



ROBERT HORSBURGH ROBERTSON, Rutherglen, caps 14, cap number 36

Robert Horsburgh Robertson was born on 11th October 1884 in Rutherglen. He was the third child of Robert Holmes Robertson, a bleacher and finisher, by his wife Jessie (nee Horsburgh). He was educated at Stonelaw School and Glasgow Academy. At school he played rugby and cricket. He is also described as an ardent golfer. Robert followed his father into the bleaching trade. In the 1911 Census he was staying at the Royal Pier Hotel, Weston Super Mare and gives his occupation as cloth finisher, bleacher.

Robertson seems to have taken up hockey in 1904. He was an important part of a dominant Rutherglen H.C. team which were Scottish Champions in three successive seasons 1905-06, 1906-07 and 1907-08. He was also Club Secretary for 5 years up to 1913. The Illustrated and Sporting News named him one of the top hockey players in the UK in January 1913. They described him as “fairly fast, and neat in his dribble. Mr Robertson shows great judgement in his centreing (sic)”

His first representative honours were when picked for the West team to play North on 10th December 1904. He gained his first cap in the game against Ireland in Belfast on 3rd March 1906. Scotland came a poor second that day, which was not uncommon in that era, losing 7-1. Although Robertson received some positive press coverage, the selectors went back to the experienced Francis Burnett Stuart at right wing for the England game on 31st March 1906.

Robertson was to collect a total of 14 caps for Scotland. He was a member of the first Scotland team to win against Ireland and also the first team to beat England. There is a certain symmetry to his international career with his final game also being to Ireland. This time it was only a 2-1 defeat. But poor finishing was blamed for the loss and the selectors made seven changes for the game against England, Robertson's place on the right wing going to G T Harvey.

In 1913 Robertson moved to Bradninch in Devon to work for his uncle in the Hele Paper Company. His last appearance for Rutherglen was as a guest when he was home on holiday in January 1914. He quickly established himself as a Devon County player, representing Exeter University H.C.

On the outbreak of war, Robertson volunteered for the colours and enlisted with the 14th Battalion London Regiment (London Scottish). The battalion were the first Territorial Force unit to travel to France, landing on 16th September 1914. Robertson joined them in France as a replacement on 24th November 1914.

On the 6th May 1915, the battalion were in support trenches about 360 yards North of the Rue du Bois, Richebourg when Robertson was hit and killed by a stray bullet. He died the day after being offered and accepting a commission. He was initially buried in an orchard near Richebourg by the remainder of his friends in the “five inseparable” of which he was one.

His obituary in The Illustrated and Sporting News considered him “probably the finest outside right forward that Scotland has ever produced at hockey”, “ very speedy, quick and accurate”.

Robert Horsburgh Robertson, Scottish Hockey cap No 36 is buried in Rue-des-Berceaux Military Cemetery, Richenourg-L’Avoue. He is remembered on the Glasgow Academy Roll of Honour, Rutherglen War Memorial, Scottish Cooperative Society’s Roll of Honour, Bradninch War Memorial and Hele Mill Plaque. His “Dead Man’s Penny” was found in the 1970s and donated to Rutherglen Heritage Centre

Sources:

Scotland’s People

British Newspaper Archive

Ancestry

Scottish Hockey Records

Commonwealth War Graves Commission

<https://www.longlongtrail.co.uk/>

De Ruvigny’s Roll of Honour