

MAKING SPORTING TRADITIONS

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Despite its recent origin, the history of sporting history in Australia is already mythologised. It is not unknown for younger doctoral students to seek out those who were at the first 'Making of Sporting Traditions' conference at the University of New South Wales in July 1977 to hear first-hand accounts from those who had been there at the beginning. To the mythologisers, the organisers and participants had a clear sense of destiny, an unswerving sense of mission and a unity of purpose. Would that it had been so! While those of us who can recall those far-off days do encourage the myth making, it is worthwhile recalling also the origins of what has become a healthy sub-discipline. In this special issue of *Sporting Traditions*, it is appropriate to remember the important role played by Barry Andrews in developing the friendly, inter-disciplinary and scholarly spirit that has informed all sporting history conferences since that fabled first.

When Richard Cashman and I made application to the University of New South Wales' Special Projects Fund for support for a sporting history conference we were not even sure that we could locate sufficient speakers, let alone participants. We knew, of course, that many historians professed a personal sporting prowess and a deep love of spectatorhood. It was rumoured that while selection panels in history departments sifted candidates on many criteria, sporting interests played some part in the outcome. It was unusual, for example, for a non-Carlton supporter to be appointed to Manning Clark's department in Canberra and while an occasional outsider made it, it was on the same basis that Catholics occasionally reached senior levels in the Public Service: it was nice to have one to be able to deflect any accusations of bias.

so sporting ability and enthusiasm was well-established amongst historians but few wrote about this passion. If, as Ken Inglis has said, as students of history 'we left our families

behind', then sport was as much a victim as other manifestations of popular culture. In this, as in almost every other matter, Bill Mandle was the exception and although Bill might have enjoyed it, a conference consisting largely of papers written by himself might have seemed a trifle unbalanced.

In the cause of balance then - and remember we already had a grant from the University and the possibility of promotion to senior vice-tutor could depend upon our success - we asked Bill for a paper - he suggested several - and for the names of other scholars working in the field. Was that on the field, he asked hopefully by return mail? We wrote to Wray Vamplew and received a somewhat miffed reply from Wray. We contacted a well-regarded 'international expert' as our University and promotion hopes required and though he declined he was kind enough to remark how much he would have enjoyed visiting south Wales in the summer-time. Ken Inglis, accepting, wondered whether we proposed to slice sport and John O'Hara asked whether we might include a visit to the Harold Park trots on the programme.

On Mandle's suggestion, we had also written to Barry Andrews at Duntroon, somewhat nervously as Mandle had made it clear that Andrews was not a historian and our grant had been specific about 'acceptable academic standards'. At least Barry was a graduate from the host University and worked in one of its remote branches. The archives of the Sporting History Association do not contain Barry's reply - we had not at that stage, short-sightedly, appointed a full-time archivist. Richard has reminded me, however, of the substance of the response - pure incredulity. Might it be, Barry mused, that historians were at last seeking to tackle a subject or more than passing interest to most of the population, But had we, he enquired hesitantly, approached him on the basis of his reputation as a scholar or a wicket-keeper?

As we were not quite sure, we asked Bill Mandle and then accepted Barry's proposal for a paper on Australian sport and Australian literature, a topic reflecting Barry's two great passions. A more enthusiastic paper-giver I have never encountered. Barry threw himself into his project and would ring from the Duntroon fastnesses to report progress and recent dis-

coveries. The conference and his part in it had clearly captured his enormous energies. While we reported to the University's sceptical Special Projects Collective (or was that task-force?) Barry raced on, suggesting names, drumming up participants and, in general, talking the whole thing up. At this stage, neither of the organisers had yet met this Duntroon dynamo.

Interdisciplinary conferences were not, in those remote days, as much in vogue as they are now and there was amongst historians a healthy disregard - for Australian literature, bearing in mind the standards demanded by the Special Projects Task-force (or was that collective?) and the subject-matter we decided to 'bury' the paper late in the afternoon of the first day of the conference, traditionally a time when people are either dying of thirst or lining up other refreshments for the dreary days to come (not that there was much of that at Sport 1).

Finally that first bright day dawned and participants, clutching their drab brown folders, began drifting towards the Central Lecture Block at the barren Kensington campus. One stood out, all energy and bustle - this had to be Barry Andrews, the literary bloke. I thought I heard him say that this would be his first paper at an academic conference and what a pity that there were so many historians about and I remember him nervously expecting Harold Oliver to materialise because Barry's former memories of the CLB relied largely on the University's long-serving, irascible Professor of English. However I had too much on my mind, what with starting sessions on time, calming Richard and finding an after-dinner speaker for our bash at the handsomely appointed Coogee Bay Hotel.

In this last capacity we approached Bill Mandle, a Canberra professional entertainer, but I think that I remember that his fee was slightly steepish and he suggested that we might approach Barry Andrews. As Andrews was on the spot, and pacing nervously, he accepted this additional burden almost unconsciously, suggesting that once his wretched paper was out of the way he might be able to knock something up.

For most, the first day of Sport 1 was a special occasion. I can recall an initial sense of exhilaration that the conference

had got off the ground at all, and then a growing sense of confidence as speakers, 'discussants' and participants subjected sporting history to critical scrutiny and presented it as an appropriate subject for academic discourse. In view of the strength of the sub-discipline now, this may seem unduly apologetic but in those far-off days so many of our academic colleagues regarded the whole exercise as frivolous.

We were all fairly weary by the time Barry's paper came up and unprepared, perhaps, for the performance we were to enjoy. Barry ranged over the entire Australian literary output, judiciously selecting material to support his thesis. As the paper has of course been published I will not repeat the argument. A sidelight on the performance may be appropriate and is not, I hope, disrespectful. In editing papers for publication I found it useful to study the printed paper alongside the taped version of the paper as read. In this way the author's emphasis often became more apparent. Barry had a slight stutter, usually apparent only when he was under some pressure. On this occasion he stuttered while reading the introductory poem, having particular difficulty with the word 'Murillo'. The audience did not seem unduly disturbed, in fact some thought the stutter was for comic effect, but from then on, the tape discloses, Barry altered almost every word beginning with 'm' (mob to crowd and so on). I later congratulated him on this feat of composure; he however had been unaware that he had made the substitutions. The audience greatly enjoyed Barry's paper and it was rightly regarded as one of the conference highlights.

I cannot now recall why the Coogee Bay Hotel had been chosen as the venue for the conference dinner, Not then owned by prominent Sydney book-maker Terry Page, the hotel had no obvious sporting connections nor was it a focal point for Sydney high life. In fact, perhaps because it was cheap, available and local it appealed. I well recall the 'wedding reception' nature of the venue but this was of no consequence for by the time we came together on that Saturday evening it was more than apparent that sporting history had 'arrived'. The conference had been stimulating, productive and, for, academic historians, remarkably

friendly. A senior historian had already complimented the organisers for involving so many younger academics and looking back, and in comparison with conferences then, I suppose we were. For most, the conference dinner rounded off what had been a memorable few days.

Barry Andrews cemented the mood and the friendships with one of the most effective after-dinner speeches that I have ever heard. That it was decided by acclamation that a second conference would be held, again at the University of New South Wales, and in two years time gave a permanence to what might have been an ephemeral occasion. The main part of Barry's address was a fictitious *Australian Dictionary of Biography* entry On 'Lap, Phar' which I subsequently reprinted in the *Australian Historical Association Bulletin*. The printed version is a pale shadow of the performed work.

Barry began by paying fulsome, justified and irreverent tribute to Frank Crowley, the Dean of Arts who had supplied the money and the support. Crowley, Ph.D. and Bar, in Barry's extraordinary catalogue, there and then pledged the money for the next conference. For that success alone Barry deserved the thanks of the fledgling 'Traditions' conference.

'Lap, Phar' is a gentle dig at academic pretensions and absurdities but based on a deep respect for scholarly achievement. Barry, even at his most whimsical or amusing, was ever the serious scholar, ever passionate about his subject and its importance. In retrospect it was Barry's after-dinner speech that set the tone for 'Sporting Traditions'. Scholarly if somewhat irreverent, friendly but not matey, interdisciplinary and tolerant of the various approaches to the advancement of knowledge. We laughed until we could bear no more; the timing of the performer and the occasion was perfect. It was a privilege to have been there.

But that was Barry Andrews. In his enthusiasm, his excitement, his nervousness and his achievement, both on the conference floor and at its dinner, he had shaped the development of sporting history in this country. He had displayed a talent as simple as it was important. The history of sporting history ought to record the debt we all owe to him.