The Iron Duke

Bobby Windsor – The Life and Times of a Working-Class Rugby Hero

Bobby Windsor with Peter Jackson

Mainstream Publishing eBooks

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EDINBURGH AND LONDON

Epub ISBN: 9781907195792
Version 1.0
www.mainstreampublishing.com

First published in Great Britain in 2010 by
MAINSTREAM PUBLISHING COMPANY
(EDINBURGH) LTD
7 Albany Street
Edinburgh EH1 3UG

ISBN 9781845966508

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book would never have been completed without those who gave freely of their time to help make it possible, like Fran Cotton. A tower of strength alongside the Iron Duke in every battle throughout the invincible Lions tour of South Africa in 1974, the former England captain readily agreed to write the foreword in glowing admiration of the Welshman with whom he ventured into the jungle all those years ago.

My thanks, too, to Ray Prosser, the legendary Pontypool coach and biggest single influence on the Duke's career, for taking the trouble to give his unique insight into what set Windsor apart from the rest. Eddie Butler, once part of the same fearsome pack, now BBC television's leading commentator, offered an expert, first-hand appreciation of what it took to be the middle member of the 'Viet-Gwent'. I am indebted to Stephen Jones of the *Sunday Times* for finding the time in his hectic schedule to provide his pre-publication verdict. Phil Bennett, Mike Burton, Mervyn Davies and Fergus Slattery, all 1974 Lions, also deserve special mention.

The story would never have been possible without the inspiration of schoolteachers like Dick Shotton and Hedley Rowland. In singling out both for special mention, the Duke also acknowledges the help given by lifelong friends like John Whitfield, kit-man, trainer, coach and first-aid expert at Whitehead's Steelworks RFC, where the teenaged Windsor began the climb which would take him to the summit of the world game; John 'Paddy' Burke, who did British and Irish

rugby the colossal favour of shoving Windsor from prop to hooker, is another, along with George Thomas, in his capacity as captain of Newport Saracens RFC. The Old Lion will forever be grateful to those at Cross Keys for giving him his big break in the first-class game and those selectors, both Welsh and Lions, who acknowledged his rare talent. ‘I’d like to thank you, gentlemen, one and all,’ he says. ‘Thank you very much.’

Most of all, he is indebted to the Windsor family, especially to his first wife, the late Judi, and to his six children for their enduring love and unfailing support – Joanne, Ricky, Mandy, Mark, Luke and Sean. I thank them, too, for all their help and am grateful to Ricky’s partner, Ceri Edwards, for the endless cups of tea which kept us going through long interviews during the Welsh winter until the Iron Duke could take the cold no more and retreated to the warmth of Majorca.

I owe a million thanks to a whole host of people for their generosity, not least with photographic material – to Robin Davey and Jackie Davies of the *South Wales Argus,* Alan Walter of the *Daily Mail* and Rob Cole of the Westgate Agency in Cardiff. Others gave their time selflessly to check a multitude of facts – Alan Evans (the Barbarian Football Club), Horace Jefferies (Cross Keys RFC), Ray Ruddick (Pontypool RFC), Ivor Thom (Newport Saracens RFC), Mal Beynon (Monmouthshire RFC), Geoff Pritchard (Crawshay’s Welsh RFC) and David Power (Welsh Charitables RFC).

The book would never have seen the light of day without the technological expertise of Ceri Jackson and Neil Hore, the encouragement of Bill Campbell, Graeme Blaikie and all at Mainstream Publishing. Lastly, my gratitude to the man himself, without whom there would have been no story to write. His *nom de guerre,* as you will discover, comes from a speech made by a senior French official in admiration of Windsor’s courage after one particular match in Toulouse.

The French, after all, know an Iron Duke when they see one, the original, the Duke of Wellington, having seen Napoleon off at the Battle of Waterloo almost 200 years ago.

Peter Jackson, Cardiff, July 2010

CONTENTS

FOREWORD

Fran Cotton spent the most glorious summer of his international career cheek by jowl with Bobby Windsor all over South Africa in 1974 without losing a single match. No wonder the Welshman claims he would have fought Al Capone on the proviso that the 'great English oak' of a prop had been alongside him.

A native of Wigan, Cotton is the only Lion to have played in a winning Test series against the Springboks and then repeated the feat almost a quarter of a century later as manager of what has been acclaimed as the best tour since the '70s. Since retiring after ten years at the sharp end of Test rugby for England and the Lions, the Lancastrian has translated his success into the business world, as well as becoming one of the most respected figures during his time as a member of the Rugby Football Union. He is a director of his former club, Sale Sharks.

As you are about to find out, Bobby Windsor was a lot more than just one of Wales' and the Lions' greatest players. He was also one of the most colourful characters in the history of the sport.

Our paths first crossed shortly after we had been selected for the 1974 Lions tour to South Africa. For reasons fully explained in this book, Bobby had to be whisked straight from the plane on arrival to the nearest hospital. The gastric problem which meant he was missing for most of the first week may have had something to do with his being in the

same drinking company as ‘Swerve’ [Mervyn Davies] and J.P.R. [Williams].

An interesting thing happened shortly after he rejoined the party at our first training camp in Serfontein. ‘The Duke’ returned just in time for our first choir practice led by Billy Steele of Scotland, who introduced us to some beautiful Scottish ballads, including the one which we adopted as a battle hymn, ‘Flower of Scotland’.

During a break in rehearsals, Bobby took his do-it-yourself tobacco kit out and began rolling a cigarette before turning round to address all and sundry.

‘Never mind all this singing,’ he said. ‘I want to know when the booting starts.’

All the forwards nodded their approval and while the three-quarters didn’t understand what he was talking about, J.P.R. most certainly did. He was positively salivating at the prospect of joining in the forwards’ fun, which he did, with typical enthusiasm, during the weeks and months which followed.

Bobby was true to his word every time he played. Never once did he take a backward step during some of the most brutal scenes in Test match history. In so many ways, Windsor set the tone for the no-nonsense, rugged approach which underpinned the unprecedented success of the only invincible tour ever made by the Lions, one which will never be matched, if only because modern tours barely involve half the number of games.

Off the field, Bobby could best be described as a likeable rogue. You needed to have your wits about you in his presence. Very often, if anybody left their Lions sweater or tracksuit lying around unattended for any length of time, it would be too late. By the time its loss had been discovered, the item of clothing would be all parcelled up and on its way to Windsor’s mates in the steelworks at Newport where he worked.

The same with the cigarettes. A well-known manufacturer would leave large numbers of the company's product in the team room of every hotel on our itinerary, which only goes to show how attitudes to fitness have changed. Anyway, most of the cigarettes disappeared within hours of check-in. We all had our suspicions, but we could never prove anything.

Bobby was far too streetwise to be caught, but, for all that, we loved him to bits. We loved his mischief, we loved his sense of humour, but, above all, we loved his brutal honesty. I had the privilege in my time of playing with many great hookers and the Duke was unquestionably the greatest of them all.

To wrap your arms round this bull of a man from Pontypool just before locking horns with Springboks or All Blacks was a great feeling. It gave you an unshakeable sense of security and supremacy, that whatever trouble was coming our way, we could take it and give it back with a lot of interest. Nobody frightened Windsor, not even the great French pack of the second half of the '70s and they were the most frightening sight of all.

Bobby has certainly had his share of personal tragedy and trauma over the years, which makes this book all the more revealing. I have waited a long time for a book to be written about his life and times, because nobody can have quite as many hair-raising stories to tell.

This book will not be for the faint-hearted, but if you want to know all about what the violence of Test rugby used to be like, it is not to be missed.

Not for nothing is it entitled *The Iron Duke.* His ever-readiness to cut out the candyfloss and give it to you straight from the shoulder is bound to make this a sure-fire winner.

Fran Cotton, July 2010

1

‘BASH’ STREET KID

Thursday, 31 January 1946. A world exhausted by six years of bloodshed recoils in horror at evidence from the International War Crimes Tribunal of more unspeakable Nazi atrocities. Day 47 of the trial of Hitler’s high command at Nuremberg uncovers the full scale of the slaughter of 642 French men, women and children at Oradour-sur-Glane, the scorched village near Limoges which has been preserved exactly as the 2nd SS Panzer Division left it in June 1944, a permanent memorial of man’s inhumanity to man.

On the other side of the Atlantic, car workers in Detroit begin the 71st day of their four-month strike. Elsewhere in America, Alfred Arnold Cocozza and Arnold Raymond Cream, better known as Mario Lanza, the American opera singer-cum-film star, and Jersey Joe Walcott, the aspiring world heavyweight boxing champion, are celebrating birthdays, their 25th and 32nd respectively.

Winston Churchill is preparing to make his landmark speech about ‘an Iron Curtain descending across Europe’ and Alistair Cooke comes up with the idea to broadcast a weekly *Letter from America,* the first of 2,869 – the longest-running weekly programme of its kind in radio history.

In New York, Ethel Merman, the Barbra Streisand of her time, is clearing her throat for the Broadway premiere of *Annie Get Your Gun,* Estee Lauder puts the finishing touches to the launch of her cosmetics empire and *Billboard*

magazine declares that ‘ol’ leather tonsils’, Vaughn Monroe, has knocked Bing Crosby off the top of the US chart with ‘Let it Snow, Let it Snow, Let it Snow’.

Nearer home, one half of Merseyside is in gloom over Liverpool’s 5–0 trouncing by Bolton Wanderers in the fourth round of the FA Cup. Newport Harriers are celebrating their first post-war title as cross-country champions of Wales. The Ministry of Transport revives a ten-year national plan, suspended at the outbreak of war, which includes a bridge across the Severn near Chepstow and a ‘high speed’ dual carriageway from the bridge to Newport.

A new phenomenon is bursting out all over the United States – the sound of the ‘baby boomers’. Amongst them is a 12-day-old girl from Locust Ridge, Tennessee, whose lung power will make her famous the world over: Dolly Parton.

And several thousand miles west, shortly before midday on that last Thursday of January, the baby boom embraces a bruiser who will shake, rattle ‘n’ roll with the best.

Robert William Windsor enters the world at 25 Harrow Road, Newport, Monmouthshire, the only son of Victor Windsor, ex-Royal Navy, and his wife, Connie. It is just as well that the boy should be blissfully oblivious to developments in the world around him. Two days later, on the first Saturday of his life, at the St Helen’s ground in Swansea, Wales are routed 25–6 by Scotland in a ‘victory’ rugby international which turns out to be anything but.

Harrow Road and its neat terraced houses are within sight and sound of Rodney Parade, home of Newport RFC, where, on the second Saturday of his life, the famous Black-and-Ambers defeat Leicester 15–5 before seeing Cardiff off the following week.

One of the Newport team had fought at Arnhem and been awarded the *Croix de guerre* by the French government for his bravery as an assistant major in the 1st Airborne Division of the Parachute Regiment. Back in civvy street as a schoolmaster, Hedley Rowland, alias ‘The Poacher’ in

recognition of his 93 tries in 136 matches for Newport, would do more than anyone to keep the young Windsor out of the clutches of the police and put him on the road to fame with Wales and the Lions.

In that grim first winter of his life, the embryonic Duke is not to know that within a matter of months, a pair of barristers, one English, the other Australian, will create Mensa, the high IQ society; for a multitude of reasons, the new arrival never quite gets round to joining.

Instead, he ploughs his own fighting furrow through the rugby world, commanding more column inches and making more headlines than he could ever have dreamed about. A working-class boy born with fire in his belly, he keeps it alight by hook or by crook, or both, in defiance of the hardships of growing up in the severe austerity of post-war Britain.

‘We lived with my mother’s sister, Sarah, in a one-down, one-up house,’ Windsor says. ‘I’ll always remember the tin bath in front of the fire. My dad had come back home from the war to what was supposed to be a land fit for heroes. Mind, you had to be heroic to find your way through the pitch-black night down to the toilet at the bottom of the back garden. And in winter it was freezing cold. But back then you had to be resourceful and make the most of what you had, because you didn’t have much. Certainly nothing as fancy as a toilet roll. So the *South Wales Argus* was cut up into neat squares and used in the proper way.

‘My dad had been in the Merchant Navy until war broke out, then he switched to the Royal Navy and worked his way up through the ranks to chief petty officer. Serving King and Country was all very well, but it didn’t seem to count for much when it came to starting afresh in civvy street. The vast majority of the men who had been away fighting for the victory were asking themselves the same question – what do we do now? Dad got a job in Newport driving taxis, which kept a roof over our heads and allowed him a bit of time to

devote to his real passion, for engines and engineering. He was always into that. For a while, he went to America to lecture at colleges on diesel engines, then came home and became a fitter and turner for the rest of his working days.

‘He worked hard all his life. He’d work seven days a week whenever he could, for the overtime. We needed the money. People think times are hard now, but it’s paradise compared to back then. Even bread was rationed. And they called it a land fit for heroes?

‘My mother had seven sisters and three brothers, not that she ever told us much about her family. All we knew was that two of her brothers were killed at Dunkirk; the surviving boy, Uncle Tommy, died of cancer.

‘We lived less than a hundred yards from one of the main entrances to Rodney Parade. When Newport were playing, I could hear the roar of the crowd before I opened the front door. In those early post-war years, the Black-and-Ambers were one of the biggest clubs in the country. I’d walk out of the house, turn right, cross the main road and sneak in with my sister, Sally, not to watch the match but to get in under the wooden stand to see if anyone had dropped any pennies or ha’pennies. We’d find one or two and go straight to the sweet shop. You could buy a bar of chocolate with a couple of those old pennies.

‘Bonfire night was the big money-making night for us kids. You’d take the guy down to the front entrance and make a few bob from the fans going in and out to the match. The great Ken Jones would be playing on the wing for Newport and all I’d be interested in was going ferreting about under the stand to see what had been dropped by the spectators sitting above!

‘The thing I remember more than anything else about my childhood was being hungry. It was that hunger which put the gravel in my gut – without it I’d never have been able to fight my way to the top as a rugby player.

‘Although my parents did their very best, more often than not I’d be starving when I got to school. Maindee Junior was a concrete jungle with no room for a piece of grass, never mind a playing field. I had to cross a few roads to get there. One day, as a six year old coming home with my sister, I ran out into the Chepstow Road and got hit by a motorbike with a sidecar. I’ve never been so frightened in all my life. I got up and ran home, crying. The bloke on the motorbike followed me all the way home because he was concerned that I might have been seriously hurt. I was lucky not to have been killed and if I had been it would have been entirely my fault.

‘On my way to school, I’d walk past the main Newport police station, which I did visit a few times later in my life, as will be revealed. As a kid, I only had one goal, and that was to be a professional footballer. Soccer wasn’t so much my first love, it was my only love. I was absolutely football mad.

‘During that time, my mum and dad got a council house up at St Julians, a brand-new estate with a brand-new junior school. Best of all, the school had a football pitch. For a working-class kid like me, I felt like I was going to Eton. Mr Shotton, the history master who was also in charge of games, had been a Navy man and he’d tell us the story of the sinking of the *Bismarck.*

‘As kids of eight and nine, he’d have us mesmerised. Then the bell would go and he’d say, “We’ll continue the story next week.” And we’d say, “No, sir, more please.” One or two teachers gave me a punch around the earhole – which I probably asked for – but Mr Shotton was brilliant. Years later, I went back to the school when they put up a plaque in honour of the fifty-six goals I scored in one season – which is still a record.

‘I’d come home from school, change and play football until it got too dark. Our council house was at the end of the terrace. Next to it was a lawn and we’d play with a bald old

tennis ball or whatever kind of ball we could find. If there were only two of us, one would keep goal until the other scored three goals and then we'd switch round.

'The old leather balls of the day were like a lead weight, especially when it was wet – and when wasn't it wet? Heading that was like being assaulted, but I was soccer daft. Being a centre-forward, I'd head it any time because you could barge the goalie then, so I'd often have the ball and the keeper in the back of the net.

'The first plastic ball I had was one my sister bought me for Christmas when I was nine. We headed straight out to play and we'd been going about 30 seconds when a boy booted it straight into a thorn bush.

'All you could hear was the sound of the air coming out. Flat as a pancake. It broke my heart. That was the only Christmas present I ever got, because my mother was a Jehovah's Witness. All my friends were getting presents and I wasn't. Try and explain that to a kid.

'Clothes were another thing. Being a Navy man, my father got me a pair of trousers with bell-bottoms. He'd say, "Oh, that's smart, son. Real smart." In 20 years' time, they'd be the height of fashion. Back then, all they did was make me a figure of fun. The bastard bell-bottoms were bigger than my bastard shoes, and they were another sight.

'I had to wear those big Tuf boots. "Good strong shoes, son," said my dad. So while everyone else was wearing winkle-pickers or whatever the fashion was at the time, I was in these big clodhoppers like I was going to work on a building site.

'Then I had a military mac with flaps. I was the new kid on the block and, boy, did they give me some stick. They'd nick my cap and boot it around the school yard. They gave me a bit of bumping, my mac was ripped and our mum went to the school to ask the headmaster, "What's gone on with my boy? Blah, blah blah."

‘One of the prefects, a right bully-boy, had it in for me. I was out in the yard one day when he came up and put a snowball down the back of my neck. I turned round and beat the stuffing out of him, even though he was in the fourth form and I was in the second. Next thing, I’m up before the head, Mr Wilkinson, and I’m thinking I’m in shit street.

‘He asked me why I’d done it and I told him. He thought for a moment, then he said, “Now you know how to look after yourself, Windsor.” He called the prefect in and apparently tore a strip off him, said he was made of milk and water and that he wasn’t a prefect any longer. From that day on, I never let anyone mess me about. I learned a valuable lesson, that if you let people get away with doing things to you, they’ll keep on f*****g doing them until you do something about it.

‘It was round about then that I first felt the long arm of the law. There was still building work being done on the estate after we moved in. One day I saw a heap of concrete blocks with a wheelbarrow beside them. So I loaded up the wheelbarrow and thought, I’ll take these home for our dad. Be a nice surprise.

‘The estate copper, a Mr Waters, who was a right bastard, stopped me on the way.

‘He said, “Hello, hello. Where are you going with them?”

‘I said, “I’m taking them home to my father.” I had no idea I was stealing them. The way they were chucked on the ground made me think they were there to be picked up. He made me take them all the way back and stack them in a neat pile, and then he took me down to the house to see my father.

‘I had to go to the police station. Our dad came with me. I loved my father, I could not have wished for a better one. He used to call me “Bash”. When we got to the station, he said, “Sit there, Bash.” My father was sticking up for me and I was just sitting there scared stiff in case they were going to lock me up.

‘Anyway, after a while they let us go and the first thing Dad did was to stop at the nearest shop. He went in and came out with two bars of chocolate and a bottle of ice-cream soda for me and my sister while he nipped into the boozer for a pint.

‘It wouldn’t be the last I’d see of the inside of that police station, but I could go back to playing football without a care in the world.

‘When I got a bit older, 11 or 12, I’d go with a few mates to Somerton Park and watch Newport County in the old Third Division (South). We’d be “up the County” every other Saturday, watching players like the goalie Len Weare, who a few years later made a name for himself as the first player from the Fourth Division to play in an international. For us kids, playing football for the County and getting paid to do it was the perfect job. Brilliant days.

‘My life slowly began to change after I did the 11-plus and went to Brynglas Secondary Modern which was like a mansion with its own grounds. That meant a bus into town, a bus to Brynglas and two buses back. That was tuppence a day in old money and my mother gave me my lunch money on a Monday for the week, about half-a-crown [twelve and a half pence post-decimalisation], except that I’d have it all spent by Monday morning on sweets and chocolate eclairs.

‘That meant I’d be starving all week. For the mid-morning break, some boys would bring cold toast. Now when you’re hungry, cold toast smells like a sirloin steak. Beautiful. So you’d be following these boys round hoping they’d give you a crust or, if they were eating an apple, that they’d let you have the core.

‘More often than not, I’d spend the bus fare on sweets as well as the lunch money. So I’d have to walk all the way from Brynglas. Must have been five miles. When I got older, I’d wonder why my mother didn’t ask why I was so late getting home. Maybe she knew why and never let on.

‘I’d always run home, in case my mates started the soccer match without me. Once, when I’d got into another scrape and had to report to the police station at one o’clock Saturday lunchtime, I ran a good mile from Brynglas to Maindee and said I was very sorry for what I did. Then I ran all the way back, sweating and praying I’d get to the match for kick-off.

‘When you had a new estate, like the one I lived on at St Julians, you had people being rehoused from all over the place and there’d be a few territorial issues, which meant you’d always be scrapping. For some reason that I never understood, I got a bad name on the estate. I never broke into anyone’s house or anything like that, but I always seemed to be in trouble. Coppers appeared to follow me round.

‘At Brynglas I met the man who changed my life, Hedley Rowland. We had two teachers there who took sport, a fellow called Don Thomas who was soccer mad and Hedley who was rugby mad. So I’d play soccer for the school on a Tuesday and rugby on a Thursday. I only played rugby because Hedley Rowland said I wanted to play and I was trying to say, “But, sir, I play football.” And he’d say, “You’re playing rugby on Thursday.”

‘He played me at outside-half and full-back. At school I was small for my age, but I was quick, as I was when I was older. There wasn’t a faster forward playing for Pontypool than me. Gradually, I was leaning more towards rugby. I was getting the feel of it, enjoying the contact and running with the ball. On the football field, I felt too small for my position as a centre-forward, jumping against centre-halfs who were at least a foot taller.

‘Another thing struck me about rugby. I could see from the very early days that I had a brain for the game, not just to spot a gap but an instinctive feeling for what was going to happen next. Hedley was that much into sport, especially

swimming, that I got my life-saving medallion. I'd swim for the school and play baseball in the summer.

'Monday afternoon was swimming, Tuesday rugby, Wednesday swimming, Thursday rugby. When it came to studying, we only really went to school on Friday! Brilliant, it was. The amount of time teachers gave up in those days outside school to organise sport was outstanding because they never got paid for it. I'm not sure whether that still happens now, but it did then, thank God.

'When you played at home, your teacher refereed and vice versa. There was always a lot of fighting. Brynglas would have been considered by some to have been a bit rough and ready, like the teams from Pill, the docks area of Newport. Anyway, on one particular day, we were playing Llantarnam, which was an upmarket place by comparison.

'We were fighting like bantam cocks. Their referee sent me off. He came up to me afterwards: "Windsor, come here. Do you realise you have no need to be doing what you're doing? You're messing yourself up. Stick to what you're good at, cut out the nonsense and you might go a long way in this game."

'It was nice of him to say so and it made me think – use your head instead of getting caught all the time. I was 14 and shortly after that, I'll never forget it, Hedley was a forward short and he said, "Windsor, you're playing hooker today." We were playing one of the local schools and everyone knew it was going to be a fight because they were full of the dull bastards who'd failed the 11-plus.

'I'd never been in a scrum in my life. This boy Stephen Hall was hooking for the other side. We became friends for life, but not then, because the front rows went down and bang, there was a fight straight away. The ref sent us both off. The next day, Hedley Rowland says, "Windsor, after watching that yesterday, I'm going to leave you in the forwards."

‘He said something about me getting a couple of strikes against the head or some technical jargon like that. I thought he was having a dig at me hitting somebody and I felt like protesting that if I did strike anyone on the head it was in self-defence. Because I didn’t know what the hell was happening in the front row, I didn’t have a clue that he was complimenting me for winning the ball on the opposition put-in. The decision turned out to be a masterstroke by Hedley even though I was still on the small side.

‘He had such a good influence on me that he even improved me academically, which, I admit, took some doing. Hedley taught history and I’d always be in the top four at history. Hopeless at every other subject, but I made a point of studying history because I wanted to please him so he’d say, “Well done, Windsor.” He’d given me so much that I wanted to give him something back.

‘Hedley Rowland used to drink at the Royal Albert in Newport, a real pukka pub where they would have chickens on the spit in the window. Just before the end of this one term, he came to a few of us and said, “Do you boys want to earn a few bob over Christmas working in the Royal Albert? All you do is go down into the cellar, they send the empty bottles down, you stack them in crates and send the full ones back up on a pulley.”

‘We said, “Right, sir.” We’d get ten bob a night [50p] and have a bit of fun. That was the plan and it all went well until Christmas Eve. We’d had a few drinks in the cellar, then we were up in the bar clearing up the empties till the time came for us to take them back down. The boy I was with said that instead of taking the long way down he’d go down on the pulley and that I had to hold the rope. I was letting him down slowly when the rope came off the wheel and all I could hear was, “Aaaargh”. He’d hit the ground, fallen out and smashed a few bottles.

‘When I went down to grab him in the dark, I stretched out my right hand and caught it on a jagged piece of glass.

Blood was spurting all over the place. They carried me out and straight down to the Royal Gwent. Nineteen stitches in my hand, then I went back to the pub to collect my money. They gave me half a quid and a roasted chicken, and took me home by car.

‘I walked into the house and held the chicken up in my good hand for my parents to see – “Look what I’ve got!” In those days, you couldn’t afford anything as fancy as a chicken. I’d just come from a pub plastered with decorations and full of all kinds of Christmas spirit, not all of it alcoholic. At home we didn’t even have as much as a Christmas tree, never mind any fairy lights.

‘I understood that was because of my mother’s religion and while I respected that, I always resented it. I was jealous of all those other kids who were jumping about opening their presents and there was me with virtually nothing. One of my pals, a lad called Alan Jones, lived on the same block of houses and that Christmas my sister had given me a bar of toffee.

‘I put it in a tin and wrapped it up as neatly as I could and knocked on Alan’s back door, Christmas Day. I wasn’t doing it entirely out of the kindness of my heart. I was hoping that I would get a present in return. Alan said, “Thanks very much,” and closed the door. Nothing. But worse than that, I’d lost my bastard toffee. If someone had told me there and then that it is better to give than to receive, I would have told him to get stuffed.

‘Christmas should have been the best time of the year. Instead it was probably the worst. In the early days when we lived at Harrow Road, we did celebrate Christmas in a small way and I’d hang up my stocking. I’d only get an apple, an orange, maybe a few nuts, but it was something. Then, once we’d moved and my mother got into her religion, all that stopped.

‘At that time, I was doing a milk round, which meant my father got me up at half past four every morning. I’d walk

from my house across the estate for about a mile to the milkman's. At five we'd load up the milk and I'd work with him until eight, then I'd go to school. I'd be on the go for eight hours without anything to eat. It was unbelievable how hungry I was. I worked with the milkman five weekdays and then until lunchtime on Saturdays.

'Weekends, I had a paper round. F*** me, was that hard work. Every house had a long drive, so I'd walk miles delivering 30 copies of the *Argus.* Sunday papers like *The Observer* and the *Sunday Times* were so heavy that you needed a crane to get them around. My father made a special bag for me, but it still felt like a ton weight. You'd always be hoping that someone at those houses would come out, say "Well done, son," and give you a tanner [sixpence in old money].

'I'd try to save a bit, but it was a losing battle. The Saturday before Mother's Day, I had no money to buy Mum something. I was working for the milkman down by St Julians and on a doorstep there was some money for him, four or five shillings, so I picked it up, went to the chemist down the road and bought her some lily of the valley perfume.

'The bloke who left the milk money out began to suspect something was up when the milkman asked him to settle the bill. The next thing I knew the coppers were on the case. The bloke who left the milk money out was a schoolteacher so my dad took me down to the house. My dad paid the money and, pointing at me, said, "He'll work it off, 'cos I'll make sure he does."

'I had lost my job with the milkman. I knew it was a very stupid thing I'd done. My dad said to me, "Right, Bash, any time you want any money, come to me. Don't steal it."

'I told him I was sorry and he took me home on his motorbike, a BSA 350.

'If I was ill, he would go and do the paper round for me. That's the kind of dad he was. Nothing was ever too much

trouble. Because he was always ready to work all the hours he could to support us, Dad very rarely had time to come and watch me play. He did get along once, to Rodney Parade for the final of the Dewar Shield, a competition involving all the schools of Newport and Cardiff. I was in the Newport squad, one of two full-backs. There had been some doubt about the game because of the weather, but I'd told him before leaving the house that morning, "Dad, the game's on." They picked the team and left me out. Sod's law. So I stood beside our dad leaning on a crush barrier and watching a boy at full-back who wasn't fit to lace my boots. He missed two tackles that cost us the match.

'The fire in my belly was burning like hell that day.'

2

PIECE OF CAKE

January 1962. Adolf Eichmann, despised as the so-called architect of the Holocaust, awaits his execution in Israel after being found guilty of crimes against humanity. Another notorious case, albeit one on an infinitely smaller scale, opens at Bedfordshire Assizes: the A6 murder trial, which would end with James Hanratty becoming one of the last people to be hanged in Britain before the abolition of the death penalty.

In Rome, Pope John XXIII excommunicates the Cuban communist revolutionary Fidel Castro. New Zealand grants independence to Western Samoa, presumably on the understanding that they could take their pick of the island's best rugby players and convert them into All Blacks for decades to come.

A rising band of musicians have their first audition, then sign Brian Epstein as their manager and cut their first disc. The Beatles are on their way, but for the moment 'The Twist', as sung by an American called Chubby Checker, is all the rage and the newspapers run photographs of the new dance being performed by Norma Sykes, a voluptuous English model better known as Sabrina.

The Americans launch John Glenn into space from Cape Canaveral and bring the 40-year-old Marine back safe and sound. As the space race hots up, NASA (the National Aeronautics and Space Administration) launches its first

space probe to the Moon, only for the rocket to miss by 22,000 miles.

At Twickenham, Wales, under the captaincy of Lloyd Williams, fire so many misguided missiles that they have to settle for a scoreless start to the Five Nations championship. In a classic case of much ado about nothing–nothing, they miss five shots at the English goal in a tricky breeze, the grim stalemate putting the wind up a crowd of more than 70,000. Mercifully, the championship has not witnessed a 0–0 draw since.

Rod Laver and Margaret Court win the singles titles at the first Grand Slam event of the tennis year, the Australian Open. On the American golf tour, Arnold Palmer is warming up for the second of his three US Masters titles and Benny ‘Kid’ Paret is in training for what would prove to be a fatal defence of his world welterweight title, the twenty-five-year-old Cuban dying from head injuries twelve days after losing to Emile Griffith.

Cliff Richard spends the first six weeks of the year on top of the charts with ‘The Young Ones’ and he’s still there when Wales follow their pointless visit to HQ by contriving to lose at home to Scotland. Just as well, then, that before Cliff can be knocked off his perch by B. Bumble and the Stingers with ‘Nut Rocker’, a youngster who would rock a few nuts in the Swinging Sixties gets his first job.

‘I was no great academic,’ says Bobby Windsor. ‘Hedley Rowland didn’t need to be Einstein to work that out, but he did me the favour of getting me an interview at Whitehead’s steelworks at the top of the docks in Newport. There was a vacancy in the accounts department as a junior wages clerk, a really pukka job. My father was chuffed to bits. His son was going to be on the staff. If you were on the staff and you kept your nose clean, you had a job for life.

‘At the interview, they asked me about my family and whether my dad had been in the forces and that’s what swung it. They thought I was from good stock, so I got the

job, which was to get all the time sheets from the mill for the wage slips. You had to be 16 to work in the mill and I was 15.

‘I was on £2 2s 6d and I didn’t like the fact that there were boys of 16 getting up to £5 2s 6d, more than twice as much. I talked with Dad about getting a trade and he found out that there was a job going as an apprentice in the bakery where he was working. I got the job. After the boredom of the wages department, it was like going to work in Aladdin’s cave. I’d have to say I was more of a taster than a baker. Working in a cake factory – I couldn’t believe my luck. Put it this way: I never went hungry. I scoffed all the cakes I wanted. In the bakery there were slabs of chocolate, four-foot square and about a foot high, which I had to smash up with a mallet and put into a melting drum. What I didn’t eat, I poured down onto the cakes below, stopping every so often to fill my face with it.

‘Boy, did I make up for lost time on that caper. Those cakes were the main reason why I went from being a sort of skinny full-back or outside-half to a front-row forward. But the job was too good to last. I was an apprentice there for six months until one day my father came up to me and said, “Come on, Bash, we’re finished here.” He’d had a barney with one of the engineers and told them to stick their job – which meant sticking mine as well.

‘There was a job going down in the hot mills at the steelworks, but you had to be 16. I went there on the 12th of January to see the trade union rep. He asked how old I was. I knew I couldn’t start until the following Monday at the earliest, so I said, “I’m 16 on the 21st.”

‘They kitted me out with steel boot-protectors and clothing for working with red-hot steel. I reported for duty and they kept asking me for my P45. Eventually, I took it in. The personnel people played holy hell when they saw I was still 15 and I had to explain that I stretched a point about my age because I was afraid I wouldn’t get the job.