

HERITAGE SOCIETY



EVERTON'S FIRST GROUND MOVE

1883/84
Season Ticket



1883/84 team



SEASON 1883-84.
E. WATSON. T. MARRIOTT. R. MORRIS. T. EVANS. W. GUNNING.
J. PICKERING. H. WILLIAMS. J. MCGILL. W. PARRY. J. RICHARDS.
E. BERRY. C. LINDSAY. M. HIGGINS.

Everton's switch from Anfield to the new purpose-built stadium at Goodison Park in 1892 is a well-documented part of the Club's history. Our latest move to Hill Dickinson Stadium is the Blues' fourth relocation, in a list that also includes the lesser-known shift from Stanley Park to Priory Road in 1883.

The former St Domingo team played their first fixtures as Everton FC at Stanley Park from 1879, on a pitch close to the Anfield Road end of the present football car park. However, as popularity of the sport grew and thousands began to attend, a mere roped-off playing area was clearly inadequate to prevent frequent encroachment onto the pitch, nor was it a simple matter to collect matchday revenue. Into the 1880s, Everton were also finding it difficult to attract the bigger clubs to play at Stanley Park and realised a more suitable home would be needed if they were to capitalise on the growing local interest and to move up to the highest level.

Matters reached a head in 1883, when the committee decided to move across Priory Road onto land owned by livestock trader William Cruit. His home, Coney Green, was located opposite the current football car park exit, and the pitch would be laid out to the left, but set back, sloping down the hill. The move was timely, as a revision in the laws for the 1883/84 season included a minimum pitch size, compulsory crossbars, and referees empowered to abandon games for pitch encroachment.

After weeks of preparation, which included the first

home game of the season against Southport being played at nearby Walton Stiles, Everton finally graced their new ground on 3 November 1883, in a 3-1 defeat of Hartford St. John's. Their home base now seemingly secured, the Club could press on to establish themselves as a force to be reckoned with, while laying down a firm financial footing.

However, just five months later, Everton's stay at Priory Road came to an abrupt end when landlord Cruit gave them notice to quit. Disappointed with the financial return, his patience also ran out regarding the noise and unruly behaviour, and he even instructed the Club to leave the goalposts, ropes, and stakes behind in lieu of unpaid rent!

By May 1884, the destiny of Everton changed once more with a second ground move following John Houlding's securing of the Anfield tenure. The 1883/84 season at Priory Road might have been unsettled, but it did bring silverware in the form of the Liverpool Cup, Earlestown beaten 1-0 at Bootle on 29 March 1884.

The first game at Anfield was a 5-0 defeat of the same opponents on 27 September 1884 and, by 18 May 1885, Houlding had bought Anfield outright. Now, with their own ground and their president as landlord, Everton Football Club could begin to enter a new exciting phase at Anfield. What could possibly go wrong?

Words // Mike Royden
(Vice-chair, Everton FC Heritage Society)