



Arthur Wharton: 1865 to 1930

The World's First Black Professional Footballer

www.arthurwharton.info

Early years

Arthur was born in 1865 in the Gold Coast, now known as Ghana in West Africa. He grew up in Accra, the capital and lived there until he left for England to study at the age of nine. Arthur's parents had ten children but only three survived to adulthood. His father, Henry, died in 1873 when Arthur was only seven.

Arthur went to school in London and stayed four years before returning to the Gold Coast. Three years later at the age of 17, Arthur came back to England with three cousins to study at Shoal Hill Methodist College in Cannock, Staffordshire. As he had lost his father, Arthur's uncle, F.C Grant, who owned the 'Gold Coast Times' newspaper, paid for he and his cousins to attend.

The expectation for Arthur was that he would become a teacher or missionary like his father. He studied religious theology for three years but also during this time, honed his skills in sprinting, cycling, football, cricket and rugby. It's likely Arthur first played some of these sports as a child in the Gold Coast, especially cricket, where it had been taken by the British colonists.

In 1885, Arthur moved to Cleveland College in County Durham and took up a range of athletics. He was known to dip in and out of rugby and cycling during his athletics career but it was sprinting, cricket and football where Arthur would make his mark.

Multiple heritage

Arthur was of multiple heritage and his family background says much about the relationships between Europe, Africa and the Caribbean at the time. The Gold Coast was part of the British Empire from 1874 to 1957; so many British people lived there, mostly in positions of power. Though the prevailing Victorian views of the time believed Africans were inferior to whites, the methodology of colonialism depended upon alliances with 'native' people to help administer colonial rule. In West Africa skin-colour was key to your status.

Arthur's father, Henry Wharton, was born in Grenada in the Caribbean. His own father was a Scottish merchant and sea captain and his mother was the daughter of a Grenadian slave woman. Henry went to the Gold Coast as a Methodist minister and missionary. Arthur's mother, Annie Florence Grant, was also of mixed race and her father, John C. Grant, was a Scottish trader. Annie's mother, Ama-Egyiriba, was part of the Fante Royal Family. The Fante people were the dominant ethnic group in the coastal part of the Gold Coast, so Arthur came from a wealthy, aristocratic family.