



INTERNATIONAL  
OLD QUEENIANS

## RICHARD MSIMANG



Photos:

- Richard Msimang (top)
- Richard Msimang pictured cross legged in Taunton RFC XV team photo (1908-09)

**Richard Msimang** (OQ 1904-1912) from South Africa was the first black sportsman to play club rugby in the UK.

Richard was a student at Queen's and was highly regarded for his skill, speed and sportsmanship.

In 1907 when he turned out for Taunton Rugby Club. He mostly played fly-half but also scrum-half. He emerged as their best player, feted by the public, so much so that he was sometimes spirited out of the ground by a side door to avoid adoring supporters.

The 1909-10 season was the most successful of the several seasons he played for Taunton (the team won 23 of 36 games) and in 1911-12 he was made vice-captain.

His last match was on 12 October when the team lost 15-8 to Newton Abbott.

At Queen's he was fully involved in the Debating Society, of which he became Secretary, an activity befitting someone with an interest in law.

Richard began his articles of clerkship at G.H. Kite Solicitors in Taunton in January 1908. Passing all the law exams necessary, he was admitted as a solicitor of England and Wales in July 1912, the first Black South African to do so.

In December 1912, he returned to South Africa and embarked on a legal career dedicated to defending the rights of native people till his premature death in 1933, aged 49.

He was tenacious in defending the vulnerable against the government and powerful vested interests but this came at a price both financially, as clients could not afford to pay him, and emotionally as the scale of the injustice caused by state laws took its toll.

He is recorded as actively involved in the SANNC (formed in January 1912) from the moment he returned to South Africa. He took the role as Chairman of the committee responsible for the SANNC constitution which was adopted in 1919 and which established the rules of the organisation.

Interestingly, the most famous leader of the ANC, as it became known in 1923, Nelson Mandela, attended the same school in South Africa, Healdtown, as Richard had before leaving for Queen's.

Richard Msimang was a pioneer on the sports field and in the birth of constitutionalism in South Africa.

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