

The early days of football in Stratford



Minutes of the meeting when the Stratford Technicals and the Stratford Rovers agree to amalgamate, 22nd August 1902

There have been Eboralls in Stratford from at least the 1860s, acting as mine hosts in a bewildering succession of local pubs. So we were anticipating some interesting material when Nick Eborall asked us to look after some items of family memorabilia. But, as it often the case, it was the unexpected that took the biscuit; for, amongst the postcards and autograph albums, was the minute book of the Technical Association Football Club. It covers three years (1901-1903) and was in the family archive because Edward Eborall, landlord of the old George Inn in Bridge Street (where the committee met) was elected chairman at the first meeting recorded in the volume. His son, Frank, was appointed team captain, soon to be succeeded by his brother, William.

There are some interesting snippets – a complaint by the Shottery team that the Technical's goalkeeper ought to have been playing for *them*, and the failure of an appeal by the Aston Cantlow Football Club against a winning penalty awarded to the Technicals – but, for those interested in the development of football in Stratford, the key entry occurs on 22 August 1902 when, at a special meeting, the Technical Football Club and its erstwhile rival, the Stratford Rovers, voted to combine forces under a new banner, the Stratford-on-Avon Association Football Club,

Up to that point, the playing of association football in Stratford – at least on an organised basis – had had something of a chequered history. It had been pioneered, from 1893, by a team which called itself the Stratford Crusaders. But the Crusaders then took up rugby, leaving the town's Athletic Club to field football teams. The subscription to this august body (2s 6d) was beyond the reach of working-class lads; so in 1896, they formed themselves into a more rough-and-ready side, known as the Stratford Rovers. In the meantime, another team, originating with students at the Stratford Technical School, then in Henley Street, had begun to field sides for 'friendlies'. In August 1901 both teams, the Technicals and the Rovers, joined the Stratford and District League – no doubt the reason that the Technicals bought their smart new minute book which begins at just this moment. The Technicals topped the league that season, with the Rovers second. It might seem strange that the two teams should, after just twelve months, then decide to amalgamate; but, in fact, what they had in mind was to compete in the more prestigious Warwick and District League, which, as the re-christened Stratford-on-Avon Association Football Club, they immediately applied to join. As it happened, they didn't do too well, ending up sixth at the end of the season; but the foundation had been laid for a town football club which still flourishes today.

It's not uncommon for club and society archives of this sort to turn up in family papers: the reverse of the coin is that so many others have been lost once the personal/business link has been broken. So next time you are in the attic ...

Robert Bearman

Living Archives from the *Stratford-upon-Avon Herald*

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