

Inventing Australians and Constructing Englishness: Cricket and the Creation of a National Consciousness, 1860-1914

James Bradley
Wellcome Unit for the History of Medicine
University of Glasgow

As regards the class of the men socially, it is much the same as that of most of the previous Australian XIs - good straightforward fellows of the rough and ready sort, but the majority of whom in this country would undoubtedly go into the players' room rather than the pavilion. Not that there is any disgrace in being a pro ...¹

In recent years there has been a steady growth on the historiography of sport and its relationship to Australia Cricket has been an essential part of this expansion, due to the perceived significance of the game in the creation of coherent forms of nationalism and the process of social development. Scholars like Stoddart, Mandle and Cashman have argued about the nature of this importance, as well as the symbiotic relationships between the game and Australian popular culture.² Two themes have been well developed. The impact of cricket on burgeoning Australian nationalism is a path which has been well trodden.³ Cricket as part of the imperial cultural bond has also been a popular theme in the past and needs some exploration here.⁴ Little work, however, has been done on the impact of Australian cricket and cricketers on English perceptions of the Australian colonies and, later, of Federation.⁵ This article, by focussing on the visits of Australian cricket teams to Britain in the period between 1868 and 1914, seeks to redress the balance by showing how cricket created a dialogue about the nature of the colonial relationship and in the process 'invented' Australians for an English audience.

The process of 'inventing' political and cultural ideologies has been discussed at length by a number of authors. Hobsbawm and Ranger's

The Invention of Tradition looked at how several facets of British political and cultural life were invented during the nineteenth century.⁶ A more important landmark for this article was the publication of *Inventing Australia*, Richard White's ground-breaking book.⁷ White mapped the way in which the self image of Australia developed from European discovery of the continent to the late 1970s. In so doing he overhauled received interpretations of Australianness. These had ranged from the romantic nationalism of Russell Ward's *Australian Legend* to the New Left meandering of Humphrey McQueen's *New Britannia*.⁸ Unlike these authors, White rejected the commonly held belief that the creation of Australia's national identity was specifically related either to the unique environment of Australia or to its economic and social development. Rather, he indicated that the making of Australian identity was the result of a process where the intelligensia moulded ideas appropriated from the 'cultural baggage' of immigrants. The invention of Australia was, therefore, influenced by 'those groups in society who wield economic power'. Consequently, while the members of the intelligensia 'create the images', 'the most influential images are those which serve the interests of the broader ruling class, on whose patronage the intelligensia rely'. However, White does not believe that national identity is the product of a monolithic structure of social control. The relationship between the 'ruling class' and 'national identity' is more complex in that groups outside the ruling class can take part in the development of national identity 'although they are unlikely to be dominant'.⁹ Equally, the ruling class is not united, containing powerful economic interests often competing with each other. National identity is then continually 'fractured, questioned and redefined'.¹⁰

This article intends to hold a mirror to White's ideas about the invention of Australian identity by exploring how an English vision of Australia and Australians was developed and will consequently encroach on an area previously charted in Colls and Dodd's *Englishness*.¹¹ As the essays in this volume show, Englishness was the product of political and

social power. Thus, it will be suggested that by ‘inventing’ Australia and Australians certain sections of English society were attempting to define Englishness in terms of exclusion. By describing what English people were not (Australians), they were attempting to say what English people were.

The suggestion that national characteristics can be described in reflexive and exclusive terms is neither an act of intellectual chicanery nor of Lacanian posturing. Reading the musings of upper and middle-class Victorian cricket writers I was struck frequently by the constant reference to the characteristics of cricketing and non-cricketing countries. The explanations of why people did not play cricket in certain countries were usually based upon a set of notional racial characteristics. The temperament of the Welsh, Scots, Irish and French were often used to explain the limited impact of cricket there. Equally, the ability of the Parsees from India and the Philadelphia Gentlemen, as well as the success of the Australians, demanded assessment and gave opportunities for the differentiation between English cricketers and others. Englishness was being defined in relation to other countries and that constant act of differentiation meant that a picture of the typical Englishman¹² was being constructed and reconstructed on the basis of how he was not Scottish, Irish, Welsh, French, Indian, North American or Australian. It would require a book to explore this entire spectrum of cultural identities. This article, however, will explore the shift in representations of Australian cricketers visiting Britain because they provide a case where texts relating to class, status and race interweave.

‘As White as Wuz’: England meets the Australians (1878)

Between 1860 and 1914 popular impressions of Australia and Australian cricketers shifted markedly. Part of this change was a result of the visits by Australian teams to Britain. This transformation broadly represented a shift from one kind of ignorance (that all Australian cricketers were black) to another (that Australian cricketers were drawn from a similar, but not the same, class background as English professional cricketers).

This section will explore the roots of this transformation. It is important to realise that the Australians, when they visited Britain as a cricket team, were acting wittingly or unwittingly as cultural ambassadors. Once they had made an impact their every move was open to description from a flourishing sport and general press.¹³ The nature of the colonies and the colonial relationship could be explored through the medium of cricket. An analysis of these ideals reveals that a dichotomous image was being created which emphasised the similarities and differences between the Old Country and its colonial offshoots in terms of social, racial and cultural characteristics. At the same time, the image did not remain static. It shifted from a position where the success of the Australians was underlined by a discourse illustrating the similarities between Britain and its antipodean colonies, to one where the differences between the social and cultural practices of the Australians and the British were highlighted.

Although Australia had been visited by British teams from the 1860s onwards, it was not until 1878 that a white Australian team toured Britain. It had been preceded by an Aboriginal team which toured in 1868. Although the progress of the Aboriginal cricketers was followed with interest by the British media and people, its impact on popular representations of Australia was not great. Even in the 1870s Australia was still associated with images derived from the discovery of gold and the convict past: a strange place where people went, but from which they rarely came back. So the arrival of the 1878 Australian team was a novelty. The team members had two distinct aims for undertaking the tour: to make money and to win cricket games. There were undoubtedly some broader aims as well: a sense of cultural mission. In their immediate aims they were successful, beating some strong opponents and returning with a handsome profit. There were some other unanticipated results, their visit led to a debate about the racial characteristics of the British and their Diaspora.

This occurred because the tour created a high level of excitement and made a huge impact on the popular imagination. This was evident both in the extent of press coverage but also by unprecedented public response with many people turning out to see the visitors at cricket games but also at stations, inns or wherever the cricketers were. When the team returned from Yorkshire:

It is said that at most of the stations on their way back to London hundreds of people assembled to have a look at them, and the windows to the saloon carriage set apart for their use was darkened by the faces pressed against it.¹⁴

The biggest sensation of the tour, and the moment when the popular imagination was captured, was the victory of the Australians over the MCC Club and Ground, a team that included the legendary W G Grace. According to Reynolds the ‘news spread like wildfire, and created a sensation in London and throughout England’.¹⁵

Representation of the ethnicity of the tourists was initially a matter of confusion to many:

Many of the lace spinners and weavers expressed disappointment at the colour of the visitors, whom they evidently expected to be black ... One onlooker was heard to observe “whoy Bill, they beant black at all; they’re as white as wuz”.¹⁶

On another occasion, while staying at an Inn at Batley, the Australians were approached by an old man who asked them whether the cricketers had arrived yet and ‘Bannerman laughing told him that they were the cricketers. The old man was much astonished to hear it, for he had been led to believe that the Australians were blackfellows.’¹⁷

The popular representation of Australian cricketers appeared to associate them with the Aboriginal tour of 1868. In these accounts, which tended to be written by middle-class journalists, the ‘working man’ had no conception of Australia’s white population, or at least no conception that it played cricket. By the end of the tour opinions had

changed. The success of the Australians demanded an explanation of how Australia could produce sporting expertise in such a short period. Rationalisation of Australian success was cloaked in Social Darwinian discourse, an intellectual sleight of hand which allowed English commentators to congratulate the English 'race' for the victory of the Australian cricketers. Thus one commentator, describing the 'Demon' bowler Spofforth, took great pains to explain the Australian's squirearchical and Yorkshire origins: 'But whether from Yorkshire originally or not, he and his colleagues are all our own flesh ... [and] ... blood, and we welcome their prowess cheerfully as a proof that the old ... [blood] ... [is] not degenerating in those fa[r]-off lands.'¹⁸ Numerous comments of this ilk demonstrate that cricket had now become a focus for racial explanation. Australians could take their place among the British people's untainted by convict origins.

But this was just part of a wider discovery of Australia and Australianness. The cricketers were initially struck by the general ignorance of Australia shown by British people. Aside from the ignorance about ethnic origins, a broader lack of awareness was apparently displayed:

The team had innumerable instances given them of the general ignorance of Australian geography ... someone inquired about a Mr Black, at Ipswich, and a Mr Dash of Western Australia, and one of the cricketers stated that even their fellow lodgers looked steadfastly at them, surprised to find them fashioned as they were, and their habits and customs the same.¹⁹

Caution as to be exercised in the interpretation of these quotations emanating from an Australian. He may have been reinforcing well-established beliefs about Britain's lack of knowledge about Australia. It is also possible that they were illustrating the exceptional over the prosaic. However, if this was the case the game was being played by both sides. The English media were collectively glorying in the scales of ignorance dropping from their eyes. Nowhere is this better seen than in an unfunny contemporary article in which Mr Punch was engaged in conversation with a notional antipodean. Mr Punch began:

‘Australia is a magnificent country ... and is famous for all sorts of things.’

‘What things?’ [replied the colonist].

‘Oh, gold and Australian beef, and kangaroos - and possums, wombats, and ornithorrhyncusses, black swans, black fellows, and bushrangers’, and then Mr Punch came to a full stop.

‘I thought so’ said the spokesman, with a smile, ‘your ideas about Australia are of the most zoological gardenish character’.

The colonist then went on to list the advancements of Australia: trade; commerce; professions; public schools; universities; and a press ‘as free and enterprising’ as Britain.

‘Stop, stop’, interrupted Mr Punch, ‘you overwhelm me. Believe me, I am quite aware that Australia has taken gigantic strides in the march of civilisation, from the date of her first European settlement.’

‘... we accepted even the past of Botany Bay, Mr Punch’, said the spokesman. ‘It is our boast that we currency-fold have been so sound at the core that we have been able to absorb your convict refuse without contamination from its criminal leaven.’

After more discussion Mr Punch concluded pithily:

‘... no blind side to them [Australians], big as bats as they are ... No doubt about their nationality. British Lions, every one. Birds of a feather, with the old cock, no mistake!’²⁰

Although cricket was only briefly mentioned in this article there can be no doubt that the visit of the Australian cricket played a part in Mr Punch’s spiel.

The lionisation of the Australian team was part of the broader discovery of the white peripheries of Empire apparent in popular literature and political commentary. In this age of Seeley, Froude, Dilke and

Trollope, there was a public thirst to consume knowledge of the Empire and there was also a desire to explain the success of Britain in racial terms. It was fortuitous, therefore, that the Australians should appear at a time when the sport had captured a mass appeal within Britain's highly urbanised society. The potent combination of the cricketers' visit and the spring tide of imperialism meant that cricket could become part of a wider discourse on the 'success' of the Anglo-Saxon 'race'.

'The Golden Fleece': Australian Gatecrashers at the English County Cricket Party, 1880-1914

Over the next twenty years, the image of Australian cricketers changed. During this period visits to Britain were always occasions for speeches about imperial bonds and cultural similarities. However, there was a rise in complaints about the money-making activities of the Australians, which had an impact on how they were viewed socially. On the one hand, the cultural-bond rhetoric remained while, on the other, Australian teams were criticised for interfering with the domestic cricket program causing turmoil in English cricket. Real problems dated from the 1884 Australian tour of England when the allegedly blatantly commercialist attitude of the tourists so riled the authorities at Lord's and the Oval that they were prepared to join force to prevent future Australian visits.

Perceptions of Australian cricketers were changing as a result of British attitudes to class. From the earliest times of organised and semi-organised first-class cricket British cricketers had been divided into two camps: amateur and professional. Notionally, the division was between those who earned money from the game (the professionals) and those who played for love (amateurs).²¹ In reality the division was defined by the class to which a cricketer belonged. The Australians consciously stood aside from this system, all of them claiming amateur status irrespective of their class background.

All Australian tours in this period were organised along joint-stock lines with each cricketer buying a share in the team and later earning a dividend from any profits accrued. Given the popularity of the

Australian tourists the dividend earned from this joint-stock financial arrangement was often a handsome one. Unlike the British professionals they were not paid by an employer but instead were self-employed as all were partners in the venture. Nevertheless, both English cricketers and commentators looked at the profits that the Australians were making and began to insinuate that they were not proper amateur cricketers. During the early 1880s several English observers commented on the similarities between the Australian XIs and professional teams which had been extremely popular before the rise of county cricket. 'They seemed to be throwing us back on past times, when All-England and the United South Elevens did little more than play a program of inferior interest' wrote *Wisden* editor, C F Pardon.²² This in itself was a significant remark because the original Australian XI had been inspired by the example set by the professional teams. But its real significance lies in the struggle that had occurred to rid the English cricket scene of these teams.

One of the most persistent features of cricket writing is anachronism. A static vision of time is presented, where the past and present merge in a mythology which reinforces the game's 'traditions'. One of the cornerstones of this mythology is that British cricket has always been dominated by the Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC) in collusion with the aristocrats in charge of the counties. This fallacy effectively ignores the importance of pre-County Championship cricket. From the 1830s to the 1860s British cricket was dominated by entrepreneurial XIs roaming around the countryside playing XVIIIIs or XXIIIs for gate money. Financially, these teams were organised along capitalist lines with one individual usually acting as capitalist/entrepreneur. He provided the working capital for the team and acted as co-ordinator, he engaged well-known cricketers whom he paid a wage retaining the profits for himself. William Clarke's All England XI was the most famous of these teams. As time went on the peripatetic XIs fragmented, with new Teams forming like the United England XI, but still remained an important part of cricket. The capitalist method of organisation was, in some ways,

more sophisticated than the early County Championship. Because the earlier teams were nomadic they were not tied to a particular location and did not incur home ground overheads. Furthermore, they were able to react to market forces by going where demand was greatest.

Entrepreneurial cricket became increasingly unpopular with sections of the cricket community, particularly the aristocracy and the emergent middle classes cricket who wanted to see games organised on territorial (county) lines with themselves rather than the professionals in control. During the early 1860s county cricket began to evolve with the foundation of many county clubs. The supporters of county cricket believed that its promotion was the best way to curb the 'speculative' activities of the professionals and to place the players firmly under the control of those who represented the dominant classes. It was some years before this was achieved. The popularity of the professional XIs persisted despite the process of fragmentation and the onslaught from the counties. By the early 1880s, the counties were able to enforce a greater degree of authority over professional players. The only market left for entrepreneurial activity involved sending touring teams abroad, particularly to Australia. Undoubtedly the rise in prestige of the County Championship coincided with the final demise of the professional teams.

The domestic battle for the control of cricket had been won, except on one front. Australian teams now visiting on a regular basis reminded the authorities of the teams that had so recently been driven into extinction. The Australians had to be tolerated because of their continuing popularity as tourists and because the control of Australian cricket was fragmented.²³ The price that Australian cricketers paid for this toleration was social marginalisation based upon their perceived financial rapaciousness which appeared dangerously close to professionalism. *Lillywhite's Annual* commented that 'if the Australians did not make cricket their profession in their native land, they most decidedly did when they came to this country'.²⁴ Furthermore, in 1882, the same publication blamed the players' strike of the previous year 'indirectly on

the Australian elevens' and the clubs which had met the 'exorbitant demands' of the team's managers? Lord Harris, doyen of aristocratic cricket players and administrators, noted that the Australians behaved like professionals and professed himself worried about the possible development of a semi-professional rank.²⁶ In the early 1890s, Lord Hawke, who was also a leading light on the MCC Committee and was captain of Yorkshire, had his guinea's worth when he was interviewed by *Cricket Field*

What I do most strongly object to is that one or two men should 'run' the thing as a commercial proposition and spoil our cricket. If the teams are coming over for the one object of making money, I maintain that they are not wanted. But if the Melbourne CC, for instance, will send over men whose object is to play the game, without consideration of how much money it will bring them, then by all means let us welcome such a team. It is one thing to pay an amateur's legitimate expenses, it is another to put money in his pocket. Only a day or two I was talking to a prominent Australian gentleman, he said he felt very strongly on the subject, himself, and disliked the idea of speculation intensely - as did all his friends ... I like Australians and Australia, but I do not like speculation?

Even though the Melbourne Cricket Club did become prominently involved in the tours, the problems remained and culminated in the dispute of 1896 when the English professionals went on strike before the Oval Test match, partly as a protest against the amount of money that some of the English amateurs were receiving, but also because the Australians seemed to be making a small fortune. The parting gift of the *Athletic News* to the Australian XI was a cartoon, entitled 'The Motherland's Farewell', which ostensibly expressed the imperial sentiment of cultural cohesion symbolised by cricket. The cartoon, however, had a barbed edge. Several of the Australians were pictured in a boat called the 'Golden Fleece' which was weighed down to the gunwales with four large sacks of gold? Another cartoon, featuring the

ever-jocular Mr Punch, echoed similar sentiments. It depicted Mr Punch dressed as an umpire along with W G Grace, Abel, the Surrey professional and Albert Trott, Australian captain. On Abel's cap is written 'pro' and on Trott's belt is written 'profess' (with the rest of the word 'professional' obscured behind his back). In the cartoon Mr Punch made the following pronouncement: 'Now, Gentleman All, I'll give you toast that every good cricketer may join in - "Fair Play, Fair Pay, and Friendliness"'.²⁹

**'Good Straightforward Fellows of the Rough and Ready Sort':
Class and Confusion in Anglo-Australian Cricket**

It would be wrong to exaggerate the discomfort which the Australians caused because the majority of commentators continued to heap praise on them and what they symbolised (imperial 'superglue'). Nevertheless, following the visit of the first team the status of Australian cricketers was questioned because they could not be fully incorporated into this system. British commentators were quite aware of Australian hostility to the division between amateurs and professionals. Equally, the authorities and media refused to see Australians as people of the 'correct' social stamp and there were condescending descriptions of them as 'Good Straightforward fellows of the rough and ready sort'. Despite the ambiguities of the Australians' position, the MCC refused to act or make any form of official pronouncement, a strange course of action given that both Harris and Hawke were influential members of the MCC committee. The most likely explanation for the stance lay in the reluctance of those who wielded power to deal with the 'shamateur' issue on their own doorstep. If they had objected in an authoritative way to the Australians they ran the risk of exposing some of the most gifted amateur cricketers of the 'Golden Age'. During this period, many of the leading amateurs received payments far in excess of their professional counterparts, emphasising that amateurism was not based on the receipt or non-receipt of payment but on the social position of the person claiming that status?

The real issue of class was masked by talk of profit? The subtext of complaints about Australian XIs was not that they made money, but

rather that they were claiming amateur status when their class position seemed not to warrant that rank. This interpretation may have found its roots in British portrayals of colonial society. Narratives of English gentlemen touring the colonies frequently stressed the coarseness of social life.” Typical were the comments of one author in 1900. After referring to Victoria as exhibiting ‘the coarsest type of plutocracy’ because it was the wealthiest colony he added that:

It has often been remarked that the best university education which the colonies can supply seems powerless, up to the present, to develop the delicacy of perception, and that combined ease, dignity, and courtesy which Eton, Harrow, Oxford and Cambridge, with their preponderance of upper and middle class teaching and associations, so successfully aid in stimulating.³³

In reality, most of the Australian tourists were professional men or ‘white collar’ workers and were thus from a very different background to the English professionals. In the first Australian XI, for example, Charles Bannerman, who forewent investing in the joint stock venture and played for a fixed wage as a professional, was the only exception to the rule. The breakdown of the rest of the team was: solicitor (1), surveyor (1), bank workers (3) and lower to middling civil servants (5).³⁴

Used to the clear amateur-professional demarcation, Lord Harris and countless others were perplexed by the perceived egalitarian nature of Australian society reflected in the organisation of touring teams. So disturbing was this occupational egalitarianism that many cricket writers could not find the appropriate language to describe the qualities of the Australians. In the specialist cricket literature, which emerged from the 1860s, writers went to great length to define the amateur and professional. Professionals were described in terms of their personal characteristics as well as their playing abilities. The personal life and playing abilities of the amateur were outlined in less detail because an amateur was considered a gentleman and a gentleman’s personal characteristics were always beyond question. There was a lengthy description of the professional Tom Emmett:

So 'Tom Emmett' ... You would hardly believe he was forty-three years of age to watch his incessant gambols on the cricket-field. His extraordinary vitality, his unceasing flow of animal spirits would possibly mislead you, but it is a fact, 'pon honour. Listen to him, too, you will not need to be told that he is a Yorkshireman born and bred ... Always good-tempered, full of fun, but never obtrusive, Emmett is certainly the most popular professional of his day.³⁵

Amateur cricketer T C O'Brien, by contrast, was introduced sparsely in the same magazine as born in Dublin, educated at Downside and St Charles College, Notting Hill, and New Inn Hall etc.³⁶

The Australians were certainly not reported in the nondescript style reserved for amateurs, nor did they quite fit into the professional category either. Reporters opted for a style only slightly less personal than that reserved for the professionals. The 'manners' of the individual was a matter stressed. *Cricket* commented that Edwin Evans had 'unassuming manners' and that C T B Turner was 'one of the most popular cricketers of New South Wales, being very unassuming in his manners, and in no way spoiled by his recent success'.³⁷ Wine merchant Harry Moses was another considered to have 'unassuming manners' and a person without 'pretence'.³⁸ The word 'cheery', which was frequently used when describing professionals, was applied to Harry Trott who was said to be 'always cheery, whatever the future of the game, he was never heard to grumble at an umpire's decision'.³⁹

The way that the Australian cricketers played was also closely equated with the style of the British professionals. It was common in English cricket to describe the professional batsmen as boring and as a stonewaller. It was believed that they played this way because their livelihood depended on it. Some, such as Arthur Budd, viewed the Australians in similar terms:

They are slow and studiously correct in their cricket, sometimes wearisomely so. They hit at nothing but loose balls, but the fact remains that they are terribly difficult to get rid of, and that you never know when you have done with them.⁴⁰

Alfred Lyttelton made this point more explicitly:

It must be remembered, also that cricket as played by the Australians in England is cricket played straightforwardly and above-board for money and though no suggestion or hint of blame is implied by mentioning the fact, it is obvious that as a result different considerations than those of pure sport may enter into the question of the duration of matches.⁴¹

This image of a dour type of cricketer persisted. Pelham Warner offered a backhanded compliment in 1912:

What is the characteristic that has brought Australian cricket, in such a short space as one reckons time nowadays, right into the front rank? In one word, pluck. Grit and courage have for a long time been the outstanding features of Australian cricket.⁴²

However, in 1905, when the dashing Victor Trumper was part of the Australian team, S H Pardon accused them of being too brilliant.⁴³ Some commentators, however, displayed a greater equanimity about the money-making activities of the Australians, recognising that the problem lay with the British class system. Major Philip Trevor commented:

Yet let it be frankly admitted that against the Australians themselves we have no grievance. It is ourselves who have chosen to fit them into one of the two compartments by which we continue to separate our great public players. They do not understand our petty distinctions. They are eminently commonsensible.⁴⁴

A E Knight summed up the position as a professional cricketer by stating explicitly what few others dared. The major offence of the Australians was not that they were paid but that they possessed the wrong class background

The official recognition of the Australian players as 'amateurs' is an anomaly which has never been very acceptable to the mind of the English professional. The problem it presents is one of great complexity and difficulty ... We ourselves have

seen fit to draw a clear-cut and definite line theoretically separating the 'profession', ie. the paid player, from the 'amateur', the enthusiast who plays when he can spare the time. The distinction has long lost its validity. The 'amateur' is very frequently, directly, no less than indirectly, a paid player, and the distinction now rests on social grounds ... Australia, save in a narrow circle which gathers round the vice-regal representative, knows practically nothing of the system of petty caste ... 'The practical position of the Australian is, however, a perfectly candid one, and on the whole I admire the courage and skill with which they have asserted their status.'⁴⁵

Knight and Trevor, however, were mavericks. Knight was a top-rank professional cricketer who was well educated and possessed the unusual and, to some, unwelcome trait of speaking his mind. Trevor, despite his army rank and his close connections with the MCC, was always prepared to criticise the contemporary structure of cricket. He was not overly popular in administrative circles. If we look, however, at the impression of Australia that is being projected by both these passages we see an idealised portrait as the classless, no near classless, society. This viewpoint is only marginally removed from preceding passages where the commentators were disturbed by the ability of the Australians to escape the 'niceties' of the British class system.

'Conquistadors' with 'Murderous' Intent: Neville Cardus and the English Dreamtime

To further assess the impact of ideals and perceptions of Australia and Australians, it is worth exploring the writing of Neville Cardus, who became an iconic figure as a cricket writer. His wistful, ornate musings have pampered the sensitivities of cricket fans educated in the classical mode. His style, reminiscent of intellectual treacle, was geared to reminding readers that both he and they were participating in an English ritual. 'No other sport', his admirers say, 'can produce such eloquent writing'. Cardus became an established cricket writer in the 1920s while working on the *Manchester Guardian*. He was, however, a product of

the pre-War period and his views on cricket were a product of that time. One of his most eloquent pieces on Australians was a passage produced to celebrate the arrival of the 1930 team:

Australian cricket has never come under the influences of village cricket or the public schools; consequently it has gained in high seriousness and arrogance what it has lost in geniality and affable manners. There has never been a comic character amongst Australian players, not one Tom Emmett or Johnny Briggs. They are men of war at most times. Even when the Australian batsman is brilliant to watch, he is at the same time a dour fellow. Your Spooner drives past cover-point with a courtliness that causes you to forget he is at bottom an antagonist, the bowler his enemy. You feel that a Spooner is batting not for the contest's prize but simply for beauty's sake. The Australians have shown us many handsome batsmen, but one and all they have worn their plumes with a difference. They have hit the ball hard and beautifully - but also have they always hit the ball vindictively. Lust for spoils, not some power above mortal combat, has been the motive force. Even Victor Trumper was a *conquistador*, and there was little humour or graciousness about the incomparable Macartney. His every innings was a scherzo - in a battle symphony; there was a touch of the macabre in the way that he led bowlers along a dancing track to their ruin. His brilliance was not sunny; out of his bat's end shot the lightning that works havoc?

Cardus' imagery was generated from his own experience as a cricket and music loving Englishman who has transcended his working-class background. He was also attempting to synthesise what it meant to be English. To achieve this he set up firstly an idealised version of England symbolised through cricket. Secondly, he compared English with Australian cricketers. The beginning of this quotation represents a bald statement that Australian cricket had not been influenced by village or public school cricket. To writers like Cardus village cricket was a potent symbol of Englishness, it portrayed a forever-green and bucolic land

SPORTING TRADITIONS

where hierarchic and paternal class relations existed untroubled by the emergence of urban and industrial society.

By the second half of the nineteenth century, village cricket had become a symbol of pastoral England, which was the point when English society could no longer be described as rural. Undoubtedly, village cricket was integral to the process described by Howkins, where a 'strain emerged within English politics and ideas in the 1880s which linked the rural to a general crisis' and produced 'a version of a specifically English culture'.⁴⁷ This rural vision of England, which was based specifically on the southern part of the country, produced a 'model' emphasising 'an organic and natural society of ranks ... based on trust, obligation and even love - the relationship between the "good squire and the "honest peasant"',⁴⁸ rather than on a society based on inequality.

Howkins could have strengthened his conclusions by referring to cricket. A passage, written in 1907, suggested the symbolic value of cricket to conceits of Englishness:

Village cricket - it is not pretentious ... Yet there is a peculiar fascination about it which is different from that of either county or club cricket, though just as full of charm ... To begin with, there are its beautiful environments - and what could fail to be luring, if surrounded by miles of stretching fields losing themselves in blue-misted distance? ... Then there is the splendid mixed composition of the teams. The squire, the curate, the schoolmaster, the grocer, the blacksmith, the doctor, the farmers, labourers, the groom and the butler from the hall, and probably in the old days a few public schoolboys whose homes are in the district. This variety is found in most village teams, rendering them splendid mediums for the spread of Kropotkin ideals. But above all, what makes real village cricket so delightful is its humour, for which it is unequalled in any other class of cricket.⁴⁹

The author 'dumped' these characters, which spanned a mixture of occupations and status hierarchy, into a notional harmonious cricket

team in which each knew his place. Thus the team to represented a stable and contented society. The allusion to the 'Kropotkin' ideals is a misrepresentation of the anarchist 'back-to-the-village' philosophy of the late nineteenth century Russian revolutionaries. This reference allows the author to denigrate radical programs by suggesting that true socialism lies in class conciliation.

Just as the concept of the countryside can only exist after wide-scale urbanisation and industrialisation, so too the idealisation of village cricket is only possible after social transformation. The phenomenon of public school cricket, the second component of Cardus' vision, was forged in the same ideological crucible - but with different effects. Where village cricket presented an idealised set of social relations, public school cricket confined its message to a specific fragment of the social structure, the dominant class. Cricket, in this context, was a powerful symbol of class membership.

The power of this symbol was generated by the rise of the English public schools as a place of education for the upper and middle classes during the second half of the nineteenth century. Run on a strict diet of classics and 'philathleticism', the schools embodied the classical and liberal ideals of the British dominant class. They were also regarded as the nursery place of English cricket not least because they provided the first-class game with the amateurs who supposedly embodied the spirit of cricket. More importantly, cricket was cited as a method for training middle-class boys in the ways of manliness, morality and the English way of life. This is clearly seen in the most famous work on English public school education, *Tom Brown's School Days*, which provided a blueprint for the traditions of the public school. Cricket was central to this process of invention. The book is commonly remembered for the football match and Tom Brown's battles with arch-cad Flashman, but cricket provides the context for the book's climax and the location of its central metaphor. It was Tom's last cricket match. He was captain of the Rugby School team playing against the MCC. At the ground he was

seated beside his sickly friend Arthur and a young classics master with whom he discussed the significance of cricket. The classics master began:

‘I’m beginning to understand the game scientifically. *what* a noble game it is too!’

‘Isn’t it? But it’s more than a game. It’s an institution,’ said Tom.

‘Yes’, said Arthur, ‘the birthright of British boys old and young, as habeas corpus and trial by jury are of British men’.

‘The discipline and reliance on one another which it teaches is so valuable, I think’, went on the master, ‘it ought to be such an unselfish game. It merges the individual in the eleven; he doesn’t play that he may win, but that his side may.’⁵⁰

By emphasising the benefits of the game, Hughes’ actors were using cricket as a synecdoche for an entire cultural system. Hughes draws the reader into a web of Englishness by the deployment of ‘noble’ and ‘institution’ as generalised tags, immediately signifying a world of tradition and veneration while Arthur provides the specifics. Cricket, like all fine traditions, is inherited but its Englishness is of such magnitude that it can be compared with the legal bequest of Magna Carta, from which habeas corpus and trial by jury were commonly supposed to have descended. Cricket is thus placed in the centre of a network of English meanings. The classics master rounds off the analysis by presenting the practical benefits of the game: it provided the country with a method of training by inculcating discipline and teamwork.

Cardus’ passage, therefore, dipped into a reservoir of established English sentiment linking two sacred myths. But the passage would have lost much of its force if he had failed to compare English with the Australian characteristics by contrasting the dashing and whimsical character of English cricketers with the more dour and pragmatic

Australians. Cardus' *oeuvre* is littered with such underlying threads yet he is also inconsistent in their application. At times he could barely bring himself to criticise his idol Trumper and yet when writing about Australians in general, could not help resorting to national stereotypes.

To Cardus, Spofforth was the representative Australian. He described him in the following terms:

He had a dark, Mephistophelian aspect; tall, sinuous - 'the spirit of denial' to highly strung cricketers ... One can even today get a good idea of Spofforth's demoniac air from the portraits in Mr Beldam's Famous Bowlers. They were taken long after his days in the sun were over, yet there lurks in the pictures of the man a sense of sinister power. The bowling action is Spring-heel-Jackish; the form of him lithe in an inimical way; his face set in hard predatory lines. He was the Australian of the Australians, a stark man who let in with him the cold blast of antagonism that ever blew on a June field?

It is significant that Cardus neither knew Spofforth nor saw him play and did not realise that regarded himself an Anglo-Australia, an Englishman who happened to be born in Australia.⁵² Yet his use of Spofforth as a cipher was a typical technique of Cardus, because his descriptions are usually located in a parallel cricketing universe. The cricket and characters described by Cardus were always one step removed from reality. Cardus has been criticised for placing style above content but his concern was to delve into the world of cricket meanings. Cricket allowed Cardus room to articulate a vision of a moral universe in which Australians were distinctly different from the English. They were too 'murderous' in intent, too grim to be equated with cheery professionals. While Spooner played for art, love and the higher spirit in the best amateur tradition, the Australians plundered runs like 'conquistadors'. They occupied the space between the two classes. Neither amateur nor professional, they were marginal and it was this marginality which allowed Cardus to exploit their un-English characteristics.

Inventing Australians and Constructing Englishness

The theme of this article has been social class. Running beneath the surface is a subtext bound to discourses of ethnicity and nationality which have operated on two levels. On the one level they have tended to emphasise the strengthening of ethnic ideas through sport's identification with racial and national characteristics. In England cricket has acted as an ideological buttress for 'Anglo-Saxonism' and nationalism. On another level, they have demonstrated the centrality of sport as a mode of communication, negotiation and even repression between different cultures. In these instances cricket acts as a cultural bond between elements of the Empire and as an insidious, if often ineffectual, means of social control over subordinate classes or national groups.

From the perspective of many English commentators, contact through cricket symbolised cultural and ethnic ties between Mother England and her colonial child, and yet they also stressed difference in terms of class. Nevertheless, the two themes are perfectly compatible because English cricket writers were telling English people a fairytale about themselves. The story gloried in the development of the Anglo-Saxon 'race' at home and abroad, so that the Australians showed themselves to be racially pure through their capacity to play and beat England at cricket, the most symbolic of the Mother Country's sports. The English could bask in the warm glow of a racial superiority which explained the twin-headed impostors of defeat and victory in terms of Social Darwinian success while at the same time defining Englishness in opposition to Australianness. Australians may well have been 'racially pure' but they were not socially equal.

Australians were, therefore, invented for a specific purpose: to emphasise the benefits of the English social system while reminding the English people that their 'Englishness' was a product of that system. It would be tempting to brand this invention as part of an over-arching mechanism of social control, particularly as the majority of cricket writers instrumental to the creation of the images discussed above were

supporters of the social status quo. After all, social control was a key part of Hobsbawm's original definition of the invention of traditions. Such an approach leads, however, to the collapse of all explanations into a single simplistic meta-theme. The intentions of Neville Cardus and A E Knight, it should be noted, were very different, even if their representations of cricket were remarkably similar. Furthermore, it will always remain uncertain how effective social control strategies are. If such a strategy existed in the discourse of cricket its application was patchy and, at the most, only partially successful.

Underlying their story of the commentators was a collective desire to inculcate - in all sectors of society - the values embedded in cricket. There is plenty of documentary evidence to suggest that individuals drawn from a cross section of the social structure accepted the dominant discourse of cricket, but in all probability the majority of people remained unaffected. By telling the story, those writing on cricket undoubtedly helped to create a narrative of Australianness, a vision of which many social groups have continued to hold to the present. The narrative does not tell anyone about what Australians were really like, but it does unveil the one unifying element of Englishness: *we are what we are not*.

NOTES

- 1 'CHL', in *Athletic News and Cyclists' Journal*, 26 Apr. 1986, p. 5.
- 2 B Stoddart, *Saturday Afternoon Fever: Sport in the Australian Culture*, Angus & Robertson, N Ryde, 1987; R Cashman, *'Ave a Go, Yer Mug! Australian Cricket Crowds from Larrikin to Ocker*, Collins, Sydney, 1987; W F Mandle, 'Cricket and Australian Nationalism in the Nineteenth Century', *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, vol. 59, no. 4, 1973. See also broader works such as: S Alomes, *A Nation at Last?*, Angus & Robertson, N Ryde, 1988; N McLachlan, *Waiting for the Revolution: A History of Australian Nationalism*, Penguin, Ringwood, 1989.
- 3 In addition to Mandle's seminal article, 'Cricket and Australian Nationalism', see R Sissons and B Stoddart, *Cricket and Empire: The 1932-33 Bodyline Tour of Australia*, Allen & Unwin, London, 1984. This presents what is now the received position on this subject in Australia.
- 4 J A Mangan, ed., *Pleasure, Profit, Proselytism: British Culture and Sport at Home and Abroad 1700-1924*, Cass, London, 1988; J A Mangan, ed., *The Cultural Bond*, Cass, London, 1992; B Stoddart, 'Sport, Cultural Imperialism and Colonial Response in the British Empire: A Framework for Analysis', in D Benning, ed.,

SPORTING TRADITIONS

Sport and Imperialism: Proceedings of the Fourth British Society of Sports Historians Conference, BSSH, N Staffs, 1986.

- 5 This article is restricted to Australia/Australianness and England/Englishness. It would take a separate article to explore the meaning of cricket for each of the nationalities of the British Isles. I concentrate on Englishness because it is a central aspect of cricket and little has been written on it. I do not wish to suggest that other parts of the British Isles were peripheral or unimportant.
- 6 E J Hobsbawm and T Ranger, eds, *The Invention of Tradition*, CUP, Cambridge, 1988.
- 7 R White, *Inventing Australia - Images and Identity 1688-1980*, Allen & Unwin, London, 1981.
- 8 R Ward, *The Australian Legend*, OUP, Melbourne, 1965; H McQueen, *A New Britannia: An Argument Concerning the Social Origins of Australian Radicalism*, rev. ed., Penguin, Ringwood, 1986.
- 9 White, *Inventing Australia*, p. ix.
- 10 White, *Inventing Australia*, p. x.
- 11 R Colls and P Dodd, eds, *Englishness: Politics and Culture 1880-1920*, Croom Helm, London, 1986. Colls and Dodd explicitly excluded sport from their volume, believing oddly that it had been dealt with by Hobsbawm and Ranger's *The Invention of Tradition*, hence there was no need for them to explore this area. Since sport had only a peripheral role in *The Invention of Tradition* one can only assume that sport was excluded for other reasons.
- 12 This expression is intentionally gender specific. Cricket, on the whole, was a male domain and the imagery was specifically masculine.
- 13 Tony Mason, *Sport in Britain*, Faber and Faber, London, 1988, pp. 46-59. By the early 1880s Britain had four sporting newspapers: *Sporting Life*, *Bell's Life in London*, *Sporting Chronicle* and *Sportsman*.
- 14 P E Reynolds (alias 'Argus'), *The Australian Cricketers' Tour through Australia, New Zealand and Great Britain*, reprint J W McKenzie, Epsom, 1980, p. 27.
- 15 Reynolds) *Australian Cricketers' Tour*, p. 21.
- 16 Reynolds, *Australian Cricketers' Tour*, p. 12. This account was written from an Australian angle. While it can be assumed that there was some exaggeration in it - as well as an attempt to project the tourists' own stereotypes of how the British should react to them - it still should be regarded as a valid attempt to explain the reaction to the team. It is also interesting to note that this Australian observer managed to slip in the *Punch*-style imitation of the Northern English working class accent when direct speech was involved.
- 17 Reynolds, *Australian Cricketers' Tour*, p. 33.
- 18 Reynolds, *Australian Cricketers' Tour*, p. 23.
- 19 Reynolds, *Australian Cricketers' Tour*, p. 27.
- 20 Quoted in Reynolds, *Australian Cricketers' Tour*, pp. 93-4.
- 21 Ric Sissons had written a fine history of the cricket professional. See *The Players: A Social History of the Professional Cricketer*, Heinemann, London, 1988.
- 22 C F Pardon, *The Australians in England: A Complete Record of the Cricket Tour of 1884*, J W McKenzie reprint, Epsom, 1984, p. 175.

- 23 Cricket in Australia in the nineteenth century was organised along colonial lines, with each colony controlling its own cricket. The Australian Board of Control was founded in 1905.
- 24 *John Lillywhite's Cricket Companion for 1881*, Lillywhite's, London, 1881, p. 39.
- 25 Quoted in C Brookes, *English Cricket: The Game and the Players through the Ages*, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, London, 1978, pp. 148-9.
- 26 Lord Harris, 'The Development of Cricket', *National Review*, vol. 2, 1883, 1883-4, p. 79.
- 27 Quoted in *Cricket Field*, vol. 1, 11 June 1892, p. 92.
- 28 The Golden Fleece was a standard symbol for Australia, it represented colonial wealth based on sheep rearing. It is quite feasible that the cartoonist a pun on 'fleece', that the tourists made a pile of money from cricket. *Athletic News and Cyclists' Journal*, 7 Sept. 1896.
- 29 *Punch*, 22 Aug. 1896.
- 30 There were still amateurs, of course, who played the occasional first-class game. The players who are referred to here include Grace, Stoddart and Fry, among others. Even an amateur like Pelham Warner, who seemed above repute, supplemented any income he earned with substantial writing and journalistic activities, which in a sport such as Rugby Union would have been enough to tarnish him as a professional leading to his expulsion.
- 31 Several commentators were aware that this was the situation. One of the more perceptive, Major Phillip Trevor, noted in 1907 that 'Social considerations and social considerations alone underlie the whole problem'. See Major Phillip Trevor, *The Problem of Cricket*, Sampson Low, London, 1907, p. 207.
- 32 R E N Twopeny, *Town Life in Australia*, Elliot Stock, London, 1883; A Trollope, *Victoria and Tasmania ...* Chapman and Hall, London, 1874; J A Froude, *Oceana or England and Her Colonies*, Longmans, London, 1886.
- 33 Matthew Macfie, 'Australia', in the British Empire League, *The British Empire Series*, vol. 4, Kegan Paul et al, London, 1900, pp. 28-9.
- 34 D Montefiore, *Cricket in the Doldrums: The Struggle between Private and Public Control of Australian Cricket in the 1880s*, ASSH Studies, no. 8, Sydney, 1992, p. 28. William Midwinter was another professional who joined the team in Britain only to be 'stolen' away by W G Grace.
- 35 *Cricket Chat*, 1883-4, pp. 59-60.
- 36 *Cricket Chat*, 1883-4, p. 9.
- 37 *Cricket Chat*, 1886-7, p. 81.
- 38 *Cricket Chat*, 1886-7, pp. 65-6.
- 39 *Sporting Life*, 7 Sept. 1892, p. 2.
- 40 *Athletic News and Cyclists' Journal*, 3 Aug. 1896, p. 3.
- 41 Sir A Lyttelton, 'Cricket Reform', *National Review*, vol. XXXIV, 1899-1900, p. 233.
- 42 P F Warner, *England v Australia*, Mills and Boon, London, 1912, p. 114.
- 43 *Wisden*, 1906, p. 5.
- 44 Trevor, *Problems of Cricket*, p. 214.
- 45 A E Knight, *The Complete Cricketer*, Methuen, London, 1906, p. 228.

SPORTING TRADITIONS

- 46 Neville Cardus, *Cardus on the Ashes*, Souvenir Press, London, 1989, p. 5. When Cardus wrote this article in 1930, entitled 'Invasion', he had seen little of the tourists.
- 47 Alan Howkins, 'The Discovery of Rural England', in Colls and Dodd, *Englishness*, p. 62.
- 48 Howkins, 'The Discovery of Rural England', p. 80.
- 49 'The Gaffer', 'Village Cricket', *Cricketer and Hockey Player* (1907) cited in D Rayvern Allen, *Cricket's Silver Linings, 1864-1914*, Collins, London, 1987, p. 362.
- 50 T Hughes, *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, Puffin, London, 1986, p. 271.
- 51 Cardus, *Cardus on the Ashes*, pp. 31-2.
- 52 R Cashrnan, *The 'Demon' Spofforth*, NSWUP, Kensington, 1990.