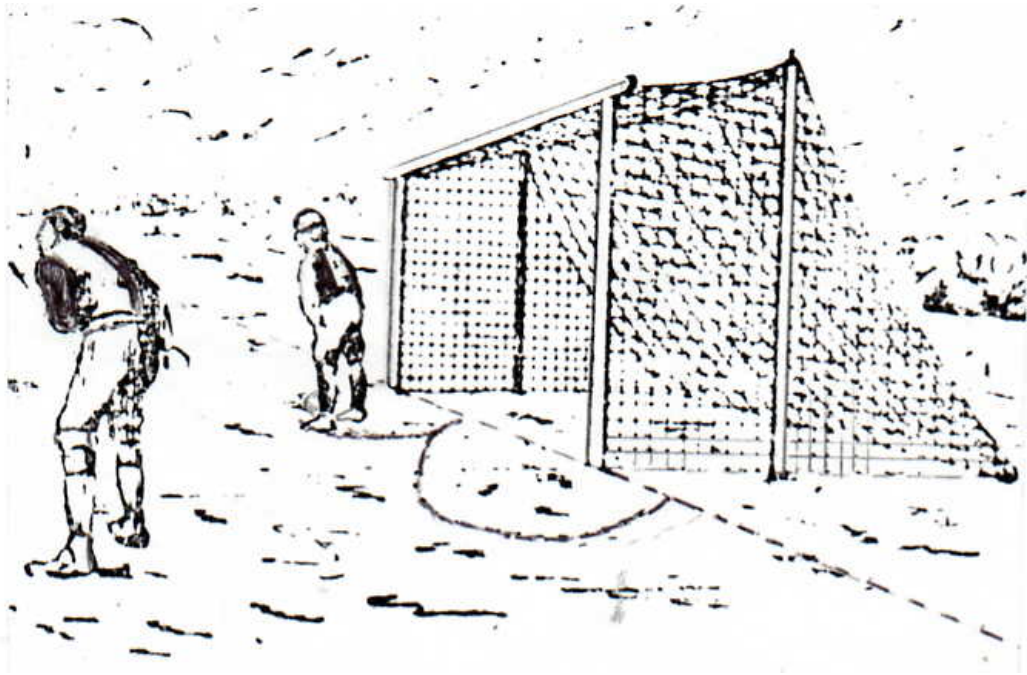


# The Ramblers of Liverpool.



LRAFC



**The history of the oldest Amateur  
Soccer Club on Merseyside.**

**Tony Onslow.**

## Part One.

### The Birth of Liverpool Ramblers AFC.

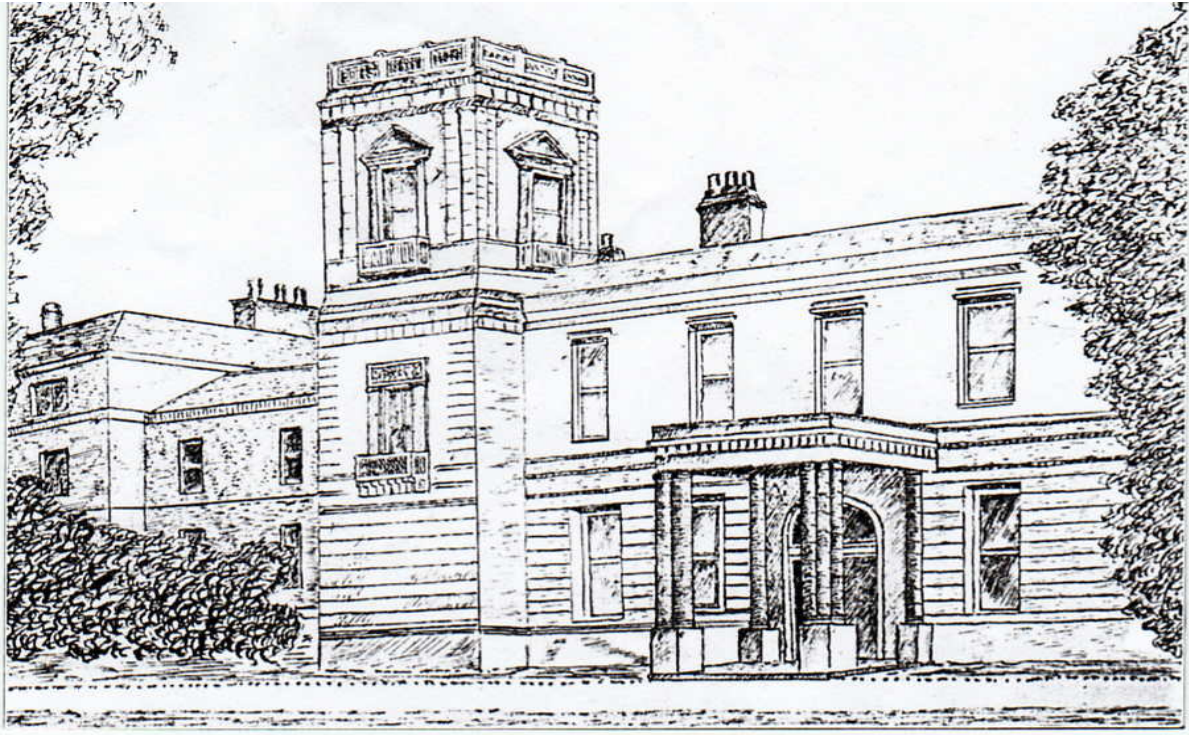
The local public school players, during the next twelve months, slowly gathered their numbers together and began to play soccer. The old boys of Eton and Harrow, by far the most numerous amongst them, were soon in the news. The following report, dated 14<sup>th</sup> January 1882, appeared in a publication called "The Field". It was a national newspaper aimed at the sporting Gentleman of the day and it was published once a week.

#### ETON v HARROW, (LIVERPOOL).

*A match was played on Saturday under Association rules at Allerton Towers near Liverpool, between teams of past and present members of these schools. The weather fortunately proved fine, and the advantage of the fall of the ground was more than balanced by a strong breeze blowing up the hill. At first the game was very even, Harrow having the wind with them, and both goal s were several times threatened before, by a good pass from a half back, E Baxter managed to score for Eton. Which performance his brother repeated shortly before the ends were changed. After half time, with the wind at their backs, Eton kept the ball chiefly in their opponents ground, but the Harrovians showed better form than the first, and there were several good corners kicks were made. Eton, only succeeding in adding one goal to their total, winnings, when time was called, by 3 goals to 0. For the winners the brothers Baxter, Earle and J Gladstone were conspicuous, while for Harrow F Bateson, and H Stewart Brown did their best to avoid defeat.*

Eton : E V Rayner (goal), J S Gladstone and R Bickersteth, AS Gladstone and R Pilkington, E Baxter, H A Greaves, W E Earle, E Bateson O Rayner and J Baxter

Harrow: E Crossley (goal) Brockenhurst and J F Bateson, E Stewart-Brown and Alexander, H Rawcliffe, H Bushell, R Brockenhurst, Stewart-Brown and P Bateson.



Allerton Tower

It is likely that this first reported game took place during a time when the younger players, who were still attending college, were to be at home with their families during the Christmas holiday. What is known for certain is that the venue, Allerton Towers, was, at the time, the home of wealthy local businessman named Sir Thomas Earle. His son William Edward Earle, born 1865, is listed amongst the players on the Eton team. Also on the field was Percy Bateson.

The son of a local cotton broker, Percy was born in 1865. He was a far sighted individual whose vision was to have a great bearing on the development of the association game in his native Liverpool. He had attended Harrow school before going on to complete his education at Edinburgh University where he became conversant with the rules of association football. He later, on completing his studies, returned to his home at Little Woolton and took up a position in the family business. Percy, back amongst own his people, continued to pursue an active sporting life and, along with E & J Baxter and G W Turner, he was soon to turn out in the colours of Bootle AFC.

The match, against Everton, was played before a crowd of five hundred people on the new Bootle ground at Marsh Lane. The fixture was an innovation and gave the public school players of Liverpool, a brief glimpse of how the game would be played in the future. Everton, to aid their development, were importing experienced players from Scotland. Nevertheless E Baxter, when play got under way, gave Bootle an early lead. The rest of the game however, was dominated by Jack McGill. The Scotsman, who was signed from Glasgow Rangers, gave a great solo display He scored twice in each half as Everton ran out winners by 4 goals to 1. Percy Bateson, by means of a dispatch, now called all public school players, who were, at he

time, resident in the Merseyside area to a meeting that was to be held in Liverpool. This letter, which may be seen to-day in the clubhouse, was worded as follows. ... *“ It is felt that want has been growing for some time for a first class Association Football in Liverpool. With this object in view a Committee has been formed and intending members are requested to send their names to any one of the committee, as soon as possible. A meeting of the Committee will be held on Friday 24<sup>th</sup> February. A general meeting will then be held of all the members at which election of officers, selection of ground and other preliminaries will be proceeded with. The club will not begin actively until next season but it is thought advisable to procure the names of members now in order to make the arrangements quite complete so that there will be no hitch when the season commences. Your assistance & co-operation are earnestly solicited.*

Percy Bateson, who was voted in as club secretary, convened a meeting at the offices of his father, Messrs James Bateson, Sons & Co, at Old Hall Street in Liverpool. Present were many of the prominent families from amongst the commercial gentlemen of Liverpool. They included: E. Baxter, W. E. Earle, A.B.Hull, R. V. Pilkington, E. V. Rayner, and G. W. Turner. The club officers were elected as follows: President, Sir Thomas Earle, Bart : Vice-Presidents, J. Bateson, S. H. Brown, H.H. Hornby, J. E. Moss, E. V. Rayner and W. Pilkington. E Baxter was elected as club captain and served on the committee along with : F. Bushall, W. E. Earle, J. Heald, A. B. Hull, and R. V. Pilkington. Mr E. V. Rayner, it was also decided, would fill the position of club Treasurer.

It would appear that former pupils of Eton College influenced the decision when the club colours were finally chosen. It was decided, presumably as several members already possessed such an outfit, that the team would play in Orange and Dark Blue quartered shirts. These were, at the time, the uniform of one of the houses at Eton College. The Eton lobby may also have proved decisive in the decision to add a suffix to the name their native town. Eton Ramblers, as it is to-day, was the name used by the Old Etonian cricket players. Liverpool Ramblers AFC were now ready to take on the leading clubs in the land. It was however, a land where the old order was beginning to crumble.

Blackburn Rovers had, that very year, become the first team from the north of England to reach the FA Cup final. The trophy had, until then, been considered the sole property of the gentleman amateur's players from the South. The Old Etonians, in one last gesture of defiance, had beaten the aspirants 1-0 to lift the trophy at Kennington Oval. Liverpool, unlike many other towns, had yet to place a team in the competition. Percy Bateson, in order to remedy the matter, registered Liverpool Ramblers with the FA and entered his side for the tournament. He also registered his team with Lancashire FA thus making them eligible to enter the county knock out competition. Ramblers, in order to fulfil these fixtures, now had to find a suitable ground.

Percy, ever alert, had taken note of the new pavilion, belonging Liverpool Cricket Club that was rapidly taking shape on Aigburth Road. He approached the owners and requested permission for Ramblers to play their home matches on the cricket field. The cricket committee, with some reluctance, refused the request. They were, at the time, having problems with the newly laid playing surface that was taking its time to bed down. A solution however, lay close at hand.

Percy Bateson now approached the management of the Aigburth Hotel. The hostelry, which lay adjacent to the cricket ground, had, at its disposal, a large field that could be utilized for recreational purposes. The meadow, which lay behind the Inn, was formerly part of the nearby Aigburth Hall estate. It was ideal for football and could be easily reached, by train, from the centre of Liverpool. Percy Bateson now began to re-think his strategy. He once again approached the cricket committee who agreed, for a nominal fee, to allow the football players to use the club pavilion in which to change. Liverpool Ramblers had found their first home.

*It was decided that Football should not  
be allow<sup>ed</sup> on the ground during the coming  
winter and the Secretary was instructed to write  
to the <sup>Liverpool</sup> "Ramblers F.A.C." & the "L'pool Football Club"  
informing them of the decision of the Committee -*

An entry in the minutes of Liverpool Cricket Club.



The Aigburth Hotel.

Percy Bateson, by good fortune, choose the perfect moment in which to integrate his Liverpool Ramblers in to the Merseyside football scene. The local soccer clubs, around ten in number, were, at the time, attempting to form their own football association similar to the ones already in existence at Sheffield and Birmingham. The first meeting, which took place at the Tarleton Hotel, Liverpool, was well attended and proved a great success. Liverpool Ramblers , although not represented on the night, became one of the founder members of the Liverpool & District Football Association. They were also included in the draw for a new knock out competition, The Liverpool Cup. (To-day, along with Everton, Liverpool Ramblers are the only consistent survivors from the original members.)

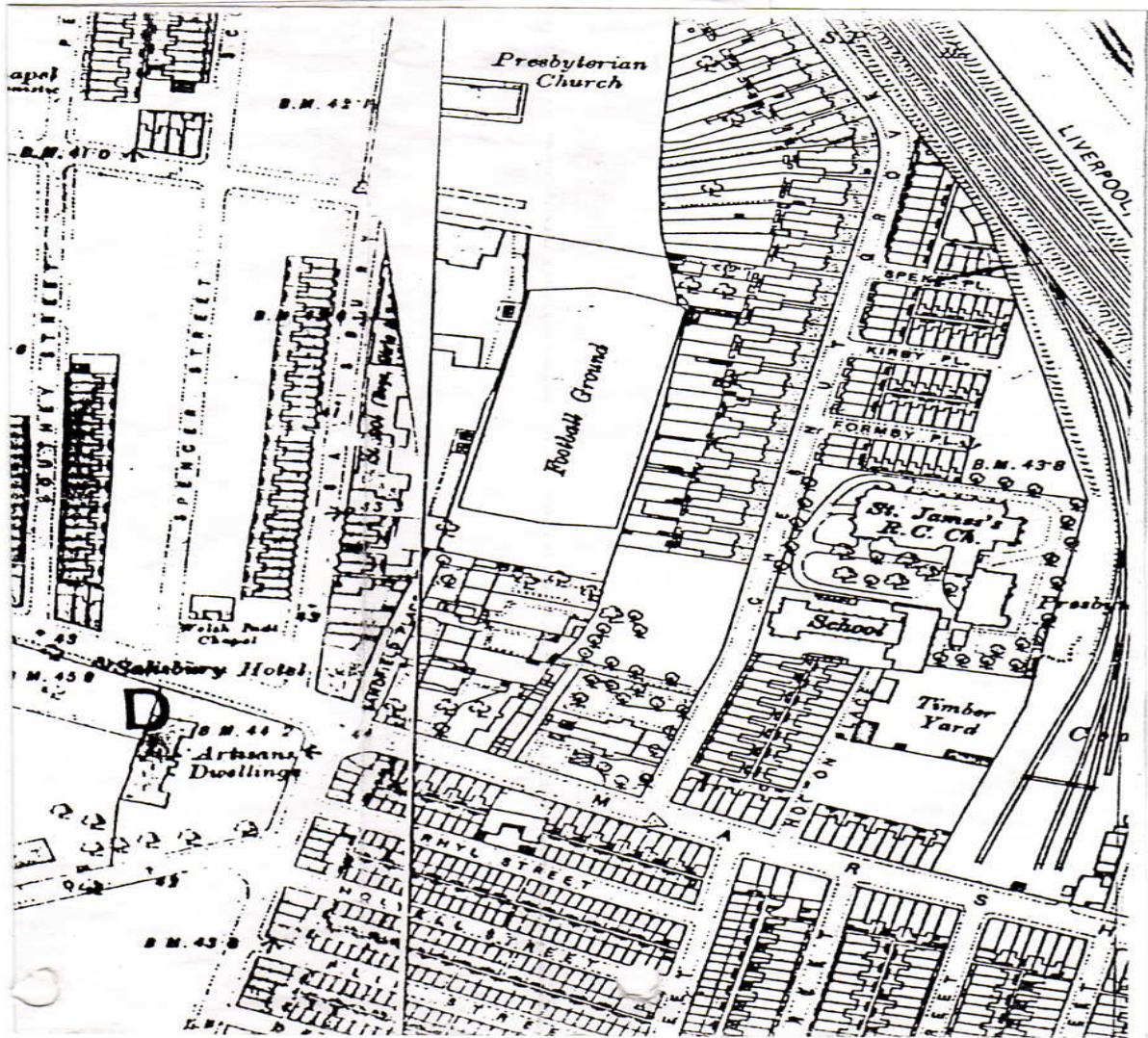
Percy Bateson had, in the meantime, been busy arranging a set of fixtures that would keep Liverpool Ramblers entertained during the forthcoming winter months. The club, as September approached, released the following list of intended fixtures..

September  
23rd....Bootle.....a  
October.

21.....St Mary's (Kirkdale).....	a
28.....Nottingham County.....	a
November.	
4.....Everton 2 <sup>nd</sup> XI.....	h
11.....,Blackburn Rovers 2 <sup>nd</sup> XI.....	a
18.....Old Kings Scholars.....	h
25.....Rossall School.....	a
December.	
2	
9.....Shrewsbury School.....	a
20.....Cambridge University Wanderers.....	a
23.....Burscough.....	a
30.....Bootle.....	a
January	
6.....Halliwell.....	a
13.....Harrovians..v..Eton.....	h
20.....Toxteth Wanderers, L, pool Cup.....	h
February	
3.....Stanley.....	a
March	
19.....Shrewsbury.....	a

Liverpool Ramblers, for leadership in their inaugural match, engaged the services of an English International player. Henry Cursham, a former pupil at Repton School, had gained extensive experience playing football in his native Nottingham. He was strong running forward player and a prolific goal scorer. This famous player, on his arrival, was quickly introduced to the disorganised state of soccer on Merseyside.

The Ramblers party, arriving at Marsh Lane, where disappointed to discover that the home club had lost the use of their previous ground. Percy Bateson, along with the Bootle secretary, acted positively. They approached a neighbouring soccer club, Bootle Wanderers, who allowed the match to be played on their home ground at nearby Sandfield Place. It was here that the two sides eventually, took to the field. The Ramblers line up was as follows, J Jacob, goalkeeper: E M Pilkington and P C Morris, full backs: E Heald and G W Turner, half backs: H A Cursham, E Baxter, H Baxter, J F Bateson, G Smith, and T Williamson, forwards



The venue of the first match played by Liverpool Ramblers.

The uncertainty of the Ramblers early play was quickly exploited by the home side who took a 1-0 lead before the break. Ramblers, as the game progressed, began to press their opponents and, with minutes remaining, scored what they believed to be a perfectly good goal. The home side however, objected to it being acceptable on a plea of offside. As no referee had been appointed, the final outcome could not be decided upon and the match ended in confusion. What Harry Cursham much have thought of the proceedings is open to conjecture but he must



have smiled as watched Merseyside, who lagged far behind his native Nottingham, struggle to establish its self as a soccer power. It is to be hoped that he enjoyed in his visit because next time the Liverpool players caught sight of him, he would be wearing the colours of the opposing side. Ramblers, in between times, became the first side from Liverpool to compete in the FA Cup tournament.