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Born 10th October 1947 in Allonby,
Cumberland

Pearson attended the Nelson Thomlinson Grammar School, Wigton where his love of rugby was fostered by the PE teacher Jimmy Moreton before going on to study Physical Education (Specialist) and History at Madeley College where he finished first in his year receiving the College Prize for Academic Achievement. Further qualifications were obtained from Goldsmiths College/London University and Sheffield University.

His first refereeing experience took place on the 28th March 1967 when he refereed Silloth Secondary Modern School versus Wigton Secondary Modern School at the behest of the two PE teachers with whom he played rugby. He continued with occasional refereeing at Madeley including a Wing PE Colleges Cup match in 1968 versus Chester when the Staffordshire Society referee became unavailable at the last minute.

His early experiences were significantly enhanced at the first three schools in which he taught and included the refereeing of Kent Schools RFU U.15 trials. He also served as the forwards coach for this team.

He represented Silloth, Wigton, Madeley College, Winnington Park, Stoke, Sidcup and Orpington. Positionally he started as a winger and ended his playing days as a hooker. In 1970 he was selected for the Cheshire squad and played for a Kent Clubs XV in 1972. As a former Cumberland and Westmoreland Schools 220 yards record holder and a personal best of 10.8 for a hundred metres this pace would prove extremely useful in his future refereeing career.

In November 1977 following a number of injuries he joined the Kent Society of Rugby Football Union Referees as a C3. Promotion was rapid (especially for those days) and by May 1980 he was a B1. After promotion to the RFU County Panel in September 1988 he satisfied his ambition to equal the level of refereeing to that which he had attained as a player having played in the National Knockout Cup for Sidcup. A year later he received his first appointment to Division 1 (Premiership) between Orrell and Rosslyn Park. In 1990 he was promoted to the RFU Top 10 In addition to County Matches and Divisional matches between 1992 and 1998 he was appointed to referee 34 Age Grade, University, Student and 'A' Internationals.

France vs Wales 1995



In November 1994 he was promoted to the RFU International Panel and subsequently refereed France v Wales on the 21st January 1995 and remained on this panel until 1998. In 1995 he was the reserve referee for the Rugby World Cup in South Africa. He is allegedly the oldest referee to start a Tier 1 v Tier 1 International at the age of 47 years 3 months and 11 days.

During the period 1993 – 1998 he was associated with West Hartlepool RFC where he trained before being involved with controlled games involving the players at the end of their training session. This undoubtedly provided the maximum opportunity for him to referee Premiership players involved in the scenarios set by the coaches.

In 1995 he refereed to Pilkington Cup Final when Bath beat Wasps. The following year he again attended Twickenham to referee the Pilkington Junior Cup Final between Medicals and Helston with Medicals winning. The final part of the triumvirate, The Intermediate Cup Final was refereed in 1997 between Doncaster and Thanet Wanderers with Thanet winning. This made him the only referee to referee all three Cup Finals.

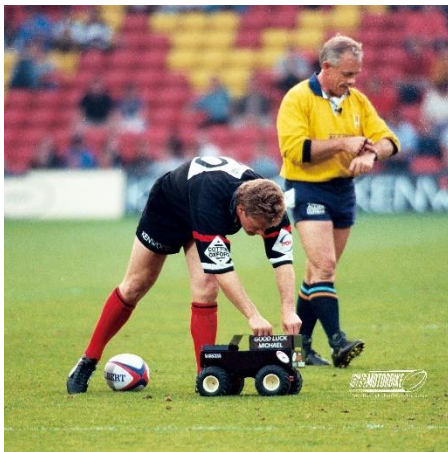
In 1996 he was invited to referee Oxford v Cambridge (the last referee to do this as the RFU began to make an appointment in 1997) and in 1997 the Womens Varsity Match. He would also be invited to referee 6 Womens Internationals including the Womens World Cup held in Scotland.



His first visit to Twickenham was as a Kent Society referee on exchange with London Society to referee Harlequins v Swansea (the days when Quins played half a dozen games at HQ) and then the Army v Navy Inter services Match. This was followed by 3 Cup Finals, the Varsity match a number 4 appointment for England v The All Blacks and running touch in the Cup Final Sale v Newcastle.

'Have boots will travel' is an accurate description of his career whether this be in the UK and Ireland, in Europe in the Heineken Cup or Worldwide. Domestically he was

invited to referee County Cup Finals in Cumbria, Hertfordshire, Kent (twice) and Northumberland. Invites were received to referee at Benidorm 7's, Hawick 7's (twice), Henley 7's (twice), Kelso 7's (five times), Kenya Safari 7's (five times), Portugese 7's, Cherry Blossom 7's Washington, USA.. In addition, he refereed the East Midlands versus the Barbarians on two occasions. In 1993 he undertook the first of 4 visits to Israel to referee in the Maccabiah Games (Jewish Olympics). He also refereed two knock out games and the Argentinian National final in the same year and attended the first of his visits (5) to Bermuda to referee in the Rugby World Classic which included a Bermuda v Presidents XV. In terms of far away places he has refereed Premiership games in Australia, South Africa, the USA, the Cobra 10s in Kuala Lumpur and Suva v Ndronga in Fiji in the National Championships. He was invited to referee An England XV who played a Naas Botha Springbok XV in Ghana in order to raise funds for the Max Britto appeal. This was preceded by his refereeing of a game branded Ghana v Nigeria. Closer to home he has been a regular visitor to Belgium for the Dendermonde International 10's.



Senior International sides involved with (in italics – countries refereed in)- *Argentina, Australia, Bermuda, Belgium, Canada, Cote D'Ivoire, Denmark, England, Fiji, France, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Hong Kong, Holland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Madagascar, Malawi, Malaysia, Namibia, New Zealand, New Zealand Maoris, Nigeria, Portugal, Reunion, Romania, Scotland, Seychelles, South Africa, Singapore, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Tanzania, Thailand, Uganda, Wales, Western Samoa, USA, Yugoslavia, Zambia, Zimbabwe.*

On resigning from the Premiership Panel of referees in 1999 he undertook the new role of touch judge on the Elite Panel of Touch Judges officiating in the Premiership and associated competitions in the Heineken Cup, visiting international teams and cross border games. In 2005 he was retired from this but continued to referee alongside being a member of the RFU Touch Judge Panel until 2015.

Locally he was to receive the Journal North East Referee of the year for 10 consecutive years and referee in excess of 3000 games in his career.

Similar to a number of his predecessors Pearson undertook a number of Committee roles being the re-appointments Secretary at Sidcup FC, the team manager of Kent Schools U.19s and Kent County RFU u.21s. He served as Assistant Secretary and Secretary of the Kent Schools RFU from 1973 to 1984. During this time he was the co-developer, with A J G Hopkins OBE, of the first ever Proficiency Award for Schools Rugby sponsored by the National Westminster Bank. He also served on the London Counties Schools Committee and was an U.19 Selector. Whilst teaching in the Inner London Education Authority he tutored RFU Preliminary and Intermediate Awards for the Authority. In 1980 he produced a 'Handbook for refereeing' for the

Kent Society which has been updated on three occasions the last being for Durham Society in 2021.

On taking up the position of General Adviser for Education (Physical Education and Health Education) with Cleveland County Council (and OFSTED Team Inspector) he soon became involved with Durham Society not only as a referee but as training officer and produced the first versions of REFSOC obtaining Sportsmatch sponsorship from Sport England. His wider involvement with the Northern Group of referees led him to tread the pathway initiated by Alan Bean and he became the Director of Conferences for the Northern Group organising a number of day conferences and two Hatfield Conferences (the last being cancelled at the last minute because of the death of Princess Diana).

On discovering that the Durham County RFU Schools Union required a Secretary he undertook to revitalise the organisation starting in 2016. By 2021 with the assistance of a number of others the Schools Union was in an extremely healthy position. Significant during this time was the work which he undertook in liaison with the County, the Referees Society and the Community Rugby Coaches in the introduction and development of the highly successful Young Match Officials Programme Durham being the first Schools Union in the country to undertake this. Sponsorship was obtained from Vic Young (South Shields) Ltd, Sport England and the ERFSU. During his tenure as controller of the programme over 300 young people were involved with a number going on to join the Referees Society. Equally the production of UPDATE on a regular basis kept the Schools in membership and the wider rugby audience up to date with what was happening in the Schools Union.

At National Level the RFU National Referee Development Officer, Steve Griffiths, involved him in a number of projects including the production of a Video entitled 'The team of 3', the use of a radio link from the touch judge (Steve Griffiths) to the referee at Northampton v Harlequins, the use of a two way link at the Pilkington Cup Final, the linking of the referee to the television audience (Saracens v Wasps Pilkington Cup match).

In 2005 he became an IRB Performance Reviewer and utilised these skills at the U.19 World Cup in South Africa where he also undertook the role of Citing Officer. To further widen and extend his expertise he undertook the course leading to accreditation as an RFU Referee Coach.

He also spent five years assisting Ian Smith on Radio Newcastle, Radio 5 Live, Radio Five Live Sports Extra and Radio Worcester acting as an expert summariser.

Pearson often said that he felt lucky to have been so closely involved in the bridging of the old and the new, the change from amateurism to professionalism and all that this involved. No great lover of Leagues he never fully came to terms with the negative effects which he saw that this had in terms of rugby in the Community game. Probably most significantly from his own point of view he was recognised by persons such as Brian Leigh (IRB Assessing Guru), Colin High (RFU Referees Controller) and Richie Dickson (Scotland Age Grade Coach and Scotland Coach) as



an outstanding communicator having empathy for the game and being paid the ultimate accolade of being said to be a player's referee.

***JP Communicating with Lawrence Dallaglio
(Wasps and England)***