

RESTORING THE GRAVE OF AN EVERTON ICON

Words // Rob Sawyer

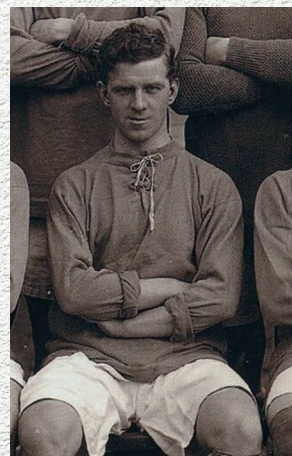
Everton FC Heritage Society has undertaken the restoration and rededication of the graves of 12 former Toffees players, Club officials and employees. These include the likes of Will Cuff, Sandy Young and Billy Scott. Some years ago, our member, Tony Onslow – whose research has focused on the Blues' Scottish links – suggested the Glasgow resting place of centre-forward Bobby Parker would be a deserving restoration project.

Parker, who hailed from Possilpark, was a modest 5ft 8in tall, but mobile and deadly when through on goal. He joined Everton from Rangers in 1913 and more than justified the £1,500 fee, netting 35 league goals in the 1914/15 campaign (a figure bettered in one season only by Dixie Dean and Bertie Freeman) as the Toffees claimed their second League Championship.

The suspension of competitive football due to the First World War couldn't have come at a worse time for Parker, who was in the form of his life. He returned to Scotland to work in a munitions factory before enlisting with the Royal Scots Fusiliers. Posted to the Middle East, he sustained significant shrapnel wounds in May 1917, necessitating a prolonged spell in hospital in Alexandria.

When demobbed in the autumn of 1919, he and his Everton teammates struggled to recapture their form of five years previously. Within two years, Parker was offloaded to Nottingham Forest, whom he

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helped gain promotion to the top-flight. A season back in Scotland with Fraserburgh of the Highland League, saw him combine playing with coaching and club secretarial duties. He went on to enjoy several highly-successful seasons with Bohemian FC in Dublin before he started to experience the debilitating effects of Multiple Sclerosis. Contrary to speculation, there is nothing concrete to link Parker's war injuries to his later health issues.

As his condition deteriorated and financial hardship took hold, Everton quietly stepped in. In 1937, a donation of 10/- per week was arranged by the Club on an ongoing basis. Parker passed away in December 1950 at the age of 59, although Everton continued to send payments to his wife, Jeanie, until her financial circumstances improved.

Who knows what Bobby Parker could have gone on to achieve, but for the war and his injuries. As it is, we can reflect on that one glorious season in which his brilliance wrote him into Everton folklore.

Having been delayed by the COVID pandemic, Parker's grave restoration project has progressed in recent months, aided by a GoFundMe campaign. The original headstone has been re-erected while plans are under way to install an additional stone on which his football and military careers will be recorded. For more about the fundraiser, visit efcheritagesociety.com.



Parker's 1914/15 League Championship medal