

## The Everton Collection Talks



# St Domingo's and the birth of Everton Football Club

By **David Starsky** : 20/10/2009 :

## The Men behind OUR story

The second of Peter Lupson's 'Everlution Talks' at the Picton Library focused on the men behind the greatest story ever told. No not THAT one, although there is a Godly connection. This story involved the clergy and the characters who sowed the seeds from which our beloved club grew.

Despite this being a Talk about Everton, there was still a good smattering of Liverpool fans in the audience of 34 people, there were even some ex-St Domingo's players in attendance.

Peter began by explaining that in the late 1800s three Methodist chapels from the Methodist New Connexion branch decided, because of dwindling numbers, to merge into one, hence the foundation stone for St Domingo's was laid in Breckfield Road North on 12 September 1870.

Three names are synonymous with the roots of St Domingo's: Wade, Cuff and Ben Swift Chambers.

Both Henry Cuff and Joseph Wade were trustees of the new St Domingo's chapel, and both had sons who would become major influences on the early Everton Football Club.

Henry's son Will was to serve Everton with great distinction, and is the subject of one of Peter's Talks in December. While Joseph's son Alfred was one of the first known Everton players and later became a director of Everton.

The Reverend Ben Swift Chambers, who hailed from Stocksmoor near Huddersfield, took up his role as St Domingo's minister, aged 32, in 1877. And being an advocate of the 'Band of Hope Union', which sought to try and keep the young people on the straight and narrow and away from the demon drink, he started a cricket team. Why a cricket team? Well because football was very much a minority sport in these times and was a rough game played by numbers of up to 500 a side! – it was not until

Association Football rules came into being that the game began to resemble the matches we watch today.

Most of the cricket team was comprised of young men aged 15 to 22, and according to the 'muscular Christians' such as Ben, the characteristics of self control, courage, fair play and morals could be acquired through participation in sports.

It was this same gaggle of youngsters who, to keep fit for their cricket season were encouraged to play football during the winter, made up the first St Domingo's football team. No doubt that Reverend Edward Moseley from the Everton United Church Club team and a curate of St Saviours, was also instrumental in encouraging the budding football team.

Why St Domingo's? – well it was named after the two streets either side of the chapel - St Domingo Grove and St Domingo Vale – and both had derived their name from 'St Domingo House', a villa built on the brow of Everton hill. The villa was built from the spoils of a ship captured off the island of Santo Domingo (now the Dominican Republic). It has nothing to do with any sectarian rivalries.

The football team created a pitch on the South East corner of Stanley Park, where they began playing other church teams... and this was the way football sprang up on Merseyside.

The first recorded result, thanks to the *Liverpool Daily Courier*, was from 20 October 1879 (exactly 130 years to the day that I am penning this article).

### **St Domingo 1 - 0 Everton United Church Club**

The St Domingo shirt is believed to have been Blue and White stripes. But unfortunately, to date we have no information about the team line-up or the scorer, as football was not deemed important enough in these times to warrant the raft of stats that the cricket reports carried. *But if the information is out there I have no doubt that the **Everton Heritage Society** members will unearth it, in time.*

As St Domingo's became more adept at football they began attracting the better players from other church teams and eventually the majority of players were from teams other than St Domingo's. Certainly, Everton United Church Club and St Peters lost a number of players to St Domingo's. And as each player would still play wearing his old team's shirt one can only wonder what the predominant colour of St Domingo's became.

It was in November 1879 that a meeting was held in the Queens Head Hotel, Everton, where it was decided that the team name should reflect the district from where the players came from, rather than the chapel that no longer boasted the majority of players, and hence THE EVERTON FOOTBALL CLUB was born.

On 23 December 1879, Everton's first game was a resounding 6 - 0 victory over St Peter's. The return game against St Peter's was on 24 January 1880, Everton again triumphing, this time 4 - 0, and the first Everton line-up was recorded, in their 2-2-6 formation.

One player in this first known team line-up was Alfred Riley Wade. Alfred went on to serve the club as a director until 1936, overseeing two League Championships, and an FA Cup win. How proud he must have been to have seen the club he played for as a youngster conquer the English football world.

And later, in an act that is reminiscent of David France's modern day handing over of the club's history, Alfred Wade handed over to the club the trowel and mallet mementos that had been used by his father Joseph to lay the foundation stone of the St Domingo's chapel, as a reminder of Everton's background.

This trowel and mallet can be seen in the current exhibits in the Everton Collection at the library.

The links with St Domingo's remained strong even after the name change; other members of St Domingo's who played an important part in creating Everton include: Will Cuff (Mr Everton), and George Mahon (I have one in my pocket), whilst Everton's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary was held at St Domingo's chapel, and both Everton and Liverpool worshipped at the chapel on the original 'Football Sunday' for many decades.

Peter also explained how he and the Everton Heritage Society located and restored the grave of Ben Chambers in Shepley. The grave was re-dedicated on 2 July 2008, in an event that was attended by both Everton and Liverpool representatives, including Sir Philip Carter and Rick Parry.

This is a fitting tribute to the Reverend Ben who did so much to encourage the early footballers, and a great show of determination and tenacity from Peter Lupson to research and bring to life the intertwined history of Everton and St Domingo's.

For those with enquiring minds, talks of this nature throw up numerous questions... What was the first team line-up? What colour shirt was predominant in that first recorded game? etc, etc...

So I implore you to make the effort to attend Peter's Talks and ask questions, or Read more in Peter's books - *Thank God for Football* and *Across The Park*, or read Thomas Keats's book - *History of the Everton Football Club* (first published in 1929, but re-released in 1998 as a facsimile edition by Desert Island Books), or surf the Everton Collection website and see if you can unearth some interesting facts about Everton, Liverpool, or indeed any of the other early clubs, including Newton Heath. The website has apparently already exceeded a million hits, so it must have something to interest that many views.