

Tony Gayfer (BaA 37-44)

Born 1926, died 29th November 2010.

Obituary contributed by **Bob Betson (LaA 46-53)**

On leaving CH, Tony studied Mechanical Engineering at King's College London and gained a 2nd Class Honours degree. In 1947 he became a Sub-Lieutenant (E) in the Royal Navy – this was in the days of National Service – and was posted to Malta, spending much of his time clearing mines in the Adriatic. Off-duty time in Valetta also resulted in an increasing love of opera – something that remained with him throughout his life. His principal interest however was the Old Blues RFC. Subsequently Tony's working life was spent exercising his engineering skills for a variety of companies – W J Frazer, Clarnico, Reckitt & Colman, and principally Sainsbury's.

How best to summarise the more than sixty-year relationship between Tony and the Old Blues? In the 1997 *Who's Blue* publication, Tony listed his interests in the order: Old Blues RFC, civil liberties, music (Bach, Berlioz, Mussorgsky and Verdi), cycling, home-brewing and reading. That says much for his long-standing affection for the club, particularly to those who had listened to him expound on politics, or on any of his other varied interests; nor should we overlook his service on the Management Council of Oxfam for twenty years (1961-81). His deep commitment to the Old Blues was self-evident even at our first encounter in 1956 just after I'd started playing for them, and when he was the club captain (1954-57). He made a point of introducing himself, as he did to every new Old Blue of whatever playing capability, aiming to make every player feel at ease and a valued part of the club. At that time the club was running at least five, and sometimes six, sides every week, and was undoubtedly the most continuously active section of the Old Blue fraternity. It also provided many of the participants in the OB Amateur Dramatic and Operatic Society, as well as the CH Club, BSB and Masonic Lodges. At the heart of the club, Tony's role as skipper was therefore vital and he cannot be praised too highly. His comparatively diminutive frame harboured tremendous determination, energy and spirit that he managed to convey to others. He led by his own enthusiastic example. At a time when the country had not yet fully recovered from a major conflict, with memories of shortages and rationing still comparatively fresh in minds, a sense of humour was therefore essential – something Tony certainly possessed in abundance.

A story to illustrate Tony's quirky take on life at this time concerns an away game against, I think, Taunton, where, with time to spare before kick-off and having read the match programme notes, in which he found himself described as "a utility player", he fashioned a replica of the distinctive label (CC41) that had adorned goods and clothing of the governmental utility status. This he taped over the team number on the back of his jersey, much to the amusement of the spectators and opponents alike.

Surprisingly, Tony had not listed a further favourite interest of his in that edition of *Who's Blue* – the Marx Bros; he was a keen fan of their films, delighting in the emphasis on zany, incongruous situations, and the general state of anarchy that prevailed in them. He continued to maintain the ability to see the funny side of things throughout his life. In 1997 he sent me a copy of an article that had appeared in a learned medical journal that was in fact a case study of the extremely serious operation that Tony had undergone earlier that year in which his surgeon (who had written the article) had, for the sake of anonymity, described Tony as "a 69 year old Caucasian male". Above this Tony had written: "I've never been called **that** before!"

Not all of Tony's rugby playing life was spent with the Old Blues. His job took him to Yorkshire where he then played for Hull & East Riding for a season or two. When he eventually hung up his boots he was made Vice President of the Old Blues and continued to support them from the touchline; first at Fairlop of which many older Old Blues will have fond memories – especially those who played there in the late 1940s and the 50s, when the ground was also used by the Old Blue lady hockey players, resulting in matches of a very different nature (Tony and Ruth as well as Phil and Margery Allen, for example). After the club moved across London to its present home at Motspur Park, his stentorian cries from the touchline continued to be heard. His presence has been much missed in the past few years, when he became less mobile, especially as he had been largely inspirational in organising the now well established 'reunion matches', where different generations of former players meet for a buffet lunch, and a drink or three, before some of the home matches each season.

Tony and Ruth (née Oliver, Wards 2 & 5 1940-47) married in 1954, and their son and two daughters together with nine grandchildren were among the many who thronged Eltham Crematorium chapel on 13th December 2010. About twenty Old Blues joined with the family, neighbours from Blackheath, and other friends, to bid farewell to a notable and much-loved character.