

The History of the St. Mirren Football Club

By
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SIXPENCE.

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The St. Mirren Football Club

THE love of sport in Paisley is a heritage handed down from generation to generation. As a sporting community, the town of bobbins and thread, of bards, weavers, and famous athletes, Paisley yields pride of place to no other town of its size.

Long before football had become the rage, a Paisley "ped" had attracted world-wide attention to the town by his brilliant record achievements on the running track. Old-timers relate with pride how W. G. George, the finest distance runner England had produced, was tempted to renounce his amateur status to match his powers against Willie Cummings. As an apprentice engineer, Wm. Jeffrey—to give Cummings his real name—had walked daily to and from the famous shipyard at Fairfield, to harden the muscles that carried his slim frame from one triumph to another. Cummings won the rubber of the three contests between the pair over one, four and ten miles, for £200 and a £50 gold watch gifted by Sir John D. Astley. In the deciding race at Lillie Bridge, the peerless Cummings lowered the ten-miles record to 51 mins. 6 $\frac{3}{4}$ secs. unpaced.

"Cutty" Smith and Bob Hindle, who afterwards trained the St. Mirren players for more than twelve years, were contemporary with Cummings. Hindle handled many notable athletes and footballers in his day, and was a personality when he held the pistol at amateur sports gatherings in the West of Scotland.

One's memories of Association football in Paisley are linked with the names of St. Mirren, Abercorn, Dykebar



Academicals, Olympic, Paisley Athletic and Paisley Hibernian. None of the rival clubs ever attained to the position of St. Mirren. The grim struggles between Abercorn and the "Saints," witnessed a ferment of excitement in the town every time they met, and paralleled for fierceness of contact the recurring struggles between Paisley's champion team and Greenock Morton. Abercorn is now no more, but its players were doughty Renfrewshire Cup Champions five times, beginning 1885-86 and ending 1891-92.

There were only four clubs in the county—Busby, Renfrew, Thornliebank, and 23rd R.R.V.—when the St. Mirren Football Club came into existence nine years after Queen's Park F.C. had set the new fashion in outdoor sport. Like many other football organisations the "Saints" were cradled in a Rugger atmosphere. The fifteen Rugby players who laid the foundation of the club in 1876 were the means of spreading the game of the round ball to other parts of Renfrewshire. After one year's trial of the Rugby game, the pioneer "Saints" fell under the magnetic spell of the Association game that grips men so the world over. As an Association club, St. Mirren flourished.

In its first year, when the youths who favoured the "Carrying" code took possession of a field for which no rent was paid, the income was only £2. An idea of the gigantic strides made since was revealed by the Scottish Cup between St. Mirren and Rangers on 9th February, 1924 at Love Street Grounds, Paisley, when the previous record attendance return of 35,290 persons (paid), established on 3rd September 1921 in a match when the same clubs were concerned, was broken. The occasion was also notable for the opening of the new grand stand. The new record is 40,291 persons (paid) and the money drawn was £1,682, exclusive of Government Entertainment Tax.

The Cup game ended in a victory for the champions of the Scottish Football League by 1 goal to 0. In spite of the circumstance that within a comparatively brief period the strength of the St. Mirren team had been weakened by the transfer to Nottingham Forest, Cardiff

City and Sunderland, respectively, of three players of tophole class in Duncan Walker (centre-forward), Denis Lawson (right wing forward), and William Clunas (right half). In the season of 1921-22 Walker broke the Scottish League goal scoring record when he obtained



45 goals in 38 matches. He scored four times in each of three matches, and twice in succession. In the previous season, Hugh Ferguson, the Motherwell centre-forward, scored 42 goals in 36 League matches. The burden of the cost of the capacious new ground and stand were responsible for the transfer of Lawson and Clunas. The sturdily-built right winger was a big favourite in the town and had played against England at Hampden Park in 1923.

Thistle Park was the headquarters of St. Mirren when the club blossomed into existence in 1876. A lease was taken of the ground at Shortroads the following year. The next move was to Abingdon Park, but the Saints returned to Thistle Park and there they remained until the completion of more ambitious headquarters at Westmarch. About the period when the second tenancy of Thistle Park was acquired, the Thornliebank, Arthurlie and Cartvale clubs were at their best. Many famous players were reared in these clubs. Cartvale introduced John McCartney, the Portsmouth F.C. manager to football. Years before he became manager of the St. Mirren club, Mr. McCartney was a sterling back in the ranks of Glasgow Thistle, Cowlaids and Rangers. The village club of Busby also produced Michael Dunbar of Celtic, and Bobby Calderwood, who leapt into fame as an International forward against England in 1885.

A permanent relic of St. Mirren's early acquaintance with Cup football is a silver cup, presented by Mr. T. C. Barlow, the London pyrotechnic artist, who gifted the trophy to the winner of a match between the Alexandra Athletic Club and St. Mirren. The game took place on 5th November, 1881, and was won by St. Mirren

by 5 goals to 1. The names of the winning team are inscribed on the trophy. The players were : J. Burgess (goal) : D. Marshall and H. Wilson (backs) : T. Arrol and J. Paterson, captain (halfbacks) : A. Wallace, G. Watt, J. Davis, J. Campbell, J. Johnstone and J. Imrie (forwards). The Alexandra Athletic Club has long been defunct. It was one of the early sports-holding clubs of Glasgow and gave to football in George Ker, who gained lasting renown in the ranks of Queen's Park, one of the greatest shooting centre-forwards the game ever produced. A knee injury terminated Ker's career, in 1884, when he settled in America.

In 1882-83 St. Mirren gladdened the hearts of Paisley enthusiasts by winning the Renfrewshire Cup in the fifth year of the competition. Thornliebank held the trophy the first two years of its existence and Arthurlie were champions the following two seasons. The men who proved the forerunners of many subsequent victorious teams in the county competition were : D. Drinnan (goal) : D. Marshall and D. Mc. Phee (backs) : John Paterson and James Kerr (substitute for R. White) (half-backs) : James Imrie, Tom Johnstone, Andrew Wallace, Robert Fairlie, George Watt and Andrew Brown.

Among several new players recruited from the second eleven, big "Andy" Brown and Robert Fairlie had improved the efficiency of the team considerably. By a strange coincidence, one of the regular half-backs, R. White, sustained a fractured leg at work and could not take his place in the first final when Thornliebank were vanquished. The following year, in the second of the four games which were played ere St. Mirren disposed of Thornliebank in the succeeding final, White again had the bad luck to have a leg broken.

There are thousands of supporters of St. Mirren in Paisley who remember the auspicious opening of Westmarch Ground in August, 1883, when the club had the distinction to lower the colours of Queen's Park by 2 goals to 1.

The thrilling struggles between Thornliebank and St. Mirren in the county tournament in that first season at Westmarch, when it took four games to separate the

rivals, in the final, gained fresh adherents to the club. The real big stride forward in the history of the club dates from those early days at Westmarch.

A few years of uneventful happenings preceded the 1887-88 season, when public attention was focussed on Paisley by a wonderful series of brilliant games between Heart of Midlothian and St. Mirren in the fourth round of the Scottish Cup. A draw at Tynecastle (1-1) was followed by another at Paisley (2-2). The neutral ground of the Falkirk Club was the scene of the rubber game, and still the issue hung in the balance, as each team scored twice. A decision was reached at the fourth attempt, at Cathkin Park, when St. Mirren won through by 4 goals to 2.

Such a fine performance as the overthrow of the Hearts, established St. Mirren as probable Cup-winner, but fate was against them in the next round when that grand old club Renton, then in the zenith of its fame, won a desperately contested game by 3 goals to 2 and ran into the final to defeat Cambuslang by the record score of 6 goals to 1. Cambuslang won the Glasgow Cup in that first season of the competition, and Renton carried off the handsome Glasgow Charity Cup for the fourth year in succession.



Renton enjoyed a world-wide reputation at the time and its team comprised several of the most celebrated players of the day, including Andrew Hannah, James Kelly, Robert Kelso, James McCall and Harry and John Campbell. Renton beat West Bromwich Albion, holders of the English Cup in a match for the "Championship of the world," and as they also conquered Preston North End, the runners-up, they could claim to have been the best team of the day. In the light of Renton's performances, the standard to which St. Mirren had attained, was a credit to the town and a tribute to the training of Bob Hindle.

The bull-dog grip of the Saints was a feature of the 1888-89 season when the team did not lose a match

until the last Saturday of 1888, when Dumbarton blasted their hopes of winning the Scottish Cup by 3 goals to 1, after two drawn games. The deciding struggle took place at Ibrox Park, and produced a brilliantly contested game, with the result in doubt until the last ten minutes. The losers were handicapped by the absence of Robert Brandon, the centre-forward, who was injured in the second match at Westmarch. The rearrangement of the forwards, with Brown in the centre, and Ferguson, once of Partick Thistle, on the left, was not a success. Hunter at left back, who quite eclipsed his more renowned partner, Tom Brandon, and Eddie McBain at centre half, were outstanding successes. Ralph Aitken was chiefly responsible for Dumbarton's triumph. This droll little left winger, who played against England, had two of the goals, and Jack Bell, the other one. John Madden, Leitch Keir, George Dewar and Tom McMillan were other prominent Dumbarton players at the time.

The first time St. Mirren encountered Queen's Park in the Scottish Cup occurred in 1889-90 at Hampden Park, when the famous amateurs triumphed by 1 goal to 0. Of St. Mirren's display on that memorable occasion, a well-known critic said :

"The Saints had long ere this become most popular with the Glasgow crowds owing to their clever exposition of the Association game, in which anything like roughness was conspicuous by its absence, and when they appeared within the historic enclosure of the "Spiders" they received a most flattering reception, which was fully warranted by their exhibition that day, although, unfortunately, their famous opponents secured the referee's verdict by a goal—a decision which would have been nullified had the spectators' opinion been consulted, as almost everyone present would have been pleased to see a second trial between teams where the victory of one was almost (on play) a hardship on the other."

The tribute to the skill and strength of the Saints was well merited, for Queen's Park, after bowling over Leith Athletic (1-0), and Abercorn (2-0), in the succeeding



rounds, defeated Vale of Leven in the Cup Final, following a drawn game, by 2 goals to 1. The Queen's Park team that season was of International strength. The side was: George Gillespie; Walter Arnott and R. Smellie; Tom Robertson, Allan Stewart, and James McAra; William Gulliland, W. H. Berry, James Hamilton, D. S. Allan and William Sellar. With the exception of Stewart and McAra, every man wore the Lion Rampant against England.

A year later St. Mirren and Queen's met once more in the fifth round of the Scottish Cup, the venue this time being Westmarch. The only changes in the Amateurs team from the previous season were Muir Glen and Humphrey Jones—the Welsh International—at half-back, and James Eccles on the left. Eccles was a product of Dykebar, and Paisley enthusiasts were much interested in his appearance in their midst. The St. Mirren team was: Cameron: Hunter and Mc. Bain: Mc. Cartney, Brown, and Eddie Mc. Bain: Morrison, McAnlay, Wylie, Dunlop, and J. Douglas. The latter player was brother to the famous "Black" Douglas, of the early Blackburn Rovers cup-winning teams.

Overconfidence proved the undoing of St. Mirren. They led their redoubtable opponents by two goals and appeared to have the game well won at half time, but Queen's Park, by a remarkable exhibition of pluck, pulled the game out of the fire and won by 3 goals to 2. James Dunlop's shot, when the Saints got their second goal, was one of the most brilliant ever seen on Westmarch. He got the ball on the drop at an angle and whizzed it past Gillespie like a rocket. This stylish forward, and "Poem" Berry, were mere striplings but their craft and scientific football were a delight to watch. The peerless Arnott, Berry, Dunlop, and Eddie Mc. Bain invested this game with a charm which nothing else could have provided.

One is tempted to prolong the recital of the career of the club in cup ties, but space precludes an extensive

reference. The ambition to reach the coveted niche in Scottish football stimulated the enthusiasm of the officials and players of Renfrewshire's most enterprising club. Nothing could damp their ardour. A 2-1 defeat by the Rangers at Paisley, in the semi-final round in 1899, had its consolation. One step further and the prize was St. Mirren's for the winning.

In 1901, and again in 1902, the famous Celtic blasted the hopes of Paisley's citizens in the same advanced stage of the tournament. In the next two seasons the Big Two in football—Celtic and Rangers—were responsible for their eclipse. The following year the Saints disposed of their Eastern rivals of Tynecastle before losing to Airdrieonians. In 1906 they could not shake off Third Lanark, who survived three gruelling contests, ere the rivals were separated.

The great day arrived at last when on April 18, 1908, St. Mirren encountered Celtic in the Scottish Cup Final at Hampden Park. A black one it was for Paisley. The Celts carried all before them in those days when James Quinn led as brilliant an attack as ever served the Parkhead organisation. The sides were: Celtic—Adams; McNair and Weir; Young, Loney and Hay; Bennett, McMenemy, Quinn, Somers, and Hamilton. St. Mirren—Grant; Gordon and White; Kay, Robertson and McAvoy; Clements, Paton (T.H.), Wylie, Cunningham and Anderson. Nothing could withstand the bewildering passing of the inside trio of the Celtic attack, and St. Mirren lost the game by 5 goals to 1.

Once more St. Mirren had to begin all over again. The Heart of Midlothian cropped up in 1909 to renew the old feud for cup supremacy and the inevitable three games were required to affect a separation, with the men of Tynecastle in the ascendant.

A brighter day dawned in the "Victory" Cup Final of 1919 at Celtic Park when St. Mirren realised a long cherished ambition and vanquished the doughty Hearts—survivors and successors of the 16th Royal Scots—by 3 goals to 0, after extra time. The Saints won through by sheer stamina, and there were many leg-weary soldier footballers at the close of the fray. Scotland's

newly discovered centre-forward, Andrew Wilson, now of Chelsea F.C. who wore the Hearts colours, had made a big reputation for himself in the early ties by his marvellous ability to score goals. Wilson had joined the Hearts at the end of October and by the close of the season he had scored 46 goals, including two against England and two against Ireland, in the "Victory" Internationals.

The Cup was reckoned a snip for the Hearts, who were big public favourites. Wilson had scared most goalkeepers. His four goals against Airdrieonians seemed to presage what was in store for St. Mirren. Big of heart the Saints entered upon what was regarded by most people throughout the country as a forlorn hope. At the end of the game neither side had scored. A remarkable climax thrilled the excited crowd, in the extra half hour that was played to determine the winners. A wonderful "Victory" Cup it was for St. Mirren whose players scored three goals off the reel, without response from their opponents. The teams were: St. Mirren—W. O'Hagan: Marshall and Fulton: Perry, McKenna and Anderson: Hodges, Page, Clark, Sutherland and Thomson. Heart of Midlothian—Black: Birrell and Wilson (J.); Preston, Mercer and Sharp; Sinclair, Miller, Wilson, (A.), McCall and Wilson (W.).



The establishment of League football in England in 1888-89, marked one of the most fateful epochs in the history of football. The system was introduced to secure fixity of fixtures and a more attractive match card for the leading professional clubs. There was too much money in the game for the sport to remain amateur.

The dawn of the Celtic Club hastened the formation of the Scottish Football League in 1890. The new body experienced much adverse and unjustifiable criticism at its formation; even at headquarters its inception was presumed to be a covert move to precipitate professionalism.

Scotland was amateur when its leading clubs formed

the League six years after the payment of football players was legalised in England. In 1893 Scotland followed suit. Open professionalism was much to be preferred to the sham amateurism that was known to exist in many quarters.

The pioneer clubs of the Scottish Football League were : Celtic, Rangers, St. Mirren, Renton, Heart of Midlothian, Dumbarton, Third Lanark, Cowlares, Vale of Leven, Cambuslang, and Abercorn. Four of these clubs are no longer in existence, but St. Mirren share with Celtic, Rangers, Heart of Midlothian and Third Lanark, the honour of having retained an unbroken connection with the First Division in a competition that entails a strenuous toll on the playing strength of a team.

The career of certain clubs is characterised more by eventful feats in Cup Ties than by what they achieve in a League tournament. To a pronounced extent this is true of St. Mirren. In the first season, when ten clubs comprised the League, St. Mirren just managed to escape bottom position, with 11 points, which was five points more than was secured by Cowlares. The record was 18 matches played, 5 won, 12 lost, 1 drawn ; 39 goals scored, against 62 goals lost. In 1892-93, when that grand old player, Andrew Brown, captained the side, the " Saints " finished third from the top for the championship, with the " Big Two "—Celtic and Rangers—occupying the leading places.

A reminder of the ups and downs of League football occurred in 1899-1900, when St. Mirren and St. Bernard were equal for second lowest position in the First Division, with 12 points each. St. Mirren had a slightly better goal average. The clubs had to play a deciding match to determine which of the pair should go to the vote for re-election. St. Mirren won through. Clyde and St. Bernard went into the Second Division and Morton and Partick Thistle were promoted, while an extra club in Queen's Park, was introduced to the competition without having to qualify.

Other bad seasons in the League occurred in 1911-12, 1913-14, and 1920-21 when St. Mirren held the " Wooden spoon." The advent of Duncan Walker, the Dumbarton

centre-forward, effected a wonderful change next season in the fortunes of the club, and 46 points were won out of a possible 84. The improvement was continued in the season of 1922-23, when 42 points, out of a possible



[Stewart

James Dunlop

76, were recorded. The club's longest sequence of successes in the League was in 1908-9, when 11 matches were played without defeat, and 17 games with only one reverse. A rot set in following a bad beating at Dundee, and after the middle of December only three more games were won.

Among distinguished St. Mirren players who joined leading clubs in England were: James Hill (Burnley) Ronald Orr (Newcastle United), Hugh Morgan (Liverpool) John Cameron (Chelsea), Tom Brandon (Blackburn Rovers), Jack Fraser (Notts County), John Marshall (Middlesbrough), Sandy Young (Everton), David Steele (Huddersfield Town), and more recent times, Duncan Walker, Charles Pringle in (Manchester City), Denis Lawson and W. Clunas, who are mentioned in the course of the narrative.

The brilliant left wing partnership between James Hill and James Dunlop, is still green in the memory of many people. Dunlop would have gained the highest honours in football had he lived. His passing was a tragedy and was the result of a cut to the knee caused by a fall on a piece of broken glass some thoughtless individual had thrown on the field during a New Year match between St. Mirren and Abercorn. A public subscription to erect a monument in the local cemetery to this gifted youth realised £100.

Famous club players who remained proof against English overtures to leave, included such men as Tom A. Jackson, a stylish International back, who was killed in the Great War, David Crawford, the coolest first-class back ever known, who joined the Rangers and was contemporary with Nicol Smith and John Drummond. Then there was Abe Wylie and John

Patrick, who kept goal brilliantly in a winning Scottish team at the Crystal Palace in 1897. Arthur Dixon and J. Walls (Rangers), and David Halliday (Dundee), who led the Scottish League team against the English League this year, also passed through the St. Mirren ranks.

All along the St. Mirren F.C. Ltd. has been managed by earnest and capable officials, whose chief aim was to secure a team that would be a credit to the town. A prominent figure in the official life of the club for over 25 years was Mr. James Scouler, who received a testimonial recently upon his retirement, when he was made a Life Member of the Club. His successor on the Executive, for length of service, is Mr. Thomas Hart. Mr. Hart had the distinction to be the President of the Scottish Football League for five years. He held the honour longer than any previous occupant of the chair. Another former President of the Club, Mr. James K. Horsburgh was also the President of the League in the days when the greatest St. Mirren half-back trio of all time—Donald Greenlees, Walter Bruce and M. McAvoy were outstanding players in the country. Mr. Horsburgh was fortunate to be in a position to be able to give employment in the paper manufacturing industry to as many as eight members of the first eleven at the one time, a circumstance of incalculable benefit to a football club. Another former member of the club, Mr. Archibald Towns, was the Vice-President of the League for several years, in its early days.

The business acumen of the Club's officials in undertaking a big ground extension scheme, revealed the faith they have in the future of football in Paisley. The holding capacity of the Love Street enclosure has been increased to over 50,000 and its appearance has been enhanced by the erection of a handsome new grand stand with seated accommodation for 4,000 persons. The club are the owners of the ground, which has cost, up to now, £28,000.

Long live the Saints !



Photo by John Cochrane (Secretary and Manager) W. F. Walker (Director) D. S. Stewart
 James R. Hell (Vice-President) Thos. Craig (President).
 Cups won—Barlow Cup, 1881, Barcelona Cup, 1922.
 Paisley Charity Challenge Cup—Victory Cup, 1919 (Scottish Football League).



Photo by Renfrewshire Challenge Cup, Won by St. Mirren F.C., 1887-88. D. L. Stewart
 Robert Hindle, Thomas Brandon, Robert Lang, John McManus, James Maxwell.
 Robert Fairlie, John Paterson, James Cameron, Hugh McHardy, Alex McBain, John Harper.
 James Brandon, Thomas Johnstone, Robert Brandon, Edward McBain, Andrew Brown,
 with cup—Robert Allison.



Photo by St. Mirren Football Club, 1903-1904. D. L. Stewart
 Top Row : J. Hindle, J. Cameron, F. Rae, J. Scouler, W. Bruce, M. McAvoy, R. Smith,
 (Trainer) (Treasurer) (Secretary)
 T. A. Jackson, D. Crawford.
 Middle Row : J. K. Horsburgh, (President).
 D. Greenlees, Robertson, G. Reid, J. Smith.
 Front Row : H. McDonald, D. Lindsay.



Photo by St. Mirren Football Club, Scottish League Victory Cup Winners, 1918-1919. D. L. Stewart
 Top Row : C. Durning (Trainer), W. R. Cook, J. Scouler, W. Farner, S. Riddell, T. Hart.
 Middle Row : J. Cochrane (Sec. and Manager), J. Granger, R. Perry, J. Marshall, W. O'Hagan,
 J. Fulton, H. McKenna, S. Coyle (Groundsman), W. H. Lamond.
 Front Row : F. Hodges, T. Page, J. Clark, J. Fleming (Chairman), H. Anderson, G. Sutherland,
 Sitting. J. Thomson.



A. GILLEAS and A. REID (Trainer), *D. L. Stewart*

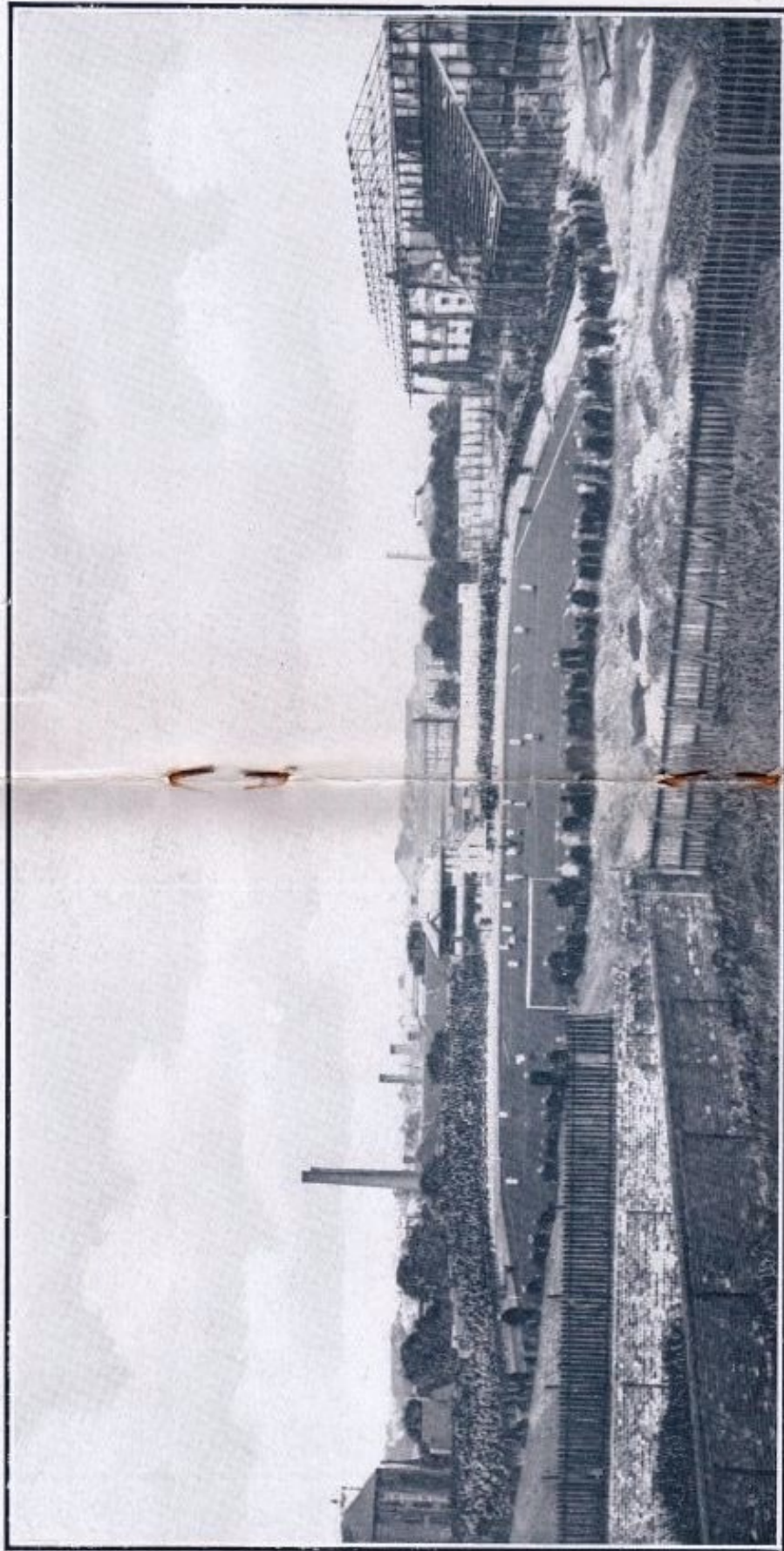


Photo by

Opening of New Greater Love Street Ground, 3rd September, 1921.

D. L. Stewart