the referee who awarded the goal to give Cas a 10-5 lead at half-time. Australia then drew level again seven minutes into the second half when Irvine finished off a 75 yard move to score, and the Cas line came under increasing pressure as the half wore on. Johns eventually put Australia in front again with a drop-goal from 40 yards before, with only two minutes remaining, came the moment that most people who saw the match will always remember. Australia were on the attack again when the ball ran loose. Cas winger Frank Smith scooped up the loose ball and sprinted clear to go 75 yards to score what turned out to be the match winning try. Again there was some controversy as some of the opposition players felt he had knocked-on as he picked up the ball. When interviewed after the match Smith was adamant

he had picked the ball up cleanly and, most importantly, the referee clearly agreed with him! Still the drama wasn't over as Langlands had a chance to win the match with a 45 yard penalty in the last minute. Amazingly, the ball hit the upright and bounced away and Cas were able to hang on for a famous victory.

After the match both teams attended a civic reception at the Kiosk Ballroom hosted by the Mayor of Castleford, Alderman H Astbury. The Rugby League secretary and Great Britain coach, Bill Fallowfield, paid tribute to Castleford's fitness and teamwork whilst the Australian manager, Mr A J Sparks, referred to the great promise shown by Castleford's young team.

This match was an important one for a number of reasons. Johnny Ward's performance earned him a first international call-up for the final test at Headingley. He scored a try as Great Britain won 16-5 to avoid a series whitewash. Derek Edwards' performance also didn't go unnoticed. Two last ditch try-saving tackles went a long way to persuading the directors they had found the answer to the fullback problem. He became a fixture in the position in the Cas team for the rest of the decade, winning two Challenge Cup winners medals as well as playing five times for Great Britain. The match also provided a turning point for the team.

Helped by a run of eleven consecutive wins, they eventually finished in 6th place in the league and came within a whisker of reaching the Challenge Cup Final for the first time in 29 years, losing 7-5 in a semi-final reply to eventual winners Widnes.

The strength of the production line of local talent was illustrated the week after the win over the tourists when the Castleford Under 17 team won the Yorkshire County Final, beating Hull 29-13. The Castleford team included future Challenge Cup winner Mick Redfearn, whilst the star of the final with

three tries was a young man by the name of Roger Millward. At the time, a series of these Under 17 matches were televised. According to newspaper adverts of the time you could have watched them on a state of the art 19-inch screen television for a rental of only 8 shillings and 6 pence a week! Elsewhere in the world of sport, a young Ackworth-born cricketer named Geoffrey Boycott had just given up his job as a civil servant to play county cricket with Yorkshire. In his first season he finished second in the first class batting averages with an average of 45.2.

The local newspapers were also reporting protests being made by local councils about plans to close seven local railway stations recommended by the Beeching Report into the state of British railways. They were also reporting progress on the continuing construction of Ferrybridge 'C' power station. Beatlemania was in full swing following The Beatles' appearance at the Royal Variety Performance on 5th November. If you wanted to look the part you could get an all-wool "Beatle" sweater from Keyzer's in Pontefract for 42 shillings! The charts were dominated by "Merseybeat", with 'She Loves You' having just been displaced at Number 1 by Gerry and the Pacemakers and 'You'll Never Walk Alone'. The Kiosk Ballroom, advertised as "Yorkshire's Happiest Ballroom", was tapping into this craze by holding a weekly beat group contest - the grand final ended in a tie between Bob Taylor and



Cas on the defensive against Australia

the Strangers and Johnny Dawn and the Stormriders. During the autumn of 1963 The Kiosk also hosted groups who had had chart success such as Sounds Incorporated and The Rocking Berries.

One sad piece of news for Castleford rugby followers was the death, just three days after the game against the Australian tourists, of Arthur Atkinson at the age of 57. He had captained Castleford's 1935 Challenge Cup winning team and played eleven times for Great Britain between 1932 and 1936. The club set up a memorial fund in his name which paid for a memorial gate bearing his name which has been at the Wheldon Road end of the ground ever since. And only five days later the whole world was shocked by another death - the assassination of United States President John F Kennedy during a presidential visit to Dallas, Texas.

Personal Recollections:

I knew the match against the Australians was a special event because not only was I allowed to have the afternoon off school, but my dad even missed a shift at work to take me to the match! To be honest, I don't remember very much about the game itself. I remember being fascinated by the fact that players from the opposite side of the world had come to play rugby in Castleford. I also remember being fascinated by their kit. Green and gold shirts! I was always a bit obsessed by the away teams' kits because the matches I'd seen on television were always in black and white so to see them in the flesh was amazing. We stood in the Princess Street stand and I was right down at the front near the half-way line. One memory that has stayed with me is the sight of Frank Smith flying past me on his way to scoring the winning try. As he went by he seemed almost near enough to touch. But the thing I remember most is that he seemed to be running with his eyes closed as he strained every muscle to outpace the defence.

Downloaded from www.castigersheritage.com