

A Blueblood Tribute

**Don't thank me,  
being a Blue  
is my reward**

Ian Macdonald's interview  
with David France

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## The Interview

There are many fellow Blues over the years for whom I've found a lot of respect. Not just for their passion, their loyalty and their dedication to the club that we all love but for their inputs into the club's meaning, to their fellow fans and for leaving their own special mark on Everton. One person who meets all the above criteria is our very own Dr David France. There is much more to 'Dr Everton' than a world-famous collection of swag.

David's an elusive Blue. Of course, it doesn't help that he lives on the other side the pond near Seattle, where he is fighting health issues. I think of him as a caped crusader and the fact that he vanished into the ether confirmed that belief. David does his good deeds without looking for publicity, satisfied that a fellow Blue has been helped on the quiet is his reward. I bumped into him last month during an event at Goodison but he had disappeared before I could bend his ear. As a result I was forced to telephone him in the States to get the latest scoop on his activities. Unfortunately I forgot all about the 8-hour time difference and the Blue Pimpernel took a little while to warm up. The following is the result of our trans-Atlantic conversation:

**Ian Macdonald:** They say that only when the sieve of history has stopped shaking and the dross has been removed can what is left behind justly be called great. And the Hall of Fame dinners were truly great. They were the Nuremburg Rallies of football. I've been privileged to attend all of them but it's still hard for me to describe them. Never before had a religious congregation been so close to its heroes. After rubbing shoulders with World Cup, FA Cup, European trophy and League title winners, many of us thought we had actually gone to heaven alongside grown men with tears streaming down their cheeks, some of whom were fans and others were players. I remember fans kneeling in awe in front of their heroes while others danced on the tables. At the end of the night I had expected the roof to open and the Angel Gabriel to whisk us away. If you could bottle that atmosphere and take it to the game, we would be masters of British football again. So David, why have you brought down the curtain on the Hall of Fame?

**David France:** Nothing can compare with the first dinner - it was better than sex. That said, the second dinner was pretty tantric too. And so was the third. I can't believe that they've continued for a full decade because the Hall of Fame gathering was designed to be a one-off celebration. As for the 2009 celebrations, I expect that they will be another love-in with the new inductees overwhelmed by the atmosphere. It will be the eleventh one - coincidentally there were the same number of Nuremburg Rallies. It'll be another sell-out. By the way, I hope you're not called me at this unearthly hour to bug me for tickets. As usual, the event is being organised by Brian Snagg, Tommy Birch and Roger Kenyon. These great Blues have added their own special touch to the proceedings which are scheduled for Thursday 19 March. The dinner is being called 'The Alex Young Awards Night' and possibly it will be one of that great man's last visits to Merseyside. As for the Hall of Fame, the membership currently stands at 119 and stretches way back to the pioneers of St Domingo. Seven new names will be added in March making the grand total 126 and then the doors will be closed. I still believe that its integrity is reflected by the quality of the men who are waiting in the shadows and don't want the membership to be diluted. Also there are lots of other Everton dinners nowadays - maybe too many.

This year's voting went on for a couple of months. We distributed a couple of thousand postal ballots and both ToffeeWeb and NSNO hosted the web voting. There's been a little controversy but everything was above board. The support for Duncan Ferguson was overwhelming but all of the new additions are worthy. Some people forget that Tony Kay was a truly magnificent footballer, who cost a record British transfer fee, and that his arrival sealed the 1963 title. Graham Stuart saved our bacon in 1994 and David Unsworth was simply Rhino, who would charge through a brick wall for Everton. I wasn't surprised that Bill Kenwright was selected. Some thought that he was a controversial candidate but it turns out that he was a popular choice. However two of my favourites - van den Hauwe and Trebilcock - were left out. More than anything, I hope that all five of the new additions show up on the night. It'll be a great opportunity for the fans to pay tribute to them and will provide Duncan and Tony with opportunities to thank the fans who demonstrated loyalty to them during their darkest days. On the other hand, I'll be satisfied if the other two inductees show up in spirit. They are long gone but thankfully not forgotten. Alfred Wade played in Everton's first match against St Peter's in 1879 and Reverend Ben Chambers is credited with starting St Domingo Football Club in 1878. Both lit the football flame that has been passed from generation to generation on Merseyside.

**Ian Macdonald:** What about your Everton books? 'Dr Everton's Magnificent Obsession' is a fantastic read and will be a hard act to follow. It is a beautifully crafted publication. I recall that the other night Peter Lupson, an acclaimed author himself, proclaimed that 'it wasn't just the greatest Everton book but the greatest football book of all time'. So are there any more books in the pipeline?

**David France:** I know that I've said it before but I'm in the process of hanging up my keyboard. As anyone who has ever read one of my books will concur, I can't write for toffee. To be honest, I wish I could communicate as well as many of the contributors to ToffeeWeb. That said there are some tremendous Everton books out there. In particular I like the one by Mark O'Brien of WSAG fame. I think it's called 'Everton Miscellany'. There will be no Hall of Fame book as such this time but there will be a Hall of Fame DVD full of unflattering caricatures and flattering pen-pics.

Regarding my own bookshelf, 'Dr Everton' was my first and only book not to be produced on Merseyside. It was printed by Trinity Mirror in China, like so many books nowadays, to keep costs down. I asked them to price it at a level which would facilitate a copy in every blue & white Christmas stocking. It's great value at £15. I must add that Ken Rogers and his team were great to work with and I'm not alone in appreciating their provision of extra copies which we made good use of. Dave Prentice, my truly talented co-author, and I visited Alder Hey a couple of weeks ago to donate a stack of books to the kids, both Blues and Reds. I thought that it's only fair that the little Kopites learn something about the city's rich football heritage. Also we donated another stack to the Shareholders' Association to raise funds for the painting of George Mahon's portrait. We raised a few hundred pounds. But back to books, it's tough to sell them nowadays. For example, JJB balked at stocking Alex Young's biography in the megastore therefore we decided to take the mail order route. Nevertheless, the demand has been tremendous. So much so that there are only a few copies available at mersey.com. Billy Butler tells me that Radio Merseyside still receives at least one call every day asking where the book is available.

**Ian Macdonald:** Now about your football hero - a certain Alexander Young. He is such a modest man and a gentleman to boot. Alex epitomizes why the Hall of Fame is such a success and so unforgettable. Are you satisfied that you've succeeded in reinforcing his place near the top of the Everton family? Also back in October I was interviewed for a film you had commissioned. Have I been abandoned to the cutting-room floor?

**David France:** Like every Blue of my vintage, I'm a huge fan of Alex. He was the most celebrated British footballer in the Sixties who never betrayed his god-given flair. My dad claimed that the big Blue upstairs would send us one of his own to lead us from the post-war gloom and it was love at first sight. Alex had such eye-catching grace that as long as Everton survives, I hope that men will talk in awe of his sublime skills. Despite his blisters, hearing loss and feud with his boss Harry Catterick, he made us proud to be Blue. In many eyes, he's second only to William Ralph Dean in our folklore. Dixie's contributions can be measured by the number of times he hit the back of the net, whereas my hero's can be characterized by the number of times he took our breath away. Alex's biography provided some wonderful recollections from those who saw him in his pomp that I decided to go one step farther. I'm working on a modest follow-up to the Ken Loach film made in 1968. I'd got to know the guys at Tabacula who are making a movie about Dixie. Their film company is based in Toxteth. I had helped them with a short film about John Brodie and his invention of goal-nets and was so impressed that I decided to commission a one-hour documentary provisionally entitled 'Alex the Great'. I suppose it will be an enduring love story.

Tabacula have already interviewed many of Alex's team-mates as well as the fans about their memories. They plan to use some of the testimonials from Alex's biography and are seeking a cross-section of accents for the voice-overs. I understand that Tabacula will be advertising for volunteers to read snippets from Alex's biography on Thursday 15 January between 4 pm and 7 pm. As for the film, I'm told that the pilot will be available in March for previewing with the television channels. My fingers are crossed and I hope that you don't end on the cutting room floor!

**Ian Macdonald:** What's the latest news from the Former-Players' Foundation? I haven't seen many of our old players limping along Goodison Road lately, in fact looking at some could still grace our bench especially at the beginning of this season. Have there been many more knee and hip replacements?

**David France:** The Reverend, Harry Ross that is, keeps me informed of the on-going work and as you know I am sworn to secrecy about individual players. However, I know that every penny raised is accounted for and put to good use. By all accounts and thanks to the continued support of the PFA and the club, the Foundation is in great shape - as are many of the former-players. They seem to be in better health than the first-team squad. Certainly, the Foundation is the model for other clubs in the land and farther a field. It's something for all of us to be proud of. Actually, I had an opportunity to gate-crash the Christmas lunch. It was great to see so many smiling faces like Gordon West, Alan Whittle, Tommy Jones, Gary Jones, Jimmy Harris, Fred Pickering, Duncan McKenzie and even his nemesis Gordon Lee. Reverend Harry Ross and Laurence Lee have done the Everton family proud and have reinforced the old mantra 'Once a Blue, always a Blue'.

Another new example of this saying is the initiative to commemorate the Fallen Blues. It started when Dr John Rowland's confirmed the details of the three Blues who perished during the two world wars. They are Leading Aircraftman Brian Patrick Atkins RAFVR, Pilot Officer William Sumner RAFVR and Lance Corporal Leigh Rouse MM 9th Battalion Royal Fusiliers. John has visited the graves of Atkins at Monte Cassino and Sumner in Madras and laid crosses and pennants on them at Brian Labone's request. As a result, the Shareholders' Association is working to coordinate the inscription of a memorial plaque to honour these Blues. In addition to these Merseyside-based fallen heroes, two of our extended family who played for our sister club Everton in Chile may be also incorporated in the plaque. They are Frank Everard Boundy and Malcolm Goulding Fraser. They were members of the group of teenagers who founded the club in June 1909. Unlike the vast majority of this group, they were born in the UK; Frank near Truro and Malcolm in Edinburgh. Both died in the Great War.

**Ian Macdonald:** Now that you are no longer sorting through attics, junk shops and skips for swag, how do you manage to fill your days? It's been twelve months since the deal was done but when will we get to see the famed treasures of The Everton Collection?

**David France:** While there has been little in the way of formal updates from the Trust, I expect that there will be a grand exhibition in the New Year which will turn the Kopites green with envy. Certainly, the taster organized by Tony Tighe at Goodison during Heritage Week in 2007 was fantastic and that highlighted less than 10% of my collection. So imagine the mind-blowing treasures available from the combination of the club's archives with my bits and bobs. From what I can gather, the Trust's has been working hard but progress has been slowed by the extra effort required to restore some of the water damaged items retrieved from the Goodison bunker.

A lot of the early work, more than anticipated, has been required to catalogue the vast compilation of 20,000 or so artifacts and prepare them for digitisation. It's important yet painstaking work and I for one look forward to accessing the fruits of their labours on the planned state-of-the-art website. Again I encourage the fans to be patient as the Trust navigates the previously uncharted waters of world-class exhibitions and world-class websites. Three experts have been recruited to work on the Everton Collection but the real challenges lie in the longer term. In less than two years from now, after the initial scope of work has been completed, the project will benefit from the appointment of a full-time coordinator, preferably with a royal blue pedigree, to maintain and possibly further enhance the project. Given that the lottery grant will have been consumed by then, it's clear that the Trust's ambitions would benefit from a reliable stream of funds to support all long-term plans. While it, like the Foundation, is a registered and independent charity, I hope that it continues to work closely with the club and the fans on fund raising initiatives to facilitate preservation and security work as well as new acquisitions.

Gems surface every now and then. In fact during the past 12 months, I've aided Lord Grantchester to secure some exquisite additions and I've been fortunate also to track down some items which had belonged to Big Bob and Big Nev. Therefore, I encourage all Blues to get involved because it's our collection, it's our heritage and it's an ongoing process. Of course, no embryonic team of hand-picked experts can be perfect.

Back in October I took them on an orientation tour of the important sites which feature in our early history. Their need for a royal blue education became evident when I pointed to the huge advertising board bordering on Walton Lane which featured Mike Lyons. Sadly, none of them could put a name to his face. Worse still they didn't know who he was or that he had played nearly 500 times for the club. However, it proved to be a blessing in disguise because it led to the Shareholders' Association establishing an Everton Heritage Society. To date it's composed of 20 really enthusiastic Blues. Names like Steve Johnson (evertonresults.com), Steve Clay (efchistory.co.uk), Brendan Connolly, Mark Denny, Barry Hewitt, Steve Hickson, Glyn Minchall, David Starsky (memorabilia collectors), Steve Flanagan (statistics guru), Tony Heslop (who is at trustee of the Everton Collection), George Orr (Blueblood fanzine), John Shearon (Ruleteros) as well as Everton-crazy enthusiasts Keith Wilson and Paul Wharton spring readily to mind but I'm sure there are others I've overlooked. These Blues don't just sing about it, they know about our history and hopefully will share their knowledge with the equally enthusiastic collection staff.

I'm impressed by the diligence of Max, Belinda and Karen but hope that improvements will be made to their working conditions at the Records Office. The building is due for a renovation and trust that these experts will be re-housed into facilities befitting them and the collection's importance. May be I'm paranoid but security will always be a priority for me. I don't expect protocols like those employed at Oak Ridge (David consulted to the US nuclear research laboratories famous for the Manhattan Project) but it's vital that all items are electronically tagged and logged in and out of a secure vault. From my experience, even the most conscientious staff can get sloppy. It would be unforgivable if any item, especially one in an unbroken sequence, was misplaced or went walkabouts.

I've said this before but it's worth repeating - a lot of people have worked hard to prepare the world's greatest collection of football memorabilia for the public's eyes. It belongs to all Everton fans. It's something for us all to be proud of and I encourage everyone to continue to support Lord Grantchester, his trustees and the collection staff during their near-term and longer-term initiatives.

**Ian Macdonald:** So what were you doing 7,000 miles from home at Goodison when I last met you, the Blue Pimpernel?

**David France:** Simply, I had returned to say my goodbyes because I doubt if I'll be healthy enough to return to the UK in 2009. I know that you claim that I've had more leaving gigs than the Rolling Stones but I just wanted to thank the people who have helped me over the years and slip away. There's lots a good Blues around to carry the torch. The flame seems to be in safe hands. Why was I at the meeting of the Shareholders' Association? Well, they invited me to become its Lifetime President.

Actually I wanted to show my support for Paul Wharton who, as you know, has a deep love for all things Everton and worked so hard with little recognition on the 'Dixie' play last year. I was fascinated by his desire to tell another story at the December meeting, this time about George Mahon, one of the greatest Evertonians who never hoofed a ball in anger. I hope that I'm not alone in thinking that the meeting was a tremendous success and that it will give birth to similar heritage events.

No-one who has ever trawled through ToffeeWeb will be surprised to learn that Steve Flanagan's research into the life and times of George Mahon was top-class. Also Tony Helsop and John Shearon provided some fascinating insights into our brothers in Chile. He wants to arrange at least one fixture between these two great clubs. I can pay him no greater compliment that says that this is the kind of initiative that Messrs Mahon and Cuff would have taken. I understand that another heritage meeting is scheduled for early February. This time the subject is Will Cuff, arguably the greatest Evertonian of all time. He ran the club with an iron fist for decades during which time he developed Goodison into a world-class stadium, captured four League titles and two FA Cups, implemented a commitment to cultured football and earned worldwide respect for the club.

Also he invested in big money signings like Dean, Cresswell, Britton and Lawton and also nurtured raw recruits like Chedgzoy, Gee, Sagar and Mercer. Sadly he fell out with the other directors towards the end of his life because he believed in the democratic concept of one shareholder-one vote. Isn't that a novel idea? As for the Shareholders' Association itself, possibly it will become redundant in the not too distant future but there again it could serve a meaningful role as a valuable conduit for the new owners.

**Ian Macdonald:** Look, David, as I respect your views no more beating about the bush, where do you stand on Destination Kirkby? What do you think about the state of the club? Are we in good hands?

**David France:** I'm sure you've heard about my meeting with a specialist in Seattle. He asked: 'So what do you want first the good news or the bad news. The bad news is that your problem has spread. The good news is that you'll never see Everton play in Kirkby!' To be honest, I've grown weary of the ground move debate and saddened by the damage done to the Everton family. Obviously, I'm concerned about the continued erosion of our identity and our disappearance from the city's landscape. The Kings Dock aside, I've never held strong views about any move. Of course, I'm fond of the Grand Old Lady Park but I suppose that I don't care passionately about where we play every other week but I feel strongly about a redefinition and strengthening of our identity.

I've always favoured the concept of an Everton Centre, by that I mean a headquarters in the city centre. I've come to terms that it will never happen but over the years I've proposed a handful of sites which, like the Old Collegiate building, have been converted into flats. Nonetheless I still nurture a vision of revamping somewhere like the old ABC Cinema in Lime Street. I would love to see us in such a signature building, one with a massive sign announcing 'Everton Football Club' in 12 feet high or even higher neon letters which would illuminate Lime Street for 24 hours per day. Of course, it could also project a subliminal message like 'Kopites are Gobshites'. The building would house the administrative staff, press and communications centre, city centre dining facilities, museum and exhibitions centre, ticket office, retail shop, meeting rooms, sponsors' rooms, etc. It would have cost a few million to renovate but that's a small price for reinforcing our presence to Blues and Reds alike and healing the Everton family.

On the subject of Kopites, I'm tired of interacting with them at Goodison. We need more Blues on the payroll. As for the change of ownership, I hear, from people who claim to

know about these things, that it could be imminent after the Inquiry findings have been released but remain wary because I can't understand why anyone would want to buy a football club unless it's to turn it around and sell it on. I never had. The profits are modest by design, nowadays the debt is perilous and I doubt if football will be exempt from the realities of the economic meltdown.

As you know, I like Bill. Of course, I don't agree with some of his decisions but there again I'm not privy to the information which honed them. What I do know is that he invested in the club when no-one else was prepared to do so. There is no greater living Evertonian. Moving on... while he may have a Rugby League roots, which as a lad from Widnes I consider to be a good thing, the acting CEO makes a good first impression. He comes across as a real gentleman with an unblemished past. Perhaps more important than even the CEO is the quality of the team assembled around him. I wish Robert well. His immediate worry must be the absent fans and the austerity required to manage the club's borrowings. Of course, his life as well as ours would be made a lot easier with a decent cup run. I hate derbies. I always have. I intend to watch the imminent derbies (two nil-nil draws I hope) at my barber's shop in Victoria. He's an old Blue from Crosby. While I'm too fat to wear my famous lucky suit, I do plan to hold on to it like a comfort blanket.

**Ian Macdonald:** So is this really farewell? Or can we expect another fleeting visit from the good doctor?

**David France:** My specialists and more importantly my long suffering wife permitting, I had hoped to make one more trans-Atlantic trip to attend the Hall of Fame dinner. But I doubt that it will happen. Unfortunately my last two visits to Goodison involved losses to Pompey and Villa. I'll miss Merseyside. It's been great to see the transition of our great city. I only wish that we had played a part of it at the Kings Dock. Of course, I'll miss my 'bitter and twisted' blue friends.

On a personal note, have I told you about my recent stalkers? There were two of them. Two big, burly and intoxicated brutes. They had followed me along Church Street before eventually confronting me outside of Central Station. At that point they both threw his arms around me. One of them looked me straight in the eyes and mumbled: 'Thanks for everything you've done for our club'. All I could say was: 'Don't thank me - being a Blue is my reward.' I think it was one of those very rare occasions in life when you find the words to say exactly how you feel.

**Ian Macdonald:** David, I will never be more sincere in saying these words: 'God bless you'. Thank you for saving our heritage with the definitive Everton collection, a labour of love of Herculean proportions. I know you could have sold it to private collectors for far more money but I know also that you never ever wanted to split this magnificent obsession. As I always said to you before, the Everton Collection, the Hall of Fame, the books and the fantastically innovative Former-Players' Foundation are your legacy to the Everton family. For generations to come, Evertonian's will look into our past and punch the air. They will be able to see how our club was formed and then follow its journey to greatness. The people involved, the sad times and the glories - all there documented. These rarities also provide an insight as to how we lived, what we bought and survived



## The Tributes

Within minutes the website was bombarded with heartfelt responses from Evertonians. Some of which have been edited:

**Arthur Jones:** A magnificent article as ever, Ian. Dr David must be 'The Ultimate Evertonian'. As regards a tribute for this great man, might I suggest something that no matter how often the club changed ownership or postcode an award sponsored by the one thing that will remain constant - the fans. The Dr David France Ultimate Evertonian award? Presented to a player, manager, supporter, long-serving employee or whoever the Everton Collection trustees consider worthy of receiving such an honour. Not necessarily an annual award, as legends don't turn up on a regular timetable.

**James Yates:** Great article, Ian. The idea of the 'Everton Centre' is just brilliant, typical of David France, an Evertonian of unbelievable imagination - one of those rare people who has a dream and sees it through in style. If only the club itself could find the finances and employ individuals capable of operating with such immense vision, foresight and determination to show the world that Everton Football Club really is the greatest football club there's ever been. Maybe one day, eh...

On a personal note, I'm delighted to spot in the background of the photo of David with the Alex Young painting at the Radio Merseyside book signing, second and third along from his right shoulder, myself and my Uncle Dave - another proud, devoted Blue who really inspired my brother and I to become avid Evertonians ourselves, as we grew up down south near London in exile from our Walton roots. It was the first time in 15 years that I'd seen my uncle and was a truly special day - the icing on the cake being the chance to meet The Golden Vision, the great Alex Parker and Dr Everton himself. The idea of a club award named after David France is a good one, perhaps ToffeeWeb could organise a petition.

**Steve Flanagan:** The first time I spoke to David France was in July 2004, when he requested help with some facts and figures for one of his myriad of books. Since then he has badgered me for more and more information on a regular basis. The work put in researching stuff for his tomes have been worth every minute. David's naturally generous nature has meant that he has paid me back in spades by the things he does, not just for me personally, but for other Blues who have had the pleasure in meeting the great man. I've been lucky to have seen a fair bit of his collection, and, hopefully the Collection Trust will ensure that us and future Evertonians will get to do the same. David mentions the Heritage Week event when some of the collection was on show in Goodison. Naturally, I went along and, like David, was delighted to see that the older generation had brought along their children, grand-children, nieces and nephews. Everyone I saw was looking in wonder at the collection of medals, the ledgers and the various other bits and pieces of the club's history that David has tirelessly and diligently sought and purchased.

As we all know, David could've got a lot more money for his collection by selling it privately and he has told me, in confidence of course, of some of the mad ideas that suitors proposed to him when trying to pry the collection away from him. As far as David

is concerned, the collection is for the Everton family, and that speaks volumes when trying to describe how generous he is and how much he is committed to the Blue cause. I know that he has given shares to fellow Blues to allow them to own a piece of 'our' club, he continually provides little gifts to worthwhile Everton causes. One example, is where he provided the Everton Shareholders' Association with a large quantity of his recent book on his collection to help raise funds for new portraits to be made of George Mahon (the creator of Goodison Park), Dr James Clement Baxter (financial backer to the creator of Goodison Park) and William C Cuff (the original Mr Everton) to be hung in the boardroom. By the way, the book "Dr Everton's Magnificent Obsession" is a must read, not just for Evertonians but for any fan of football. Peter Lupson got it spot on when he said that this book is the greatest football book of all-time.

David is also very tenacious and very thorough. For example, let's start with the Gwladys Street Hall of Fame. Not only were we the first football club to do such a thing, but David spoke to Baseball's Hall of Fame to see how they went about selecting their incumbents to ensure that we would remember those that were truly worth remembering and I can think of no greater honour for any player (or backroom staff) than to be immortalised in this great institution.

Then there's the Hall of Fame dinners, which are now legendary in Evertonian circles. How about the Everton Former-Players' Foundation? Not only was it the first of its kind anywhere in the world, but has also been copied by the likes of Barcelona, and other top European clubs and now UEFA have got a committee of such charities who meet on a regular basis. Former Everton players who have had their lives and dignity restored thanks to this magnificent charity, know how much they owe to David France and the compassion he has shown to them and their plight. But despite doing all of these things for the entire Everton family, he has rarely been seen, or heard, preferring to remain in the background and let others do the talking. In fact, there are a lot of things that he has done for Everton that a large number of us don't know about. For example, the Alex Young documentary, which David has funded, which will bring the deeds of The Golden Vision to a new generation of football fans who can now marvel in wonder at this legend.

I was hoping to keep this comment on my thoughts of David fairly short, but when you see what he has done for the club and its supporters and start writing about it, you can't stop! In a way I am saddened though by two things. Firstly, that David will no longer be making his trips from over the pond. Often we have had meetings to talk about something and ended up spending an hour or two remembering the good old days, discussing the Kirkby move and even David Moyes' tactics. And finally, that the Hall of Fame will be closing its doors after March's dinner. The membership will stand at 126. To me that number should be 127 and the final place should be taken by one of the greatest Evertonians I have ever had the pleasure to meet Dr David France.

**Damian Wilde:** What a fantastic article, it made me feel so warm inside. It's warming that there are some fantastic Evertonians like David. What he has done is unbelievable. Reading the article makes you so proud to be a Blue. I love what he has done, his thoughts and his ideas, what a man. It would be awesome to have 'The Everton Centre', what a great idea. A truly fantastic read, well done Ian.

**Simon Paul:** I've known about David France for a number of years, and been excited by his collection since the announcement was made that it would be made available for Everton - or as it turned out to be, an Everton trust - to display to Evertonians. I marvelled at just how dedicated a Blue had to be to have travelled continents and spent hundreds up on hundreds of thousands of pounds putting it together, and wasn't surprised to learn that this collection wasn't matched by any other club in the world. Only an Evertonian could amass such a collection, and only the most dedicated. However, I only actually met David early last year, but everything I had thought was true. Only the most dedicated, loyal, and genuine Evertonian - in fact football fan- could have done what David has done. He'll probably get a clip round the ear if his wife reads that even up until last summer he was still buying items to be included in the collection - which he no longer owns!

He introduced me to his hero, Alex Young. Although to be honest, it was hard to tell which man held whom in the highest regard, such is the respect David wins and deserves from everyone he meets. Given the chance, David could talk for days on end about his Everton and his Everton Collection. A cold afternoon in the Vines discussing the relative merits of everything from Victor Anichebe to George Mahon whilst trying to figure out how the voting would be run for the last ever Hall of Fame shows an example of a man who, despite having more pressing things to do with his short time in England, found himself wrapped up in conversation about Everton. The idea of the Everton Centre on Lime Street was discussed with enthusiasm - imagine a massive sign 'Welcome to Liverpool, home of EFC' slapping everyone who gets off a train right in the eyes!

David has always worked tirelessly for Everton, and for Evertonians. And I am saddened that he probably won't visit the UK again, not least for the selfish reason that I quite fancied another few afternoons sat talking about Everton with him, but also because the work with the Everton Collection is only just beginning. David's laid the foundations for a wonderful piece of history to be available to everyone. We all know he could have got at least double what he let the Everton Collection Charitable Trust get it for, but he wanted it kept together, and he desperately didn't want those horrible reds getting hold of any of it, but the one thing that seems to have been lost in the post is a simple 'thank you'. Evertonians have thanked David personally, I know I have, Ian has, and countless others that have, but what would be nice would be for Everton Football Club to formally recognise the work this man has done for our 'family' over the decades. As Evertonians, we've said thank you, now it's time the club did the same.

**Dennis Stevens:** I'm filled with admiration for 'Doctor Everton'. David France has achieved so much from humble beginnings, the man is an inspiration. Those who have had the pleasure of meeting him are privileged to have done so, like many others I'll have to make do with his literary works which are amongst the best of many Everton books I own. I hope Dr France does feel appreciated by supporters, former players and the club from board level down, he certainly should be. Perhaps we need a Supporters' Hall of Fame; David France would be automatically first nominee and would any of us ever be worthy of nomination in comparison?

**Steve Carter:** Marvellous article, Ian. Thank you. I do hope that Bill Kenwright bashers will take some heed of Dr France's assessment of our Chairman.

**Steve Johnson:** I've never met David France but it was such a thrill after I'd set up evertonresults.com to receive a supportive email from him. Like most supporters, my devotion to the club is inevitably at arms length from the players, administrators and independent VIPs like David. To be contacted by him was like receiving an email from royalty. It took me about a week or so to pluck up the courage to respond! Why the nervousness? Because, for those of us like me with a deep interest in the history of the club, he is indeed royalty. 'Dr Everton' - yes. The 'King of Evertonians' - almost certainly.

Since that first contact, I've been lucky enough to have had fairly regular contact - always in the form of supportive and complimentary emails, as well as signed copies of one or two of his astounding books. To be asked by him to be part of the Everton Heritage Society was probably the biggest honour I've ever had and I just hope that we can continue the fight to preserve and promote Everton's history with as much energy and diligence as he himself has shown in everything he has done in the name of the club. His achievements in the Everton cause are legion and expounded beautifully in Ian Macdonald's piece. There's no need for me to do anything other than echo what has already been said by everyone else. It's a point of deep regret that David's illness means that I'm now unlikely to have the chance to actually meet him in person - but it's what he's done, and continues to do, that matters. And boy does it matter!

**Robbie Muldoon:** Reading articles like this makes me proud to be an Evertonian. Oh and what a great idea about converting the old cinema on Lime Street into an Everton city centre base/ticket office, etc. Brilliant idea!

**Keith Wilson:** Dr David France - 'The Evertonian's Evertonian'. His dedication to the Everton cause is unprecedented. Dr David France is up there in my opinion with William Ralph Dean Alex Young and Alan Ball. He alone lifted me and my spirit in the bad times of trophy-free years. His "Hall of Fame" nights and his countless (fantastic) books are there to be cherished, remembered for all time. It's an honour and a privilege to know you

The very first time we met, we just talked for hours and hours about our beloved Everton, and I realised then how passionate he was about Everton FC. We have always shared a joke and a laugh about our 'Everton Widows' who have had to put up with our fanaticism of our beloved club and the extended family of Evertonians we have in our bosom. Only in years to come all Evertonians will look back at what legacy David has left. Most of the "Great Contribution" that David has given to Evertonians worldwide has been written in Ian Macdonald's fine article. I'd just like to finish off by saying that I hope that David and Elizabeth have many happy days ahead. God bless you both. Keep the faith.

**Sean Condon:** The above article and comments are truly moving. I can only imagine sharing the depth of feeling in the room at that first Hall of Fame Dinner.

**Paul Conatzer:** Perhaps, we should put the phrase 'Being a Blue is my Reward' on a t-shirt and give the proceeds to a charity of Dr France's choosing.

**Colin Potter:** That is one great idea Paul!

**Peter Laing:** Thanks to Ian for providing such a moving and passionate eulogy of David France. Reading in the Echo a week or so ago one of the regular contributors remarked: 'At Everton we not only support the team but we also support each other'. This sentiment for me rang true, it confirms the notion of the Everton family and what it means to be a blue, after all we do not choose we are chosen. With the glory seeking shower across the Park we see vanity, self-deprecation and self-righteousness; guys like Dr David France provide a glowing beacon to the Everton brethren that we are much, much more than that. Thank you, Dr France for your hard work, you make me proud to follow the Club that we call Everton. Long may we continue, hopefully to prosper and demonstrate humility in how we go about our business.

**Mark Reid:** Great article Ian. Best of health to David France. I hope he knows what an important role model he's played for young Evertonians. His enthusiasm and his deeds are certainly going to leave a brilliant legacy for all Evertonians interested in every nook-and-cranny of Toffee folklore. His charitable work is also something to be admired. I just hope that Dr Everton doesn't disappear off the scene completely. Everton will always need men like him. He's been an inspiration to many fans - that's for sure!

**Frank Hargreaves:** Great article, Ian. Sincere thanks to David, and Liz, from myself and my family. I had the great honour of being invited by David to view the... erm.... stuff? 'Collection' seems such a trivial word for something so wondrous. I was truly staggered. Not just by the display on show but the sheer love David has for Everton. Obsessed? Not half.

Everton has history that is second to none and if you ever need to back that up, it's all there in glorious technicolour. Living and breathing. No myth, you can touch it. I hope the collection gets the stage it deserves and although it's a great thing that a partnership has been forged with the city fathers, I sincerely hope it's not left to gather dust because there is no space or something else is deemed more important. I don't think there is a more complete set of documents and ephemera, about ANYTHING, in the city. Don't let it go to waste.

I wish David well in what I hope will be a long (come on David you know you want to show those quacks up) and comfortable retirement and offer a VERY sincere, massive and heartfelt THANK YOU for letting me into what at the time was a very exclusive club and also for leaving a legacy that I know will be forever unsurpassed. God Bless you indeed.

**Phil Homer:** We are blessed to have the dedicated support that we have, but people like Dr Everton make the club we all support so special. Shame he has never become Chairman, I'm sure we would be playing in Kings Dock now and not going to Kirkby. Thanks for all the advice you have given over the years, but especially for the collection so future Evertonians can share our history.

**Jason Davenport:** Perhaps a little off topic, but if Dr France has the big C, please try Essiac which has been proven to work. Please pass this on to Dr France. Thank you.

**George Orr:** I've been lucky to know David France for many years, we met after we both had books published on Everton. As time went on, David told me of his idea to form the Former-Players' Foundation and hold a Hall of Fame Dinner at the Adelphi. I was lucky enough to be involved with him on the first five dinners. He travelled the length and breadth of Britain tracking down our lost heroes, some of whom had hit hard times financially and health wise. He gave them their pride back, he told them that they were not forgotten and that the Blue fans wanted to pay homage to them for their services to our great club.

Some were skeptical and thought that he was overestimating their worth to Evertonians but most of them agreed to come to the first Hall of Fame Dinner. I was allocated my duties for the night to make sure the ex-players arrived safely and were treated well in the Reception area. I was so in awe of these players, I saw men like Alex Young, Alex Parker, Ray Wilson, heroes of mine, they all came ... and when it was time for them to enter the main dining area, they were taken out and brought into the room one by one. The 600 Evertonians rose as one and greeted every one of them with a roar that made the hair rise on the back of your neck. You could see that the ex-players were amazed, completely taken aback by this reception, it was stunning... so overpowering that it was hard not to get emotional. This was Everton's Football Oscars. The chandeliers sparkled overhead while the ex-players sparkled below, it was an unforgettable night. Everton fans had been reunited with their past, their heroes. David France had brought Christmas forward - it was only March but it was Christmas, believe me. I can only say this about David ... that considering he never donned the famous Blue Jersey, he is as important in our history as any who did. I am proud to know him as an Evertonian and Author but most of all I treasure him as a friend. I hope he and Elizabeth have a great and happy retirement over in Canada and the USA and may they be as happy as they have made me.

**Peter Lupson:** I had the privilege of meeting David France for the first time at the George Mahon centenary evening at Goodison Park last December. I must admit I was quite in awe at the prospect of meeting the author of arguably the most important book on football history ever written. I'm referring, of course, to Dr Everton's Magnificent Obsession which is probably the nearest thing that exists to a personal time machine. It's years since I've read anything so absorbing, informative and entertaining. And to think that it merely scratches the surface of David's collection itself leaves me awestruck. It's made me realise that, for all my many years' research into football history, I actually know very little.

Despite David's gargantuan achievements, his razor-sharp intellect and his god-like status among Evertonians, it was immediately obvious to me when I met him that he is a down-to-earth, unassuming and caring man. He chatted easily to everyone, including strangers such as myself, as if we had been friends of long standing. I only wish I had met him sooner. Everton may or may not move to a new stadium. If they do, they should loudly proclaim David France's place in the club's proud history as the man who safeguarded that history in all its breadth and depth for future generations. I can think of no better way than naming a stand after him.

**Denis Byrne:** Quite simply overwhelming and nothing but tributes for this truly great man. Here are some practical ideas for a tribute to this remarkable Evertonian:

How about re-naming the Everton Collection - 'The David France Collection'.  
If we ever move, how about naming the stadium - 'The David France Stadium'?  
The Legends dinner to continue and be renamed 'The Annual David France Dinner'?  
The Player of the Year to receive 'The David France Award'?  
A petition to the Pope for canonisation for 'Saint David France'.

Eternally and lovingly grateful, David — you are my hero!

**Jah Jussa:** Great article Ian, about a great man. We at Tabacula have had the pleasure of knowing and working with David for the last couple of years. Whenever he's in Liverpool, it's a pleasure to have him in the office, talking about all things Everton and ribbing me the only Red in the office. The first time we met David was when he helped us with a documentary about John Brodie (mentioned in Ian's article), the Evertonian who invented goal nets. We were amazed at his warmth, generosity and of course the amazing collection. He passed us one of the early ledgers: 'Have a look through that' and sure enough, there an entry, detailing the purchase of goal nets from Mr Brodie. To us, searching for evidence of the commercial use of goal nets, it was a major breakthrough. Although he was clearly tired from a day of media coverage for the collection, David was happy to take time for an interview. Incidentally, you can see the film and the interview on youtube. And then there were the medals, the season tickets from the early days of the club, the document detailing the building on Anfield, which LFC would love to have in their museum - it's unbelievable that this collection, unparalleled in the football world, would be either lost, or spread across the globe and inaccessible to anyone with half an interest if it wasn't for David France. There is nowhere else that you can follow the history of football from before the football league to the present day, and for that we've got to be eternally grateful to the good Doctor. And not just Blues. Anyone researching the history of LFC has got to start with the Everton Collection. Anyone trying to find out about the birth of football has got to start with the Everton Collection.

The more you get to know David, the more you're taken with him as a man. And the more we're amazed that David hasn't received the recognition he deserves for his dedication in amassing the collection, which is the best in the world bar none. Can we get Andy Burnham on this? Surely he can sort out an OBE for services to football?

**Tony Heslop:** A great piece on a great man who is himself an Everton treasure. I'm struck by two comments particularly, from Lord Grantchester who says "every club needs a David France" and from Keith "Sower of the Seed" Wilson himself describing David as "The Evertonian's Evertonian". As one who has cherished the treasures both human and material, he has earned our eternal gratitude and all the plaudits that rightly come his way. Tireless in Seattle, still, he has worked and is working to ensure that we as Evertonians understand, cherish, honour and preserve our history and heritage as well as draw inspiration from it in looking to the future. It's a serious responsibility but one we bear with gratitude, a reminder to give thanks for being an Evertonian.

**Brendan Connolly:** Well done Ian. A tremendous tribute from one great Evertonian to another. It seems strange to say this about such a magnificent Evertonian, but I can't really remember the first time I met David. It's probably about fifteen years ago. The reason it doesn't stick in my memory is because he was 'just' another Evertonian who collected memorabilia, another Widnesian. It's a measure of the man's modesty that it was years later before I discovered that he was an extremely successful business executive in great demand from major multi-national businesses ... not to mention the owner of an Everton collection worth over £1,000,000. Many people who have worked their way into a similar position from humble beginnings attempt to ignore or even hide their past, but David regularly referred to his childhood in a two-up, two-down terraced house in Widnes. Certainly no 'airs and graces' from this doctor.

The Everton Collection could have contained even more items. It eventually became evident that David was 'worth a bob or two', but he has never been one to be brash with his money. At auctions he would often be prepared to discuss Everton items on sale, to allow other collectors to get their hands on some of our prized possessions. He could, I'm sure, have 'cleaned up' had he wished and left everybody else totally frustrated. Make no mistake though – if there was a real prized item: the season tickets from Stanley Park, an itinerary from the 1906 FA Cup Final, a medal that was required for the collection, there was no stopping David.

As many people have already said, it's a privilege to know David and to regard him as a friend. I cannot think of another couple who would have tolerated the dealings with the club that were experienced. Can you imagine having something valued at £1.2 million, then struggling for years to convince somebody to buy it for significantly less, when major auction houses would bite your hand off at a handsome profit? Add to all the above, the Foundation, the Hall of Fame and the fantastic books he has written. The determination of David to ensure that his legacy was left to his Everton family cannot be underestimated and we should all be eternally grateful. A truly fantastic Evertonian and even more importantly, a lovely human being.

**Colin Jones:** Ian, that is an excellent article - thank you. What can you say about Dr France? I am in absolute awe of this guy's devotion to our club and its history. He has truly left a great legacy and I agree with the comments above - it would be fitting for him to be officially recognised by the club. A high profile Everton Centre in the city centre is an excellent idea. It could combine a ticket office and shop. Could it one day house the collection itself as well? Thank you Dr France. May you enjoy your retirement.

**Dave Brierley:** I envy you, Ian, for having this great man as a friend. He is truly inspirational. To read: 'As well as combing the world for Everton jewels for the past 25 years, he has flown more than two million miles from his homes in Canada and Washington State to attend games, published 16 books (the latest, The Golden Vision, about 1960s centre-forward Alex Young) to raise money for Alder Hey Children's Hospital, established the club's Hall of Fame and founded the Everton Former Players' Foundation, a charity to assist old Evertonians who have fallen on hard times and which UEFA use as their template for all such associations.'

I can only marvel at his achievements and be thankful for everything that he has done for Everton and Evertonians. As for how he should be remembered and recognised for his amazing contribution, wouldn't it be something for the Everton Team to play a pre-season friendly game in or near to DF's home in 2009, name it the David France Testimonial and have BK or Moyes present him with a unique achievement award prior to the start of the game. Whichever way, Ian, thanks for the piece. Like others, it makes me proud to be a Blue.

**Paul Wharton:** Ian, once again a great article from the Crosby correspondent. The one thing I've noticed with David is that, when he comes up with an idea, he is prepared to listen and embrace your ideas, not just do what he wants. The Hall of Fame nights will go down in history, not just because we all enjoyed it but what it meant, the money helping our former-players, our heroes being helped was another first in Evertonia other clubs now follow our lead. When David asked me to join the Everton Heritage Society, I was very proud, as here was a man who has written over 20 books on EFC, the Collection to boot, and he wants me to play a part with our history - I was honoured, the only way I could sum this up it's like getting a letter off the Pope. David, you are a great Evertonian.

**Steve Clay:** A superb article, Ian, a fitting tribute to a great Evertonian. I have had the privilege to meet David on only a hand full of occasions but each time the enthusiasm and love for our club has shone through and becomes infectious. The first time I met with David was in March last year after he had stumbled across a web site I had started. After a few correspondence he invited to meet him at a printers in Bootle where he was putting the finishing touches to his Alex Young autobiography. On my arrival I received the warmest of welcomes and we settled down to talk about our common love, Everton Football Club. After we had talked for some time he proceeded to go through file after file of photographs, all related to the club's illustrious past. From the earliest team photo and the first board of Directors to Dixie's era, the superb Sixties, the list seemed endless. When we had been through all of the photos David started to pick out ones he thought would benefit my site. After several hours in David's company you realise what the club and its great players mean to him and why he has done all he has to make their lives a little better. Although I have met him a few times since, the last of which was at the Alex Young dinner last year, it was that first meeting that left a lasting impression. When he asked me to join him and others as part of the Everton Heritage Society - how can you refuse? His legacy has to be preserved not only for ourselves and future Evertonians but for David France who has put so much time and effort into putting a collection together that is second to none.

**Anne Asquith:** Ian, as ever your words are straight from the heart. Your article, together with the tributes, show just how much Dr Everton has come to mean to his Everton family. I haven't had the privilege of knowing David for as long as many of you and have not had the good fortune to meet Elizabeth at all, but feel blessed to know there are such people in the world and to think of them as friends. On meeting David for the first time, far from the awe I expected to feel I found him to be such a pleasant, down-to-earth guy who immediately seemed part of the group. But his ability to instinctively grasp and prioritise issues hinted of an awesome intellect, cleverly disguised by a gentle, mild manner!

It was not hard to see how anything he decided to do would be planned, pursued and completed come what may - and so it has proved. Let's face it, this man has achieved what most of us can only dream of thinking about. More importantly, he has achieved it in a way that has not only restored the health and self-respect of many of our former heroes, but has restored the pride of Evertonians everywhere in our heritage, and enabled us all to learn so much more about the story of our Club. It was with some trepidation that I asked David if he would consider becoming the Life President of the Everton Shareholders' Association as I felt he already took on far too much and would not have the time to devote to the Association. It was an honour when (having consulted the boss, of course!) he agreed to take the position, and despite his problematic health and his many other commitments has supported our efforts as well as providing many valuable suggestions and initiatives. Just another typical example of his devotion to all things Everton!

David, through the collection of so many club artefacts, has given us all so much to treasure for years and generations to come. But truly, one of the greatest Everton treasures is the man himself. He neither seeks nor desires recognition or reward, but I hope he and his devoted, long-suffering wife know that the future history of Everton Football Club will tell of a very special, very much respected and very much loved man - Dr David France. We salute you, Dr Everton - and we all thank you from the bottom of our hearts for all you have done.

**Damian Carville:** I must confess to not having paid much attention to the campaign to purchase David France's collection. I'm not sure why but I just did not feel attached to it. So I watched from a distance, I was happy when its safety was secured, but, as I say, it did not mean a huge amount to me. This all changed when I recently read an article on Toffeeweb about David France. I must say it was one of the most inspirational reads in some time.

I met Ian McDonald (who wrote the article) a few years ago in Houston airport, the day after Everton played (and lost of course) against Club America of Mexico. He and his mates were on their way back to Liverpool and I was getting a flight back to Los Angeles, to where I moved in 2002. I was struck by Ian's commitment to the Everton cause - he dipped into his bag and gave me an Everton yearbook (which I still have even though it has a picture of young Wayne on the front) and some other stuff. It was a very magnanimous gesture which meant a lot to me at the time, since I was feeling a little sentimental about home and all things Everton. I remember one of Ian's mates was a little concerned about his arrival home since he had not told his wife he was going to Texas for a few days. I think it was the old 'just popping out for a loaf' trick.

Anyway, Ian's article ignited my interest in the collection - and in David France himself. The article references his book, 'Dr Everton's Magnificent Obsession' - there is a quote from acclaimed author, Peter Lupson, about this book: 'It isn't just the greatest Everton book but the greatest football book of all time'. This was all I needed, I went onto Amazon and ordered my copy. When it arrived, I was genuinely excited. As I opened the package and first saw the cover, I knew that this was going to be a special book. It is surprisingly heavy and fittingly well-produced for such important subject matter.

The first thing I read was 'Final Words from Elizabeth France', which is (obviously) at the back of the book. Not sure why I started here, maybe there is an unconscious desire to understand things from the perspective of my own (American) wife who gamely supports my emotional journey on the Everton roller-coaster (even though she catches me on various Everton websites when I claim to be working, she never does more than raise an eyebrow and smile ... as we watched the Cup derby in a Santa Monica bar on Sunday morning and my extremely loud and offensive swearing at the referee was disturbing the woman next to me, she just smiled and consoled me.. After the 1-1 league draw she got four of her tennis students to call me to congratulate me, even though they don't really understand....) - but this is where I started. What a great couple of pages. This woman is a saint...and a very funny one at that. She is so smart and funny - she talks of our 'blue rage associated with our neighbour's apparent inalienable right to more than their fair share of investment and luck'. How accurate is that. The sentence alone feels like therapy? She describes the terms that were attached to the purchase of the collection, such as it has to be physically displayed in the city of Liverpool, and one final prerequisite - 'no items can be loaned to Liverpool Football Club. If the Reds want to inspect their birth certificate, they're more than welcome to visit our website and exhibitions.' BIRTH CERTIFICATE - this is genius and far better than some of the more unseemly suggestions for a banner than I have read about.

David's collection has over 10,000 articles in it and this book has pictures of only around 400 of them. It is going to be one hell of an exhibition! Other things I have learned today: William Ralph Dean was the first player ever to wear the number 9 jersey for any team in the 1933 cup final. I knew this was the first match with numbers, but never actually associated that 'Dixie' was the first number 9 ...this adds even more poignancy to its symbolism to EFC. Also, the Football League resisted the introduction of numbers for league matches until 1939, since they wanted football to be recognised as a team and not an individual support. In times of names on shirts and players having their own 'brand', how refreshing - and depressing - is that? His mother referred to EFC as the 'Blue Dog' - 'a pure-bred canine who steals your loyalty and demands your unconditional love'. And his collection contains the first known programme for a match involving Newton Heath, who became Manchester United. Dr France has had several offers from around the World for this programme, including lots of digits, but has rebuffed them all, it is an Everton collection after all (As an aside, I used to work in Newton Heath and it is the biggest shithole on the planet. I worked for a Japanese company and they introduced an alarm system at 9pm to make sure the Japs would leave work ... any later and there would be Mancs waiting to car-jack them outside.)

By the way, apart from having read Elizabeth's words, I'm only up to page 13 of the book! So there you have it. I'm not sure what inspired me to write this long topic. I hope it has not bored you too much (that is if you got this far). I think that Dr France's affection for the club and willingness to share is contagious. I want every Evertonian to read this incredible book and contribute - if possible - to the continuation of the growth and exhibition of what is the largest collection of football memorabilia in the World. Everyone should know about Dr David France, this man created the Everton Former-Players' Foundation (the first of its kind in the world, now copied by clubs all around the world) because he could not bear to see former Everton greats fall on hard times.

He created the Everton Hall of Fame, he has campaigned for an Everton Centre in town, which could house Everton's marketing, ticket sales and possibly even his collection. This man really is 'Dr Everton'. David and Elizabeth, I thank you for enriching my life and that of so many Evertonians. When I travel to Seattle for business I will keep my eyes peeled just in case I bump into you, which would be such an honour and a privilege. Buy the book, it is a work of art!

**David Collins:** All I can say is 'Thank You, Dr France' for the legacy you have left behind for all Evertonians to cherish.

**Norman Jones:** I first met David in the early 1990s: he sat on the same row as me in the old 300 club, and I knew then his obsession with Everton when he told me in passing that he travelled to and from Houston, Texas to our home games!

Even then, David was desperate to find some way of looking after former players who were now suffering from all manner of disabilities resulting from their playing careers. First I was his sounding board, but as those who knew David well, it was not long before his enthusiasm rubbed off on me, and so I set to work on devising an entity which would be able to fulfil David's criteria and at the same time achieve charitable status. Spurred on by David, we spent time researching, meeting with the Charity Commission, preparing trust deeds, countless meetings etc and so it was that the Everton Former-Players' Foundation was formed, the first charitable organisation of its kind, and now superbly lead by Laurence Lee, the Reverend Harry Ross and others.

Of course during this time I became aware of David's collection of football memorabilia and generally all things Everton, and his vision for preserving Everton's heritage. Whilst most of us would have taken the easy option, and instructed Sotheby's or Christie's to sell the collection (and made an absolute fortune in the process), no, not David; he wanted his collection to be part of the Everton family, and capable of being enjoyed by all of us.

So began the long and laborious process of securing a proper home for his collection, and as we all know thanks to Lord Grantchester, the Club and others who formed the Everton Collection Trust which acquired the collection, this is now the case. Without David's absolute commitment, enthusiasm and devotion to the cause not to mention sheer hard work, time and effort (which took its toll on David's health), none of us would be able to enjoy what is now the Everton Collection, incorporating the David France Collection, which Lord Grantchester and his fellow trustees will now take to the next level so that our heritage is preserved for posterity.

We meet only very few individuals in a lifetime who we can honestly say have such drive, enthusiasm, charisma, and total single-mindedness to be able to turn visions into reality, but David is one of them. Truly exceptional, and I am proud to have worked with him.

Spare a thought too for Elizabeth France because, without her patience, tolerance and unwavering support, we would never have had our man!

**Peter King:** Whisper it but there is another collection – The David France Portfolio. Even those who think that they know David France will be surprised to discover that his final initiative has been ongoing for the past 12 years. During that time we have been collaborating on assembling a comprehensive portfolio of Everton players from all eras. Today there are some 350 drawings of players and staff stretching back to the club's days in Stanley Park through to today. Love them or loathe them, the number of these colour caricatures has exploded since the first 100 or so were used to illustrate the third edition of his Hall of Fame book. Without publicising our activities, we have been working diligently at adding two or three drawings every month. That is two or three every month for 12 years. It is a remarkable undertaking in which all of the subjects as well as their kits have been researched thoroughly using previously unavailable archives. Today, the David's portfolio contains an original caricature of just about every man who has made 50 or more appearances for Everton as well as many men who enjoyed more fleeting Goodison careers. While the financial investment has been significant, the dedication of time is mind-boggling because each drawing takes at least four hours for David to research and another four hours for me to draw.

Without question, no other club has such a comprehensive and consistent portfolio of its icons, legends, stars, favourites as well as the legions of men simply forgotten by the passing of time. I think that it's unlikely that anyone else, or any organization for that matter, would invest the resources to undertake something similar. It is unique. And although I'm biased, I must add that we have compiled a wonderful gallery of the men who made Everton. Of course, we never intended to tackle so many Evertonians but there were so many interesting characters in the club's history that warranted inclusion. The drawings with their exaggerated features have been well received by the subjects. Some players claim that they flatter their team-mates. I recall that only one player, who for obvious reasons had better remain anonymous, complained about his hair-line and requested some airbrush surgery. It's truly been a privilege to be involved in this project. The exhaustive research carried out by David being a true reflection of the man's devotion to his club. From the early draughts of Harry Makepeace, the test subject, it was clear that he had a vision. From my own point of view the favourite subjects have been those from the formative years of Merseyside football. The paucity of reference material available made the challenge much greater. Our procedure is always the same. I draw roughs and show them to David. We disagree on some points but sit down over a coffee and then we agree he's right. He will send emails saying: 'Love the pose but are those the correct laces for the era?' or 'This man was a teetotaler, please show more humility!'

Many fans will have seen the copies of the early Hall of Fame caricatures, many signed by the subjects, which have been on display in one of the lounges at Goodison for the past decade. However the final resting place of the 350, perhaps even 400, pieces of original artwork in The David France Portfolio remains uncertain. I know that he doesn't believe that a book would not do justice to the depth of the portfolio. Possibly he'll prefer a dedicated website. But imagine browsing at them in corridors at Goodison or at a new stadium. If you displayed them at say three feet intervals the gallery would stretch for 400 yards - that's about once around the complete ground. This week we added, Fellaini - caricaturist's dream and also young Gosling - a Kopite's nightmare. For the time being, it is anticipated that the initiative will continue throughout 2009.



