



EVERTON

HERITAGE SOCIETY



BEN SWIFT CHAMBERS – THE MINISTER WHO STARTED IT ALL

**Words // Henry Corbett,
Club Chaplain and member of the
Everton FC Heritage Society**

On 24 November 1901, the person who founded Everton Football Club died, and he was buried in Shepley Methodist Churchyard near Huddersfield in Yorkshire. His name was Ben Swift Chambers, and many Evertonians know of him as the minister of St Domingo's Church in Everton who, in 1878, started a team that would become Everton Football Club.

Chambers came to the Everton district in 1877 and started a cricket team for young men in the area. He then wanted to keep them fit during the winter and so a football team was formed.

After a year, the St Domingo's team was doing so well it was attracting men from other churches, and so there was a famous meeting in 1879 in the Queens Head pub just off Village Street in Everton and the decision was made to change the name to Everton Football Club.

Ben Chambers left Everton in 1882 to serve the Methodist circuit in Southport before he returned to Everton to continue his ministry at St Domingo's from 1890-94. He later died, aged 58, in his old home village of Shepley, and this tribute was paid to him. "He possessed a winning personality, eager to serve, keen to do good, and delighting in the success of his friends".

More than 100 years later, schoolteacher Peter Lupson was investigating the foundation of some of our leading football clubs, and in particular he was searching out the graves of some of these clubs' founders, some of whom were ministers. Fulham was founded by the Rev John Cardwell, Bolton Wanderers by Rev Joseph Wright, and Manchester City by a vicar's daughter, Anna Connell.



Graeme Sharp and Brian Hall next to the newly-restored grave of Ben Chambers (left)



In 2007, Peter (a member of the Everton FC Heritage Society) discovered the overgrown grave of Ben Chambers, so he suggested to Everton and Liverpool (after all, Liverpool FC was born when Everton left Anfield) that it should be restored.

From an overgrown, somewhat neglected grave, it now bears the words, "Who set the ball rolling that led to the birth of Everton and Liverpool clubs".

The grave was re-dedicated in 2008 by myself and the Liverpool chaplain Rev Bill Bygroves, with Rick Parry, Sir Philip Carter, Graeme Sharp, Brian Hall, and two Academy players from each club in attendance.

What would the Reverend Ben Chambers make of Everton FC today?

I think he would be amazed at the growth of the Club, thrilled at Everton's history with our trophies, stories of comebacks, resilience, and maybe, above all, he would be delighted that the club is continuing to care for the community just as he did back in the 1870s.