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THE SPORT OF NEWCASTLE

By W. J. GOOLD, F.R.A.H.S.

CRICKET

One of the earliest recorded cricket matches in Newcastle was played in 1854 on the old Barrack Square in Watt Street. This was between boys from the Newcastle and Maitland Grammar Schools, and resulted in a tie, the Newcastle boys scoring 31 and 62, and Maitland 44 and 49. Among the players in this game were several, who in later years, became prominently associated with cricket in both Newcastle and Maitland.

There was little cricket played in the Newcastle district in the "fifties," the principal sports being boat pulling and sailing, with a little horse racing. John Hannell, of the "Wheat Sheaf Arms" Inn at Hexham used frequently to include in his holiday sports at the Inn "A Match at Cricket"- but this was merely an inducement to bring custom to the house.

"NEWCASTLE CITY" – THE PIONEER CRICKET CLUB

It was another member of the Hannell family, James Hannell, of the "Ship Inn" in Hunter Street, Newcastle, who, in association with John Livesley Beetson and William John Greaves, called a meeting at the "Ship Inn" in 1854 to form the first cricket club in the district. At this meeting the Newcastle Cricket Club was established with James Hannell as President, J. L. Beetson as Hon. Secretary and W. J. Greaves as the Hon. Treasurer.

The members of the club were recruited from the colliery and shipping offices, the legal and medical professions, banks, etc. Most of these were active players, but many residents of the City paid their one guinea subscription to assist the club financially, and in later years the Newcastle Club had a large membership.

The early matches of the club were played on the Australian Agricultural Company's paddock, and occasionally on the old Barrack Square. The A. A. Company's paddock was a flat in front of the Company's offices on the waterfront, and the Barrack Square a level patch of ground, originally designed for a parade ground, was in front of the old Military Barracks in Watt Street (now the Mental Hospital).

It must be remembered there were no prepared wickets of any kind, neither was there matting. All the old-timers needed was a reasonably level patch of ground where the wicket was pitched, and the outfield was as nature had designed it, if possible, free of stumps. Under these conditions scoring was naturally small, and a double figure individual score was considered quite class.

In 1860 the Newcastle Club began playing its matches on the flat near St. John's Church in Lake Macquarie Road, then more often called "Lake Road," and now Darby Street. Later, this flat became known as "St. John's Green." A cricket match on "St. John's Green," near the Parish Church – what an atmosphere of old England this creates! One can almost visualise top-hatted cricketers playing on the green sward of the County of Kent, with the villagers, in their smocks, drinking their pots of ale! But this St. John's Green was in Sunny New South Wales, and the players were sturdy young Australians.

During the first few seasons matches were between teams selected from members of the club for the obvious reason that there were no other clubs in the district. These matches took the form of Married v. Single; Natives v. Europeans (a designation soon altered to Australians v. Europeans); East of the Bridge v. West of the Bridge (meaning those residing on opposite sides of the A. A. Company's bridge crossing Hunter Street); Law v. Commerce; and so on. Matches were frequently arranged between teams selected by members of the club, as, for instance, Hannell's Eleven v. Greaves Eleven, probably for a dinner.

In the early sixties came matches with the outer districts, such as Borehole (Hamilton), Waratah, Wallsend, etc. These were the means of introducing the game into these small colliery towns, and which, in later years, became strong cricketing centres.

In the city area another club was formed, named the "Alberts" (after the famous Sydney club), together with a few junior or juvenile clubs known as the "Young Alberts," "Young Australians" "Warwick," etc. This was indeed a progressive move for the game, for the Newcastle club was comprised mainly of the older and staid members of the community, while these new clubs were of the youthful element, keen and eager to learn.

The officials of the Newcastle club, elected on October 25, 1863, were: President, James Hannell; Vice-President, Helenus Scott, P.M.; Hon. Secretary, J.B. Oliffe; Hon. Treasurer, J.L. Beetson; Committee, H. J. Brown, H. Webb, J. B. Dibbs, R. Scott, J. Rodgers, E. McPherson, S. Chapman, C. Ranclaud, C. H. Hannell and T. Dulling.

It was in 1863 that Mr. Edward Christopher Merewether came to Newcastle as the Superintendent of the Australian Agricultural Company. He was an enthusiastic cricketer and a firm

supporter of the game, and it was indeed a wise move when Mr. Hannell resigned the Presidency of the Newcastle club, in his favour, an office that Mr. Merewether held until his death, 28 years later.

In the 1861-62 season J.L. Beetson headed the batting averages with 19.00, and then followed S. Chapman, C.H. Hannell, B. Wells, G. Allen, H. Webb, J. Rodgers, H. J. Brown, E. McPherson, Dr. Parsons, J. B. Oliffe, W. Francis, R. Scott, T. Dulling, C. B. Ranclaud and J. C. Dibbs. Beetson also won the bowling average, and was then undoubtedly the best cricketer in the club. Other playing members of the club in the early sixties, were: J. Steel, J. Burrows, G. Bridges, J. Hudson, W. Harris, W. Beetson, J. Ellis, D. Dobie, D. Miller, - Harkness, H. J. Goldfinch, B. Lipscomb, G. R. Dibbs (later Sir George Dibbs, Premier of New South Wales), C. W. Readett, J. Coutts, C. F. Stokes, J. Crampton, J. Crocker, T. Wrightson, R. Watt, R. Fleming, T. Dalby, T. Adam, J. Tyler, R. B. Wallace, T. Alcock, G. Gardener, T. W Hogue.

In 1863, the name of W. Tracey appears on the old score sheets, and he was to become one of the best-known characters of Newcastle cricket.

During Easter, 1862, a Newcastle Club team went by steamer to Morpeth to play a two-day's match against the local club. Both teams had completed an innings on the first day, but when the match was resumed on the following day it soon came to an untimely end, owing to one of the Morpeth players, who had been given out by the Newcastle umpire (Mr. James Ellis), refusing to go – there upon the Newcastle team packed their bags and came home!

The Australian Club of West Maitland visited Newcastle on April 18, 1862, to play the local team on the A.A. Company's paddock – unfortunately the match had to be abandoned owing to rain. The visiting team was entertained at dinner at the Metropolitan Hotel, where James Hannell presided over a happy gathering. These old-time cricket dinners were most enjoyable – a good spread; sundry toasts and plenty of wit and humour. It was rare if there was not a pianist among the players, and if one could not sing a song – all could roar out the chorus! On this occasion we are told that a Mr. Abrahams sang "Sally in Our Alley," and other songs that are now forgotten.

On Saturday, April 8, 1864, a team from Raymond Terrace played the Newcastle Club on St. John's Green, being defeated by four wickets, mainly due to the effective slow bowling of J. L. Beetson. The "farmers" were entertained at dinner in the old "Caledonian Hotel" in Watt St.

One of the earliest matches played by the Newcastle Club against Singleton took place on Easter Monday, 1864, at Singleton, Newcastle scoring 138 against the local team's 60.

On Easter Monday, 1866, the Newcastle Club played a Sydney combination known as the "Civil and Military Club," comprised mainly of Officers of the 72nd Regiment. The ground, the site of the present Sydney Cricket Ground, was then a strip of land at the rear of the Victoria Barracks, and it was here also that the famous Albert Club played many of its early matches. The Newcastle team in this match comprised: J. L. Beetson, E. C. Merewether, S. Chapman, B. Lipscombe, C. H. Hannell, H. J. Brown, E. McPherson, W. Francis, A. Bowman, H. J. Goldfinch and W. Tracey. The match was drawn, Newcastle 41 – 58; Civil and Military 69.

In a match played at St. John's Green on Saturday, October 29, 1866, J. L. Beetson put up a fine bowling performance by taking the whole 10 wickets.

We learn of fast bowling in 1866, in a match played at St. John's Green against an eleven selected by Guy Wyndham, of Dalwood. Newcastle won the match, greatly aided by the byes from the fast bowling of the Wyndham brothers.

The Australian Aboriginals, prior to their tour of England, played a Newcastle Eleven on St. John's Green in November, 1867. The local team, which won by 7 runs, comprised: J. L. Beetson, C. W. Readett, C. H. Hannell, G. Ferris, T.W. Hogue, J. Hogue, E. McPherson, S. Chapman, H. J. Brown, W. Tracey and J. Tracey. Umpires: James Hannell and G. Bewick, Senr.

A team of cricketers came from Murrurundi on July 8, 1868, to try conclusions with Newcastle players at St. John's Green. The well-known Abbott family of Murrurundi was well represented by three players, and Mr. J. P. Abbott (for many years the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly) was their umpire. Newcastle scored 98, Murrurundi 65.

Waratah was also defeated at St. John's Green on December 2, 1866, by 29 runs. The teams in this match were: Newcastle: J. L. Beetson, E. C. Merewether, H. J. Goldfinch, S. Chapman, C. H. Hannell, F. M. Haddon, E. McPherson, H. J. Brown, T. W. Hogue, F. Brown, W. Tracey. Waratah: D. T. Hicks, G. Harvey, H. Hall, T. Braye, G. Ferris, J. Palmer, W. Longworth, F. Turton, J. Bevan, W. McEwen, --. Taylor. Umpires: J. Hannell and J. Grant. Newcastle 65-125; Waratah 66-95.

A progressive move in the encouragement of cricket in the Newcastle District was made possible by the arrival in Newcastle of Charles Lawrence, an English professional cricketer, and formerly coach to the Albert Club in Sydney. He was a member of the first English team to tour Australia in 1862, and at the conclusion of the tour he accepted an engagement with the Albert Club of Sydney as coach at a salary of £300 per annum. Lawrence played in many matches for New South Wales against Victoria, Queensland and visiting English teams.

In 1867, when an Aboriginal cricket team was organised to tour England, it was coached by Lawrence, who was also appointed to captain the team. On arrival back in Australia early in 1869 Lawrence accepted a position on the clerical staff of the Great Northern Railway, and made his residence in Newcastle. Here he played with the Newcastle City Club, and also with the Great Northern Railway and Railway Clerical Clubs; he also figured in many representative games. When Lawrence arrived in Newcastle he was 40 years of age, and after 20 years residence here, he accepted an engagement as coach to the Melbourne Cricket Club.

About the time Lawrence came to Newcastle, another old English player came North to West Maitland, this was George Gilbert, a cousin of Dr. W. G. Grace (the "G" in Grace's initials is for Gilbert). The lure of the goldfields brought Gilbert to Australia in the early fifties. He and a local product, Harry Hilliard, were the best cricketers in Sydney at that time, and were the heroes of many early matches. Gilbert had the distinction of having bowled the first ball in the Interstate matches between Victoria and New South Wales at Melbourne on March 26, 1856. Later he removed to New South Wales, and then represented that State against Victoria.

Like Lawrence, Gilbert came North as an employee of the Railway Department, and for a time was stationmaster at High Street Station. He was then playing for Maitland, but later joined the Newcastle City Club, with which he had some phenomenal bowling averages.

These two former English players had much to do with the development of the game in both Newcastle and Maitland and although both past their prime as players, their advice and instruction to the younger generation bore fruit in later years.

Charles Lawrence made his first appearance for the Newcastle City Club on November 20, 1869, against the Alberts on St. John's Green. Newcastle's team was: J. L. Beetson, C. Lawrence, A. A. Glennie, C. L. Blair, C. H. Hannell, C. W. Readett, E. C. Merewether, W. Tracey, C. F. Stokes, C. Sweetland and S. Chapman. Newcastle, 101; Alberts, 8 for 23, Lawrence taking six of the eight wickets.

The following Saturday, November 27, 1869, Lawrence played for Great Northern Railway against the Newcastle City team, at the Newcastle Cricket Ground. The City team was dismissed for 30 runs through the bowling of Lawrence and Tracey, and in the Railway score of 5 for 90, Lawrence contributed 46.

The officials of the Newcastle Club for the year 1870 were; President, E. C. Merewether; Vice-Presidents, C. F. Stokes and J. L. Beetson; Hon. Secretary, C. L. Blair; Hon. Treasurer, C. Sweetland; Committee, C. W. Readett, G. F. Scott, T. W. Hogue, C. Lawrence, H. J. Brown, F. R. Neild and A. A. Glennie.

The annual matches between the cricketers of Newcastle and Maitland date back to the earliest days of cricket in the North. In the "seventies" the teams were very evenly matched, and in the "home and home" matches of 1871 each won a match. At the Albion Ground, West Maitland, on January 21, 1871, Newcastle won by 9 wickets, due to the bowling combination of Lawrence and Tracey, Lawrence taking 14 wickets for 34 and Tracey 6 for 31. At the Newcastle Cricket Ground, on February 25, 1871, the Maitland team was victorious by 22 runs, notwithstanding that Lawrence took 11 for 58 and Tracey 9 for 31. It was two Maitland bowlers who won this match – Johnson, who took 10 for 28, and George Moore 9 for 38. The players who took part in these two matches were: Newcastle: J. L. Beetson, C. Lawrence, C. L. Blair, T. W. Hogue, John Hogue, James Hogue, C. W. Readett, F. M. Haddon, E. C. Merewether, F. R. Neild, G. Bewick Junr. Maitland: R. A. Waddy, G. Gilbert, A. E. Johnson, G. Moore, J. Moore, C. McDougall, C. Solling, J. Patrick, M. Patrick, G. Brackenrigg, J. J. Riley, C. Boydell, -- . Jeffs.

At the end of the 1871 season Newcastle Club received what was termed a "cocky" challenge from an eleven of Branxton "to play anything that Newcastle could produce!" The outcome was a match played on the neutral Albion Ground at Maitland. The Branxton team, which was organised by Mr. Guy Wyndham, included two of his brothers, who specialised in the art of fast bowling, and according to the local press: "The Newcastle players were overwhelmed by the fast bowling of the Wyndhams. R. Wyndham's bowling was something in its velocity like the catapult, and not only sent the stumps flying, but also injured the batsmen's fingers and legs." Newcastle team only scored 11 runs in that first innings – yet won the match by eight wickets, strange to relate, mainly through the *slow* bowling of Charles Lawrence.

At the Newcastle Cricket Ground on March 14 and 15, 1871, the first representative match in the Northern Districts took place; this was Victoria v. Northern Districts.

Victoria: T. W. Wills (Capt.), L. Goldsmith, D. Campbell, B. B. Cooper, E. Gregory, S. Cosstick, C. Reid, W. F. Darke, E. D. Heather, --. Wadson, --. McFarland. Northern Districts: C. Lawrence (Capt.), F. M. Haddow, C. L. Blair, W. Tracey, C. W. Readett, A. A. Glennie, T. W. Hogue, J. Hogue (Newcastle), J. Moore, G. Gilbert, R. A. Waddy (Maitland). Umpires: J. D. Beetson (Newcastle), --. Miller (Victoria). Scorers: Hipwell and H. F. Cross. Scores: Victoria 50 – 4 for 19, Northern 84.

The Victorian team, which had defeated New South Wales at Sydney, arrived in Newcastle by the steamer "Florence Irving." Their captain (Wills) who had the best bowling figures, was notorious for his doubtful delivery, and the local scribe wrote: "Wills, as usual, deliberately threw the ball at the wickets, with the idea he was bowling."

It was the Newcastle Club which financed and controlled visits of touring representative teams, such as the English and Australian Elevens, and leading Metropolitan clubs, all these matches being played on the Newcastle Cricket Ground.

On March 18, 1871, Frederick Merewether Haddow, a nephew of Mr. E. C. Merewether, was drowned in the floodwaters at the Junction, near the "Duke of Edinburgh Hotel." At his funeral the pall-bearers were: W. Tracey, C. L. Blair, T. W. Hogue, J. Hogue, A. A. Glennie and W. J. Greaves, all fellow members of the Newcastle Club.

A leaf taken from a score book of 1872 gives details of a match played on Newcastle Cricket Ground on April 6, 1872, between Newcastle City Club and the Sydney University Eleven. The names on this sheet recall men who in later years became prominent in other spheres beside sport, such as Richard Teece, J. P. Sheridan, J. Coates, H. M. Faithfull and, probably the greatest of them, E. Barton, who became the first Prime Minister of the Commonwealth. The Newcastle team in this match comprised: A. A. Glennie, E. C. Merewether, C. Lawrence, T. W. Hogue, Jas. Hogue, John Hogue, C. L. Blair, W. Tracey, G. Bewick, Bowden and Johnstone.

The first English team to play at Newcastle did so on December 12, 13 and 14, 1876, the teams being: England: J. Lilywhite (Capt.), G. Ulyett, A. Hill, H. Charlwood, J. Selby, T. Armitage, G. Pooley, A. Greenwood, A. Shaw, T. Emmett, J. Southeron. Northern Districts: R. Riley (Capt.), R. A. Waddy, A. E. Johnstone, C. Onus, E. J. Clarke, G. Lawrie, R. Wyndham, A. A. Glennie, F. C. Elliott, R. Bryant, G. W. Webb, W. Moore, G. Gilbert, R. Donald, W. Tracey, B. Morley, C. Glennie, M. Costello, --. Hand, --, Hewitt, --. Taylor. Umpires: H. Jupp (England), G. Moore (Northern). Scores: England, 96 – 77; Northern, 31 – 67.