

The Old 'Un wanders through Walton, lonely as a cloud. With Bill.

Introduction by Mike Royden

Read by Jamie Yates

This article, written by Thomas Keates, originally appeared in the Liverpool Evening Express, of 23 November 1912. Tom Keates, (or is it John Keats?), dreamily wanders through the rural byways of Walton with his old pal Bill, trying to reimagine the excursion as preparation for his epic poem the 'Eve of St. Domingo'. Nevertheless, there are a few points of interest here for students of early Everton history:

"Goodison Park eh –a funny park," said my cousin Bill. He was down from 'Brum' for the day, a cheap tripper. He came to see the Villa bury Everton, but as it fell upon the day the Villa were laid low, he attended the funeral. Some people who attend funerals find it difficult to maintain the grave demeanour and mute solemnity appropriate to the sad occasions. Bill had no difficulty. He was genuinely downhearted. His before-the-match gaiety was badly eclipsed by his after-the-match mortification. He hadn't a laugh left in him. When a fellow's team is beaten before his eyes, life's scarcely worth living, is it? Especially when you've come a long way to see the smash-up. We may take the reverses of the team we shout for, and swear by, too sadly, and excite the sneers of the cynic, who has never had the football fever. Let him sneer, and jeer, "What a waste of enthusiasm over the kicking of a leather ball!" and suggest that we make more fuss over a lost match than we do over a lost mother-in-law. That all depends on the mother-in-law. Her loss is sometimes a gain in money and comfort. When she's a good 'un, we'd gladly sacrifice the money for her life.

In spite of all that's been said about putting down drink, Bill persists in putting it down (his throat) in small quantities. He admits it's a bad master, but will persist in saying it's not a bad slave. If, like Bill, we could draw the line at the small quantity, as many can do, it would be alright. It's the mastery that's the trouble. Certainly, Bill's gloom lifted very soon after he sampled some beer and found it all right. He became cheerful enough to forget, or throw aside the funeral, and exclaim:

"Goodison Park! It's a funny sort of park, Albert. Not many trees about it eh? I've heard it said stone walls don't a prison make. Neither do bricks, slates, iron bars, and sawn wood make a park. "That's where you're mistaken, Bill," said I, "Your idea of a park is trees, green sward, flowers beds, and shady walks. A pretty idea my boy, but not according to the book. It might be just as well if your idea was correct, but if you'll take the trouble to look up our Nuttall, you'll find his dictionary defines a

park as 'a larger piece of ground enclosed for public or private recreation; an enclosure round a mansion; an artillery encampment; or, the train or artillery belonging to an army or army division.'

"I agree with you, Bill. It does seem to be absurd that the same term should be applied to things so entirely different. The military people appear to be dropping it. The football ground christeners may. As a rule, if a colony of bricks is called a park, it keeps the memory green (grimy) of some lovely park of former days, as in the instance of Toxteth Park. Whatever we may think of the change for the worse, from a beauty point of view, the reminder excites the fancy, and is a bit to the good. "The contemplation of the beautiful that was, Bill, is only second, as a refining influence, to the beautiful that is. Goodison Park was not a park before Everton FC enclosed it and called it one, but, Bill, it seems but yesterday to me that it was a huge field, one of a number that stretched to Church Road Walton. A hedge divided it from another called Mere Green. That extended to the Cemetery, only Mere Lane intervening.

"A farm-house stood sentry over the other fields, hedge-bordered, away to Walton. The present Goodison Road covers a part of a stile-road, a lover's walk called Walton Stiles. Instead of the jostling crowd of today, stray lads and lasses limply sauntered through the wining rural pathways, its curving recesses facilitating the bold 'osculatory license' young men have always been addicted to. "I can see the corn waving gracefully, zephyr-fanned, in the bright sun, on a hot day, as plainly in my memory as I did in those happy days with my eyes, when life was young. Bill is strong to talk of the old days, the old boys, and the old scenes. On the river side of the Stiles, Skirving's Nursery graced the land (we stole glimpses of its glorious floral beauties through the giant hawthorn hedges from Spellow Lane (hawthorn edged on the north side) away to Walton, and down to the present country road, on the other side of which, ploughed fields met the eye down to Bootle.

"Bill, opined the semi-primitive natural beauty spot, and charming landscape was certainly more pleasing to gaze on than the bricks of Goodison Park, and its baked clay and stone environment. If we old chaps don't admire the change in the picture, we have the pull of the youngsters in the pleasant memory of the effaced loveliness. "The melancholy Count Arnheim, in the 'Bohemian Girl', sings about memory being the only friend the grief can ever know. If old memories were a consolation to the dejected Count, what a pleasure they must be to the gay old veterans, who, like evergreens always look fairly well, who are merry, merry hearts, and seems as if they'll die young, however long they live, like those enviable whom the gods love. Good health Bill!"