

= Billy Geen =

William " Billy " Purdon Geen (14 March 1891 ? 31 July 1915) was a rugby union wing and centre , who represented Wales , and played club rugby for Oxford University and Newport and county rugby for Monmouthshire . He was also invited to play for the Barbarians on several occasions . Geen unsuccessfully trialled for England in 1910 , but was selected and played for Wales on three occasions in the 1912 ? 1913 season . Injury prevented him from playing more internationals , and his service in the First World War put an end to his career .

Geen excelled athletically at Oxford , earning four Blues between 1910 and 1913 . However , in three successive Varsity Matches , he failed to score after dropping the ball over the tryline . In the holidays , he played club rugby for Newport , and he was part of the team that defeated the touring South African side of 1912 ? 1913 . He was also a decent cricketer keeping wicket for Oxford University Authentics and Monmouthshire .

Geen was commissioned second lieutenant into the 9th King 's Royal Rifle Corps in August 1914 and sent to the Western Front in May 1915 . He was killed in action in Hooze , Belgium . He is remembered on the Menin Gate memorial .

= = Early life = =

Geen was born in Newport , Wales . He went to school in England at Northam Place , Potter 's Bar , and then Haileybury College before being accepted into Oxford University . At Haileybury he was wicketkeeper for the cricket team ; he also captained the rugby team , playing at centre .

= = Rugby career = =

Although Geen was a decent cricketer , keeping wicket for Oxford University Authentics and Monmouthshire in the Minor Counties Championship between 1909 and 1912 , his rugby playing was more notable . He played wing for Oxford and Wales , and centre for Newport . He was " in the thick of everything " , a " class centre " with a " dodging style " , according to the rugby journalist E. H. D. Sewell . He also appeared for Blackheath and the Barbarians . He was , however , repeatedly injured and his form was at times inconsistent . The First World War prevented him from playing more for Wales .

= = = Oxford University and England trial = = =

Geen was selected to play for Oxford against Cambridge in four consecutive years from 1910 to 1913 . In the first of these , on 13 December 1910 , a 9 @,@ 000 @-@ strong crowd turned up at Queen 's , mostly to watch Ronnie Poulton , playing for Oxford . Cambridge started strong but a try by Bryn Lewis was disallowed in the opening minutes after a touch judge signalled that Geen had put his foot into touch in the preceding Oxford move . Moments later , Poulton ran through the Cambridge defence , drew the fullback and passed to Geen to dive in at the corner for a try . With Turner 's conversion , Oxford led 5 ? 0 . A similar passage of play again saw Poulton put Geen through for a try , but he dropped the ball after crossing the line while trying to get closer to the posts .

Geen got his second try after another break from Poulton . Cambridge meanwhile scored two tries and at half @-@ time were leading 15 ? 13 . Fifteen minutes into the second half , a second try for Cambridge put them five points ahead . An injury to one of Cambridge 's scoring wings reduced the team to fourteen players ; a forward moved to cover the wing , giving Oxford an advantage in the forwards . Poulton capitalised on it : he scored from a dummy pass to Geen ; and ran in a solo try after receiving a pass from flyhalf Freddie Knott . The end score was 23 ? 18 to Oxford .

A couple of days before the Varsity Match , talk in the press had been of Geen 's likely selection for England for the forthcoming Home Nations Championship . Geen and Poulton , who together were considered the scoring force of the Oxford team , were both selected to play for England in the

second trial match against The North in Leeds . Although Geen scored a try in the game , his form was lacking and he was outshone by Poulton . So for the third and final trial , England versus The Rest on 7 January 1911 , Geen was not selected .

In the run up to the 1911 Varsity Match , the Poulton ? Geen partnership was a constant threat to opposition teams . Ten days before the Varsity Match , Oxford beat London Scottish 39 ? 3 . Twice Poulton put Geen in the clear , with the latter ending the day with four tries in total . On 12 December , Cambridge were favourites to win but Poulton captained Oxford to victory , in front of a crowd of 10 @, @ 000 . Geen 's form coming in to the game was suspect but he proved his worth . However , Poulton suffered a hamstring injury early on and his replacement Eric Thomas , a forward , lacked the speed and skills to combine effectively with Geen . Nevertheless , he came close to scoring , but , as he had done in the previous year 's match , he dropped the ball over the tryline . He was to repeat the error the following year .

= = = Newport Rugby Club and Wales = = =

Geen played for Newport Rugby Club before going to Oxford and returned to Newport during the holiday periods , providing " dazzling entertainment " . He was described by Tommy Vile 's biographer Philip J Grant as looking " the promising player in Wales " ; and scored 10 tries and a dropped goal in 14 games for the Monmouthshire club . On 24 October 1912 , he was part of the team that played and beat the touring South Africans 9 ? 3 . He was not first choice for the game , but when George Hirst failed to recover from an injury sustained at Leicester the week before , Geen was his replacement .

South Africa was as yet undefeated on the tour , with wins over Somerset , Devon , Cornwall , Monmouthshire , Glamorgan and Llanelli . Whereas Newport , according to " Dromio " (W J Townsend Collins) writing in the Argus , had been poor in attack in their previous three encounters and weak in defence in the last two . Townsend Collins later recollected that the South Africans were taller , heavier , stronger and faster . The Newport victory was the result of " superior tactics and superlative captaincy " .

Just before half time , a try by Newport 's Jack Wetter was disallowed for a forward pass . The ball was then worked back to Fred Birt , standing within range in front of the posts , and he kicked a drop @-@ goal , putting the home side 4 ? 0 ahead at the break . In the second half , the Springboks repeatedly attacked but the Newport defence kept them from crossing the line , although a break from Dick Luyt , the South African centre , left Douglas Morkel to score under the posts . Luyt failed to convert and Newport remained a point ahead . Newport scored again through a cross @-@ kick from Wetter , which Birt jumped on over the line for a try , which he then converted .

Newport was one of only three teams to beat the Springboks on the tour and Geen played his part , bringing down Johan Stegmann when he was within sight of the try line . He was praised after the match for his play . The Times the following day reported : " Newport deserved the victory , if only for their remarkably sound and highly intelligent defence ... In spite , however , of the good play of the Newport forwards ... the South African backs would have scored at least three tries but for the fine tackling of Geen and Reg Plummer , the Newport wings , who saved one certain try by just stopping Otto Van Der Hoff on the line . "

Geen was then selected and played three times for Wales in the 1912 ? 1913 season . He earned his first cap against the same touring South Africans on 14 December . His next international appearance , under the captaincy of his Newport team mate Tommy Vile , was on 18 January 1913 against England . Wales were beaten in Cardiff 0 ? 12 . After the game , and disappointed by the performance of most of the team , the selectors made nine changes for the upcoming match against Scotland . Only two backs were to be retained , Bobby Williams , the fullback , and Billy Geen , deemed the outstanding threequarter against England , moving from wing to centre . However , on the Wednesday preceding the encounter in Edinburgh , Geen withdrew after a training session due to an ongoing shoulder injury , and his place on the team was taken by Willie Watts .

His final game for Wales was on 8 March 1913 against Ireland , when he showed " brilliance and judgment " (according to Townsend Collins) helping to create two tries towards a Welsh 16 ? 13

victory . Geen was selected to play centre for the first match of the 1914 Home Nations against England at Twickenham but was forced to withdraw due to injury . He was replaced , once again , by Willie Watts , and probably missed out on four more caps for Wales .

= = = Barbarian F.C. = = =

In 1911 , Geen was approached by Barbarian F.C. , an invitational touring rugby team based in England , to join them on their 1911 Easter tour . Geen played in two matches of the tour , the first a 15 ? 8 loss against Cardiff RFC where he was captained by Ireland 's Tommy Smyth . Despite missing the Swansea game two days later , Geen returned to the Barbarians squad to face Cheltenham , which ended in a 8 ? 3 victory for the tourists . Later that year Geen was again invited to play for the Barbarians , another contest against Cardiff in their traditional Boxing Day encounter . In 1912 Geen played in his first Barbarians match outside Wales , facing the Leicester Tigers . His captain on that day was England international Edgar Mobbs , and although finishing on the losing side , Geen scored his first and only try for the Barbarians .

With the outbreak of the First World War in 1914 , competitive rugby union matches were suspended . Despite this , Edgar Mobbs organized two Barbarians matches against Leicester in early 1915 to aid recruiting and to raise charity funds . Mobbs then arranged one final Barbarians match against the Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC) , leading a team made up of military personnel , including Geen in his last Barbarians appearance , to a 10 ? 3 victory . Of Geen 's team @-@ mates on that day , Mobbs and another England international Arthur James Dingle , would also die in action during the war .

= = = International appearances for Wales = = =

= = Military service and death = =

Geen was commissioned second lieutenant in the 9th Battalion , King 's Royal Rifle Corps on 21 August 1914 . He trained in Petworth and was sent to the Western Front in May 1915 . The 9th was assigned to the 14th (Light) Division and served with it during the Second Battle of Ypres . After six weeks ' combat , the battalion was withdrawn for rest but two days later was sent back to the front to reinforce the 41st Brigade . Geen was killed in action on 31 July 1915 at Hooze , Belgium . He was last seen leading his men in hand @-@ to @-@ hand fighting as they advanced towards ruined village buildings . Major John Hope wrote : " Geen fought gloriously , and was last seen alive leading his platoon in a charge after being for hours subjected to liquid fire and every device the Germans could bring to bear to break through . Seventeen officers and 333 other ranks of this battalion were killed in this engagement , in which officers and men showed themselves worthy of the best traditions of their Regiment . "

Billy Geen is commemorated on panels 51 and 53 of the Menin Gate in Ypres , the memorial to missing soldiers from the battles of the Ypres Salient .