

ETON RAMBLERS TOUR OF AUSTRALIA

"MANAGER'S" REPORT

JANUARY, 1975

It was with the greatest regret in September of last year that we heard that Cedric Gunnery would be unable to come to Australia. In his absence, I was asked to take on the job of Manager—a great honour and one I assumed with a certain degree of trepidation.

I hope that this report of our activities, and my impressions of the tour will be of interest to all those Ramblers not lucky enough to have been with the party.

We are all indebted to Dick Robins for the conception of the tour in the first place, and for the arrangements of many of our fixtures. Its ultimate birth was the result of hours of hard work put in over many months by the pre-tour committee, of which James Mackinnon was a leading light, and able through his Australian connections to assist in so much private accommodation. We were lucky in having our former Secretary, Guy Pease, resident in Sydney, and his help as local liaison officer and decision maker was invaluable when coupled with that of Brian Bavin of the Old Cranbrookians of Sydney. Without Brian's help before and during the tour, many of our fixtures could not have taken place.

As all Ramblers will know, we usually go onto the field with 11 captains! On tour we were to have 18, plus 6 wives whose interest had very much to be taken into account—a daunting prospect. The Tour Committee, however, decided that 4 captains only would be used, as it was felt that experience of Australian conditions gained early on would assist in achieving good results. The remaining 14 poachers turned into magnificent gamekeepers!

Before we left London on 27th December, 1974, a series of indoor nets were arranged for all those able to get there, and training sessions were held at the gymnasium in Knightsbridge Barracks, kindly arranged for us by Bay Hodgson. Peter Lowndes was in charge, and it was obvious from the number who attended these sessions that the party was taking its responsibility seriously.

The flight to Sydney was unevenful, apart from the consumption of duty free liquor. After one night in a motel, we moved on to Melbourne. After 24 hours in the air it was a rather jaded party that dispersed to the various private houses in which we were staying. There is, no longer, any doubt in our minds of the existence of "jet lag" and its effects were to be felt for several days to come. Nets had been made available to us and for two days the whole party attended in relays to get accustomed to Australian conditions.

The bare facts and figures of the tour are all shown in the list of results, and I will not comment on these in detail, but will try to highlight certain events.

Our first match, on 2nd January, 1975, against the "Twenty Niners" at the Albert Oval in Melbourne, gave us a foretaste of what was to follow. After electing to bat, the Ramblers quickly found themselves 3 for 3 to the reserve opening bowler of the Victoria Sheffield Shield side, although Colin Braithwaite stood firm and helped us to a reasonable total. Their captain was Ian Macdonald, formerly the Victoria State wicket-keeper and batsman, and he was supported, amongst others, by a former Queensland player and Neil Fraser, manager of the Australian Davis Cup team. It was no surprise that, out of practice and still feeling the jet lag, we lost this first match,

which was followed by a visit to Geelong, to play the Old Grammarians. Here, we were faced by Paul Sheahan, just retired from the Australian test side, and a team of young and active old boys who were being watched by their headmaster, the charming and cultured son of the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Fisher.

A sterling innings of defiance by Mathew Prichard staved off defeat and earned a draw, but the highlight of the match was provided by a nameless member who had temporarily lost his spectacles when he went in to bat. Gently pushing the ball towards extra cover, and calling for a run, he was smartly run out by silly mid-off whom he swears he had failed to notice!

By now, we had started to come to terms with realities. Australians are, by nature, highly competitive and however charming, generous and entertaining, both off and on the field are, nevertheless, determined to win. Their pitches, including the square, are used during the winter for football and, in spite of the incredible powers of recovery of their playing surfaces, the pitches were likely to vary with outfields uneven and requiring different fielding techniques from those employed on smooth English turf. The light was harsher and stronger, making the judging of speed and distance difficult to English eyes, and we had to get accustomed to being pestered with flies at nearly every match.

Many of our matches were going to be "limited overs" matches, and not usual one-day cricket, making changes in our approach to captaincy, bowling and field placing essential.

We were starting to adjust and knit together as a team.

It had been decided at a pre-tour meeting that at no time would we have 1st and 2nd XI's, but that everyone on the tour would get his fair share of 8 or 9 matches out of the 15, provided that we put a reasonably balanced side onto the field.

We were now to leave Melbourne for Sydney, after a stay of six days, during which a New Year's Eve party and dance had been given in our honour, our various hosts had given barbeques and we, ourselves, had held an O.E. cocktail party at the Melbourne Club, arranged by the O.Es in Melbourne, and to which our hosts were invited. Some members had watched the exciting final stages of the Test match, some had challenged the Royal Melbourne Tennis Club to a Real Tennis match, and others visited the magnificent Melbourne Botanical Gardens.

On arrival in Sydney, we dispersed to various flats, either kindly lent to us or rented in advance. We collected our quota of five cars and a minibus, which latter was most ably piloted by James Leonard for the remainder of the tour, assisted by John Consett as pathfinder. The only necessary instruction from your manager was for those playing to appear at the appointed place on time, in good order, and in a fit state to play cricket. Remarkably, this was achieved in spite of the "Master's" attempts at sabotage by keeping his colleagues awake, talking into the small hours of the morning and reputedly, amongst themselves, settling the ills of international cricket and politics!

Our next match was against I Zingari at the Camden Park Oval, some 1½ hours drive south west of Sydney. The lovely ground is set in park-like surroundings in the grounds of Camden Park, one of Australia's few early stately homes, and now preserved as part of its national heritage. Its owner, Quentin Stanham was both our host and opposing captain. After early disasters, Peter Lowndes made a magnificent 90 and, finally, a respectable score of over 200 was achieved. We were unlucky to lose this close match in the last over.

After the match, an ox was roasted whole by the swimming pool near the house,

and both teams with wives and other guests had a delightful evening. Peter Lowndes, my wife and I were lucky enough to be invited by Quentin Stanham, not only to see round the house but to sample the Australian wines in his cellar—a task we undertook with relish.

It was with some apprehension that we next tackled a Churches of N.S.W. XI, fearing perhaps that the natural flow of expression from Ramblers' lips following errors of judgement in the field might have to be curbed. Our fears were groundless, as our opponents were a side drawn from the members of church congregations, and just as capable of forcible expressions as we were. The match was narrowly lost, possibly through an over-generous declaration, as a result of a two hour lunch break.

Four matches: three lost—one drawn. Not good. The Manager was getting reluctant to cable the news back to the President. Better things, however, were in store.

The next three matches were won convincingly, largely due to some excellent bowling and tight fielding and good captaincy, before Brian Bavin and the Old Cranbrookians put us in our place again. Our bowling had dismissed them for 144 in spite of the fact that 10 of their XI had, at some time, made centuries for their Club. Apart from David Barber, we batted miserably and were dismissed for 94. A return match will take place on Upper Club on 18th July, when we hope to do better.

Brian, his wife, and her parents gave us dinner and a party after the match, which we intend to reciprocate in full measure in July.

On 15th January, we left Sydney and drove to Canberra to be put up for two nights by various kind hosts. The following day, two parties were taken for lunch to see a typical Australian cattle station, and the remainder visited the Tidbinbilla Game Reserve, to gaze at Koala bears, Kangaroos, Bower Birds and other wild life in their natural habitat, and guided round by the charming and knowledgeable English Head Ranger. Dick and Penelope Robins had gone to Adelaide to stay with his godfather, Sir Donald Bradman.

Our match at Canberra, against the Molongo XI, was well won with a good all round performance and, during the match, a stage was reached where we were able to give a few overs to Charles Maxsted, our off-spinner who, as we had 13 prospective bowlers on tour, had not yet had a chance to show us his gifts. As he came up to bowl his first ball, the trees around the ground, silent until now, erupted into shrieks of raucous laughter, as the watching Kookaburras enjoyed their first giggle of the day!

We next moved to the Cattle rearing country, and the town of Goulburn to play the Kookaburras, a side with a reputation of being tough opposition. After our usual precarious start, we amassed the modest total of 169, mainly due to an excellent and dogged innings of 69 by Ian MacDonald, the 1972 captain of the Eton XI. That we won this 35 overs match in the last over was mainly due to Ian, and to determined captaincy by Tom Pugh, who adjusted his field to live up to the name of "Master".

After an uproarious barbeque evening, the elderly sisters, owners of the cattle station, were serenaded by a joyful choir of Ramblers, and were finally lulled into oblivion with renderings of "Waltzing Matilda" and "The Boating Song"!

10 matches played: five won—four lost—one drawn. A great improvement and the party cock-a-hoop. We felt we detected a smile on the face of the Tiger of Carrington House.

Back in Sydney, we won an extra match laid on at the last moment, thanks to five wickets taken by Denzil How, followed by two drawn matches, both of which were

closely fought to the end. The highlights were innings of distinction by Mark Faber and Bruce Powell. After the last of these matches held at the ground of the Railways Institute, we all repaired to their clubhouse, shared also by the Railwaymen's Tennis and Bowls Club. On being introduced as a visiting English team, we were surrounded, and the beer started to flow in earnest. An hour and half later, your Manager left the field with his cricket bag overflowing with 42 tubes of Fosters beer and, like his colleagues, was in no fit state to face any breathalyser test.

Two further matches were to follow, and we ended our tour against the Scots Old Boys on 22nd January. In the first, we suffered a heavy defeat against a Northern District side—B.P. Crawford making the only century of the tour against us but, in the last match, we redeemed ourselves to end with an easy win, mainly due to excellent bowling by George Meyrick and Peter Lowndes, and ending with the wiles of Dick Robins, whose wrong 'uns the opposition couldn't detect.

15 matches: seven won, five lost, three drawn. The Ashes were ours. As Col. A. C. Wilkinson cabled the President from Sydney—Nulli Secundus.

During the stay in Sydney, a number of extra-cricketing activities were enjoyed—Golf, Swimming, Sunbathing, Sightseeing, visits to the Opera, trips round Sydney Harbour, good eating and drinking, all found their adherents. The six wives who came, Mandy Barber, Angela Prichard, Caroline Dunnington-Jefferson, Penelope Robins, Jean Meyrick and Diana Jenkinson, were pillars of support to the whole side, and helped immeasurably in entertaining our hosts, including another O.E. cocktail party at the Royal Sydney Golf Club. They even sat with enjoyment with us through a day at the Sydney Test, to watch England humiliated by Thomson and Lillee.

Apart from his cricketing prowess, Mervyn Dunnington-Jefferson was voted the best of the B.D.O.'s (for the uninitiated—"Bird Duty Officers").

Such is the fame of the Ramblers that the tour was mentioned on the radio and television during the test match commentaries, and articles with photographs appeared in the Melbourne and Sydney press.

Every member played his full part in making this ambitious tour probably the most successful and harmonious ever undertaken by the Ramblers. The fielding and catching were way above normal Rambler standards. Jim MacKinnon alone had five run outs by hitting the wicket from cover, and John Consett's hands were always safe. The bowling of George Meyrick, Alec Foster and Peter Lowndes as openers was accurate and tight, and they were ably supported by the others who pinned the batsmen down. Our opening partnerships were always suspect and never realised their true potential, but the middle order batsmen and individual openers all made good scores, in particular Peter Lowndes, Bruce Powell, James Leonard, Mathew Prichard and Ian MacDonald. The wicket-keeping of James Leonard and Ian MacDonald was alert, sound and above average.

If the Ramblers have learned anything on their tour, it is that good cricket played hard and with determination, with keen fielding and captaincy, is even more rewarding than "social" cricket and I think all of us would wish to instil this into the Rambler cricket we play at home.

Finally, I would like to thank all those in Australia who made our visit so enjoyable, the Tour Committee, and all members of the party who proved by their support, that pre-tour managerial apprehension was unfounded.

JULIAN JENKINSON,
Tour Manager.