

LIDDELL AT ONE HUNDRED

A Family Portrait
of a Liverpool Icon



PETER KENNY JONES

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Testimonials

Betty Liddell – Sister-in-law

He was ever so quiet. He shook my hand and said, 'Pleased to meet you,' but a very quiet man. He was his own person, but he was lovely. He had a lovely family.

David Liddell – Son

He was very straightforward, he was fast, and of course he scored a lot of goals. I think that's why the Kop just took to him, as well as his work ethic and loyalty to the club.

Malcolm Liddell – Son

I would sum him up by saying he was a father figure; he was my father and he was a great footballer.

Rena Liddell – Sister

He played for Liverpool, received many an accolade, and was very happy in what he did. He wasn't a boaster and didn't go on about what he had done, he just enjoyed what he did. He enjoyed playing football and enjoyed life after football. Most of all he was my brother and family through and through.

Tom Ogilvie – Cousin

They called them 'Liddellpool' instead of Liverpool, but he always said there was everyone in the team, it was not just him.

He was that type of man; he did not want all the praise.

**Pat Martin – Parishioner of Court Hey
Methodist Church**

If Phyllis didn't want to get up and dance, he would get one of the other ladies up to dance, myself included, but I could never dance as good as he did.

Ian Tracey – Family Friend

A true 'gentleman' in every sense of the word, and lovely Christian man, whom it was my immense privilege to know, and moreover to be able to call 'friend'.

Alan Banks – Liverpool FC (1956–1961)

He is one of the best players that has ever played for the club. I put him alongside Kenny Dalglish and Steven Gerrard as the three best players ever to play for this club. When you consider all the best players we've had, counting the present-day players, that's how high I rate Bill.

Alex South – Liverpool FC (1954–1956)

A gentleman, a scholar, and a fine football player, he was some player was Billy. Once he got on a run with the ball, by Christ he took some stopping. He was like an express train down that wing! He was a household name and they adored him, and he couldn't do any wrong. He deserved to be praised because he was such a wonderful player.

Billy Howard – Liverpool FC (1956–1962)

Football has changed, and different stars have come along, but Billy was the original star for me. There may have been players going back into the 1800s and maybe bigger stars then, but Billy was Mr Liverpool. Apart from being a top player, Billy engineered spirit in the fans just by playing for us.

Doug Cowie – Scotland National Team (1953–1958)

He had the type of build that he looked strong and speedy. You thought just by looking at him that he had a good chance of pushing the ball past the full-back and beating him for speed and that was really his game; he was direct. Rather than looking for short passes inside, he was more likely to get up the line and whip the ball across for team-mates or cut inside for a shot at goal.

George Scott – Liverpool FC (1961–1965)

He had time for everyone, considering what he had achieved. He achieved everything in the game, played over 500 times for the club and scored over 200 goals. Shankly told us all at the beginning that the club was called Liddellpool. He carried that team, there were some good players, but Billy was the main man. I would say he was one of the top three players that Liverpool ever had.

Gordon Milne – Liverpool FC (1960–1967)

Billy was unassuming, he was helpful to young players, he was always talking to me in training and the short time that I worked with him. It's probably old-fashioned to say now, but he just came across as a proper gentleman and a wonderful ambassador for football, never mind what he did for the club.

Gordon Wallace – Liverpool FC (1961–1967)

I can understand why people used to tell us as kids about Billy Liddell and how powerful his shooting was. He could head the ball, he kicked with his left and right, he had everything. He was a remarkable man.

Ian Callaghan – Liverpool FC (1957–1978)

I went in the Boys' Pen when it was in the Kemlyn Road Stand and the enthusiasm from the crowd when Billy got the ball was very special. He really was a great player and a really lovely man as well.

Jimmy Melia – Liverpool FC (1953–1964)

He was amongst the best five players that have ever played for Liverpool. Two-footed player, terrific in the air, two great feet, right foot and left foot, and he was that good at Liverpool, they called them Liddellpool.

Johnny Morrissey – Liverpool FC (1955–1962)

Liverpool have had so many good players but most of the players Liverpool had when he played were fairly good or average, but not great. He was the first great Liverpool player in my eyes, definitely!

Keith Burkinshaw – Liverpool FC (1953–1957)

He was a player that other players looked up to, the most influential player at Liverpool while I was there with regard to the winning and losing of games, because he was the one who scored the most number of goals and he had a big effect on the team.

Alan Hansen – Liverpool FC (1977–1991)

He was the friendliest and most approachable guy that I think has ever been at Liverpool. Between Billy Liddell and Ian Callaghan, I think there is a lesson to everyone that plays football on how to conduct themselves. Billy was beyond friendliness; he was just awesome.

Jamie Carragher – Liverpool FC (1987–2013)

Liverpool fans are great at remembering the former players and they never forget what players have done for them. I think he'll always be remembered.

**Norman Gard – Former Liverpool FC
Player Liaison Officer**

He is everything the modern footballer isn't. He was respected, he was like a pillar of the community. He was a great player, strong and dedicated and would still have made it today.

**Paul Moran – Son of Ronnie Moran – Liverpool FC
Player and Coach (1949–1998)**

People asked my dad about Billy Liddell; he used to say that when he was starting up at Liverpool, while Billy Liddell was there, any good habits or anything he thought could help him, he picked them up from Billy. He said he was an absolute leader in the dressing room and my dad admired him.

**Dominic Myers – Colleague at the Guild of Students at
University of Liverpool**

Gentle and not wanting to bring the attention to his glory. I did ask him if he had met Bill Shankly and what he was like

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(very naïve of me). He gave me a wry smile and something along the lines of 'a very special man for Liverpool'. In those days I gave a lot but hadn't learned the skills of listening and pausing ... such a wasted opportunity.

Adrian Killen – Supporter

From what I saw of him in his later days and what I've read about him, as well as what my grandparents, parents, brother and all the others supporters have said, he has to be possibly the best player that ever played for Liverpool Football Club.

Bill Hughes – Supporter

Billy was just a nice guy, who we all knew and loved. He was top of the tree, as far as I'm concerned, as a player and as a man. I was in awe of him.

Frank Cann – Supporter

My very first memory was seeing Billy in 1954, the first game of the season when we had come down to the Second Division and we played Doncaster Rovers. The first time I saw Billy, because he was talked about that much in our house, the hairs on the back of my neck stood on end. I've never had such a thrill since and I've seen six European Cups and 19 leagues, but the first moment I saw that man was etched in my mind forever.

Fred Wilson – Supporter

The greatest man ever in football that I've ever known, without a doubt, and I've seen some greats like Kenny Dalglish, Ian Rush and Graeme Souness, but nobody comes near Billy. I think he was the greatest thing to ever happen to Liverpool Football Club.

John Carey – Supporter

He played on the wings and at centre-forward, he could head a ball, he was two-footed, he could tackle, he could dribble. He was a good all-round footballer and you never heard him shouting or bawling, because he was a gentleman too.

Phil Cummings – Supporter

Billy was my first hero. One game he played on after a head injury, which meant he came back on to the pitch with an old-fashioned bandage around his forehead. Every time he got the ball that game, the Kop would chant, 'Geronimo!' He was the fastest forward in the game, the hardest shot on the run and the hardest header of anyone in the game. The fans used to wait for him to get the ball on the halfway line, and as he got nearer the goal, it got louder and louder. It was spine-tingling.

Tommy Jones – Supporter

I never knew my dad, he died when I was a baby. I only have stories told by my mum and my uncle. But Billy was undoubtedly my dad's hero. I've always felt closest to my dad on the Kop at Anfield. From the stories I've heard, Billy gave the red half of the city pride. He was obviously a great player and very strong on the ball, but his humility still shone through.

I loved those qualities in my hero Kenny Dalglish. Both were real team players. Billy was also incredibly loyal, like Steven Gerrard. Both had offers to leave but they stuck around when times were hard. For Billy to stay when they were in the Second Division speaks volumes about the man. Billy was my dad's hero, Kenny was mine, Stevie is my lad's. That spans

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eight decades of Liverpool Football Club. I have an emotional attachment to all three and Billy started it.

Paul McNulty – Supporter

He was well respected throughout the city. Everybody you spoke to would say he was a gentleman, he was a great player on the pitch and a great man off it. He was a true gentleman, which you don't get now.

Ron Schofield – Supporter

We had the greatest players that world football has ever seen. He was a Scottish international, he was an outstanding player, could use both feet and he could head the ball. He played the game in a sportsmanlike manner and was a gentleman on and off the field.

Townhill, Growing Up, and the Liddell Family

BILLY LIDDELL'S story begins in a small Scottish village called Townhill, just north of Dunfermline, in Fife, Scotland. Food, or the lack of it, was a major part of his early days. The staple diet of mince and tatties was often on the menu and Billy was habitually mocked for being such a slow eater.

Although his life certainly later moved to Liverpool, he was very proud of the place where he was born. Townhill has become a village synonymous with Billy Liddell, honouring the man with the 'Billy Liddell Sports Complex'. There stands the cairn memorial with a plaque that has the following inscribed:

William Beveridge Liddell

The garden and memorial cairn are dedicated to
the memory of Townhill-born football legend
Billy Liddell.

TOWNHILL, GROWING UP, AND THE LIDDELL FAMILY

Billy began his football career with Kingseat Juveniles then Lochgelly Violet.

He spent his entire professional career with Liverpool Football Club, signing in 1939 and making 534 appearances scoring 228 goals.

His contribution to Liverpool was such that the club was nicknamed 'Liddellpool'.

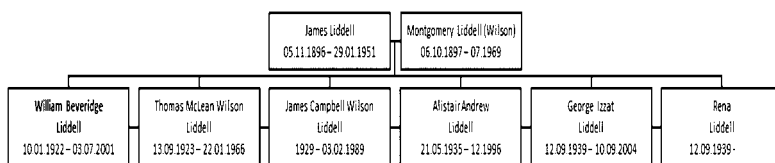
Billy was capped 29 times for Scotland and was one of only two players to appear in the Great Britain team of 1947 and 1955.

A true sportsman and a great professional, Billy was never booked or sent off in his entire footballing career.

Born – Townhill 1922. Died – Liverpool 2001.

Evidently and understandably, the town is very proud of him.

William Beveridge Liddell was born on 10 January 1922, the eldest child of six. He had four younger brothers: Tom, Campbell, Alistair and George, the latter being the twin brother of Billy's only sister, Rena. The twins were the youngest siblings, being born 17 years after Billy and while their mother, Montgomery, was 42.



The strange forename of Montgomery came from the Scottish tradition of using surnames as middle and first names of children, to keep the mother's maiden name alive, Montgomery being in the family as far back as the 1700s. This strong sense of Scottish family tradition caused Montgomery countless embarrassing moments. 'Mr Liddell' would often be called in doctors' surgeries and places alike, before confusion as Mrs Liddell would have to explain her peculiar first name!

The real Mr Liddell was James, a miner continuing the family trade from his father William. Life for an early-20th-century miner in Scotland was far from easy. James worked in Muircockhall Colliery, mining coal amongst 200 other men in Townhill. Long hours, little-to-no health and safety consideration and equally low wages meant that the family home was a cottage with no inside toilet for the eight inhabitants.

No one within the family continued James's mining profession, as per the instructions of James, who knew the health dangers attached to the job. So, the Liddell parents were keen to ensure that all six children were supported by a trade as they entered working life. Aside from going on to dominate Merseyside football for a couple of decades, Billy's talents in the working world came from his mathematical ability. Having always been strong at maths all the way through school, he was set to pursue a career as an accountant to sustain his footballing passion, or to fall

back on in case of injury or simply not being good enough to play at a high level.

Billy's siblings also did not follow their father into mining, nor did they possess the mathematical skills of their eldest brother. Tom was a footballer turned cobbler, Campbell a grocer for the Co-Op in Blairhall, playing football for his work team. Alistair was a baker and the least interested and talented footballer. He enjoyed rugby and swimming in his spare time and the family would all purchase tickets to attend his galas. The twins George and Rena both did office work, George playing five-a-side football with his friends. It is testament to their parents that they would all go on to have varied lives away from Townhill, but this was largely down to Billy's footballing talents that uprooted them from their family home in 1951.

Before Billy attended primary school, Montgomery would use his excitement, energy and already obvious athletic ability to run messages around Townhill. Despite his jet-black hair of his Liverpool heyday, the fair-haired Billy would deliver the messages with a small ball at his feet. He was constantly honing and improving his skills by rebounding the ball off kerbsides and working on his technique. The best evidence that his skills were being built rather than perfected was the fact that with every message that he delivered for his mother, he often asked the recipients, 'Whaur's ma ba?' (Where's my ball?)

As James was a coal miner, he worked long hours down the pits, so Billy was closest to Montgomery. The relationship remained strong after Billy left home, with the weekly letters the two would write to each other after church on a Sunday. When Montgomery ended up moving to Liverpool, the bond grew stronger still and they had a very close mother–son relationship.

Billy's love for football came from his father, grandfather and his school. Despite playing football locally, James Liddell was not the man that Billy's inherited football talents would be attributed to – it was James's father, Billy's grandfather, William. He played to a high amateur standard in Scotland as a centre-half and could see the obvious ability that his grandson possessed. Billy's father would also encourage his football and take him to watch Dunfermline with the rest of the Liddell boys.

In a way to encourage Billy, William would give Billy a penny for every goal he scored. This near enough bankrupted him during Billy's early days at Townhill Primary School, Kingseat Juveniles and Lochgelly Violet, so much so that he had to swiftly lower the price! Billy's goalscoring initially improved but soon started faltering. Whether it was a young Billy's negotiation tactic or just a dip in form, William then promised twopence for each goal. Miraculously, in the next match Billy's goal drought ended as he scored nine goals. He was mischievously happy to inform his grandfather of the money he was owed.

However, Billy's first-ever footballing appearance was as a six-year-old goalkeeper in a local five-a-side kids' tournament run by Townhill Industrial Co-Operative Society. Billy played in goal for the opening minutes of his first match but, as he conceded an early goal, he was released upfield and quickly ran riot.

By the age of seven, Billy was playing for Townhill Primary School, who he went on to captain, and played against boys three years older than himself. James Liddell was called into school one day as Mr Wilson, the headmaster, had been approached by neighbouring school headmasters who had requested proof that Billy was only seven. James quickly provided proof of Billy's age and ended the arguments.

Playing above his years no doubt hardened Billy's game from a young age, but this was to the detriment of the Scotland Schoolboys selectors. He did manage to make his way into the Scottish Schoolboys against Ireland and England in 1935 but, despite his obvious talents, he was so small that he was often overlooked because of his physique. Billy then played briefly for Townhill Keep Fit Class before joining Kingseat Juveniles when he was 12, getting paid 12½d a match.

Frustratingly for some of his peers, Billy was not only the footballing hero, but he was a real academic. He was the only one of his siblings to attend Dunfermline High School, whereas the rest went to Queen Anne, the difference

between the two being that essentially Billy attended a grammar school for the more academically gifted children and the rest of the Liddells attended the comprehensive school. He was a bright student, doing well in his exams and excelling in maths. His good behaviour meant that he was not too often on the receiving end of 'the strap', the horrendous punishment tool at the school. Billy's attendance at Dunfermline High School also gave him access to better sporting opportunities in both rugby, which he disliked, and football.

His academic ability was first displayed through the bursary he was awarded for the high school, where he studied for his higher leaving certificate. He played for and captained the school's football team, and also played for the rugby team and the cricket team, for which he was a competent batsman. Being the all-round athlete he was, Billy also won eight medals for track and field events in the school, all while achieving high grades, attending the Townhill church choir and teaching in the Sunday school.

When he reached 15, the local junior clubs were keen to take Billy and it was Lochgelly Violet who managed to secure his services, paying him 7s. 6d. a match. He only spent one season with the club, but this was enough to attract a lot of admirers from further afield. Scouts from Partick Thistle, Hamilton, Manchester City and Arsenal were on the scene quickly and Liverpool were soon to follow.

An interesting aside to the origins of football and rugby in Britain can be mentioned here. Upon researching the footballing periods of Billy's prominence, it becomes quite glaring that football is referred to as 'soccer'. Indeed Billy's own autobiography is titled *My Soccer Story*. When the word soccer is used in reference to football in Britain today, it is scoffed at as Americanisation of 'our game'; however, the origins of football, soccer and rugby intertwine.

In a very simplified version of the tale, during an early Football Association meeting in 1863, the laws of football were outlined. This was at the time that the rules of rugby were also being drawn up. Rugby was then known as rugby football and football as association football. In a way to ensure that the two were not mixed up, rugby football was shortened to 'rugger', and association football to 'soccer'. Although this was used quite colloquially in the late 1800s, it became the more highbrow and old-school way of referring to football in the era of Billy Liddell, in the 1940s and 50s. Therefore, many newspapers and books used 'soccer', but the word has almost entirely died out from British terraces today and has now become a stick to beat American football fans with.

The Liddells' early football (or soccer!) encounters were between Cowdenbeath and Dunfermline Athletic. The Liddells supported Dunfermline and their cousins, the Ogilvies (Montgomery's sister's family) supported Cowdenbeath. Although the two teams are traditional

rivals, the family connection meant that the boys would travel between each team on matchdays. One week they would don the black and white of Dunfermline alongside the Ogilvies, the next they would be with them in Cowdenbeath cheering on Cowden.

Billy's love for Dunfermline was diluted with his move to Liverpool; however, the boys in the family would still attend Dunfermline matches without Billy. Meanwhile, one of his cousins, Tom Ogilvie, went on to be a ball boy, scout, stadium announcer and secretary for Cowdenbeath. Tom's love for the Blue Brazil shows the importance of football to the wider family and the loyalty and sense of community that football brought them all.

Rena Liddell, the only female sibling of Billy, is also football mad. One of the earliest presents she received from the family was a pair of football boots so that she could play with her twin brother George. She is now a Liverpool season ticket holder and lives within a stone's throw of Anfield.

The 17-year age gap between Billy and the twins Rena and George meant that much of their early childhood was spent supporting their brother from afar. This being the days before television and the fact that they lived in Townhill meant that, as they could not get the train to Liverpool every week, their knowledge of their brother the football star was often through the radio for Scotland matches. As the family gathered round the wireless to support Billy, one thing would be of constant annoyance to his father, James.

Whenever Willie (or Wully), as Billy was often referred to in his early playing days, had the ball, they would refer to him as ‘Willie Lid-ell’ and James would shout at the radio, ‘It’s Liddell, you idiots!’

The surname did seem to cause a lot of problems in Billy’s formative footballing years. One article that was just 19 lines long and discussed how Tranmere Rovers refused to take Billy on loan (a decision I am sure they lived to regret), only managed to spell his surname correctly once in three attempts! One article even described Billy as an up-and-coming Chinese winger called Li Dell!

Despite these inexplicable surname complications, Billy would intermittently return from his footballing exploits to see the family as a local football star but without an ego to match. This was a different time where fan adulation culminated in a ‘hello Mr Liddell’ and a polite request for an autograph; however, Billy never made any of his family feel as though they were living in his shadow. He would return from football or from the war to see his brothers and youngest twin siblings, and they would laugh and joke as he threw the twins around like a rugby ball. Despite the family becoming increasingly known as ‘the brother/parent of Billy Liddell’ to the Townhill and wider Scottish and British communities, Billy never let it go to his head and remained kind, softly spoken and level-headed.

Another important part of Billy’s early life in Scotland was religion. The Liddells were a very pious family that

would spend their Sundays in church, including at Sunday school. Billy was a staunch Christian and these values were the key reason why he never drank and never swore. He was a very morally righteous man and, without being outspoken, he was very proud of his religion.

Without a doubt, Billy's religious beliefs made him a better footballer. Not because God scored over 200 Liverpool goals for him, but because it gave him the drive and strength of will to play until he was 38. He was ahead of his time in that he had a great diet and was incredibly fit. Much is made of sports science in the modern game, and one can only imagine the extra years he could have added on to his career, beyond him being the oldest ever post-war outfield player for Liverpool when he retired.

One of the first to follow Billy out of Townhill was Tom, the brother that he was closest to. This was not just because of the one-year age gap between the two but they also shared a love and ability for playing football. Unfortunately for Tom, he was no Billy Liddell and, despite having the opportunity to sign for Liverpool in 1949, he never managed a first-team appearance.

After Tom's exit from Liverpool, his career never really took off, which led to him dropping out of the game. The Liddell family plan of a trade to fall back on meant that he would then go on to become a full-time cobbler. However, this decision nearly killed Tom prematurely as he was diagnosed with cancer. His cancer was of the oesophagus,

which doctors attributed to him putting nails in his mouth during his work as he would hold them there before spitting them into his hand ready to hammer them.

Tom endured a terrible end to his life following his diagnosis of throat cancer in the late 1960s as he was unable to swallow. After many operations, first stretching the gullet and then inserting various prostheses, he was unable to eat solid food and he passed away in his fifties. Billy was crushed by Tom's death, losing a brother and a great friend.

Unfortunately for the middle Liddell brothers, disease and illness was a big part of all of their lives. Campbell was also diagnosed with cancer before he died of the disease in 1989 and Alistair died of a heart attack in 1996. Their mother, Montgomery, passed away in 1969 of a brain haemorrhage. Only Billy, Campbell and George had children but through Campbell the Liddell family lives on in Townhill as his family remains in the area.

Although Billy moved to Liverpool in 1938, this was not the reason that the family left their home. The death of his father, James, when he was 54, in 1951, turned the family upside down. As the eldest male in the family, Billy took the Liddell helm. He took charge of the family, moved them into his Liverpool home and found himself a new house so they could live in his – all this at the age of 29. But the story of Billy Liddell will always begin in Townhill and it is a small village that played a huge role in creating a hard-working, virtuous and football-mad family.