



Easter Tour 1972

by Nick Dance

My first tour was back in 1972 when I was young, foolish and celebrating my 20th birthday. Now I am approaching my 70th but still remember most of those events that happened in that extraordinary weekend 50 years ago. These are just a few memories that have survived in my failing memory. Many thanks to Wally and Dave Walker, two of the few survivors still in touch with the club, for jogging my memories, helping me distinguish fact from fiction, throwing in their own anecdotes and reminding me of what incidents happened on other tours!

Friday 31st March

I hadn't planned to go on tour at all but earlier in the week had met Wally who insisted that I should go along, meet some of the lads and enjoy myself, I hadn't been at the club for more than a couple of years and hadn't been away with them before but I did know some of the players from my playing in the 3rd team and Colts so thought 'why not?'. That is how I found myself walking from Richmond to Ealing Common on my 20th birthday at 6 o'clock in the morning. Well, I couldn't afford a cab in those days!

Wally was already there to welcome me when I joined the boys at Ealing and in no time, we were on the bus and away to Wales with a case of beer. Noel Quinlan was the tour organiser and not at all worried that I had turned up out of the blue at the last moment and calmly collected £10 from me for the cost of the tour. This was half my budget for the weekend and only left me with £10 spending money for the tour! I met some of the other tourists including Eric Davies, one of the founder members, his wife, Doris and many others whom I knew by sight or by reputation.

On the coach, Big Jim O'Neil then stood up and introduced himself as the self-appointed sheriff for the tour and announced the rules:

1. No swearing in front of the lads
2. Drinking should be done from the left hand only with the little pinkie extended.

Nobody disagreed with him and I was soon fined 2p twice for right-handed drinking and then for failing to stick my pinkie out for the second offence. Left-handed drinking remained a habit for me ever since and I still subconsciously stick my little pinkie when I do! Watch me when I am next at the bar!

Eventually we arrived in Wales singing 'Land of my Fathers' with an interesting variation of the lyrics while crossing the Severn Bridge, and we soon left the motorway and stopped at a pub in a little village. It's true what they say about local village pubs. We walked in, the general hubbub ceased and the place went totally silent as the locals, all men and dressed in jackets and ties, stood and stared at us.

Well, it was Good Friday and I guess they had all been to church and popped in for a pint before going home. Anyway, we settled in and had a few beers during which I foolishly admitted that it was my birthday that day, to which the boys responded by singing 'Happy Birthday' to me to the great amusement to the pub locals. After my introduction to Welsh society, we then continued the journey to our hotel just outside Carmarthen. Waiting for us there in the bar was Ralph Arnold, a Grasshoppers player from our first season in 1950 and an old friend to the senior members of our party. After a mad scramble for bedrooms, I found myself sharing a room with Karl Nichol who was at least my age and had played with from the Colts team the previous season.

We had our first game that afternoon although I cannot remember who we played or much about the game apart from the fact that we lost. We did play Pontyates RFC that weekend but whether it was the Friday or Saturday fixture, I'll never know. I doubt they kept any records! We had 15 players plus Jack, Ralph Arnold, Eric and Doris so selection was not a great problem. I played in the back row with Bob Boyd and Dave Walker, Jim and Wally played second row and the front row consisted of Dave Delderfield, Bob Edmunds and Dave MacKinnes, all specialist front row players. The rest of the team is listed below. (See Appendix A).

In the evening the opposition welcomed us to their clubhouse with food, beer and a singsong with a lovely old lady playing the piano. By now, I was firmly ensconced in a round with Geoff Gardner, Tony Saull, Jack Edmunds and others and I rather foolishly left them at one point in the evening to answer a call of nature. When I returned to my seat, I heard the compere announce 'Nick Dance is going to sing us a song!' I looked at the other in surprise and realised I had been stitched up on my birthday. Fortunately, I remembered some amended lyrics to 'Side by Side' (See Appendix B), heard from another club the previous week, checked with the sweet old lady and she began to play while I belted it out to great applause from the lads and our hosts. Dave MacKinnes who had been with me the previous week congratulated me on remembering the lyrics. After that, other players sang solos. Jack Neate's party piece was 'Keyhole in the Door' which I was to hear many more times over the years, Eric Davies sang a song about winding up clocks, with a chorus of 'Tiralie-yea', but the star was, of course, Wally. He sang a bunch of old classics like Mother Kelly's Doorstep, Any Old Iron and other old Music Hall numbers including a version of 'Esso Blue' to the tune of 'Smoke Gets in Your Eyes' in which he coached and led the chorus. To a young, innocent, just 20-year-old boy like me, it was a wonderful evening full of singing and cheap beer.

I assume we made it back to the hotel, had a few more drinks and found our beds.

Saturday, 1st April, 1972

I got up earlier than Karl and went downstairs for breakfast. The only other Hopper present was Charlie Bowman whom I did not really know then but wished me good morning. After a fry up breakfast a group of us strolled into Carmarthen to have a look round before meeting back at the hotel ready for the Saturday afternoon fixture. I am not sure whom we played or anything about the game except that we came second.

But I do remember the opposition had roped off the pitch and when Karl Nicholls was climbing over it, one of the lads shouted that it was electrified and Karl jumped vertically about 4 foot up in to air clutching his delicate bits! Also, Jack Neate, as a

spectator, was charged to enter the ground to come and watch us play. He never let us forget that for the rest of the trip.

After a few drinks with the opposition, we split up and went back into Carmarthen for a few beers and the local nightlife. Big Jim had joined our round by then and came with us. Later in the evening on the way back to the hotel, he played 'chicken' with the local traffic by standing in the middle of the road, arms and legs akimbo, forcing the drivers to pull up or swerving to avoid him while hooting their horns! What a lunatic! When we got back to the hotel, the bar was still open and we carried on through the night. On that night, drinking late in the hotel, Wally was very tired and eventually fell asleep at the bar resting his cheek on a whiskey glass. Nobody thought of waking him and he ended up with a circle imprinted on his cheek for the next two weeks.

Sunday, 2nd April, 1972 – Easter Sunday

We all woke up with hangovers to discover that in that part of Wales, the pubs did not open on Easter Day as it was a dry county. However, we found out that that rule did not apply to yacht clubs, one of which Ralph Arnold just happened to be a member. So as his guests, we were invited to the local yacht club by the coast.

On the way to the club, we stopped after seeing a car somersault over a hedgerow on the left. We thought the driver would be terribly injured and we wondered if we could assist him. We were amazed when we saw him get out of the upside-down car, shake himself off and said that he'd be alright! We soon realised that he was still very drunk and this had obviously saved his life!

At the yacht club, we were welcomed by the local members who were out celebrating Easter Day. Lots of beer was consumed, lots of singing ensued and there was even a striptease performed by one of our lads, who will fortunately remain anonymous. No, it wasn't me! A couple more of us, Bob Boyd and Charlie Bowman, even managed to chat up some of the local girls, the results of which would affect our evening later on.

After our pre-lunch session, we returned to our hotel where that had prepared a lunch for us all with a top table presided over by Noel Quinlan, Eric and Doris Davies, Jack Neate and Dave Delderfield. By this point of the tour, Doris's vocabulary had been reduced to simply responding to any comment with a request for 'Gin and Tonic, please'. Wally remembers two mornings on the trot, making the mistake of saying good morning to Doris and she replying: "Oh I'll have a large Gordons and tonic please!" A lovely lady, indeed! During lunch, a lot of banter passed between Jack and Charlie Bowman, refereed by Dave Delderfield who occasionally called out 'Three Cheers for Charlie, lads!'. We all cheered for Charlie followed by a call from Dave, 'Now, for Jack!' No one cheered for Jack.

After lunch a few of us returned to bed for a well-deserved snooze while a few harder members led by Big Jim and Dave Mackinnes retreated to the bar for the afternoon. In the evening, where could we go in a dry county? Yes, back to the Yacht Club where Charlie and Bob met their lady friends again. At some point, the ladies invited the lads back to their place for a drink. Charlie pointed at all of us and said 'What about the lads?'. 'Bring them all!' was the reply. 'There's plenty of room!'.

So, we all boarded the coach and drove up some hill or mountain to a tiny little village. By then it was getting dark and the village was quiet and deserted. We pulled up outside a dark building and were asked to be quiet as we entered the back door. I remember the lads tiptoeing through a living room behind a sofa where some kids were watching telly and entering a dim room beyond. The girls switched on the lights on and suddenly we saw a bar! They only happened to live in a pub!

Suddenly the pub sprang into life, lights came on, music started playing, the entire village came to life and the local villagers came down to investigate the noise and to join the party at the pub that we had just opened. One elderly resident told us we were lucky the village policeman was off duty that evening as he would have had to arrest us all for illegally drinking on a Sunday in a dry county. We asked him where the local copper was, but he just smiled, winked and sipped his beer. And that was the atmosphere for the rest of the evening.

My memory is faded but I am sure that that was the night when Jim O'Neil and Dave Delderfield took it upon themselves to ensure that back at the hotel, everyone went to bed. To enforce this, they adapted a procedure where they knocked on everyone's door and if anyone was foolish enough to get out of bed to answer the door, they were deemed to be out of bed! A playful slap on the jaw from Big Jim and a command of 'Go to Bed!' from Doris ensured that they returned to bed without any further discussion.

Monday, 3rd April, 1972

Monday mornings are never the highlight of a four-day tour and as we woke up, we realised that we had a premonition that had been nagging us all since Saturday. Yes, we had to play another game, maybe the toughest game of the tour against none other than Llanelli Wanderers RFC, a feeder club to Llanelli RFC itself and who even played at their ground at Stradey Park. At that point some of us tried to get back into bed.

However, off we went to Llanelli not without a certain amount of trepidation and arrived there about 1pm. There, we were met by the Wanderers' committee full of apologies. 'Sorry lads, we forgot to let you know but as Llanelli are playing St Luke's College this afternoon, we had to switch our game to a morning fixture and neglected to tell you, it's too late now, so our game is off'. As our faces dropped with disappointment or relief, they carried on, 'But please come in, stay for lunch, be our guests for the afternoon and watch the big game'. We were generously fed and entertained in the Llanelli Clubhouse in true Rugby tradition and were then shown to our seats.

Unfortunately, we came out of the players' tunnel on to the pitch, were announced to the applause of a full crowd and were mobbed by a bunch of boys all wanting our autographs. Of course, we all signed using names of current international players such as Barry John and Gareth Edwards and, I believe Wally, signed as 'Ronald Biggs', one of the Great Train Robbers still on the run! It was a good game to watch as Llanelli was a strong team which beat the All Blacks later that year and included Welsh British Lions Phil Bennett, Delme Thomas, Derek Quinlan and Tommy David and had no problem in beating St Luke's. I still remember seeing the saucepans perched on top the goal posts.

The rest of the evening was spent at Stradey Park where we were challenged to finish off the bottles of Newcastle Brown Ale in the clubhouse. Eventually, having achieved that, we made it back to the coach for an overnight drive back to London. I slept the whole way!

Tuesday 4th April, 1972

The coach dropped us off at Ealing Common and Bob Edmunds kindly offered me a lift back to Richmond. He must have arranged a cab or lift. As we drove down the Kew Road I wondered if it was before midnight in which case, I could pick up a Chinese to take home. When I asked the time, I was told it was 6.30am. I realised two facts, first I missed the chance to pick up a Chinese and that, secondly, in an hour, I had to get changed and go to work! But how I made it through that day at work is another story!

That is the story of my first tour with the Grasshoppers, an extraordinary weekend from which I doubt I ever fully recovered. I still drink my beer with the glass in my left hand and my little pinkie sticks out automatically. Of all those who participated in that unforgettable tour (**see Appendix A below**), only Wally, Dave Delderfield, Dave Walker and I are still in regular contact with the Grasshoppers. Many have moved away or lost touch and far too many have passed on. If anyone who was present or knows any of the tourists, please get in touch and allow them to confirm, deny or defend their actions from 50 years ago.

Nick Dance, 31st March, 2022

Fortis in animo

Appendix A

Tourists

Team

- | | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| 1. Dave 'Doris' Delderfield | Hon. VP, now living in Spain |
| 2. Bob Edmunds | whereabouts unknown |
| 3. Dave 'Mac' Mackinnes | deceased 1980 |
| 4. 'Big Jim' O'Neil | deceased 2016 |
| 5. Malcolm 'Wally' Wallace | Hon. VP, living in Basingstoke, attends lunches |
| 6. Nick Dance | Club Secretary, living in Richmond |
| 7. Bob Boyd | whereabouts unknown |
| 8. Dave Walker | Hon. VP |
| 9. Noel 'Quinners' Quinlan | deceased |
| 10. Tony 'Saully' Saul | deceased 2025 |
| 11. Charle Bowman | deceased 2012 |
| 12. Geoff Gardner | living in Australia |
| 13. Jack Edmunds | whereabouts unknown |
| 14. Karl Nicholls | living in Wembley, London |
| 15. Roy 'Amazing' Grace | moved to Folkestone, Kent in 1970s |

Substitutes

- | | |
|-------------------------------|---------------|
| 1. Eric Davies | deceased 2014 |
| 2. Doris 'Gin n tonic' Davies | deceased 2016 |
| 3. Jack 'Wacker' Neate | deceased 2016 |
| 4. Ralph Arnold | deceased 2010 |

Appendix B

(My impromptu solo to the tune of 'Side by Side')

We got married on Friday,
The Vicar said it was my day,
When the guests were all gone,
We were alone,
Side by Side

We got ready for bed when,
I nearly dropped dead when,
Her teeth and her hair,
She placed on the chair,
Side by Side

I stood in blank amazement,
As her glass eye so small,
Her arms, her legs and her bosom,
She placed on the chair by the wall.

I was broken hearted,
For most of my wife had departed.
So, I slept on the chair
There was more of her there,
Side by Side.

Nick Dance, 31st March, 2022

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