

By Mike Royden

# THE LOTHIAN LASSES

## Boxing Day at Goodison 130 years ago

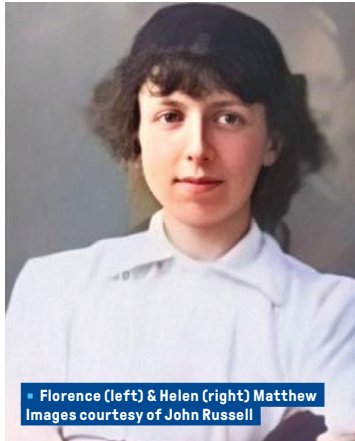
It was on Boxing Day 1892, not long after Goodison Park was opened, that a rather unique fixture took place.

A charity game between the *Liverpool Evening Express* and the *Liverpool Echo* had become a regular festive attraction and on this occasion the two line officials were women.

In fact, they were sisters, Helen and Florence Matthew, who were making a name for themselves as footballers and were known as the 'Lothian Lasses'. They lived in Chepstow Street, a stone's throw from Mere Green (which later became Goodison Park) before they moved to Merton Road in Bootle.

The first appearance of the sisters in an organised match was believed to be in the summer of 1890, as part of a theatrical touring package, which included a male and female football team playing in various characters.

After the sisters watched Everton play a touring Canadian/American side at Anfield in September 1891, they wrote a match report as 'Our Lady Specialists at Anfield Road', which was printed in *Cricknet & Football Field*. Florence concentrated on the text, while Helen sketched incidents from the game. Their style brought a measure of local fame as they moved to the *Liverpool*



• Florence (left) & Helen (right) Matthew  
Images courtesy of John Russell



*Echo* and later the *Lancashire Evening Post*. Their pen-name, now the Lothian Lasses, probably came from their support of Preston North End and their Scottish influx of players.

On 13 September 1892, the Everton Board granted the Lothian Lasses press passes to cover our game against Newton Heath (later Manchester United), which was only the second ever league game to be played at Goodison. In February 1893, the Everton Board resolved that the Lothian Lasses' press passes be withdrawn. No doubt the Lasses appealed this ruling, as at the

following meeting on 20 February, the curt reply of the Board stated, 'Their letter was not entertained'. Then in July 1893, the Lothian Lasses requested permission to stage a benefit match at Goodison, to which the Board gave a brusque 'not granted'. It seems this early foray of women into the game was not taken at all seriously by the Everton Board.

Florence married in 1894 and gave up her football and journalistic career, while Helen continued to play as 'Mrs Graham' (despite being single) for the British Ladies' Football Club or The Lady Footballers. She later played four games for the Reds v Blues, the Original Lady Footballers and Mrs Graham's XI, as goalkeeper and occasional captain. The latter team also included Emma Clarke, the first black woman player (also from Bootle).

After her branch of the British Ladies' Club dissolved in July 1896, Helen left football and spent the 1900s racing horses. She passed away in Devon in 1963, and in 2018 she was finally recognised (as Helen Graham) in the inaugural Scottish Women in Sport Hall of Fame.



• Helen Graham Matthews team playing in High Wycombe, 1895