

Everton FC and Anfield Cemetery

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(on behalf of Everton Football Club)

The first burial at Anfield Cemetery took place in 1863, some 15 years before the cricketers of St. Domingo's Church in Everton decided to form a football team to keep themselves fit over winter. The slopes of Everton Brow have never been particularly conducive to ball games and those with an interest in the nascent art of "soccer" found nearby Stanley Park an ideal environment to hone their skills.

Stanley Park had opened in 1870, designed by the architect Edward Kemp, who had also been the man behind the plans for Anfield Cemetery across Priory Road a few years earlier. A public competition had been held in 1860 to decide the design for a new cemetery at Anfield. The rapidly expanding population of Liverpool and subsequent overcrowding at burial grounds closer to the city centre resulted in an urgent need for bigger graveyards elsewhere. Building work started at Anfield in 1861 and the project was completed within two years at a cost of over 1.5 million pounds in modern terms.

In 1892, Everton Football Club left Anfield for pastures new at Goodison Park. The Liverpool Football Club was formed shortly thereafter, and the pathways of Stanley Park and Anfield Cemetery have been traversed by generations of Red and Blue ever since. A broad, green expanse sat calmly between the respective cauldrons of two of the preeminent institutions in the history of Association Football.

What pre-match chatter has bubbled on the walk to either stadium between lads and dads, grandmas and granddaughters, old and young, scarves round their necks, matchday programme stuffed in their pockets, over the past 130 years plus! Many a jig of celebration or glum shuffle has littered the same well-trodden routes home come 5pm on a Saturday.

While the park has provided space for a litany of exercise and outdoor pursuits from carriage riding in the early days, cycling, rowing boats on the lake, dog walking, fishing, football, cricket and more, to spectating at Sunday League footy, the blossoming of countless friendships and romance; the cemetery of course has been a place for quiet reflection and saying goodbye to tens of thousands of loved ones. One wonders how many times over the stands of Anfield and Goodison could be filled by the football fanatics of either persuasion who lie at rest here were they all brought back for one last game.

In addition to the massed ranks of Evertonians buried at Anfield Cemetery, over 40 former players, coaches, backroom staff and directors, dating back to the days of St. Domingo can be found here. Possibly the first significant football-related internments at Anfield took place in

January 1895. The funerals of early club director John Dermott and pre-Football League striker Jack Whittle, both locally born and bred, took place a fortnight apart.

John Dermott had been a senior employee at Cope Brothers tobacco manufacturers, operators of the largest tobacco factory in the world on Lord Nelson Street beside Lime Street Station, for many years. He was an early director of both Everton and Liverpool Football Clubs and died aged 61 after a short illness.

Jack Whittle scored 16 goals in 36 games for Everton between 1885 and 1888, his last appearances and goals coming in the final season before the inception of the Football League. A clerk and stockbroker throughout his short professional life, John Robson Whittle passed away aged only 29, having succumbed to tuberculosis, leaving a wife and two infants.

Everton Heritage Society have been proud to work on a programme of grave rededications, marking previously unmarked plots and, in this case replacing a damaged headstone, for former Everton players and staff up and down the United Kingdom over the past 15 years.

It seems appropriate at this juncture, with the move to a new stadium on the waterfront imminent, that we should remember a man whose passion for research, reminiscence and recording of those early years of our great club remains second to none. Without the book he wrote and his submission of numerous letters and articles to the local press detailing his memories of players, matches and happenings in and around Everton Football Club in eras long bygone, the phrase “if you know your history” which is sung by Evertonians on the terraces today would not carry nearly as much weight.

Everton Football Club is also proud this year, 2023, to have joined our neighbours Liverpool in becoming an official patron of Anfield Cemetery. That this expanse of land is resting place to so many generations of loyal supporters, alongside a good number of men who represented the club as players and individuals who worked diligently behind the scenes in an effort to establish Everton as one of the greatest names in football lore in those early decades, surely marks Anfield Cemetery out as one of the most significant sites in the Everton story.

That Thomas Keates was there to see the transition from rough and ready kickabouts in Stanley Park, to established footballing aristocracy on the relative billiard table of a Goodison Park surface, put him in the perfect position to record those formative years in some style. Thankfully for Evertonians everywhere ever since, he did not waste the opportunity!

The ‘Golden Jubilee History of Everton Football Club’, published just months after his death, certainly guaranteed that the name Thomas Keates will never be forgotten in Everton circles.

May he rest in peace.