

Pilot Officer Prince Alexander Obolensky

By Alan Smith, May 2008

Obolensky, a Russian prince who is celebrated in the field of Rugby football as the scorer of two tries in the 1936 match against the All Blacks after they had defeated England in their two previous matches.

Obolensky, at the age of 19, was the only Russian to be selected for the England team. This led to his becoming a naturalised English citizen before the game which caused some controversy at the time, but was soon forgotten after the match.

During the game he scored two tries in the first half, the second being considered one of the greatest ever scored. The result was an England win of 13-0 against the 'invincible' All Blacks.

Although Obolensky played three more times in the 1935-36 season he did not score again. In 1936 he toured with a British representative side and in a match against a Brazilian XV, he scored 17 tries in the 82 – 0 defeat of the Brazilian side.

Prince Obolensky's name has a permanent place in the history of rugby, not just because of his briefly flowering talent, but also on account of his dashing good looks and charismatic personality. Much of his fan mail came from female admirers, and his favoured breakfast was said to be oysters and champagne!

At the outbreak of WW2, he joined the RAF and trained as a pilot.

On completing his training, he was posted to 504 Squadron, but unfortunately before he could take part in any action, he was killed in an accident at Martlesham Heath when his Hurricane, L1946, which he was taxiing, ran into a dip in the ground and tipped onto its nose. Obolensky was thrown out, breaking his neck and was killed.

The aircraft was not badly damaged and was repaired and served with other units before it was destroyed in a crash.

Prince Obolensky was buried in Ipswich Cemetery and an impressive statue and monument to him can now be seen in Ipswich.

Rugby has honoured him – he is one of the 100 players featured on the 'Walk of Legends' at Twickenham, and a plush restaurant at the stadium is named 'Obolensky's'.