

Fooling Around in Flannels

Cricket on the Limestone Plains



A joint exhibition by the Canberra and District Historical Society and
the Hall School Museum and Heritage Centre

G A Mawer and N J Swain

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Front cover: Hall players at the Cricketers' Arms
c. 1905 (HSMHC)

Back cover: Tharwa Rockley team 1899 (HSMHC)

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Preface

The *Fooling Around in Flannels* exhibition is a co-production of the Canberra and District Historical Society (CDHS) and the Hall School Museum and Heritage Centre (HSMHC), the first joint venture of its kind. It draws on the collections of both bodies, supplemented by material on loan from other institutions and individuals.

It was impractical to attempt a comprehensive account of nearly two centuries of cricket on the Limestone Plains and so an episodic, anecdotal and thematic approach was taken. The final product is as much social history as sporting history, demonstrating how closely the game was woven into the fabric of district life from the earliest colonial times. The transformation of Canberra that began in 1959, growing it from a large country town into a capital city, disrupted many aspects of local life – including cricket. As it was not possible to do that later story justice in the same exhibition, our coverage tails off in the 1960s but not without noting the direction in which some of the straws were being carried on the wind.

The co-curators wish to express their thanks to the ACT Government for funding the exhibition with a heritage grant. The National Museum of Australia generously lent us Southwell cricketing items from the national collection in response to an initiative by Sandra Southwell. Wes Kilby allowed us to borrow items from his personal collection. The National Film and Sound Archive retrieved

Bradman footage for us. Cricket ACT was supportive. Volunteers from both CDHS and HSMHC contributed. The curators would especially like to thank Graeme Backen, Michael Hall, Tony Morris, Caroline O'Clery, Sheryl Rae, Rod Roberts, Kingsley Southwell and Heather Wilford for their support and assistance.

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Above: Alured Tasker Faunce, 1807–1856. Below: Game in progress in Hyde Park (John Rae, National Library of Australia).



A Laborious Diversion

When Alured Tasker Faunce arrived at Sydney with his regiment in 1832 he found that cricket was well established. For more than 30 years, the military had been playing the game for recreation and exercise in what is now Hyde Park. Although the *Sydney Gazette* had early labelled it 'a laborious diversion'.¹ Faunce embraced the opportunity to play for his regiment, the 4th Foot. The 'sterling' (military and gentlemen playing in black and white top hats) were frequently lined up against 'currency' (the native-born in cabbage tree hats and the like), which added zest to the contest.

Faunce's enthusiasm did not wane when he left the military to become a stipendiary police magistrate, a career change that in 1837 brought him to Queanbeyan. His paid appointment was terminated in 1842 but he took up a tract of land that he called Dodsworth on the outskirts of the town and remained on the district bench of magistrates. At the time, the town had scarcely enough men of playing age to form one team, much less two, and the game languished despite publican John Daffarn's provision of bats and balls for use by patrons of his Dog and Stile Inn.²

Only Faunce and the few gentlemen of the township, particularly the medical professionals Hayley and Morton, had leisure to practice and play; the lesser orders found it difficult to get time off even for matches.

Although there was a team in Yass as early as 1843, it was not until William Davis (junior) formed a team with his employees at Ginninderra in the 1850s that the Limestone Plains district could muster enough players to challenge teams from other towns. As late as 1859 Davis had to admit that it had been difficult to assemble the composite Queanbeyan and Ginninderra team that he led to Goulburn:

... every available man had been brought from the Queanbeyan district, whereas Goulburn had several more, as good as the present eleven, whom they could bring to the field.³

On a fateful Saturday in April 1856, Faunce gathered with Queanbeyan and Ginninderra players for a married versus singles game on the market reserve between Morisset Street and the river, in what is now Queen Elizabeth II Park. During the day he several times complained of a pain in the heart and was seen to hold his left side. Bowling late in the afternoon, while in the act of picking up the ball to throw down the wicket, he fell backwards. Spectators thought that the 48-year-old had been affected by fatigue but Dr Morton knew better and quickly opened an artery. Blood did not flow freely so he opened the jugular vein. All efforts at resuscitation failed. After 15 minutes it was clear that the captain was beyond help. A door was made to do as a stretcher and the body was carried to the Reverend Edward Smith's house, where Faunce had been staying.⁴

Faunce was probably the initiator of cricket on the Limestone Plains. For nearly twenty years he had struggled to keep it alive with ad hoc and short-lived teams, waiting for the day when the population would be large enough to support a continuing club.

Had he lived another five months he would have had the pleasure of seeing just such a club formed to accept Davis's challenge to a match, the Queanbeyan team agreeing that their colours would be white turned up with scarlet against Ginninderra's white with blue binding.

What he had sown was reaped by his sons. Three of them played for local teams in the 1860s, including Queanbeyan and Ginninderra.



William Davis (junior), Squire of Ginninderra, 1821–1910.

The Old Invincibles

In the opinion of an enthusiastic obituarist from the *Queanbeyan Age*, William Davis (junior) had created in the 1850s the most famous cricket team in the colony, ‘the old, original and invincible Ginninderra Cricket Club’.⁵ What made it invincible was not an unbroken record of success (although it was hard to beat) but longevity. While teams from larger centres like Queanbeyan came and went, for well over 20 years Davis’s team stood ready to play on any Saturday in the season at the toss of a coin.

It was a rich man’s hobby. He came into a position to indulge his passion for the game when he became manager of the Palmerville estate, subsequently marrying the owner’s daughter. Carefully selected employees were given Saturday afternoons off if they were willing and – importantly – able to play. For a while Davis prevailed on the employers of Queanbeyan to follow suit. To make sure that there were sufficient players to make and accept challenges from larger centres, he combined his own and the Queanbeyan men into a Queanbeyan district team led by him. To get to towns not serviced by rail he provided a wagonette big enough to take the entire team with its luggage and gear. He drove it as far afield as Braidwood and Cooma.

At Ginninderra the matches were played on

... the excellent piece of ground that Mr Davis has set aside for the practice of cricket. The quality of the turf is excellent,

and admirably adapted for this purpose, presenting the appearance of a fine velvet sward constantly rolled and kept in order. These natural attractions to the eye of every cricketer are greatly enhanced by the tasteful arrangement of some weeping willows, which have been planted in different parts, and form an additional ornament to the whole. In short, the spirited proprietor of Ginninderra has spared neither trouble nor expense.⁶

The games at Ginninderra were also social occasions. Davis might provide a band. After-match hospitality sometimes included a woolshed dance and fireworks. The care, attention and money that Davis lavished on this pet project produced a team that he was confident could win against almost any odds. In 1862 his 13 men held 22 Queanbeyanites to a tie. At the post-match dinner he told of the place that cricket occupied in his life.

Some people said that he was cricket-mad: but he thought it as well to be cricket-mad as dollar-mad. He saw no fun in scraping money together for money's sake. It was far greater wisdom to enjoy what little money one had, than to be scraping it together till old age came when there would be no capacity for enjoying it. As to cricket being a waste of time, people could waste their time at any thing they chose. Some people wasted their time in going to parliament, where little else was done but talk.⁷

Part of the enjoyment was winning and to this end Davis employed a not-so-secret weapon. His team, uniquely in the district, included a number of talented Aboriginal players.



Cricket Challenge.

THE Gininderra Eleven will be willing (at two days' notice) to play Twenty-two of the Township of Queanbeyan, on Saturday the 27th instant.

Gininderra, 13th December, 1862.



Ginninderra cricketer Bobby Hamilton and his son Eddie, who also played for the team before his early death.

The Republic of Cricket

Duemonga, or Bobby Hamilton as he was called by white men, was a Ngunnawal man who earned a place in their world through his skills. He was a renowned horse breaker and, importantly for his employer William Davis of Ginninderra, a natural athlete in the field ('Kinsela was caught at short slip by that slippery fellow Bobby'⁸). Bobby was joined by another Aboriginal man, Jemmy Taylor. In time the contributions of both would be overshadowed by the precocious talent of Jemmy's son Johnny.

Ginninderra's Aboriginal players were treated as equals, whether on the field, between innings or at post-match functions. The amicability was temporarily upset, however, by a dispute over membership that exposed the racist attitudes held by some outside the club. In 1861 a number of Duntroon players complained that because Davis paid the club subscriptions for his black players they were ineligible to play even if their subscriptions were up to date, which they were not. The issue came to a head at a match where one Duntroon player refused to play against 'common blackfellows'. In an acrimonious correspondence waged in the newspaper columns, a Duntroon partisan styling himself *Pro Bono Publico* gratuitously insulted Bobby over his reception in Goulburn four years earlier.

Was it at that time that your friend Bobby had the pleasure of being introduced after dinner to the elite of the Southern District?

I should dearly have liked to have been present; it must have been very refreshing to have seen the worthy Mayor, Going Gone Esq, and the no less worthy aldermen, Messrs Brewer, Baker and Candlestickmaker, divest themselves of their natural dignity and with patronising solicitude ask ‘How d’ye do, Bobby?’ ... And how did Bobby bear it, did he sit ‘quiet as may be?’ or as the generous wine sent the warm blood coursing through his veins, did he pour forth his soul in song? ... Or, as others waxed fast and furious, did he grow sentimental, and descant to the bachelor portion of the company the solace to be found in the charms of a virtuous lubra?⁹

The offensiveness of this attack was exceeded only by its inaccuracy. A contemporary press report indicated that the occasion had been a triumph for equality in cricket generally and for Bobby in particular.

The world of cricket is, essentially, a republic, in which all men are on an equal footing. The prince and the peasant meet in the cricket field, and sit down together at the same festive board. One of the Queanbeyan players is an aboriginal of the colony, delighting in the name of Bobby. Whilst the feast was going on, Bobby was introduced to the company by one of the Stewards, and his appearance was the signal for a hearty burst of cheering.

Bobby, for the remainder of the evening, occupied a post of honour to the left of the chair.¹⁰

That particular Duntroon club did not long survive the episode, not least because some of its members also objected to playing against common whitefellows.

Johnny Taylor was the prodigy of Davis's team. He made his professional debut in 1862, when he was about 12, with a score of 16 against Yass. In cricketing circles he became known as the 'piccaninny blackfellow'. Davis saw in him a potential NSW representative and trained him accordingly but the plan went awry when father Jemmy died at Uriarra in 1864. Johnny's people sent him to live with kin at Tumut.

Davis bided his time. That his own interest in Aboriginal cricket extended beyond the narrow interests of the home team was evident in 1869 when he led a scratch Aboriginal team from Yass and Boorowa to a 3-run victory over the southern districts in Goulburn.

In that same year Johnny re-emerged to play for Ginninderra against Queanbeyan and the squire's faith was rewarded: Johnny scored nearly half of his team's runs, including 3 hits for 9 and 1 for 8. He became an instant sensation in the intercolonial press but it was a false dawn. He went home to Tumut and played for his local team while working as a stockman, being hailed as the best all-round

cricketer in the southern districts. He was reported to have hit a ball 165 yards ('the greatest hit ... that we believe has ever been made in the colonies'¹¹), but in 1875, at the age of about 25, he died of measles. The loss prompted a heartfelt, if condescending, tribute.

He was the last of Ginninderra's Aboriginal players. Bobby had succumbed to tuberculosis in 1872, playing almost to the end.

ON THE DEATH OF THE ABORIGINAL CRICKETER, JOHN TAYLOR

Farewell to all the games on earth,
Where honestly thou play'dst thy part
Then let me sing the native worth
Of Jackey Taylor's cricket art.

The willow-bat he handled well,
And urged after the flying ball:
His bowls dead on the wicket fell –
Best all-round player of them all.

We'll miss him at his wonted place,
When the next Wagga match is play'd;
And see no more the Darkey's face
When friendly after-feast is laid.

Now sports he in another land –
Perchance a spirit fair and bright
As any of the chosen and –
Among the happy sons of light.

Within the many-mansion'd hall
I feel there is a place for thee;
Black fellow of the white man's fall
Thou'll rise as sure and fair as he.

June 29

Whitefellow¹²

Davis appears to have lost heart for cricket and much else in 1877 when his nephew and fellow cricketer Ernest Palmer, his adopted son in all but name, was killed in a riding accident. He sold up and retired to Goulburn but never forgot how much he owed the black players.

Twenty years later, Queen Nellie Hamilton, Bobby's widow and the last full-blooded Aboriginal of the district, lay dying in Queanbeyan hospital. Davis took the train to visit her. There is no record of what they said to each other.



Bill and George Gribble (first and third, from the left), stalwarts of the Hall team, in front of the Cricketers' Arms c. 1905.

The Cricketers' Arms

William Davis had rooted cricket deep in the soil of the Limestone Plains. His successor at the Ginninderra estate, Edward Crace, had no particular affinity with the game but the dislocated players found a warm welcome further up the Yass road. In 1864 Patrick Grace had established a pub in the shadow of One Tree Hill. He called it the Cricketers' Arms and it offered the Ginninderra players a venue and refreshments like those John Daffan had provided in Queanbeyan decades earlier.

In the 1890s Crace's son Everard enticed the Ginninderra players back to their home turf (now concrete), but the recently-gazetted village of Hall quickly formed a team and the Cricketers' Arms matched Everard by installing a concrete pitch over the road from the pub. Remarkably, both clubs boasted women's teams at a time when these were few and far between.

After Federation, the Cricketers' Arms continued to thrive as a venue for matches between Limestone Plains teams and those visiting from beyond the district.

The Weetangerra team, perhaps feeling overshadowed, indulged in a little self-promotion at its 1911 banquet. George Ward Harcourt recited lines of his own composition.

Have you heard of Wee-tan-gerra?
It's a part of Yass-Can-berra
And for cricketers it's noted;
You will always hear it quoted.
If you want a rattling day,
To this club a visit pay,
And they'll show you how to play.¹³

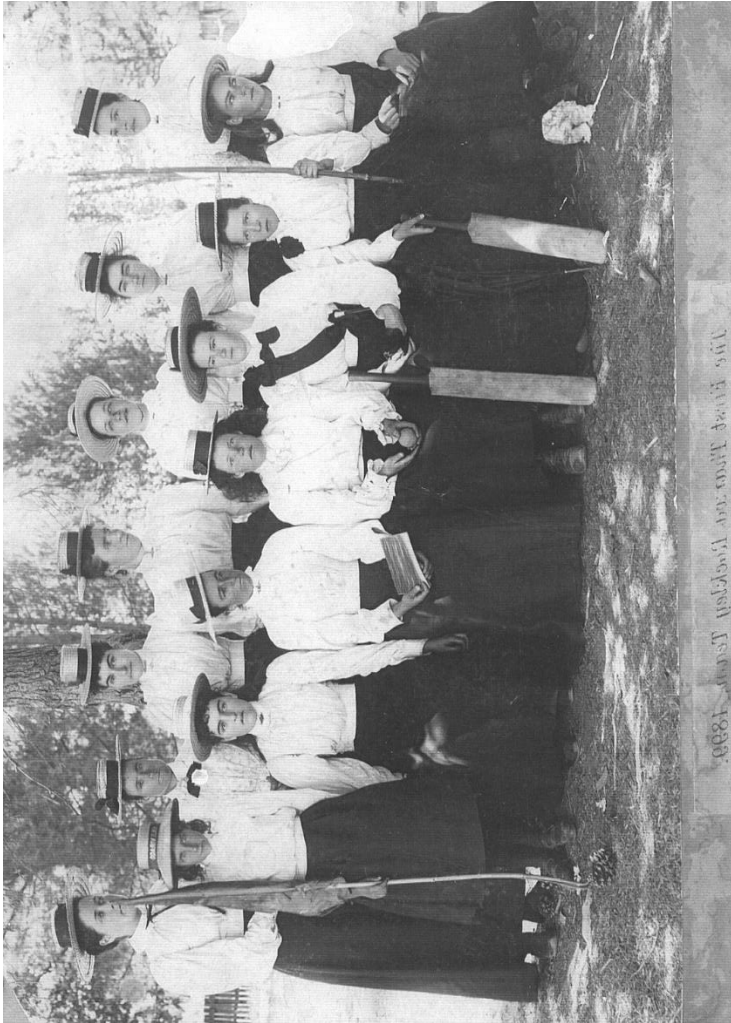
One of those rattlers was Giggling Billy Gribble, known for the perpetual smile on his face even as he put the opposition to the sword.

His was one of many local families represented over generations in the Hall district. Brothers Bill, George and Tom played almost from the word go. Bill's sons Tom, Jack and Ernie, carried on between the wars, with Tom a star of the late-thirties team that won three successive ACT premierships. They were only denied a fourth in 1940 by a wash-out on the final day.

Rockley

‘Cricket on gentle, ladylike principles’; such was the *Queanbeyan Age*’s verdict on the game brought to the district in 1899 by its creator, a newly transferred lands inspector named John Still O’Hara.¹⁴ With remarkable energy and enthusiasm he had built up the game in the Bathurst district, where he also played cricket for the Rockley village team. By 1897 the Rockley Game was being played in Sydney against western district teams. O’Hara was determined to see his ‘pleasant and well-ordered amusement’ for girls also played in the southern districts.

Although based on cricket rules, the modifications were radical. The pitch was shorter, bats were lighter and an uncovered tennis ball replaced the six-stitcher. All the bowling was done from one end, with six balls to an over (at the time eight was more common). There was no running between wickets; it was stand and deliver, with a boundary hit (80 yards) worth six in addition to the single awarded for making contact with the ball at all. Only if the batsperson advanced more than halfway down the pitch was there any possibility of getting out leg before wicket. In place of captains, teams had queens.



Standing (L-R): *Nina De Salis, Mary Maloney, May De Salis, Sarah Abbie Grady, Catherine Fitzgerald, Ann Elizabeth Tong, Susan Maxwell, Charlotte De Salis.*

Sitting (L-R): *Margaret Maloney, Emily De Salis, Elizabeth Anderson (Queen), Catherine Tiernan, Mary Jane Warner, Maria Kelly.*

At the first Queanbeyan gathering, O'Hara mustered teams of boys under 13 as well as girls. There were also mixed teams. The boys, admitted on condition that they did not 'smoke, swear or make too much row', probably decided that they preferred proper cricket anyway. They fell away but within three months five girls' teams – Tharwa, Captain's Flat, Bungendore, Sutton and Gundaroo – were in town to play return matches against the Queanbeyan clubs that had visited them in the interim. More than a hundred girls participated in the carnival. Much of the subsequent team travel to remote locations like Sydney was at O'Hara's personal expense.

Tharwa became the team to beat. Built around the daughters of George and Mary De Salis of Cuppacumbalong, it demonstrated that the socially prominent of the district embraced the concept of sport for young women with as much enthusiasm as the townspeople of Queanbeyan.

O'Hara's game was credited with

... the improved manners and behaviour of many children. Habits of self-restraint, of genial speech free from the fearful atrocities which alas sadly too much prevail, and courteous behaviour have been formed or much aided and testimonies abound¹⁵

The inspector expanded his horizons: he envisaged a Rockley Industrial Exhibition of children's

intellectual productions that would complement the physical and moral development of the Rockley Game. Another work transfer put paid to these ambitions and with him went the local driving force behind the game. It quickly faded on the Limestone Plains but was still being played in the western districts of NSW in the 1940s. Rockley Buckmaster became a major contributor with the bat to Hall's success in the late 1930s but the game he played was cricket.

Another cricket variant for girls, Vigoro, was introduced into Canberra in the 1920s. It began in the new schools like Telopea Park but by 1938 was more broadly based. In that year the Canberra Girls' Vigoro Association fielded teams from the Government Printing Office and the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), and two teams from St Christopher's, Manuka.

The Blue Triangles

Organising women's cricket was just one of the initiatives that the YWCA undertook in the late 1920s at the request of the Federal Capital Commission. Under the formidable leadership of Hilda Tapley-Short, the Blue Triangle Cricket Association was formed. It hoped to affiliate with the newly minted NSW Women's Cricket Association, and to conduct a women's competition in the 1929–30 season on a temporary women's sportsground provided by the Commission at Acton. The thirty girls who put up their hands were well short of the number needed for a competition but by 1931 six A-grade teams were registered, playing as the Gum Nuts (Westridge), the Dinkums, the Sunbeams (Westlake), the Waratahs, Queanbeyan and Hall.

The embryonic association stole a march on its male counterpart by staging the first international cricket fixture to be played in Canberra. The touring English women's Test XI met the Blue Triangles at Manuka Oval on 9 January 1935. Competition to get into the Triangles had been keen and the team's 72 runs in its innings was the highest score any country side had tallied against the English. With the latter at 2 for 42, a close finish seemed possible but rain intervened and the match was abandoned.



Hall Ladies' Cricket Club team of 1931, Nina Southwell far left.

The Governor-General arrived too late to see any play but both teams were presented. Canberra had been captained by Marjorie Moore, an 18-year-old schoolgirl attending Canberra Girls' Grammar School who went on to lead the team to two NSW country premierships.

The English captain was Betty Archdale, later headmistress of Abbotsleigh girls' high school in Sydney. Hall was represented by Nina Southwell and Helen Moore. Nina, who played for her local team until the 1950s, was vice-captain of the Canberra team at the NSW Country Week matches in Sydney in 1947. On that occasion, the team's expenses were partially met by the proceeds from a YWCA bridge night. The balance, as usual, had to be met by the players but Nina and her team were in it for fun and willing to pay for the pleasure.

In 1935 the *Canberra Times*, lamenting the professionalisation and commercialisation of men's cricket, had praised the spirit in which the match had been played at Manuka and hoped that women might be able to reclaim it as a game rather than a business. That was wishful thinking and when, half a century later, women's cricket began to get public recognition it was because standards had risen through professionalisation, mainly paid for by selling the broadcasting rights.



The 1914 handicap game teams.

Pickhandle Games

At Ginninderra, Davis had done much to turn the home cricket matches into social occasions. Half a century later it was the practice of some clubs to hold a handicap game between male players on one side and female relatives etc. on the other. The playing field was far from level: the men had to play wrong-handed and bat with a pick handle. In October 1914 a match was played in the Shumack paddock adjacent to the Weetangerra road. It marked the breakup of the Ainslie team as its members left to join the Australian Imperial Force. One of the men who played that day was Mack Southwell, subsequently killed in France; another player who went was his best friend Percy Douglas, Canberra's fire officer. In 1918 Percy sought out his friend's grave and on return to Australia married Mack's sister Una, who had also played in the 1914 match and would again in 1919.

The 1919 game was fully reported in the *Queanbeyan Age*.¹⁶ It was held to mark the opening of the Ainslie club's new wicket, near what is now the Old Canberra Inn. Among the highlights:

- Before the game, the umpire was called to a corner of the field 'where the ladies, armed with hatpins, surrounded him and all that could be heard for the next half hour was the ladies in turn calling "how's that?", to which the only acceptable reply was "not out"'.
- At the toss the coin came down heads and the ladies elected to bat. The reporter did not

want to cast aspersions but did say that he could have used that penny in one or two 'schools' he knew of.

- Miss Shumack, seeing the ball coming, shut her eyes, hit out, missed and ran to the other wicket where she collided with the umpire. 'Is that one or out?', she demanded. He, mindful of the hatpins, dutifully replied 'not out'.
- Messrs Maloney and Murray having been too successful with the ball, the ladies at the crease demanded their removal. The gentlemen concerned protested but the ladies' committee dismissed the appeal as frivolous and fined each of them half a guinea.
- Miss Una Southwell took to the now-satisfactory bowling with gusto and with Miss Billy Moore built a partnership which, it seemed 'nothing short of a mouse could break'.
- At this crisis, Maloney had a word with bowler Edwards, who sent down a 'twisty wooglie' and at the same time mentioned to Miss Southwell that her hat wasn't on quite straight. 'That settled it, she forgot everything bar her hat and was bowled.'

A remarkable feature of the men's innings was that, although the highest score was 4, the total was a creditable 96. The ladies, doubting the 83 sundries awarded by umpire John Southwell, nonetheless

accepted the score because it was one run less than their own 97.

It is sad to relate that in subsequent years the conventions were not always observed: there is no mention of hatpins in the report of the game at Hall in 1929.



The 1914 Afternoon 'Tea'



Bean as a cricketer before the Great War.

Bean and the Twisters

After the First World War C E W Bean, the official historian of the conflict, agitated to have his secretariat relocated from Sydney to a more contemplative environment. He and his team arrived at the Tuggeranong Homestead in October 1919. He was a keen cricketer and, with plentiful local competition available from local clubs like Michelago, Tharwa and Williamsdale, quickly formed the Tuggeranong Twisters. Was it sensible to advertise that their bowling strength rested with spin? The first pitch was antbed, replaced in 1921 by concrete – now reputedly the oldest of its kind in Canberra.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

A04252

Bean (crouching second from left at the front) with the team after a match c. 1922.

The presence at Tuggeranong of Bean and his team is not the district's only cricketing link with Gallipoli. Brigadier-General Sir Granville de Laune

Ryrie, who commanded the 2nd Light Horse Brigade on the peninsula, was born at Michelago where the family still resides. His descendants James and David Ryrie played in a 2002 match on Reid Oval, just across from the War Memorial, to commemorate the Gallipoli Ruse, which was staged on Shell Green to distract the Turks from preparations for the evacuation of the Anzacs.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

G01 289

Bean's photo of the Shell Green 'match', with Major George Macarthur Onslow, 7th Australian Light Horse Regiment, about to be caught out.

Ryrie had arranged for the game to be played next to his headquarters. The Turks barracked by opening fire, so 'when shells whistled by we pretended to field them. The men were wonderfully cheerful and seemed to take the whole thing as a huge joke'.¹⁷

The 'old Brig' probably participated (note the sturdy, balding bowler). His grandfather, Alured Faunce, would have approved.

The Keir Cup and the Demise of Sunday Sport

Before a formal cricket association was formed in the Federal Capital Territory, teams played in several competitions, most of which had trophies offered by patrons of cricket in the district. The two best known trophies were the Moore Shield for competition by clubs that could field a team on Wednesdays, and the Keir Cup for Sunday matches. Both were 'challenge' cups – teams arranged challenge matches at their convenience and there was no regular schedule.

The winner of each match held the cup until beaten. Whoever was holding the cup at the end of the season kept it. It is not known when the Keir Challenge Cup competition began or who Keir was. The inscriptions on the displayed cup read:

The Keir Challenge Cup
Presented to West Ridge C.C.
By T. Keir Esq
Season 1922-23
Won outright by
Eastlake C.C.
Season 1922-23

A newspaper search turned up a possible donor, although this is so far mere conjecture. Thomas Keir was born on his father's property in the Bywong area.¹⁸ He became a chainman with the survey section of the Department of the Interior. There he met Enid Tucker, who was a secretary.

They married and built a house in Queanbeyan where daughter Ilma was born in 1929. By 1939 father and daughter were living at 31 Westlake. Thomas died there in 1953 and was buried in Woden cemetery. If he was the donor of the Keir Cup he was unusual as being a benefactor of humble origins – we could call it the Chainman’s Cup.



Eastlake with their Keir Cup, won outright by defeating Queanbeyan in the last match of season 1922–23.

What his candidature lacks is evidence that he had any association with cricket, whereas others did: Keir brothers played for Weetangerra around the beginning of the twentieth century. Unfortunately their initials are unknown.

In late 1925 the Federal Capital Commission decided to ban organised Sunday sport pursuant to

the Sunday observance laws. It was the end of the Keir Cup. The last reports were of a match played on Sunday 18 October 1925.

What happened to the displayed cup after 1925 is a puzzle. It was returned to the Federal Capital Territory Cricket Association (FCTCA) in August 1937 by the former President of the then defunct Acton cricket club, Mr Griffith. We do not know how or when it found its way to the Canberra and District Historical Society.

Sunday sport involving admission charges did not resume in Canberra until the 1970s, long after the ban had been lifted in NSW.

Co-operative Cricketers



A family day out. The Canberra Co-operative Store Cricket Team outside the Royal Hotel Bungendore, on its way to play at Gidleigh Station, 1923.

The advent of the Federal Capital Territory in 1911 brought in many new groups, mainly men, who were to begin constructing the national capital. There were enough workers on the Cotter dam, the sewers, the brickworks and the powerhouse, among other sites, to field cricket teams.

One such group was employed by the territory's only shop, the Co-operative Store at Eastlake, which from 1916 to 1923, located at the Canberra Railway Station and stationmaster's residence. The store moved to a nearby block and went into liquidation in June 1925.¹⁹



Co-operative store staff at Canberra Railway Station, 1922. Keith Carnall is at the back on the far right, Jack Esmond second left in bow tie.

A notable employee was Keith Carnall, one of Canberra's best all-round sportsmen. The store's manager, Jack Esmond, captained both the store's cricket team and the Eastlake team when it was formed circa 1922. He and Carnall also represented

the Federal Capital Territory in 1925 against
Dr Blue's visiting team.

From Paddock to Pitch



Perimeter planting around Manuka Oval, June 1926.

The evolution of Manuka Oval from a paddock to a properly turfed, enclosed oval with adequate facilities for players and spectators has been essential to attract high-quality visiting cricket teams to Canberra. The oval is on land once part of the Duntroon Estate and farmed by George Henry Rottenberry, whose farmhouse was in Telopea Park.²⁰

While no oval is shown on Griffin's 1911 plan, successive evolutions saw the appearance and gradual expansion of a reserve between what is now the south end of Telopea Park and Manuka. Early on there was just a roundabout at the junction of Wellington Avenue and Eastlake Avenue (both now Canberra Avenue). By 1923 that roundabout had become an unfenced recreation reserve named Manuka Circle and the main avenues skirted

around its southern edge. For some time the grounds were unimproved paddock and facilities for players were non-existent. Eventually some 3 x 2 metre wooden huts were installed. They were on wheels so they could be pulled by horse to wherever needed.

In 1929 a galvanised iron shed, previously a mess hut from a construction camp, was moved to the oval. Two temporary cubicles were added. In response to criticism that the oval was hard and full of tussocks, it was graded and grassed, a turf pitch was laid on Bulli soil and a wire-mesh fence installed. However, the 2.03-metre slope from the pitch to the east boundary (just like Lords!) was not levelled. Locals played the first match on turf against Dr Blue's visiting Wayfarers.²¹

Facilities at the ground for players and spectators remained primitive. At a 1932 match attended by the Governor-General and Lady Isaacs, a report referred to the 'disgusting sanitary facilities'. The pavilion was still the former mess hut relocated ten years earlier; there were still no showers or lighting.

The campaign to attract international teams has seen progressive upgrades to the playing surface and facilities. The pronounced slope to the east has been removed, new turf pitches and lighting installed and a media centre built. Facilities for players and spectators have also improved with the installation of grandstands.



Preparing the ground for sowing, March 1929.



The pavilion in 1932 (far right).

Blue's Wayfarers

The Federal Territory Cricket Association, formed in 1922 (renamed the Federal Capital Territory Cricket Association in 1928), was keen to attract high-class visiting teams from outside the region. The first significant visit was by Dr Blue's Wayfarers or Stragglers in 1925. Attracted by the offer of Duntroon's turf wicket, they played an FTCA representative team at the Royal Military College on 13 April 1925. Blue bought teams to Canberra again in 1926, 1929, 1930 and 1931. He (and his father) took touring teams around NSW. Neil Blue was an extraordinary man: although lacking inches and encumbered by crutches he bowled, batted and fielded – a model of cricketing determination.

In addition to a decent playing surface, visiting teams were enticed by strong social programs. These included lengthy formal dinners at the Hotel Kurrajong, the magnitude of which is well illustrated by the souvenir menus, displayed in the *Fooling Around in Flannels* exhibition. The rounds of speeches and toasts called for considerable endurance, relieved by humour in the menu. Courses included First and Second Innings; proceedings ending with 'Stumps drawn'.

On 19 April 1930 the Wayfarers played in the opening match on the newly turfed Manuka Oval. The team included future Test player and Canberra press gallery member Jack Fingleton, after whom the heritage scoreboard bought from the Melbourne Cricket Club in the 1980s is named.



Dr. Neil Blue



Inauguration of the newly turfed Oval. The suited man with a bat is probably R.G. Kappler, FCTCA President, with Dr Blue far right.

The FCTCA team included Bill Tickner, who became the Oval groundsman, and Warren McDonald, later Chairman of the Commonwealth Banking Corporation. Percy Douglas (former President) bowled the first ball and Colonel Goodwin (Patron) took first strike. The Wayfarers won comfortably.



Mailey's Bohemians

The team that Arthur Mailey bought to Canberra in 1928 could be called the Cartoonists' Team. Mailey and Jimmy Bancks (of Ginger Meggs fame) were both professional cartoonists. The team also included a young Don Bradman.

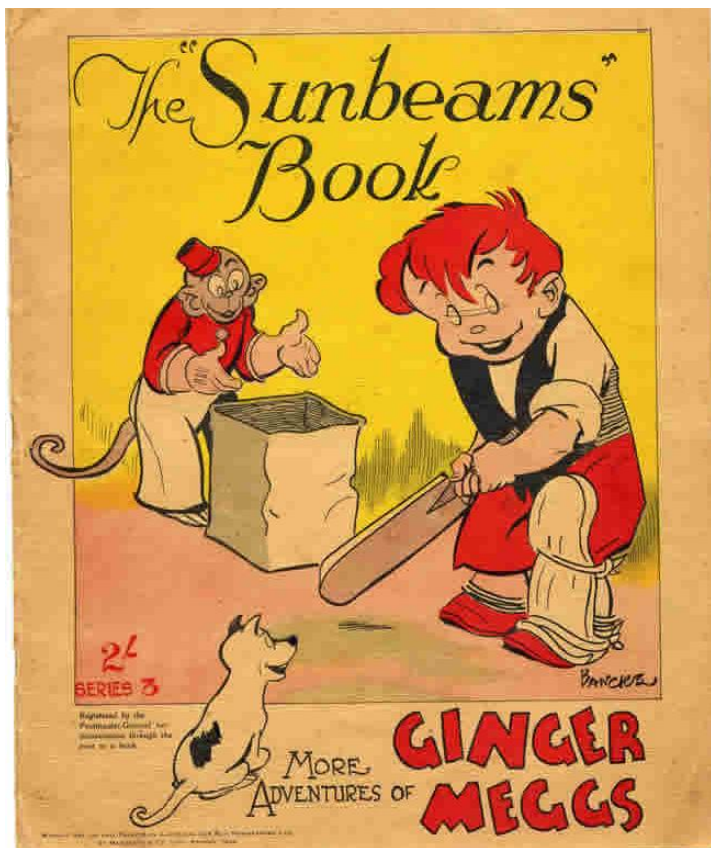


The 1928 team. At the back, Bradman is second from left and Bancks fourth from left. Mailey is seated, second from right.

Mailey's 1927 and 1928 teams were the first to include Test cricketers playing officially in the Federal Capital Territory. They were treated to lavish banquets at the Hotel Kurrajong and, in 1928, a civic ball. The 1927 banquet included 13 toasts and responses. Dishes included Consommé Governor-General (the nickname of Charlie Macartney), Oldfield Sauce, Fillet Mignon

Andrewski, Cartoon Sauce, Roast Spring Chicken à la Googly, and Iced Asparagus Wrongun.

The 1928 result? A record crowd at Northbourne Oval saw their home team defeat the Bohemians 139 to 119. Bradman scored 7.



Playing the Man

'Fast leg theory' was English captain Douglas Jardine's description of his strategy for the 1932–33 Ashes tour. Australians called it for what it was, intimidatory bowling directed not at the stumps but at the batsmen. In a word: bodyline. Several batsmen were struck and one was seriously injured. Worse, the tactic was successful.

None of the games was played in Canberra but when the Australian Board of Control for International Cricket condemned bodyline as 'unsportsmanlike' the shock waves were felt in the national capital. Deeply offended, the English muttered about taking their bat and ball and going home. The team manager, 'Plum' Warner, appealed to Britain's diplomatic representative in Canberra, Ernest Crutchley, to see if he could get the offending word withdrawn. Crutchley suggested to the Australian government that if it were withdrawn the English might agree to some modification of leg side bowling. Although Prime Minister Lyons would have been happy to accept the compromise, Warner insisted on an unqualified withdrawal. In the end the Board resorted to weasel words: 'we do not regard the sportsmanship of your team as being in question'. Ill-feeling persisted to the end of the unhappy series.

Two months later Bert Oldfield, Australia's wicketkeeper and the player worst injured by the English attack, showed film of the series to schoolboys packed into the Capitol Theatre in

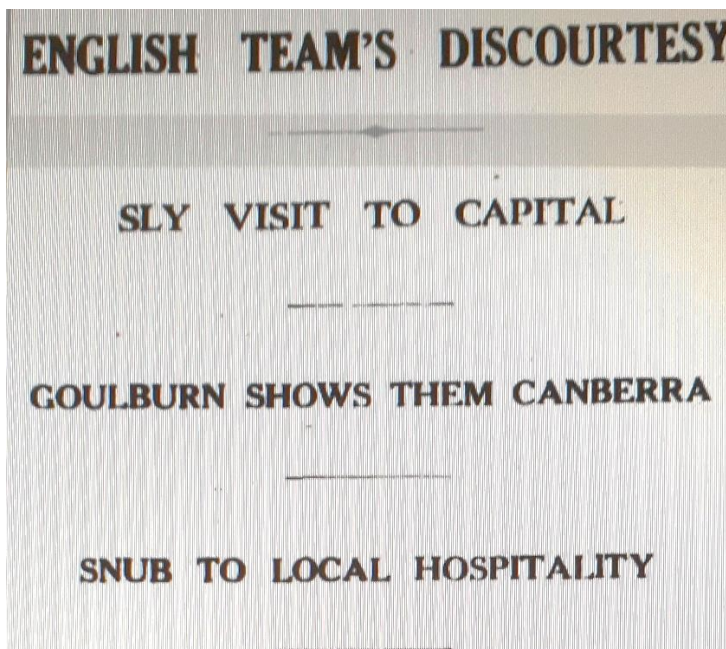
Manuka for an Empire Day gathering. He told them that it was better to lose a match played fairly than to win one 'by methods born of over-zeal'. He put Australia's loss of the Ashes down to poor fielding but was convinced that England would have lost if the Australian team had also resorted to bodyline tactics.²²

Some of the locals were less scrupulous. In a game against Kingston the Acton team thought to give it a go. Unfortunately, in the hands of their bowlers it was slow leg theory. Furthermore, with all fielders on the leg side, whenever the ball strayed to the off side it went to the fence. The *Canberra Times* described the experiment as a dismal failure.²³



Crutchley and Jardine (front, second and third from left) and Warner (far right, on step) in Canberra.

To some, fast leg theory itself was a mystery. In November 1933 Jim Bancks, creator of Ginger Meggs, came to Canberra with the 'Snappy Sydney Revue' for a charity performance. The party included a number of cricket players led by Arthur Mailey, who organised a scratch game. After Mailey failed to stop a well-struck ball he moved most of the fielders to the leg side and handed the ball to Bancks with the instruction 'you bowl bodyline'. In the opinion of a reporter 'Bancks did not look as though he knew anything about it – and he did not, either'.²⁴



Front page news in the Canberra Times of 26 February 1926.

Canberra Bypassed

In the early days there were many unsuccessful attempts to bring high-level men's cricket to the national capital. In 1929 the Board of Control thought Goulburn had a stronger claim to a match with the English team. A fleeting visit to Canberra was arranged but only three of the English team came. *The Canberra Times* was most offended.

Canberra thought it had a better chance of a match during the 1932–33 English tour, owing to the lately turfed Manuka Oval, but Wagga Wagga won out despite Prime Minister Joe Lyons' personal invitation.



PM Bruce (second left) and the sly visitors at Parliament House.



The 1936–37 touring English team.

Eventually Canberra was included. During its 1936–37 tour, the English team played a Southern and Western Districts representative side at Manuka Oval on 10–11 February 1937. Five players were selected from the FCTCA: Clem Hill (Captain), Clive Kelly, Lorne Lees, Andy McGill and John Edlington. England won comfortably and the crowd was nearly 5,000 (Canberra had a population of about 8,000).

The promotional souvenir booklet included:

- a history of cricket in the area since 1854;
- a full history of the FCTCA;
- a description of Manuka Oval;

- the story of bat willows planted near the oval;
- an account of tree plantings on the site of the proposed National Sports Ground;
- a gift from the FCTCA to Canada's leading cricket team in 1932 (delivered by Arthur Mailey); and
- a photograph of the Illuminated Address presented to the English team commemorating the 'first visit of an all-England cricket team to the national capital'.

From 1936 Canberra was included in the itinerary of all overseas teams until 1951 when Newcastle displaced Canberra. The snub prompted the inauguration of the Prime Minister's XI. Since then, local representative sides and the PM's men have played against many international teams, including England and India.

The building of a media centre at Manuka Oval in 2018 met a major condition for getting Test cricket to the national capital. The inaugural Test was played in early 2019 between the Australian men's XI and Sri Lanka. Australia won convincingly, Mitchell Starc taking 10 wickets.

One Day International (ODI) and T20 international fixtures, women's as well as men's, have become a regular feature of the Canberra season.



Menzies, Ted Dexter (English team captain) and Bradman at Manuka in 1963.

Ming the Munificent

The FCTCA and, in its subsequent form, the ACTCA had worked hard from 1937 to ensure international cricket teams played in the national capital.

However, in 1951 the West Indies team was scheduled to play at Newcastle instead of Canberra. This caused considerable disappointment, if not anger. At that time Canberra was a close-knit community, especially among parliamentarians and government officials. Many had a keen interest in cricket. Something had to be done.

R G Menzies was a cricket tragic and sometimes watched matches at Manuka Oval on a Saturday afternoon with his driver, Alf Stafford.²⁵ Stafford was a keen cricketer and had opened for St George in the 1920s, with Don Bradman batting at No. 3. Stafford moved to Canberra and later captained several representative teams in the 1930s. Only recently has it become known that he was of Aboriginal descent.

Menzies knew Ian Emerton, Deputy Clerk of the Senate and President of the ACTCA. Stafford and Emerton had been neighbours in the 1930s. We can add to the mix Jim Backen, an officer of the Prime Minister's Department and one of the best cricketers in the ACT. Another cricketing parliamentary officer was Allan Tregear who became Clerk of the House.

When Emerton broke the news to Menzies that the West Indies would not be playing in Canberra his

reply was 'Emerton, what about a Prime Minister's XI playing the West Indies in Canberra? I know the Board. Leave it to me'. Menzies was prepared to put his money where his mouth was and offered to meet costs. Any net profit would go to Canberra Legacy.

The Prime Minister got his way. A Match Arrangements Committee was set up, chaired by Emerton. The Secretary was Backen. Formally and informally most of this clique of cricket fans had an influence on the selection of players for the PM's XI. His team played the West Indies at Manuka Oval on 22 October 1951.



Menzies provided his own florin for the coin toss, watched by captains Jack Fingleton and John Goddard.



The PM's determination is rewarded: play underway on 22 October 1951.

There was no game in 1952. Other PM's XI matches played on Menzies' watch were against England in 1954, 1959, 1963 and 1965. Another match was played against the West Indies in 1961 and the South Africans played in 1964.

In 1963 a reluctant Bradman came out of retirement to humour the PM. Menzies opened the new Bradman stand and Bradman unveiled the plaque naming it in his honour. The Don's last dig (he was bowled for 4) drew an exceptional crowd of about 11,000. Legacy ended up more than a thousand pounds to the good.

Purists protested that the games were 'hit and giggle' social cricket, played so that Menzies could associate with elite cricketers whose company he enjoyed. In 1951 his enjoyment even found outlet

in verse. When Jack Fingleton was given out first ball, in disregard of the match rules, Menzies commiserated.

What, Fingleton?
Not even a singleton
O What a fruitless journey
Thanks to a singularly slow piece of
thinking by Ernie [the guilty umpire].²⁶

And this for one of Australia's greatest leg spinners, somewhat past his prime.

Who is this man with creaking bones
This ancient, uttering oaths and groans
Bowling round-arms, and that most vilely
Sir, 'tis the ghost of Bill O'Reilly.

Who, for the record, took 1 for 23 off 4 overs.

Informal they might have been, but after Menzies retired in 1966 there were no more PM's XI games, social or serious, for 18 years. Only when Bob Hawke, a seriously competitive cricketer if ever there was one, was elected in 1983 did the incumbent display interest in reviving the PM's XI. In one way it was a homecoming: as a postgraduate student at ANU he had played for Northbourne in the 1956–57 season, averaging 26.1 as the team's second-highest scorer.

After some tricky negotiations a match against the West Indies was played on 24 January 1984. It was a proper game in One Day format. The tradition of PM's XI matches at Manuka Oval has continued ever since.



Michael Bevan, Canberra original and ODI legend. In the absence of an ACT Sheffield Shield team he represented South Australia, New South Wales and Tasmania.

The Impossible Dream

From its inception in 1922 the Federal Territory Cricket Association cherished the aim of getting direct representation on the Australian Board of Control for International Cricket. With it went the ambition to get a representative team into the premier interstate competition, the Sheffield Shield. An attempt in 1927 failed when, in the words of the Territory representative, the NSW Cricket Association 'queered our pitch'. No reasons were given other than that the time was not opportune.

The most determined push began in 1974, when the Association (now the ACTCA) resolved to seek direct affiliation with the Australian Cricket Board. That achieved, and conditional on 'improvement in the standard of [ACT] play', the next step would be to apply for entry to the Shield competition which, if rejected, 'should be resubmitted every year thereafter until successful'.

Just as desirable would be a share of the profits from overseas tours that were distributed by the Board to state associations. The ACTCA marshalled its evidence. In 1980 Canberra's population would be greater than Perth's when the West had been admitted in 1947. At then current rates of growth it was expected that the ACT would exceed Tasmania's population by 1984. Although the NSWCA forwarded the application the Board again declined to take action.

In any event, the selection of Tasmania as a benchmark turned out to be an unfortunate choice: it is now predicted that the ACT's population will not exceed the island state's until about 2040.



The Western Australians won the Shield in their first season after being admitted to the competition.

Notes

¹ 8 January 1804.

² *Sydney Herald*, 21 September 1841. The brick building that replaced Daffarn's original timber structure still stands at 11–13 Macquoid Street.

³ *Goulburn Herald*, 2 March 1859.

⁴ *Goulburn Herald*, 3 May 1856, and an unnamed Sydney newspaper.

⁵ *Queanbeyan Age*, 19 July 1910.

⁶ *Goulburn Herald*, 17 November 1859.

⁷ *Golden Age*, 31 May 1862.

⁸ *Golden Age*, 29 January 1863.

⁹ *Golden Age*, 24 October 1861.

¹⁰ *Goulburn Herald*, 10 October 1857.

¹¹ *Gundagai Times*, 3 July 1875.

¹² *Queanbeyan Age*, 17 July 1875.

¹³ *Queanbeyan Age*, 2 May 1911.

¹⁴ *Queanbeyan Age*, 6 September 1899.

¹⁵ *Queanbeyan Age*, 1 September 1900.

¹⁶ *Queanbeyan Age & Queanbeyan Observer*, 21 November 1919.

¹⁷ P. Vincent, *My Darling Mick: The Life of Granville Ryrrie*, National Library, Canberra, 1997, pp. 99–100.

¹⁸ There are several Keirs listed in the ACT Electoral Roll. Thomas (chainman) and Enid were shown at 31 Westlake in 1935, 1943 and 1949. Other sources show Keirs at Bywong and Gundaroo.

¹⁹ Fortunately shops opened at Eastlake (now Kingston) in 1926. J. B. Young's emporium used the former Co-op store at Canberra Railway Station for storage.

²⁰ Demolished in 1923 to make way for Telopea Park (then called Waratah Parkway or Pathway).

²¹ The first local competition match on the oval was played in October 1930.

²² *Sydney Sun*, 3 May 1933.

²³ *Canberra Times*, 23 January 1933.

²⁴ *Sydney Sun*, 11 November 1933.

²⁵ Menzies and Stafford were close. When Stafford's wife died Menzies had him around for meals at the Lodge. It was there that Stafford met his second wife – the housekeeper.

²⁶ R. G. Menzies, *The Measure of the Years*, Cassell, North Melbourne, 1970, p. 272.



The First Tharwa Cricket Team, 1899.

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