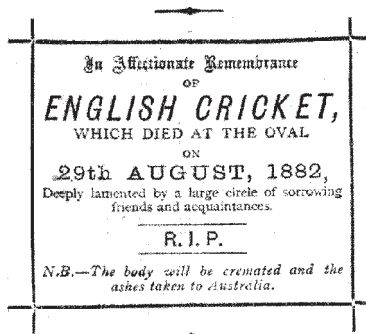


# 1882

## THE ASHES

More than 20000 spectators packed London's Kennington oval on 29 August 1882 for the final day's play in what has been described as 'one of the mightiest battles in cricketing history' — the Test match between Australia and England.

Two days later, via a Reuter's telegram and the unemotional reporting of the time, newspaper readers shared in the excitement and tension of the final moments when the touring side, defying 60 to 1 odds, trounced an All-England Eleven on home ground for the first time. In London the *Sporting Times* said it all with the satirical obituary notice to English cricket shown below:



Ironically, that advertisement created the game's most revered trophy: the mythical Ashes.

The triumph at The Oval came less than 80 years after the first recorded cricket match took place in the penal colony of New South Wales. Officers of the ship *Calcutta* are thought to have been the players referred to by the *Sydney Gazette* on 8 January 1804 in a one-paragraph report which read:

*The late intenic weather has been very favourable to the amateurs of Cricket, who have scarcely lost a day for the last month. The frequent immoderate heats might have been considered inimical to the amusement, but were productive of very opposite consequences, as the state of the atmosphere might always regulate the portions of exercise necessary to the ends this laborious diversion was originally intended to answer.*

By 1826 this 'laborious diversion' had enough followers in the colony for the Australian Club to challenge the Military Club to a match played on a cow paddock which later became the Sydney Domain. The outcome is not known, but four years later the colonials proved their strength, as the *Sydney Gazette* reported:

*The Cricket Match on the Race course yesterday, eleven aside, the competitors being an equal number of the military, expert at the game, and of native-born youths, lasted from eleven o'clock in the forenoon, till five o'clock in the evening. At two o'clock, it was thought that the natives had no chance, and that they must be beat. However as the day's play advanced, the Australians recovered all they had lost in the morning, and at*

*length won the game. A prettier day's play than this was certainly never witnessed in this Colony. At four o'clock it was estimated that there were upwards of a hundred spectators on the ground.*

The Melbourne Cricket Club was founded on 15 November 1838 by 'Gentlemen civilians of the District of Port Phillip', and the first match was played against the military two days later.

Noted the *Port Phillip Gazette*:

*After a duration of some hours, the match concluded by a triumph on the part of the civilians... On the whole the game was played with an esprit de corps, a judgment, and an activity that a first-rate club in England might not have been ashamed to boast.*

In the other Australian colonies, too, cricket was an early pastime. First matches took place in Tasmania in 1826, Western Australia in 1835, and South Australia in 1839. In 1857, a year after New South Wales had beaten Victoria in the first intercolonial match in Melbourne, the first games were played in Queensland.

Aborigines, too, soon took up the game, with an all-Aboriginal team touring England in 1868.

International cricket was brought to Australia by an enterprising Melbourne catering firm, Messrs Spiers and Pond, who sponsored a tour by an English Eleven in 1862 and netted £11 000 for their trouble.

The English team, led by Surrey Captain H. H. Stephenson, won six matches,

drew four, and lost two — against Castlemaine and a combined New South Wales-Victorian side. The odds were stacked rather unfairly against the visitors, for in most matches they were faced by teams of twenty-two players, and a few times eighteen players.

Other English tours followed in 1863-64, 1873-74, and 1876-77, during which the first Test match against an Australian Eleven took place. The four-day match against James Lillywhite's team in Melbourne ended, the *Argus* reported:

*... in an unexpected victory for Australia. A great triumph has been won by the colonial cricketers, for they have beaten the best professional eleven (if one or two men be left out of account) which probably could be got together in the old country. It is necessary to emphasise the word 'professional' lest hasty persons should run away with the idea that colonial cricket has proved itself equal to English cricket.*

Five years later, in 1882, W. L. Murdoch's team proved exactly that by defeating an All-English Eleven led by A. N. Hornby.

Later that year, Ivo Bligh (later Lord Darnley) brought an English team to Australia which, after winning two out of three Test matches, was presented with an urn containing the ashes of a cricket stump by a group of Australian women. Commented the *Sydney Morning Herald* after the final Test match:

*We have been justly proud of our cricketers and their deeds in the old country, and our briefly enjoyed honours, won in many a well-fought contest in the old country, have been wrested from us by an adventurous*

*band of cricketers, who heroically set out from England to take back with them the laurels which our representatives so lately brought with them to Australia.*

*Mr Bligh's most ardent hopes have been realised, and he has now in his custody the 'revered ashes of English cricket' from which will be rehabilitated the supremacy of the English cricketers. The blow is great ...*

Bligh presented the urn containing the Ashes to the Marylebone Cricket Club, which it displays in a place of honour at Lords.