

Thomas Keates
at the
Everton Football Club annual general meeting of 1894

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In this piece from the *Liverpool Review* of Tuesday 26 June 1894, reporter 'Linesman' shares details of the previous evening's Everton Football Club annual general meeting:

'Shouts, shrieks, groans, cheers, then handshakes all round!

On Monday evening, at the Picton Lecture Hall, the long-expected thunderbolt was hurled, and nobody was killed. But there were great ructions all the same, and many a time during the three hours' sitting of the directors and shareholders of the 'igh and mighty Everton Football Club a 'fite' appeared imminent. But it is all over now, and, as I say, nobody is assassinated. On the contrary, the whole club is decidedly the better for an annual meeting which commenced rumbly, continued with shouts, shrieks, groans, hisses, pale faces, and personalities, and concluded with humorous speeches, facetious commentaries, votes of thanks, congratulations, and hand-shaking all round. After which let us hope that patriotism will take the place of dissension amongst the members of the Everton F.C., and that the coming season will see better management, better results, and hatchets buried by the score.

To a disinterested onlooker the proceedings in the Picton were of a most humorous description. A spectator who knew not football would probably have been amazed at the intensity of interest displayed by the five or six hundred club members who for three hours howled and gesticulated themselves blue in the face, Everton-blue in the face, over the affairs financial and governmental of their body. Personally, it was the most entertaining partisan experience which I have come across since Liverpool beat Everton at Hawthorne Road in the final for the Liverpool Cup in 1893.

It really was great fun. On the platform there sat Mr. George Mahon, chairman of the meeting and president of the club. On his left was Mr. Molyneux, and on his right Mr. Clayton, and in the rear a number of directors. The shareholders were mostly

seated in the body of the hall, but grouped on a tier of seats to the right, and facing the platform was a partisan body whose business it appeared to be to play the very holocaust with the directorate in the way of criticising its management, to push forward certain members of its party for the vacancies which had occurred amongst the directorate, and to vigorously protest against the right to vote of certain newly acquired shareholders and members of 'the trade'.

Thus, we had the elements of a nice little thunderstorm, and little time was wasted in getting to words. The chairman, a thin little man with a caustic tongue and a personality powerful enough to keep the riotous spirits at his fingers' ends from first to last, confessed right away that he was in a bad temper, and then proceeded to make the best that was possible of the clubs' finances for the past season, which he admitted he expected would be warmly discussed. These he got through with fairly little interruption, but when he came to the subject of certain by-meetings which had been held by the afore-described factionists, the storm which had long been brewing burst forth in all its frenzy, and almost shook the volumes in the huge library above out of their shelves.

It was very warm indeed. Mr. Mahon said that the test of the problem lay to his mind in the question: - "Where or were not such meetings to the advantage of the club?" Whereat he was greeted with a perfect bombardment of 'Hear, hears', 'Noes' and 'Ayes'. And the state of things was not improved when he proceeded to name the leaders of the factionists, and expressed as his opinion that "Messrs. Nelson, Green and Wilson would woefully regret that they had allowed their names to be brought forward at the meeting to receive such scant support," and he trusted they would in future have a little more modesty, which would certainly be an advantage to themselves and the Everton club. In fact, it was a vigorous speech altogether, and at times the speaker carried the audience with him to such an extent that they cheered him again and again, expressing their approval in such cries as "Bravo, Mahon!", "Good old chairman!" and so on. All of which approvalisms were levelled truculently at the factionists, who sat with their faces set loweringly towards the directorate on the platform and the stormy mass in the body of the hall.

And then one of the leaders of the minority party rose to his feet and was rewarded with a roar of mingled hoots and cheers, such as that which used to greet the name of Gladstone at the pantomime, only more so. Mr. Keates was the would-be speaker, a middle-aged man with a bull-doggy countenance and a voice which would have done justice to a ship's captain. 'In a friendly way' (which was obviously a very iconoclastic way) he desired to discuss the statement of accounts which had just been approved and passed. He talked, between the whirlwinds of hooting and jeering, of the high expenditure re: players; of the injurious nature of the bonus system; and of the threatened rivalry which they had to fear from a neighbouring

club. He contended in opposition to the chairman that the directorate lost nothing by being subjected to such criticism as that which he and others had brought forward; and altogether Mr. Keates fought so well in the teeth of the wind that several times the meeting heartily echoed his sentiments, and the three gentlemen at the table on the platform visibly appreciated the Cromwellian attack. Mr. Keates subsequently distinguished himself by rushing on to the platform with a letter from a firm of lawyers, handing it triumphantly to a director in answer to a point of legal difference which had arisen striding up to the chairman's table, seizing a glass of water and gulping the contents down, and then striding back to his place in the arena as quickly as he came.

This feat simply brought down the house, and probably will have immortalized Mr. Keates in the Extraordinary Annals of the Remarkable Football Club of Everton.'

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Thomas Keates had been instrumental in organising a series of meetings of shareholders in the build up to the 1894 AGM; utilising his local standing and contacts to commandeer school halls for these gatherings. His efforts in holding the football club to account clearly had an impressive impact on his peers, and he was voted onto the Everton F.C. board of directors on 11 June 1897. As a director he worked tirelessly in areas including stadium improvements and scouting of players. After failing to gain reelection at the AGM of 1900, fate intervened and the untimely deaths in quick succession of directors J.C. Brooks and Jack Prescott, who are both buried here at Anfield, led to Keates being asked to serve a further year on the board. This he did with distinction.