

## Cecil William Boyle: England Rugby International

### Phil Hill

Rugby's earliest England internationals were far more than sportsmen. They were brewers, stockbrokers, soldiers, businessmen and adventurers, and their lives often took extraordinary turns long after they had left the playing field. Researching *The Lives of England Rugby Players 1871–1899* uncovered countless unexpected episodes. Here is one that reveals just how entertaining—and sometimes poignant—the lives of these forgotten pioneers could be.



**Cecil William Boyle** was forced to play with a dress boot on his left foot in his only England appearance. There was a touch of skulduggery ahead of the encounter against Scotland in Edinburgh in 1873. It had been raining heavily and the players dropped their boots off at a cobbler in the city to have “bars of leather” attached to the soles to stop them slipping. On returning to the shop before kick off, Cecil and two teammates were each minus a boot. The players ransacked the shop but were unable to find the missing footwear, so Cecil played with a dress boot on his left foot. The cobbler ‘found’ the missing boots after the match, which had ended in a dull pointless draw. There was a tragic postscript. During the Second Boer War, Boyle volunteered for service in South Africa, taking his own horses with

him. In April 1900 he was killed after the enemy raised a white flag and then opened fire as he advanced—a contemporary newspaper describing his death as “an act of treachery”. Cecil made a fortune on the Stock Exchange and built the magnificent Avon Carrow hunting lodge. Long after his death, the property was at the centre of a scandal that brought down Harold Macmillan’s government in 1963. By that time it belonged to War Secretary John Profumo, who had an affair with call girl Christine Keller, who was also in a relationship with a suspected Russian spy, potentially threatening national security. Profumo denied the affair in the Commons, hastening his resignation and retreat in disgrace to Avon Carrow.

*The Lives of England Rugby Players 1871–1899* ([available on Amazon](#)) features tales of the lives of those 337 men on and off the rugby pitch, with photographs accompanying each character. There

are stories of a murder mystery, spies, wild cat attacks, a fighting vicar, Queen Victoria amused and not amused, Sherlock Holmes, Peter Pan and Jack the Ripper, and much more.

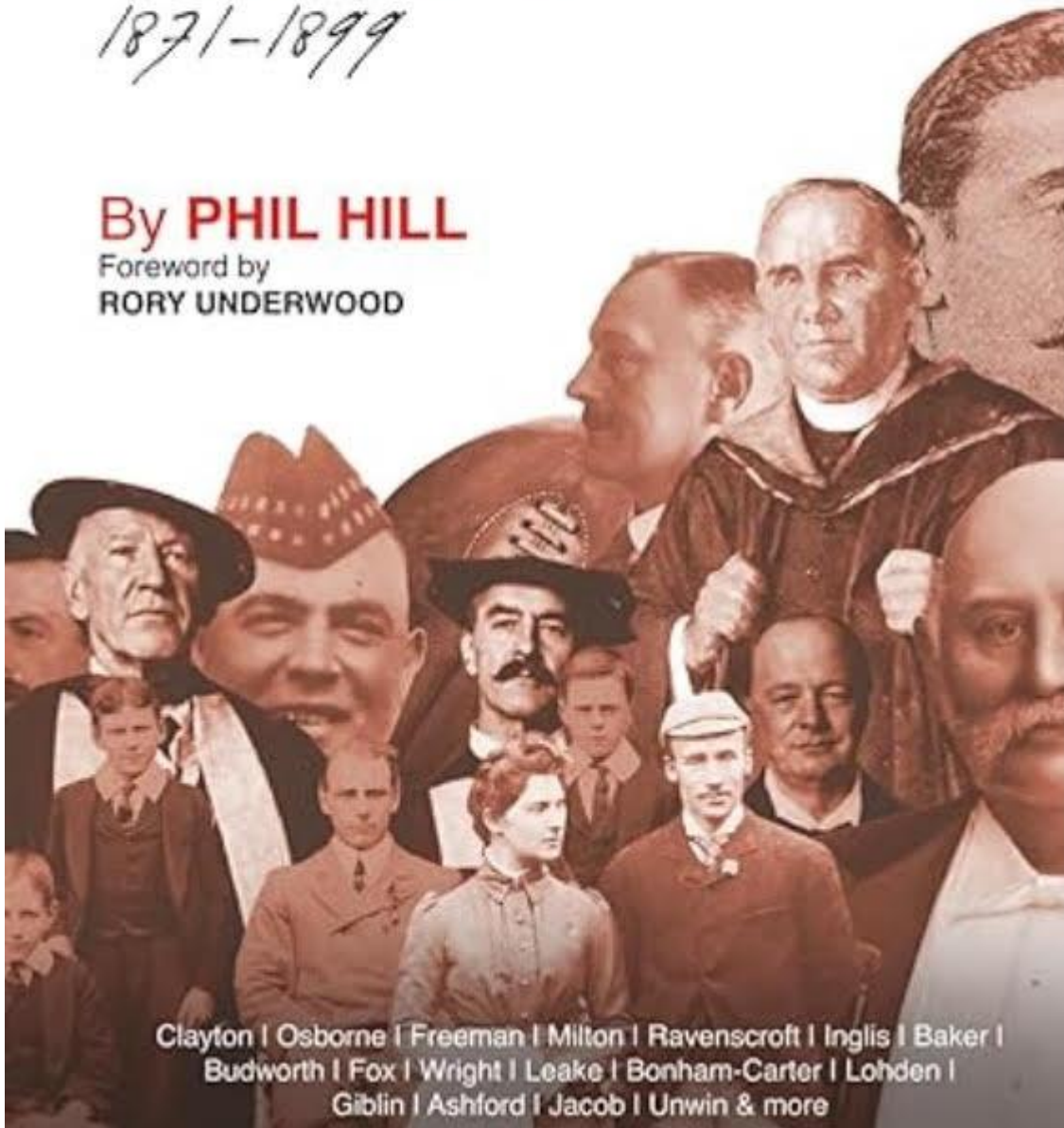
Phil Hill has worked as a local journalist in Somerset for almost forty years. He previously contributed towards a book on Somerset county cricketers.

# THE LIVES OF **ENGLAND RUGBY PLAYERS**

*1871-1899*

By **PHIL HILL**

Foreword by  
**RORY UNDERWOOD**



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