Red Men

Liverpool Football Club – The Biography

John Williams

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About the Author

John Williams has been studying football as a sociologist for the past 30 years and is author of several books on Liverpool FC, including *Rafa*, *Into the Red*, *Kennedy's Way* and *The Miracle of Istanbul*.

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The first edition of this book took much longer to produce than I thought it would. I want to thank all those who had to wait so patiently for it to be born. I was also thrilled to receive such a positive reaction to the first edition from so many Liverpool supporters. The club's history clearly means as much to them as it does to me – as I knew, of course, it would. *Red Men* also brought me into contact with a number of relatives and supporters of ex-players who were obviously delighted to learn more about their friends and family members who had once played for Liverpool. I feel privileged to have had this direct connection with the club's past and to have stirred so many happy memories. Long may it continue.

In this new updated edition of *Red Men*, I am relieved to be able to record the departure from Anfield of Hicks and Gillett and the arrival of new American owners from the Fenway Sports Group, with promises of a much better future. We have cautious hopes that they will be responsible and caring patrons who understand exactly what this club means to those who follow Liverpool FC today and what it has meant to all who have cherished the club since 1892. I have also been able to comment, of course, on the return to Liverpool football club management in January 2011 of the extraordinary Kenny Dalglish. The Scot has been woven into the Anfield story for much of the last 30 years or more, so his reappearance in the Reds dugout at a spritely 60 years of age should have come as no surprise– or disappointment – to any Liverpudlian. As usual, the club owes Kenny a huge debt for serving its cause with such passion and dignity in difficult times. We can feel sure that Liverpool's latest reinvention as a football club will have the Dalglish stamp on it, no matter what its future course.

But many more thanks are also in order here. Much of the research for this text was undertaken by ploughing through the Liverpool press and connected sources, and my dedicated researcher David Gould did as much of this crucial spadework as anyone else. I want to thank him for his excellent job, and I hope that his beloved Stoke City continue to survive – and more – in the heady Premier League. We both want to thank the staff at the Liverpool Central Library for looking after us so well during our many visits there between 2006 and 2008. I must also thank my dear friend Cathy Long for letting me stay over in her flat in Liverpool when I most needed to. I could not have completed this work without my Liverpool base.

My friends and colleagues David Gould, Andrew Ward, Stephen Hopkins, Neil Carter, Viet-Hai Phung and Alec McAulay all read early versions of some of these chapters and offered many useful comments and scholarly support. Andrew Ward, especially, is a terrific writer and researcher as well as being a very good friend. Andrew helped me restructure chapters when I was in danger of losing my way. I also ‘entertained’ some of my fellow Liverpool supporters in the Flat Iron pub in Liverpool with ad hoc and often obscure stories taken from the text, and even the occasional historical football quiz about Liverpool FC. I thank them, as always, for their tolerance, humour and interest. They are the very best of knowledgeable Liverpool supporters. Adrian Killen gave me great advice on pictures and Liverpool FC’s past, and Ken Rogers at Trinity Mirror was kind enough, initially, to ask me to write this book and had faith in the project. When the book transferred to Mainstream Publishing, Bill Campbell and Graeme Blaikie performed heroics in keeping the whole thing on track. Stephen Done at the Liverpool FC museum read an early version of the text, and he offered many priceless correctives and pieces of sound guidance and advice. He also allowed me to look at the surviving official Liverpool FC minute books (1914–56),

for which I am eternally grateful. Eric Doig, a man who knows more than anyone alive about the facts and figures of Liverpool football club, gave me some of the benefits of his recent research on the club's history for amendments for this second edition. I am deeply grateful for his care and interest. I also owe a considerable debt of thanks to an overseas Red, Matthew Baker from the *Boston Magazine*, who provided plenty of vital background material on the club's new American owners just when I needed it.

At home, as I tried valiantly to pull all this material together, my partner Sylvia offered her usual love, patience and encouragement, and my precious toddler granddaughters, Millie and Sasha, kept me amused and full of energy when things started to flag. They were even joined later on in the piece by little Esmée. Despite her US heritage, Sasha will be well schooled by her mother in the Reds tradition, and at just three years of age Millie had learned whole sections of the Fernando Torres song and is now busy learning new material about Luis Suárez – though her sudden and strange obsession with sharks and other matters proved a distraction to her much more important Liverpool FC schooling. Her uncle Seb will help keep her focused on the main task.

I also want to say here that a number of sources, in particular, were completely invaluable as I tried to make sense of Liverpool FC's extraordinary history. Tony Matthews' *Who's Who of Liverpool* is an excellent and comprehensive starting point for pen pictures of Liverpool players, going right back to the earliest days of the club. All Liverpool fans should own a copy. As he will no doubt notice, I used his research so frequently I could not always attribute it, and I give my heartfelt thanks (and sheepish apologies) to him here. Likewise, Brian Pead's *Liverpool: A Complete Record 1892–1990* is a very useful guide to the club's early formations and playing records, and Eric Doig and Alex Murphy's *The Essential History of Liverpool* is indispensable

for its accuracy and detail. Vital too is the club website lfchistory.net for providing lots of crucial historical information about the club and its players.

The *Football League Players' Records 1888–1939* by Michael Joyce got me out of many tight spots in trying to establish the identities of early opponents of Liverpool football club and to track their careers, and Jack Rollin's *Rothman's Book of Football Records* did the same for crowd-data information and for relevant Football League tables. Simon Inglis's terrific account of the history of the Football League, *League Football and the Men Who Made It* was exceptionally useful for keeping me up to date with wider developments in the game as we lurched, uncertainly, towards the present. Finally, John Belchem's wonderful edited collection in celebration of the city of Liverpool, *Liverpool 800: Culture, Character and History*, gave me plenty to contemplate – and to rely upon – concerning history, culture and social change in the city. I hope I have done no gross disservice in the text to any of these indispensable works.

When I use a source directly and extensively, I have indicated this fact in the text, though I must reiterate I used the standard Liverpool FC reference books and sites rather more liberally than such formal referencing suggests. Finally, I have tried to report on events covered in this book quite critically, as a researcher, and not simply with a supporter's feverish eye: the reader will have to judge how well (or how badly) I have done in this respect. Needless to say, all the errors in the text – though only some of the insights – are mine and mine alone.

For the lost 135, Heysel and Hillsborough

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INTRODUCTION

For the year 2008, and despite its many doubters, the city of Liverpool was a spectacularly successful European Capital of Culture. This was a fitting reason, in itself, for the writing of a book during that halcyon period that celebrates the history and cultural significance of football and of Liverpool Football Club in the city. Without doubt, football is as much a feature of the cultural heritage and artistic landscape of the city of Liverpool as any theatre production, media installation or art exhibition.

As many people have noted, Liverpool is something of a city on the edge, both geographically and culturally. Despite its considerable Welsh and Scottish in-migrations, Liverpool has typically looked westwards, to Ireland and the United States, rather than back to Britain or southwards to Continental Europe, for its inspiration and for much of its cultural history. It has many of the independent and distinctive characteristics of a city on the margins, a place at the end of the line even. Rather like other great peripheral cities of Europe that have football at their cultural heart, such as Marseille and Naples, Liverpool has an uneasy and shifting relationship with its national host, often preferring to look inwards rather than to national forms of identification. In this sense, T-shirts that describe Liverpool football supporters in the city as ‘Scouse not English’ are making rather more than a joke.

Accordingly, the city of Liverpool has a highly idiosyncratic set of cultural reference points, whether they be the city’s Irish, Welsh or Scottish cultural influences; its old traveller stories and sea shanties; its bastardised versions of American jazz and soul music; the beat traditions of the Beatles and their many imitators; the deep creativity of the shoal of Liverpool poets and artists, past and present; or else the incredible native imagination of local football

supporters in their endless task of producing new songs and banners in praise of their heroes on and off the football pitch. Indeed, there can be few places in the world where complex football songs are created so prodigiously or sung with such gusto. And there is nowhere – anywhere – in the world where one minute these anthems are likely to be pumping out to the rhythms of rousing Irish Republican choruses and then, the next, being delivered to the strains of deeply Loyalist hymns or other melodies assiduously collected from around the globe. Football in Liverpool is, quite simply, a text constructed as much by the club's avid supporters as it is by its players, managers and even directors. It is much more important today than any religious or political divide, or indeed any other schism shaped by difference, fashion or creed. But it is also interesting to note, as I have frequently done in this text, that *playing* weekend football, in Liverpool's parks and public spaces, has often been opposed fiercely by local religious leaders and for much longer than was the case in many other major English cities.

There can be few places other than in Liverpool, too, where football has quite the specific cultural-political resonances that it has – and has had – in the city. As this book, I hope, shows, football on Merseyside has variously been a focus for civic rivalry and celebration, as in the early 1900s; a local bulwark against the effects of economic depression, as in the 1920s and 1930s, and in many periods that followed; a crucial site for the recovery of local pride and a sense of community, as in the post-war reconstruction period of the 1940s and 1950s; part of a celebration of the youthful energy and the brief creative world dominance of popular culture on Merseyside in the 1960s; a potential escape, abroad, from the privations of central government meddling and cruelty and a focus for mutual community support, as in the successful and tragic 1980s; and a site for global fusion, as it increasingly seems to be in the 2000s.

But football is also important in Liverpool – perhaps most important of all – in its own terms: as an individual and collective physical performance and a local class and masculinity rite. In this last respect, I have tried to chart the near constant struggle of women in the city to play and watch the game, often against the fiercest male opposition. This fight, thankfully, is still being waged, though it is far from won. Football in England offers a very specific, but also a highly complex, range of traditional working-class aesthetic archetypes – the brave and rugged defender; the powerful and constructive midfielder; the creative and elegant winger; the cool and nerveless striker – in addition to a set of collective and individual cultural practices that many men – and increasingly women – in the city of Liverpool continue to identify with very strongly. As the author Arthur Hopcraft points out in his brilliant 1968 book on the game, *The Football Man*, football in cities such as Liverpool is not just a sport people take to, like cricket or tennis – it has both conflict and beauty and is inherent in the people. Football is something that is built into the urban psyche, and in Liverpool it really *matters* to the people who live there. It does so as poetry or fine art matters for some people and alcohol does to others. A *combined* love of alcohol and football as occurs in Liverpool and similar cities, it goes without saying, is an especially potent mix.

There are certainly few more informed, animated, articulate and passionate forums in the city than at the tables and bars in north Liverpool pubs as kick-off approaches at Anfield. The same has been true for more than 100 years and will doubtless continue to be the case for decades to come. And this huge passion remains despite the awful disasters that beset football in the 1980s, in which Liverpool Football Club and its fans played no small role as both perpetrators and victims. It has also survived the recent hyper-commercialisation of the game and its movement – because of price and restricted access to

tickets – out of the reach of many of those local people who used regularly to attend football. Instead, Liverpool supporters now travel to the city from far and wide – I was born and raised in the nearby borough of Bootle but now drive in from the East Midlands for home games – and new groups of supporters including British Asians and Continental Liverpool followers now find their places on the Kop, as well as on websites and in Internet chat rooms. This is while bars and pubs in and around Liverpool are packed on Saturday and Sunday afternoons to watch the local football clubs play live on television. This new media consumption of top-level football in cities such as Liverpool often occurs via jerky TV 'feeds' usually illegally procured from mysterious countries from around the globe. It is all part of the contradictory new globalisation and democratisation of football support, in an era when the price of a seat for a top-level game in England is now forbidding for many supporters.

Nor is football an arena today simply for the celebration of *local* talent – as if this was ever the case. In the first Liverpool v. Everton Football League derby match, way back in 1894, the Liverpool side was packed with alien Scots, and the local press in the city was full of complaints about the lack of opportunity for young men from the area to play for the top Merseyside clubs. Very few would make it into the Liverpool team before the First World War. Not much has changed in over a century, except that the clubs' players are now drawn in not just from over the border but from around the world, and that top-level footballers today can earn more in a *week* than many people would take five years, or more, to accumulate. Gone are the pre-celebrity football days when Liverpool players walked to the ground with the crowds that worshipped them. Or – as the great Billy Liddell did in the 1950s – they caught the tram to Anfield to undertake their (part-time) jobs as football professionals for Liverpool. Football today has its transient

mercenaries, of course. But, we might also ask, are some of today's football millionaires – Jamie Carragher, for one – or even the recent international Liverpool heroes – Germany's Didi Hamann or Finland's Sami Hyypiä, for example – *really* any less 'of' the city of Liverpool, or less typical of its football traditions and dedication, than earlier Reds heroes who may have been more local and earned peanuts by comparison? I wonder.

This book deals in some detail with periods when ordinary professional footballers were not especially high earners, nor nationally known. I am especially interested here in the span of almost 90 years from the late 1870s, when football began to emerge on Merseyside from diverse political roots, up to 1965 when Liverpool Football Club under Bill Shankly finally managed to win the FA Cup for the first time. This long period takes up much of the first part of the main text, and here I introduce readers to great names in the club's past, such as its first successful manager Tom Watson, the wonderful all-rounder Alex Raisbeck, and the totemic Reds goalkeeper for three decades Elisha Scott. I also explore great Liverpool sides of the past, such as the 1901 and 1906 championship teams and the Liverpool squad containing Scott that won back-to-back league titles in 1922 and 1923. But the FA Cup had certainly been Liverpool Football Club's central concern almost since the club was formed in 1892, and this was especially the case after the first Liverpool Football League championship was won near the beginning of the twentieth century.

From that point on, the FA Cup was the holy grail, *the* prime target for the Anfield board and probably for most of the club's players and supporters. Liverpool had actually come much closer to succeeding in this grand quest, at various moments, than its two losing FA Cup finals before 1965 (1914 and 1950) might suggest. But finally winning the FA Cup in 1965 seemed like something of the end of a journey, a 'natural' point of closure to the early part of the

story of Liverpool FC and the people who made it. The long period before 1965 – lengthy stretches of aspiration and hope, flecked by occasional moments of real success – is much less well known to most of the club's followers, for obvious reasons. After 1965, the footballing landscape of Europe opened up to Liverpool and set quite a different set of challenges.

I also cover, of course, the great years of Shankly and Paisley, and these will be quite well known to most Liverpool supporters. There is a fixation with managers at Liverpool that it is difficult to trace anywhere else in England. I deal with the main reasons for the decline of the club after the end of the boot-room era and with the terrible disasters at both Heysel (1985) and Hillsborough (1989) that played a major part in shaping that decline and the recent supporter traditions around the club. I discuss the successes and problems of the new Continental influences at Liverpool in recent years and try to bring the Anfield story right up to date in the closing chapters, and especially in the epilogue, by looking at aspects of the new ownership arrangements at Liverpool. Throughout the text, I have tried to provide some wider cultural and economic context for football in the city by offering brief descriptions of events and debates that were going on in and around the city at the time. This is in order better to locate developments at Liverpool Football Club in both time and space. This seems to me what a real football club history that dwells on the sport's local cultural significance should try to do.

I also try, wherever possible, to draw on the contemporaneous voices of football supporters and other people in Liverpool, admittedly taken mainly from the letters pages of the local press. This, I think, adds more cogency to the story and tells us something about how people saw relations with the club and football in the city at that time. I do, necessarily, begin my account of the history of Liverpool FC, briefly, with a discussion of the early years of *Everton*

Football Club, especially when the Blues played at Anfield. This is done in order to cover the origins of association football itself, and to try to tell the reader something about how and why organised football overtook rugby in the city of Liverpool in the late nineteenth century. I also describe here, of course, how Liverpool Football Club emerged following the famous split from Everton in 1892, and how the emerging character of the two clubs has developed and differed ever since.

Towards the very end of the book, I say something about the possibilities of choosing a ‘best-ever’ Liverpool side. In many ways, this is a rather fatuous task, for obvious reasons, but it is also a very entertaining and diverting one. I have spent many happy hours in Liverpool pubs and elsewhere doing just this kind of thing, and I would guess many other readers have done the same. Most of us are constrained in this task to choosing players we have seen live or glimpsed on television. Arguments will continue to rage on this score, and rightly so. Limits of space have meant that I have said very little in support of my own choices, but I think the main text does this for me. What I try to do in this final section is to show just how limiting most discussions currently are about the ‘greatest-ever’ Liverpool team. This is simply because they tend to ignore the first 70 years, or so, of the club’s history.

My selections consciously try to counter that tendency, and they are aimed at getting the reader at least to think about earlier periods in the history of the club. A number of my own selections come from the era before Bill Shankly produced his first great Liverpool side in the early 1960s and before Bob Paisley produced a team to dominate the game from the mid-1970s. This may surprise and even appal some readers, but there are players from earlier periods who also have their claims to be considered among the club’s greatest-ever servants. I hope this book convinces on this matter. It should go at least some way to

explaining why clearly exceptional Liverpool players of more recent eras, such as Ian St John, Ray Clemence, Phil Neal, Kevin Keegan, John Barnes, Graeme Souness, Ian Rush and also many other past and recent stars, have not made it into my own all-time ‘best’ Liverpool XI. Readers will have to make up their own minds on this and on many other issues I try to cover. At least we can all agree that the story of Liverpool Football Club – and of football in the city of Liverpool – has been a joyous and remarkable one, if one also characterised by vital moments of real human drama and occasional terrible loss. This is, of course, what makes the modern Liverpool Football Club precisely what it is. Come on, you Red Men!

John Williams

1

FOOTBALL IN LIVERPOOL
From the Very Beginning

STIRRINGS DOWN SOUTH

Despite what many Scousers and other Liverpool fans might like to think, association football didn't actually originate in Liverpool at all. In fact, the first of a series of meetings about establishing football as the national game took place in the Freemason's Tavern in Great Queen Street, London, on 26 October 1863. A group of ex-public schoolboys were trying to agree on a common set of laws for football by setting up the Football Association (FA). The meeting barely raised a murmur in the great Victorian city of Liverpool. It was certainly not reported in the local press. Why should it be? Here, after all, was a small group of southern-based toffs mulling over ideas originally coined by Cambridge University graduates. They wanted a common set of laws for a ball game – association football – to be played in Harrow, Eton and a selection of England's elite public schools. Why on earth should this little sporting cabal register even a blip of interest in the resplendent, prosperous great working port of Liverpool of the north?

Folk versions of something called 'football' had existed for centuries in England, of course. Rivers, streams and other local landmarks mapped out the playing areas. Essentially, these were brutal, public-holiday free-for-alls for local young bucks – a sort of legitimised mass brawl over possession of a ball or keg. Occasionally, they ended fatally for some of

those involved. Lancashire was a special site for sporting matches organised by pub landlords for gambling purposes. The city of Liverpool was dominated by a slightly milder version of this anarchic ritual that came codified from the English public schools. In fact, the first recorded non-school football match played under Rugby School rules in the north of England took place at the Edge Hill cricket ground, Liverpool, in 1857. It was played between men from Liverpool and Manchester but was described extravagantly as a fixture that pitched 'Rugby School' against 'the World'. Fifty players were involved, most of them ex-Rugby public schoolboys and sons of Liverpool's merchant class. Signs of what would become the association game there were none. Although early versions of 'football' often meant a mixing and matching of handling and kicking, rugby was king in mid-nineteenth-century Liverpool. The Liverpool Rugby Union Club was founded in 1862, and rugby in the city seemed just as its elite supporters wanted it to be: upper or middle class in personnel, and violent and uncompromising in play. Manchester opponents (always keen rivals for Liverpudlians, even then) commented a few years later, after a trip to the city to play rugby football, that, 'Anyone who played in the match at Queen's Park [Liverpool] in or about 1865 would remember it, as we were overmatched and roughly handled. Some of us had to be helped out of the railway carriage on arrival at Manchester Victoria station.'[1] Great stuff.

The association men at the FA did seem to have a rather more democratic view than their rugby opponents about the possibilities of spreading a new common football code *downwards* among working people in cities such as Liverpool, as well as to the new urban middle classes. This would only be possible, of course, as long as football could be stripped of some of the violent excesses of the past. They were determined to get their way, even fiddling the votes at early meetings in order to keep their vision on

track.[2] With a little more diplomacy or tact, the FA might have successfully compromised with its opponents by agreeing to establish *two* football codes: one for association football and the other for rugby football. This strategy would have boosted FA membership and increased its early national importance. Instead, the hackers and handlers would eventually set up their own rival body, outside the FA. Nor did the FA men do much even to try to *explain* or spread their modest new football laws. In any case, people in the city of Liverpool seemed largely disinterested in them. Elsewhere, the new laws served to confuse early FA members and other football clubs rather than offer any real clarity. In fact, many existing football clubs chose to adopt *some* aspects of the FA laws and to reject others, thus producing a bewildering series of hybrid football codes.[3] It looked as if this obscure new southern sporting body – and its fancy new association-football code – was actually going nowhere fast.

In 1871, the embryonic world of football was turned on its head. The Rugby Football Union was formed, and, partly as a response, the FA launched the world's first national sporting knockout competition: the FA Cup was born. Two thousand fans, drawn mainly from the London social elites, watched the first FA Cup final at the Kennington Oval in 1872. A team of ex-public schoolboys from Wanderers defeated ex-public schoolboys representing Royal Engineers, 1–0. Predictably, there were no reports of this historic southern encounter in the Liverpool press. But by the late 1870s the first real *northern* working-class football hero, Fergus Suter, a Scottish stonemason, had already emerged – not in Liverpool but in East Lancashire. Football in this part of the north seemed to be a continuation of local traditions rather than something especially encouraged by the public schools or the FA.

As football was being dragged kicking and screaming into the mainstream of English public life, the great seaport of

Liverpool remained resolutely a cricket and rugby city. In Yorkshire, and in some parts of Lancashire, cup competitions for largely working-class northern rugby were established in the late 1870s. But the controlling elitist ex-public school rugby clubs in the great cities of Liverpool and Manchester refused, point blank, to play any competitive cup rugby football. Their argument was that ‘gentlemen’ should play only friendly sporting fixtures, ‘for the good of the game’. More importantly, these social elites feared being drawn to play against their social inferiors in a cup competition. They might even come across veiled professionals. This kind of social superiority (or rank snobbery, if you like) provided just the sort of social and cultural sporting vacuum that association football would eventually rush to fill in Liverpool. Over the next decade or so, ordinary working-class people in the north and Midlands increasingly began to link up with social reformers, employers and middle-class patrons to form association football clubs in and around cities such as Sheffield, Birmingham and Nottingham.

LEFT BEHIND LIVERPOOL

But why was association football for working people in the 1870s already well established in places such as East Lancashire, South Yorkshire and the Midlands, but not so at all in Liverpool? By 1880, for example, the local press in Birmingham was reporting on eight hundred and eleven local football contests while the Liverpool press could find only two on Merseyside. For one thing, the Liverpool area lacked the folk forms of football that had been common in East Lancashire and around Sheffield. For another, the incredible economic and cultural span between Liverpool’s elite rich, its ranks of clerks in the middle and the squalid, urban poor at the bottom meant that there was much less of the sort of social mixing and paternalism that was now

common in other British cities. There were plenty of returning ex-Harrow public schoolboys living in Liverpool who might have been expected to spread association football. But because of the stark divisions between rich and poor in the city, sport could not be so easily passed down from local social elites, as had happened elsewhere. And, in any case, the poor in Liverpool's docklands had neither the space nor the good health to play sport.[4]

In the 1860s and early 1870s, northern and Midlands association football clubs had been made up mainly of players from the upper and middle classes. Then, from the middle of the 1870s, as the sport mushroomed from the bottom up, new football clubs began to develop for working people out of existing institutions, such as cricket clubs and churches. New football clubs were often inspired by the Victorian doctrine of 'Muscular Christianity', a form of community engineering from above aimed at combining the restraint and sobriety of Methodism with the obvious benefits of physical activity and healthy competition for working people. Football was seen by liberal elites as an improving form of 'moral cleansing' for the urban poor. It might even help 'save' the souls of the working class, people who could otherwise be easily tempted by the connected evils of fecklessness, crime, drinking and gambling.

Some of her critics – and even her friends – might well have argued that the Liverpool of the 1870s and 1880s was in urgent need of a good dose of moral cleansing. This heaving and turbulent nineteenth-century English seaport probably seemed a rather odd place compared to the average English provincial town of the time. But it fitted perfectly well with the outlook in transient Continental seaports such as Hamburg and Marseille, or great cities across the Atlantic. An American visitor of the time thought Liverpool to be a modern marvel, 'the Chicago of England', and the *London Illustrated News* on 15 May 1886 described

it as ‘the New York of Europe, a world city rather than merely British provincial’. Many of Liverpool’s Victorian residents were moulded, for good or ill, by this same sense of being cosmopolitans, authentic citizens of the world.[5]

Liverpool’s selective affluence, its nod to cosmopolitanism and its flamboyant identity as a thriving global port was also reflected in the conviviality and sheer liveliness of the city centre – and in the fact that by 1874 there was a grand total of 2,585 places in the city from which beer and spirits were sold. But this largesse also meant that public drunkenness – especially among Merseyside street children, criminals and the poor – was a regular local focus for moral concern and regulation among those who were occasionally forced into rubbing shoulders with the lower orders. This included the city’s civic leaders and members of the press. Liverpool’s wonderful municipal Victorian finery, its extensive programme of public lectures, an impulse for self improvement and its sheer commercial dynamism stood cheek by jowl with incredible levels of desperation and deprivation. One overseas visitor to the city remarked that he had seen such vast wealth and poverty in other cities but ‘never before had I seen the two so jammed together’.[6]

Among the worst affected by poverty and poor health was Liverpool’s Irish community, especially Catholic families who were originally from the south and west of Ireland and who were part of the group of 580,000 Irish who passed through the port at the height of the great potato famine in 1846 and 1847. Many of the Irish who then settled in Liverpool drew attention to themselves in the northern end of the city mainly through their sheer numbers and levels of unemployment and poverty, and the diseases they suffered, caused by malnutrition and overcrowded and unsanitary housing conditions. With one of the highest mortality rates in Britain, Liverpool in the mid-nineteenth century was publicly labelled as ‘the Black Spot on the Mersey’.[7] Amidst the deprivation, squalor and filth, idle hands inevitably

turned to gangs, violence and crime. The so-called ‘cornermen’ who stood outside Liverpool pubs or on street corners demanding money for beer from passers-by became notorious. Public panics about the alleged existence of organised criminal gangs in the city, including the ‘High Rip Gang’, the ‘Bridge Boys’ and the ‘Canal Bankers’, all contributed, periodically, in the wider public’s mind to a sense that Victorian Liverpool was a violent, chaotic and potentially lawless place. The city of Liverpool was now already established as a place of extremes: it hosted high culture and global commerce but also crime and destitution in an uneasy and often seemingly unequal balance. It was a stigma that would prove difficult to shift.

As well as divisions of poverty and ill health, the peculiar occupational structure of Liverpool also held back the spread of football on Merseyside. It was shaped by the port and its processing industries, and it meant that it was much more difficult for the vast majority of working people in the city to find free time for playing and supporting *any* sport. The Liverpool workforce had to lobby long and persistently for change in this area, with even most skilled workers in the city being unable to attain a shorter working week until as late as 1872. By contrast, beginning with the Ten Hours Act of 1847, East Lancashire textile workers had been granted a two o’clock end to work on Saturdays by 1850, reduced to one o’clock in 1874. The Ten Hours Act meant that cotton spinners now worked 55 hours rather than 70 hours, and for these workers ‘it became a practice, mostly on Saturdays, to play football and cricket, which had never been done before’.[8] Most men in Birmingham did not have to work Saturday afternoons from the 1870s.

By contrast, because of the casual nature of their employment practices and the lack of care shown by dock employers for their workers, the mass of Liverpool’s dockworkers had much less power to bargain with their bosses, and they would only gain Saturday afternoons off

from work in April 1890 – fully two years *after* the formation of the Football League.[9] Conditions for working people in Liverpool lagged behind as the profits poured into the city coffers.

TURNING RUGBY MEN TO FOOTBALL

Another reason for the late uptake of football in Liverpool was probably the fact that rugby remained such a powerful force in the city and that it continued to be so jealously guarded by its local social elites. But things were changing fast, and not just on Merseyside. With the establishment of the Lancashire FA Cup and other local football competitions from 1879 onwards, and especially after the national FA Cup successes of the working-class clubs of Blackburn in the late 1870s and early 1880s, previously exclusively rugby-playing areas of the north-west of England were now rapidly converting, en masse, to football. Preston and Burnley – later, founder members of the Football League – were originally staunch rugby towns, but by the early 1880s both had become football strongholds. Previously high-profile supporters of the rugby code, including the great Fergus Suter himself, by now had turned from rugby to association football.[10] The spread of football in what were previously rugby havens was like a bush fire. Local football derbies between Liverpool's emerging association clubs, such as Everton FC and Bootle FC, now began to be reported on at some length by the Liverpool press. By 1882, exhibition football matches were being staged on Stanley Park, featuring teams selected by top local footballers – one match attracted one thousand four hundred fans. By 1883, the *Liverpool Daily Post* was routinely carrying results of the national FA Cup ties, and it even ran an account of an FA meeting in London on law changes for the association game.

How times had changed. Finally, football was stirring on Merseyside.

As the association game began to challenge rugby's dominance in the parks and in the sporting press on Merseyside, another man to turn away from rugby in order to champion football was to play a crucial role in developing football in the city. Irishman and future Everton FC, Liverpool FC and Football League stalwart 'Honest' John McKenna would help shape the modern game, but his conversion from rugby was also a vital moment in the history of Liverpool Football Club. John McKenna had arrived in the city in 1854 as part of the great Irish diaspora that flooded into the sprawling mix of chaos and opportunity that was mid-nineteenth-century Liverpool. At the age of 17, McKenna had become a grocer's boy and then a vaccination officer before later becoming a sergeant major in the Lancashire Artillery military regiment. A keen rugby man when the sport was still dominant in Liverpool, this 'man of action' McKenna was eventually dismayed by rugby's avowed elitism and violence. But he was immediately impressed by the sheer competitiveness and the spectator potential of the new football cup competitions that were sweeping the north-west of England in the late 1870s. Football, with its simplicity, more civilised laws, its mixed constituents and its wider social appeal, certainly chimed well with McKenna's keen entrepreneurial instincts. He noticed that in 1880 an East Lancashire football derby between Blackburn Rovers and Darwen was already attracting an extraordinary 10,000 spectators, many of them cotton workers. He reasoned that there was money to be made by smart businessmen in association football on Merseyside.

But football was much more than a commercial proposition for McKenna. He had his values – he worked with the poor and destitute for the West Derby Union and he deplored gambling – and he was also openly envious of the way the national football cup successes of the clubs of East

Lancashire, Blackburn Olympic and Rovers, drew great publicity and brass-band welcome-home parties in these small towns for winning the southerners' FA Cup. He now desperately wanted to bring this sort of national sporting triumph to his adopted city of Liverpool. He would not have to wait too long. After a late start, by the early 1880s Liverpool had a stock of new association clubs, including Everton, Stanley Park, the ex-public school Liverpool Ramblers, Bootle FC, Druids, Bootle Wanderers, Anfield, Tranmere, Toxteth Wanderers, St Peters and Liverpool Linden. More were forming all the time. McKenna would throw his lot in with the rising Everton club and its charismatic president, 'King' John Houlding. By 1886, the new Liverpool Cup competition could attract 20 clubs from inside the city in its inaugural season. Within one extraordinary decade, between 1878 and the launch of the Football League in 1888, the city of Liverpool would move from having no association football at all to attracting the largest crowds to football matches anywhere in the world.

THE MYSTERIOUS BIRTH OF EVERTON FC AND THE COURT OF KING JOHN

In this place of extreme contrasts, boasting both plenty and abject poverty, local association clubs now rapidly started to form on Merseyside. Everton FC was established in a slightly more affluent area of the north end of Liverpool after a meeting in the Queen's Head Hotel in November 1879. The Anglican Everton United Church Football Club had been set up earlier that year by a group of curates from St John's College in Cambridge University led by the 25-year-old Reverend Alfred Keely. Keely had been spreading the virtues of Muscular Christianity via football in both Bootle and Liverpool. St Saviour's Church had provided the core of the United team, Methodism its values.

The exact origins of Everton FC remain contentious. The club is popularly believed to have grown out of a club at the St Domingo's New Connexion Methodist Chapel, which was supposedly formed in 1878 and which initially played cricket. The Reverend Ben Swift Chambers, a Yorkshire Methodist, is thought to have coaxed young men into playing football for St Domingo's. Leading early Everton committee members George Mahon and Will Cuff were prominent New Connexion Methodists. But one recent historian can find no trace of the St Domingo's Football Club, suggesting that the St Domingo's football team might have been a clever fiction invented later by Everton's directors in order to undermine the early role played at Everton by local brewer and Liverpool FC founder John Houlding.[11] But there is at least one reference in the *Liverpool Courier*, on 20 October 1879, to St Domingo's actually playing an association fixture against the Everton Church Club on Stanley Park. This was just before Everton FC was formed.[12] John Houlding, a prominent local Conservative politician and Orangeman, had been on the lay vestry at St Saviour's, and, through Everton United, he could have been involved in the early days of Everton FC before 1881, by which time he had become the club's first president. Houlding, no doubt, already had plans to exploit his links with the new football club for commercial and political gain, aspirations which were very out of tune with the ideals of both Cambridge curates and Merseyside Methodists.

Clerks dominated these early Merseyside sports clubs – Liverpool was a financial hub so was full of them – and by 1881 Everton FC had regular fixtures against local clubs and teams from nearby Lancashire and Cheshire, as well as matches with clubs from Manchester. In September 1882, the *Liverpool Courier* was already suggesting that football was overtaking rugby in Liverpool in terms of its popularity, and it was now seen as an entertainment by fans and