



By Richie Gillham

# JACK WHITLEY

One thing common to both clubs playing today is that supporters' groups have had some of their former players remembered via the installation or restoration of gravestones. One of the players honoured by our visitors was goalkeeper Jack Whitley, who asked to be buried in the shadow of Stamford Bridge after dedicating 32 years of his life to the west London club.

Whitley was born in Seacombe, Wirral, in 1878. A young goalkeeper, he played amateur football with Liscard YMCA before signing for Darwen 1899, a club then competing in the Second Division of the Football League.

Unfortunately, during the 1898/99 season Darwen won only two of their 34 matches and were relegated from the Football League. They lost 10-0 on three occasions, including once against Manchester City.

Having surrendered their league status, they also lost Whitley to Aston Villa for the princely sum of £50. After two seasons in the Midlands he moved back to Merseyside with Everton but acting as deputy to George Kitchen, the shot-stopper struggled to get many minutes on the pitch at Goodison Park.

He kept a clean sheet on his debut, though – a goalless draw away to Grimsby Town on Christmas Day 1902, alongside legends like Jack Sharp, Jimmy Settle and Walter Abbot.

Whitley made 11 appearances in 1902/03 and just three in the following season. His last game for Everton was in April 1904 when he kept a clean sheet in a 1-0 Goodison win against Manchester City.

A move to Stoke City in 1904 brought him regular first-team football before losing his place to the flamboyant Leigh Richmond Roose (who also had a spell at Everton). After Stoke, Whitley added the now-defunct Leeds City and Lincoln



Jack Whitley and, below, his grave funded by fans

City to his CV.

A career that seemed to be on a downward trajectory took an upward turn in 1907 when he moved south to join Chelsea, just two years after the club had been founded. He served the Pensioners with great distinction. He played 139 games in all competitions and friendlies and was then first-team trainer from 1914-1939. In 1929, at the age of 49, he was called back into action as an emergency keeper on the London club's tour of Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay.

Following Whitley's death in 1955, he was buried in an unmarked grave at Brompton Cemetery. Nearby plots include those of Chelsea founder Henry Augustus Mears. In 2017, the Chelsea Supporters' Trust



identified the grave and launched an appeal to fund the cost of a gravestone. The crowdfunding campaign, which Everton fans contributed to, raised £5,000 and the stone is a wonderful lasting tribute to Whitley.