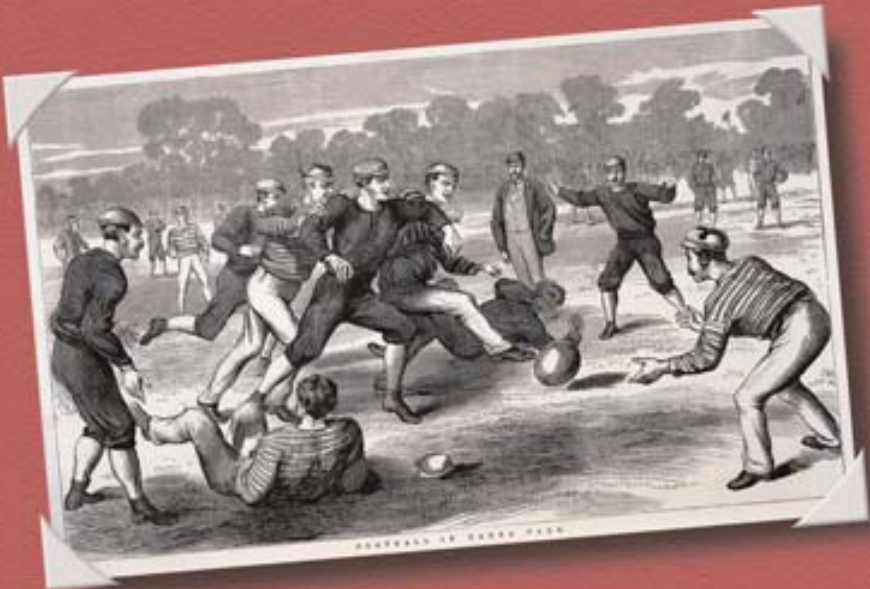




THE FIRST
FOOTBALL MATCHES
on the
MELBOURNE
CRICKET GROUND



ALF BATCHELDER



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Henry Colden Antill Harrison The outstanding athlete of his time, Harrison was football's leading player untill his retirement in 1871. this portrait was taken in New York, c.1885.

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MCC Library Volunteer



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THE FIRST FOOTBALL MATCHES

on the Melbourne Cricket Ground

On November 16, 1850, during the celebrations to mark Separation from New South Wales, a football match was played on Melbourne Cricket Club's ground in Emerald Hill. Situated on the south bank of the Yarra, this Melbourne Cricket Ground lay between the present White Street and City Road. Two teams of twelve players competed there for a prize of £15 which **was won easily by Mr Barry and his eleven**, who were cheered **loudly and heartily**. The crowd was indeed in a merry mood – the organising Committee of the Separation Sports and Games had provided **a supply of beer for the million on the ground**. In spite of the free-flowing refreshments. *The Argus* found that **everything passed off quietly, and without the slightest exhibition of ill-feeling**.

The MCC used its Emerald Hill ground for the last time on February 25 1854. From the following season, its ground was located in the Richmond or Police Paddock. Describing the early years of Australian football in his 1923 autobiography *The Story of An Athlete*, MCC Vice-President Henry Colden Antill Harrison dogmatically wrote that **the first game on the M.C.C. Ground was that played in 1869 against the Victorian Police Force**. These words from the respected **Father of the Australian Game** appear to have led football historians to hold, almost inflexibly, that after Melbourne Grammar and Scotch College played the first documented game of Australian football there in 1858, the winter game remained confined to the parklands of the Richmond Paddock for eleven years. However, Harrison's memory of events from 50 or 60 years previously was a little hazy, for materials in the MCC Library collection reveal that football was occasionally played on the Melbourne Cricket Ground well before 1869.

On July 10, 1858, *Bell's Life In Victoria* published a letter from T. W. Wills:

SIR, – Now that cricket has been put aside for some few months to come, and cricketers have assumed somewhat of the chrysalis nature (for a time only 'tis true), but at length will again burst forth in all their varied hues, rather than allow this state of torpor to creep over them, and stifle their new supple limbs, why can they not, I say, form a foot-ball club, and form a committee of three or four to draw up a code of laws?

If a club of this sort were got up, it would be of a vast benefit to any cricket-ground to be trampled upon, and would make the turf quite firm and durable; besides which it would keep those who are inclined to become stout from having their joints encased in useless superabundant flesh.

If it is not possible to form a foot-ball club, why should not these young men who have adopted this new-born country for their mother land, why I say, do they not form themselves into a rifle club, so as at any rate they may be some day called to aid their adopted land against a tyrant's band, that may some day "pop" upon us when we least expect a foe at our very doors. Surely our young cricketers are not afraid of the crack of the rifle, when they face so courageously the leathern sphere, and it would disgrace no one to learn in time how to defend his country and his hearth. A firm heart, a steady hand, and a quick eye, are all that are requisite, and, with practice, all these may be attained. Trusting that some one will take up the matter, and form either of the above clubs, or, at any rate, some athletic games, I remain, yours truly.

T. W. WILLS.



Contrary to common belief, the letter contains no suggestion that, in proposing the formation of a football or rifle club, Wills was writing on behalf of the Melbourne Cricket Club or even in his capacity as Honorary Secretary of the Club - if he were, he would surely have put forward his proposals at a Committee meeting and not in the press. Rather, the letter has to be viewed not as an official communication, but as the expression of a private viewpoint which quickly gained the endorsement of many MCC Members and others. (Just over two months later, when the Club's annual meeting was held in the pavilion on September 18, Wills' term as Honorary Secretary came to an unhappy end, for **Some Remarks of a severe nature were made by the President** [D. S. Campbell, M.L.A.] **relative to the non-production of the books by the late secretary, T. W. Wills, Esq.)**

In the weeks following publication of the Wills letter, several football items appeared in the Melbourne papers. The MCC Library's microfilms of *Bell's Life In Victoria* and *The Argus* show that, though brief, these early press reports identified the locations of matches fairly specifically, with such phrases as **near the Melbourne Cricket Club ground**, or **in the Richmond Park** or **The neighbourhood of the cricket-ground in Richmond Park**. Thus, the papers leave no doubt that most matches in 1858 were being played outside the MCG. However, a change in the pattern of reporting the venues appeared on Saturday July 31, 1858, when *Bell's Life In Victoria* announced that **Mr. Bryant, of the Parade hotel, ... will have a ball on the Melbourne cricket ground, or adjoining portion of Richmond Park, to-day, at one o'clock.**

While this item does indicate some doubt over the final location of the day's activities, it nevertheless shows that the MCG was certainly not off-limits as a potential venue. Then, a fortnight later, on the day when *The Argus* expected that **The match at football between the Church of England and Scotch Schools ... [would be] completed in the Richmond Park**, *Bell's Life* was in no doubt that the Melbourne Cricket Ground would be in use as well:

A ball will be ready on the M.C.C. ground to-day, at one o'clock, when all good "kicks" are expected to put their boots on and show.

Unfortunately, play in the long drawn out match between the schools was not resumed on that day, so, according to *The Argus* of Monday August 16, 1858, **an impromptu game was, however, organised among several members of the Melbourne Cricket Club and others who happened to be present.** Though the paper gives no indication where this match ultimately took place, the MCG was certainly being seen at this very early stage as available for football - but no conclusive evidence has emerged as yet showing that the sport was definitely played on the MCG during that first season.

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The 1859 season began on May 14, a week after the final cricket match ended in a draw between Melbourne and Richmond. (This encounter also ended on a slightly sour note, for the *Bell's Life* correspondent concluded his report **by taking exception to the conduct of one of the gentlemen of the M.C.C.** The individual's conduct must have been rather scandalous, for the paper had **no desire to report such desagremens, and [felt] assured that the gentleman alluded to is sufficiently aware of the mistake he made.**)

The weekly paper was far more willing to provide details of the football match **between two sides chosen by Messrs. Bryant and Smith:**

It was more of a scratch match, owing to there being no fixed rules of play; some of the parties engaged following out the practice of catching and holding the ball, while others strenuously objected to it, contending that the ball should never be lifted from the ground otherwise than by the foot. The difference of opinion did not, however, prevent the enjoyment of the sport, for the greatest good humour prevailed.

A preliminary meeting of gentlemen interested in the game was subsequently held at the Parade hotel, with the object of forming a Football Club. A list of fifty one members was submitted, and from amongst them the following were selected as a committee to draw up rules, etc.: - Messrs. Wills, Hammersley, Bruce, Smith, and Wray. Mr. Sewell was appointed treasurer, and Mr. J. B. Thompson secretary of the club.

Presumably, many of the 51 gentlemen would have been among those who, in the previous July, had **determined upon getting up a football club** and considered forming a committee **to draw up a short code of rules.** [*Bell's Life In Victoria, July 31, 1858.*] In those times, it was not an uncommon procedure for clubs to re-form in this way at the start of a season - indeed, in its very early years, the Melbourne Cricket Club itself followed this procedure. The rules committee appears to have been comprised entirely of MCC Members, as the surnames given are either on the 1858-59 membership list or in the report of the MCC's Annual Meeting. The set of rules drafted on this occasion not only formed the basis of the Melbourne Football Club's activities in the 1859 season, but found growing acceptance among other football enthusiasts as well. (The original document is currently displayed in The Australian Gallery of Sport.) Having laid the foundation for the winter's activities, the Football Club took its next step:

A deputation was also appointed to wait on the Ground Committee of the Melbourne Cricket Club to obtain permission to play on their reserve, at such times as may be hereafter arranged.

Apparently, permission was not immediately forthcoming. From late May until early July, the members of the Melbourne Football Club met in the Richmond



Paddock on most Saturdays to play matches among themselves. Finally, the July 9 issue of *Bell's Life In Victoria* signalled a change to this routine:

FOOTBALL - The match between the Melbourne and South Yarra clubs will be played this day, at two p.m., on the Melbourne Cricket Ground which is to be roped off for the occasion, and the Pavilion will be appropriated to the use of the fair sex.

The following are the names of the players who have been selected to compete in this match - Melbourne: Bruce, Wills, Smith, Thompson, Butterworth, Hammersley, Petrie, Morrison, Byrne, Russell, Woolley, Wardell, Kenworthy, W. Webb, Wray, McPherson, McKenzie, Ogilvie, Harrison, Grut, Henderson, May, Shepherd, Jacomb, A. McCrae. Emergency men: Cameron, Montgomery, Murray, Abbott, Sewell. South Yarra: Hammill, Greig, Dalgety, Hayward, Murray, Smith, V. Brown, R. Brown, H. Chomley, C. Chomley, J. C. Tyler, Courtney, Raleigh, F. H. Hart, G. L. Hart, Murphy, Goodman.

[On July 7, *The Argus* had published a fuller list of the South Yarra team which included the name "T. A. Brown". A recent biography has claimed that this was Thomas Alexander Browne ("Rolf Boldrewood"), author of *Robbery Under Arms*.]

Apart from its insight into the use of the Pavilion, the *Bell's Life* report requires comment on two points. First, the Ground was **roped off for the occasion** because football was then played on a rectangular field [see p.28]. Further, it would seem that many of the Melbourne team were not Members of the Melbourne Cricket Club - Abbott, Byrne, Ogilvie, Petrie, Russell and Shepherd, for example, do not appear on the 1858-59 Membership list. Presumably Grut, Harrison, Jacomb and Kenworthy were the same men who later joined the Club, while "Wardell" is undoubtedly a misspelling of the surname of R. W. Wardill. With many of the other surnames listed, the absence of initials makes clear identification almost impossible.

On Monday, July 11, 1859, *The Argus* provided a lengthy account of this game:

The long-talked-of football match between the Melbourne and South Yarra Clubs was commenced on Saturday afternoon, upon the Melbourne Cricket Ground, which was allowed to be used for the occasion. As far as roping off the arena and posting flags went, all that could be desired was effected by Mr. Bryant, who has for a long time had the catering for the M.C.C.; but as it was distinctly understood that the pavilion - or, at any rate, the verandah of the pavilion - was to be set apart for the ladies, the inadequate provision made for their comfort, and the indiscriminate manner in which all sorts of people, not members of the club, were allowed to crowd into the enclosure and occupy the best positions for viewing the match,

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reflect grave discredit upon the person who distinctly stipulated to keep a man for the express purpose of excluding those who did not possess the right of *entre*. The heavy shower which fell during the afternoon affords some excuse for the rush which took place into the pavilion, but when it was over the process of elimination might have been easily, and would have been advantageously, proceeded with. This being the second occurrence of a similar character within a very short period, points the Committee of the M.C.C. towards the necessity of either taking the management of affairs of the kind into their own hands, or of making such an arrangement as will preclude the possibility of prescribed *formulae* being transgressed by any third party for the future.

But to return to the match. Within a few minutes of the specified time, all preliminaries having been arranged, the blues and whites took up their positions opposite each other. The captains were - for South Yarra, Mr. Hammill; and for Melbourne, Mr. Hammersley; and the rules of the Melbourne Football Club, as lately revised, were agreed to be played by. Melbourne, losing the toss, had the kick off against the wind, and in the direction of Princes Bridge, the match ground being marked off about east and west.

Spectators mustered in great force, which was the more remarkable as a powerful visitation of *Jupiter Pluvius* appeared imminent long before the commencement of the contest. The fact, too, that several of the stakes defining the bounds gave way under pressure from without showed that considerable interest had been excited. For about a quarter of an hour it was difficult to say which was the better side, but as the forlorn hope of the blues, who fought manfully until pulmonary difficulties supervened, gradually slackened in their efforts, the superiority of the Melbourne Club became manifest, for, in spite of tremendous "spurts" - and many gallant ones were made - a strong head-wind blowing into the bargain, the ball was kept up near the South Yarra goal almost uninterruptedly, until Mr. Wray, who had, as is his wont, been in close proximity to the enemy's quarters *ab initio*, managed to make up for a previous mistake by kicking the leathern sphere as cleanly between the posts as even "Old Brooke" could have desired.

This first reverse seemed to put the South Yarra men on their mettle, for they now had to contend both against superior play and the wind, which for a long time baffled their opponents. Gallantly they struggled, and during many a tough bout for supremacy, neither side could fairly claim themselves to be the best men.



"Backward still and forward
Wavered that deep array,"

the severely-punished ball running now east and now west, with occasional leeway, as the fall of the ground or malpropulsion caused the diversion, until a sharp shower of rain caused all to run hurriedly for cover. Needful refreshment, congratulation, and condolence, restored the combatants to full vigor; and the fight raged anew with undiminished zeal on either side, and with no definite result, until coming night compelled an armistice. A revival of hostilities is contemplated on Saturday, the 23rd.

We have purposely omitted individual mention of the players, as, with hardly an exception, all acquitted themselves most creditably. We cannot, however, conclude this notice without giving our highest commendation of the pluck and vigor displayed by the South Yarra gentlemen, who, though a man short, and manifestly inferior to their opponents in strength and skill, fought an up-hill match in a manner which has not only won the admiration of their opponents, but enlisted the sympathies of all lookers-on. It is worthy of notice that the game was conducted throughout with the most perfect good feeling on both sides, and that in each case of acknowledged infringement of the Melbourne rules, a "free kick" was conceded without a murmur.

A week later, *Bell's Life In Victoria* presented its report on the match:

FOOTBALL - MELBOURNE V. SOUTH YARRA. - We have received the following account of this match from a correspondent:- "This exciting match came off on the Melbourne cricket ground on Saturday last; the game throughout was attentively watched by upwards of 2000 spectators, who seemed to thoroughly enjoy themselves. The preliminaries having been satisfactorily arranged, the respective sides took their places in the field a little after two, Mr. Hammill acting as captain of the South Yarra Club, and Mr. Hammersley acting in the same capacity for the Melbourne - though Mr. Wills had the placing of the men when the encounter commenced. The South Yarra had at first the advantage of a very strong wind which made the "drops" of the Melbourne men look rather seedy.

"For though they tug and strain, down, down they go,
The goal's above, and the ball below."

Affairs at this period of the game began to look desperate, and the Melbourne men to think of their laurels, which appeared anything but secure; but, as luck would have it, a heavy shower of rain came down and drove the players for a short period from the field. Upon resuming the game Boreas had

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Thomas Francis Wray Honorary Secretary of the MCC in 1859, Wray kicked the first recorded goal on the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

ceased to blow, and in a short time Mr. Wray contrived to kick a goal for the Melbourne side, and from this period, till the shades of evening gave warning to both sides to desist, no other goal was obtained.

FLOREAT VICTORIA.

It is interesting to note that, at this time, football tended to receive less coverage in *Bell's Life* than the sport of rattng, which soared in popularity after its first Melbourne appearance was advertised in the paper's issue of July 2, 1859:

Sportsmen, Dog Fanciers, and the public generally, are respectfully informed that a Rat Pit will be Opened This Evening, at the Butchers' Arms, Elizabeth street. Several exciting matches with Dogs, Ferrets, etc. Gentlemen will always find a good supply of Rats on hand, with which to try their terriers, at a moderate price.

One can only wonder what exciting matches took place involving the mysterious "etc." It is a prospect which makes the second afternoon of the Melbourne-South Yarra match, as reported in *The Argus* on Monday July 25, seem somewhat mundane:

Regardless of rain, a bitter cutting wind, and the moral certainty of being "spilt," the bulk of the 50 good men and true chosen to represent Melbourne and South Yarra at football donned respectively their white and blue uniforms on Saturday afternoon. The Melbourne cricket ground, roped off as before, was again the battlefield. Inclement as the weather was, not a few spectators braved its unpleasantness throughout the match, which was not concluded until nearly 5 o'clock.

According to the original agreement, the victory was won by Melbourne when the second goal was kicked - a circumstance that occurred about an hour after the commencement of the game. The captains, however, came to the understanding that the first three, and not two, goals should be considered decisive. Accordingly, after the ball had been propelled between the convincing posts by Mr. Wray, who in this match has gained a "double first" (an event which was the signal for a little reinvigoration in the Pavilion),



the two sides again faced each other. The third rencontre resulted in a splendidly-contested game.

The South Yarra men displayed many excellent qualities, speed, pluck, and untiring activity, being amongst the most prominent; but all in vain, for they were overweighted and outmanoeuvred by their opponents, who, as a mass, are decidedly the more matured warriors. For rapid concentration in cases of emergency South Yarra is entitled to the palm, but this habit has been so inculcated as to become almost a fault, since a sudden diversion in the game throws about half the field out, and the other half are not all available for defensive purposes. The Melbourne men, with a few exceptions, displayed the greatest adroitness in dodging, and force and precision in "giving a purl."

The ground being so slippery, falls were of momentary occurrence, and frequently four or five blues and whites would be sprawling together on the ground, not always in the most dignified attitudes. When the last goal was obtained by a fine "place kick," we venture to assert that there were not five out of the two-score-and-ten combatants not "dashed with drops of onset," and who did not carry with them evident marks of an intimate acquaintance with mother earth.

The South Yarra Club bore their defeat with the most perfect good humor, and departed with the fullest intention of being much less easily beaten in the return match, no date for which has yet been fixed. On Saturday next the Melbourne and St.Kilda Clubs will play a match on the Melbourne ground, 25 men on each side to be the limit. We omitted to mention that a good many ladies were venture some enough to sit out the match on Saturday on the verandah of the Pavilion, which was on this occasion kept quite select.

The match against St.Kilda was announced in *Bell's Life In Victoria* on Saturday July 30, 1859:

MELBOURNE V. ST. KILDA. - A match between 25 members of each of these clubs will be played this afternoon, on the Melbourne Cricket Ground. The distinctive colours on the occasion will be - for St.Kilda, pink; and for Melbourne, white.

The following gentlemen have been chosen to represent St.Kilda:-
Messrs. D. Alsop, J. Brooks, Balbirnie Vans, R. Courtney, S. Down, N. Dismorr, A. W. Fraser, P. B. Glover, E. S. Harley, - Hamilton, H. A. Hendren, - Hardcastle, D. C. Ireland, J. Ireland, - Long, D. Maccallum, - Macdougall, T. S. Martin,

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W. Oldham, C. Percell, - Roberts, - Scott, F. South, J. Watson, and E. Watson.

The Melbourne side will comprise:- Messrs. Wills, Bruce, Smith, Thompson, Hammersley, Petrie, Morrison, Byrne, Harrison, Russell, Wray, Woolley, Wardell, Kenworthy, W. Webb, McPherson, McKenzie, Ogilvie, Grut, May, Shepherd, Jacombe, Mortimer, G. McCrae, and Cameron. Emergency Men:- Messrs. Henderson, F. Murray, Abbott, Montgomery, and R. Murray.

In its next issue, *Bell's Life* stated that R. Courtney led the St.Kilda side, while Tom Wills captained of Melbourne team. *The Argus* of Monday, August 1, 1859, reveals that, contrary to expectation, this match was not played on the MCG:

It was expected, as the South Yarra had obtained a partial victory over the St.Kilda Club in a late football match, that the 25 chosen to represent Melbourne on Saturday would have an easy task. Such, however, was not the case, for a better or more closely-contested game has not been played during the season than that between Melbourne and St.Kilda.

The use of the Melbourne cricket-ground was not accorded, in consequence of the late rains, and the necessity for having the turf in good order for the ensuing campaign, so that the ordinary space was marked off in the adjoining portion of Richmond Paddock. The consequence was, that considerable inconvenience was experienced by the players from the presence of spectators, who invariably, when they have the chance, assert their freedom by getting as much in the way as possible, either careless of the annoyance they occasion, or forgetful that an equally good view could be obtained by standing outside the bounds. The single policeman sent to keep order was perfectly helpless, and contented himself with occasionally ordering the dispersal of knots of small boys, who will assemble in this manner when a game becomes exciting.

The toss having been won by St.Kilda, the game commenced, and was continued with varying success for about an hour, when a goal was kicked for the Melbourne side by Mr. Petrie. After an adjournment, hostilities were resumed, and continued until it was almost too dark to see the ball. Strenuous efforts were made on the part of St.Kilda to prevent the finishing stroke being put to the game, and equal vigor was exhibited by the Melbourne Football Club to make a one-day's match of it. There were several hairbreadth 'scapes on both sides, no definite result being arrived at, so that the conclusion is postponed until Saturday week.

Immense amusement was afforded to the lookers-on by the almost continuous series of "spills," most of which were occasioned by the wet



Yarra Park and the Melbourne



Cricket Ground in 1886



condition of the ground. One swampy bit of turf was, after a couple of hours' play, studiously avoided by all the combatants, who thought a tumble or two in comparatively dry ground was quite sufficient to show their zeal in the cause they had espoused.

On Saturday next the St.Kilda and South Yarra clubs will meet again. A challenge has been received from the Scotch College boys to play the second 25 of the Melbourne Club, which, it is understood, will be responded to. In Geelong, football has been taken up enthusiastically, and we learn that the G.F.C. purpose playing by the rules of the Melbourne Club. A home-and-home match between the Pivot and the Metropolis may therefore not be despaired of previous to the close of the season.

Football was played again on the MCG in 1860. On May 19, *Bell's Life In Victoria* gave an account of a match between Melbourne and Richmond:

On Saturday afternoon the first grand match of the season was played between the Melbourne and Richmond clubs. The Melbourne cricket ground, which had been selected as the rendezvous (notwithstanding that the secretary had stated that it would be utterly spoiled for cricket) was well roped off, and the goal posts and boundary flags having been fixed, Messrs. Wills and Smith (of the Scotch College), who were the respective captains of Richmond and Melbourne, succeeded in mustering their forces at about a quarter past two. The Richmond men were all distinguished by a broad red riband over the left shoulder of their ordinary white, whilst the Melbourne men for the most part were in white, but with any coloured caps, red apparently being the favourite.

The Melbourne club commenced with eighteen men, while their opponents were four short of that number. Mr. Smith kicked off the first ball, the field then closed in, and a series of "rushes" and "tussles" ensued. After about an hour's fun Mr. Baker, of the Melbourne division, succeeded in getting the ball into his hands when within a short distance of the goal posts, and then, thanks to the wind somewhat, succeeded further in kicking the first goal, much to the delight of his colleagues.

An interval of about ten minutes followed, for the purpose of allowing both sides to regain their lost wind. When the bell again rang, all the men on both sides speedily turned out, and so soon as the ball was set a-rolling were at it again. Another hour and a half of hard fighting followed; sometimes the Melbourne and at other times the Richmond having the advantage. Matters went on in this way until nearly five o'clock, when the captain of the Melbourne team wanted to cut the game short; but Mr. Wills, knowing that if

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his side had the worst of it as to weights, they had the advantage of wind, stoutly refused to accede to the proposal, and determined to play on until the time agreed upon - a quarter past five. So the ball was again kicked, first one way then another, and after a few more "spills" and "purls," and "charges," the ball was got up close to the pavilion, until it at last reached Mr. Nichols's hands, and ultimately his feet, and then, to the great joy of his fellows, it was seen to pass the goal posts. A loud cheer announced that the Richmond had tied their strong opponents, and the curtain was dropped for the evening. The game, we understand, will not be played out, but the return match will come off on Saturday, the 2nd of June, on the Richmond ground. A large number of spectators visited the ground during the afternoon, amongst whom were a good portion of the fair sex.

In 1859, the match against St.Kilda had not been played on the Ground, as intended, **in consequence of the late rains, and the necessity for having the turf in good order for the ensuing campaign** against New South Wales in the cricket season. In the account of the 1860 match against Richmond, the claim **that the secretary had stated that it would be utterly spoiled for cricket** indicates that concerns over the state of the playing area remained strong. Moreover, the comment that the Ground was **selected as the rendezvous** notwithstanding the views of the secretary suggests that some tension existed over the matter. Despite his skills as a goal-kicker for the Melbourne team, the MCC Honorary Secretary Thomas F. Wray clearly did not share the view advanced in Wills' letter of July 1858 that **it would be of a vast benefit to any cricket-ground to be trampled upon, and would make the turf quite firm and durable.** (On December 28, 1861, concerns over the condition of the Ground for cricket were, surprisingly, put aside only three days before the All England Eleven played the first international match in Australia - the final day of the Highland Games featured events with galloping horses, as well as a football match between Melbourne and University. [*Bell's Life in Victoria, January 4, 1862.*])

Certainly, the state of the playing area was in the minds of the Committeemen of the Melbourne Cricket Club when, on May 20, 1861, they considered a request from the secretary of the Melbourne Football Club for **the use of the Cricket ground on the occasion of the Match between Melbourne and Geelong.** The matter was left in the hands of two Committeemen, G. F. Burgoyne and Melmoth Hall, **those gentlemen to have the power of forbidding the game should they consider the ground unfit for use.** When the teams met on Friday, May 24, 1861, Burgoyne and Hall were satisfied that the match could proceed, and *Bell's Life In Victoria* published its report on the following day:



MELBOURNE V. GEELONG.- The match between the representatives of the pivot and of the metropolis was played yesterday, on the Melbourne cricket ground, in the presence of about 600 spectators. The Geelongese were under the command of Mr. Rennie; Mr. H. C. Harrison being captain of the Melbournites, who on this occasion, without a single exception, appeared in their magenta uniform, their opponents being distinguished by red caps. The ball was kept moving with great spirit till the signal was given for luncheon, when the rival forces agreed to a truce. Soon after a renewal of hostilities the first goal was kicked by Mr. Nichols for Melbourne. On changing ends the metropolitans were again fortunate, Mr. Lucas gaining the credit of kicking the leather sphere through the barriers, and thus terminating the match. To finish the afternoon, a scratch match was played, in which Messrs. Harrison and Gregg joined the visitors from Geelong, and Mr. Baker, on the part of Melbourne, gained two goals.

At times, Colden Harrison must have found it difficult to remember which team he was playing for - less than a week after leading the **forces of the Richmondites** against Melbourne, he captained Melbourne before turning out for Geelong in the **scratch match**. Harrison's wanderings as a player are an important reminder that, in many ways, the early years of football and of sport on the Melbourne Cricket Ground bear little resemblance to what our own experiences in the modern era might lead us to expect.

After the match between Melbourne and University in December 1861, football did not reappear on the MCG for over three years. On May 27, 1865, *Bell's Life In Victoria* reported that another match had been played on the Ground:

The football season promises to be a particularly active one, to judge from the spirited commencement made on the occasion of the meeting of the Melbourne and Geelong clubs to contend for the Challenge Cup, presented by the Athletic Sports Committee. The Geelong players have acquired a high reputation as football players, and no sooner were the conditions published whereby the Cup should be played for than they immediately threw down the gauntlet, and challenged the M.F.C. for the honour of being the holders. The Cup must be won three times before it becomes the property of any club. The Queen's Birthday was fixed for the first match, and the Melbourne cricket ground - which had been kindly granted for the occasion - the scene of action.

Queen's weather favoured those who were disposed to make a holiday of Wednesday last, and the bright sun soon dispelled the fears of those who

GRAND CALEDONIAN GATHERING, MELBOURNE CRICKET GROUND, THURSDAY, 26th, FRIDAY, 27th & SATURDAY, 28th DEC., 1861.

PATRONISED BY HIS EXCELLENCE SIR HENRY BARKLY, K.C.B.,
THE CHIEF MAGISTRATE, THE PROSECUTOR OF THE ASSIZES, THE ATTORNEY GENERAL, THE JUDICIAL OFFICERS,
AND ALL THE MAGISTRATES OF MELBOURNE.

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PROGRAMME. MUSIC THROUGHOUT THE FETES BY TWO BANDS. GRAND HURDY MATCH ARESKY.

LADIES FROM Melbourne and Town. GENTLEMEN FROM Melbourne and Town. GRAND SCOTTISH MATCHES.
Melbourne First Five v Melbourne Second Five. Melbourne Third Five v Melbourne Fourth Five. Melbourne Fifth Five v Melbourne Sixth Five.

FOOT-BALL MATCH. MELBOURNE V. TOWN.

ESSAYS:—
A silver Cup will be given for the best Essay on "Australian Emigration," and Silver Medals will be
awarded for each of the best Proseal Compositions in English, French, Spanish, and Latin.

BOXING DAY, THURSDAY, 26th DECEMBER.

Boxing Day is a day of general good-will and kindness, when the wealthy give to the poor, and the poor give to the wealthy. It is a day of general good-will and kindness, when the wealthy give to the poor, and the poor give to the wealthy. It is a day of general good-will and kindness, when the wealthy give to the poor, and the poor give to the wealthy.

FRIDAY, 27th DECEMBER.

Friday is a day of general good-will and kindness, when the wealthy give to the poor, and the poor give to the wealthy. It is a day of general good-will and kindness, when the wealthy give to the poor, and the poor give to the wealthy.



anticipated a repetition of the dense fog which had prevailed on the previous day. It had been arranged that the game should commence at half-past 11, but the attractions of the review prevented many spectators being present at so early an hour, and by the time the public began to flock down to the Richmond paddock, the game unfortunately was at an end, the Melbourne men having, contrary to general expectation, gone in like giants refreshed after luncheon, and kicked off two goals in somewhat less than half an hour.

Mr. R. W. Wardill was captain of the blues, and the scarlet jackets, Geelong, were under the leadership of Mr. E. Nicholls, of pedestrian fame. The goals were duly fixed, and the distances between posts, 21ft, tested by the umpires, Messrs. Hammersley and Elkington, with the tape, and pronounced correct. Time was called and the blues having won the toss Geelong kicked towards Dickson's bar. The M.F.C. team certainly appeared to disadvantage when contrasted with the scarlet uniform of their opponents, and as the places of several absentees were filled up at the last moment, the blues did not present that *tout ensemble* which the pivot men displayed.

Both sides had lost some of their best men, Melbourne being deficient of T. W. Wills, O'Brien, and B. Wardill, the two first absent from illness, and the third being on duty at the review. The captain, R. Wardill, was suffering also from indisposition, and Conway, in turf parlance, had "passed a bad night," and did not kick with his accustomed vigour. Geelong also had to put up with the loss of four of her best men, Timms (2), Rippon, and Armitage, so that the chapter of accidents on each side as about equal. The following are the names of the players on each side:-

Geelong: Messrs. E. Nicholls (captain), Adams, W. Adams, Dowling, Robinson, Hewitt, Donnelly, Higgins, Smith, Bowden, Shaw, White, Osborne, Campbell, H. Wills, Stoddart, Groom, Hellicar, Hope, Bailey.
Melbourne: Messrs. R. W. Wardill (captain), H. C. Harrison, Conway, Ogilvie, Wright, Green, Ainsley, Woolley, Balcombe, Thomas, Riggall, M. Smith, Darchy, Murray, Fleming, Wilkie, W. I. Greig, Ireland, and W. Campbell.

When the ball was fairly set going, it soon became apparent that on one point, namely catching, the reds had an advantage, nearly every chance that offered being taken; they seemed also quicker on their feet, and spread about better than the M.F.C., especially on the wings. For some little time the game was pretty evenly contested, the fine back play of Harrison, Wardill, and Ainslie, and the activity of Wright, Ireland, Green, Balcombe, and Thomas, on the wings, sending the ball back again as fast as it was brought

THE FIRST FOOTBALL MATCHES
.....
on the Melbourne Cricket Ground

forward. For Geelong, H. Wills, W. Adams, and Hope soon attracted notice, whilst Campbell gave and received more falls than any half-dozen on either side, and many a tattered shirt bore witness to his rough handling. For about twenty minutes' play, the ball got passed on very cleverly by H. Wills to W. Adams, who was within reasonable distance of goal, and by a clever kick he sent it between the posts. This was good play, but there was a little luck about it, as the men in defence of goal had just changed places previously, and in the very nick of time Adams had his opportunity, which he made such good use of.

First goal to Geelong, and 3 to 2 on their winning the Cup. Reversing sides the game was resumed, and with about the same even play continued until luncheon time (half-past one), for about a quarter of an hour before which the Melbourne men appeared rather fagged, and a very narrow squeak occurred in the ball being kicked against the goal-post instead of between. Luncheon then intervened, and about three-quarters of an hour, a welcome spell, was devoted to refreshing the inner man. The Geelongese evidently reckoned on winning the Cup as a moral, but the M.F.C., who can always play an up-hill game best, had no doubt found some virtue in Dickson's beef and bottled beer, for they went at it on resuming play with such a dash and impetuosity that their best well-wishers feared it could not last. The ball had a hard time of it, and no mistake - to use an old term, getting more kicks than half-pence - and was soon brought unpleasantly near the Geelong goal, which it seemed loth to quit, and after a little coquetting Fleming got a chance which he cleverly took advantage of, and the second goal was awarded to Melbourne.

Turn about sides again, and with renewed vigour both teams went in for the conquering goal; but before five minutes had passed the ball was on the opposite side of the ground again, close up to the head-quarters of Geelong. Some pretty play ensued, the good catching qualities of the reds being very apparent, whilst the heavy weight of Melbourne in a great measure neutralised the activity of the Geelong players by causing many of them to kiss mother earth. Smith, who was perhaps the heaviest weight in the Melbourne team, although not a brilliant kicker, had worked well all through, being always in the midst of any scrimmage that ensued; and when about fifteen yards exactly in front of goal he had the good luck to make a clever catch from a kick from Green at the wings. The mark was made, and the ball placed, the Geelong men ranging themselves in from of goal for the



last chance of touching the ball before it went through. But fortune was against them; high and dry, far above reach, the leathern sphere went flying right between the posts, and thus were dissipated any hopes the Geelong men had entertained from the auspicious commencement in their favour, the match being at an end, and decided in favour of the blues, amidst cheers at their unexpected but well-merited success.

Just as the game was finished a rush of the public set in to witness the match, and great disappointment was expressed that it was over; so a scratch match was improvised, which no doubt proved some consolation to those who missed the great event. The M.F.C are now the holders of the Cup, and when challenged have the right of playing for it on their own ground, and from what we saw of their merits, and taking the absentees into account, we think it extremely probable that the Cup will remain at Melbourne during the present season.

Thus, by 1865, football had made several appearances on the Melbourne Cricket Ground, and, despite his recollections in 1923, Colden Harrison had been a regular participant. One final point must be made about his claim that **the first game on the M.C.C. Ground was that played in 1869 against the Victorian Police Force, captained by Superintendent T. O'Callaghan.** According to *The Australasian* of Saturday July 10, 1869, that match was played on July 3, with the "bobbies" under the leadership of Sergeant Perry. In identifying the location of this encounter, which was **one of the most amusing rough-and-tumble affairs ever seen**, the paper used the term the **Melbourne ground**, the phrase used in football reports for the MFC ground outside the MCG.

However, a match had taken place on the Melbourne Cricket Ground a month earlier, when Melbourne played the Garrison. It was a memorable occasion, described by *The Australasian* in its June 12 issue:

The annual match between the civilians and the redcoats is looked forward to now as the match of the year, and the announcement that it would be played on the Melbourne cricket-ground, to which a small charge for admission would be made, attracted a considerable number of spectators. It is desirable that all important matches should be played in an enclosed ground, as, in spite of all the notices and warnings to the contrary, the public will always insist on encroaching on the space set apart for a grand match. Ropes and flags are useless to stop the nuisance, and the only remedy is an enclosed ground, where the playing portion can be kept clear.

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The soldiers have since last year improved very much in the game, and if they could be induced to forego hugging and hitting, and to trust more to good kicking and dexterity in dodging, they would play a game more in accordance with what football is understood to be in Victoria. The rules are few and simple, and easily understood by the most unsophisticated of Irishmen. The military have lost a good man in Lieutenant Noyes, who is stationed at Sydney, but Mr. Gordon, of cricketing celebrity, made a very fair substitute, whilst his brother officers, Messrs. Ross, Crosbie, and Rutledge, are all good players, and worked hard, especially Mr. Ross, who played with an utter disregard of hosiery, and had two or three shirts torn to shreds. The Melbourne team were captained by Mr. H. C. Harrison as usual, his lieutenant being Mr. Byrne, and the civilians were capitally stationed, and kept their places well.

It was arranged to play from three to five p.m.; and the toss having been won by the civilians, they elected to kick with the wind, of course, which was very strong, and gave a considerable advantage. The play was very spirited from the commencement, and was maintained with the same vigour until the close. Very soon the ball was taken near the soldiers' goal, and with the exception of some good rallies when it was cleverly taken to the other goal, it was principally kept near that of the Garrison, and several place-kicks were obtained during the first hour, but missed. There were several appeals also on both sides respecting the fairness of the play, and two or three free kicks were given. The umpires, however, were rather easy in deference to the supposed ignorance of rules on the part of the military, and although one or two scuffles and a hard word or two passed in the heat of a wrestling match, on the whole, good humour prevailed, and any tendency to rowdiness was promptly suppressed.

It was not until quarter-past four that Melbourne obtained the first goal from a well-judged place-kick of Carr's. After a short spell for drinks, sides were changed, and the play kept up with much spirit until time was called, when Mr. Harrison mustered his men, and called for three cheers for the Garrison, which were most heartily given, and as heartily returned by the soldiers.

Of the play, we think the kicking, on the whole, was scarcely so good as might be expected in such a contest, and we missed those magnificent displays of the olden times, when Tommy Wills, Bruce, Tait, O'Mullane, Smith, and others, were in their prime. The old-fashioned system of charging, shoulder to shoulder, when Greek met Greek fairly in the tug of war and the weaker went



down, seems also to have given way to an abominable plan of holding and hitting. A scrimmage from which half-a-dozen men emerge in a semi-nude state may be very amusing, and in some people's breasts may cause pleasant reminiscences of Donnybrook, but it is not football according to recognised rules, and is only calculated to beget ill-feeling, but we suppose it is useless to draw attention to what has been pointed out so often before without effect.

More than three months after the Garrison match, W. J. Hammersley complained that the playing surface was still suffering from the damage done on that occasion. Commenting in *The Australasian* on the September 18 opening of the cricket season, Hammersley observed, under his pen-name of "Longstop", that

A great deal has been said in praise of the M.C.C. ground lately, but those who have done so can hardly have gone over the centre part, which is chock-full of weeds, &c. On the sides which were ploughed up the grass is growing well, and if the footballers had not been allowed to break up the surface so, the sward would now have been true and level, instead of being full of holes, which is the case at present ...

Such remarks have undoubtedly contributed to the modern belief that the Melbourne Cricket Club was reluctant to have football on its Ground and was anxious to protect the sacred turf for cricket. However, the Club's Minutes show that, while few applications for use of the Ground were received, those that were usually obtained a favourable response. Indeed, in 1871, the Committee actually wanted **a foot-ball match to be played upon the ground before the close of the season ...**

However, football clubs had little incentive to play on the MCG, since they were usually required to pay for the privilege. In addition, the footballers of the day were quite content on their own grounds. Contrary to modern myth, the Melbourne Football Club was not part of the MCC. While they were very close neighbours, the two bodies were quite separate. Although the footballers were permitted use of the Pavilion for their matches in Yarra Park, the Melbourne men appear to have had no great desire before the mid-seventies to play regularly on the MCG. In 1869, the Melbourne Football Club wrote to the City Corporation, anxiously seeking assurances that **in any alterations intended to be carried out in the Richmond-paddock the club's ground (which they have played on for some years) should not be interfered with.**

What really kept football off the MCG was the fact that, for over two decades after the Melbourne Cricket Club first used the site in 1854, the winters had been used for major works at the Ground. These ranged from the installation of water pipes and the construction of embankments to repeated resurfacing of the playing area. As late as

1876, for example, the curator, Rowland Newbury, spent part of the winter **filling up the low swampy portion of the ground on the Richmond side, where it was so difficult to procure good wickets. The surface was raised about eight inches, and can now furnish excellent and well-conditioned wickets for practice or matches.** For a time, the MCG was one of several sites around Melbourne where nightsoil was dumped. The Committee Minutes reveal that, in 1873, two men were paid 12/- for **trenching a portion of the ground for the reception of manure.**

In June 1877, Melbourne used the MCG for a match against its traditional rival Carlton. Following the success of that game - and the profits generated - football appeared on the Ground on a more regular basis. Melbourne had five matches on the Ground in 1878, while Carlton played Hotham there in June, then used the Ground for return fixtures (under Rugby and Victorian rules) against the Waratahs, whom they had played in Sydney the previous year. In the 1879 season, the Melbourne Cricket Ground was used for football on an almost weekly basis. The MCC had written to the Carlton, Hotham, Melbourne and Geelong clubs offering the Ground for football matches until August. Club Minutes show that when Melbourne applied for twelve Saturdays, the remaining days were offered to Hotham. In August, two night matches were played, the first between the East Melbourne Artillery and Collingwood Rifles and another between Melbourne and Carlton.

The pioneering era of football on the Melbourne Cricket Ground was well and truly over.



Tom Hepburn A Victorian cricketer, Hepburn played in the 1869 match against the Garrison.



Benjamin Goldsmith A portrait of the former Melbourne captain, around the time of his 1875 departure for China.



John Bennie The legendary "Specs" Bennie reputedly brought a stock of spectacles to every match so that he had replacements for those broken during play.



Charles Forrester In 1874, the Melbourne player was described as a heavyweight, "having his own part of the ground, which none of his opponents cared much about invading."

APPENDIX

Football Matches on the Melbourne Cricket Ground 1859-1878.

July 9, 1859	Melbourne v. South Yarra.
July 23, 1859	Melbourne v. South Yarra.
May 12, 1860	Melbourne v. Richmond.
May 24, 1861	Melbourne v. Geelong.
December 28, 1861	Melbourne v. University.
May 25, 1865	Melbourne v. Geelong.
June 5, 1869	Melbourne v. The Garrison.
May 13, 1871	Natives v. The World.
June 9, 1877	Melbourne v. Carlton.
May 11, 1878	Melbourne v. Hotham
May 18, 1878	Melbourne v. Clifton.
May 25, 1878	Melbourne v. South Melbourne.
June 1, 1878	Melbourne v. Hotham.
June 8, 1878	Melbourne v. Carlton.
June 22, 1878	Carlton v. Hotham.
June 29, 1878	Carlton v. Waratah (Rugby Rules)
July 1, 1878	Carlton v. Waratah

PLAN OF PLAY-GROUND.



†† Goal Posts. •• 20 yards Posts. Ball has to be kicked off 20 yards in front, if it goes between these and the Goal posts.
 ○ Boundary Posts.

- 1.—Goalkeeper.
- 2.—Back.
- 3 and 4.—Backs on the right and left wings.
- 5.—Half-Back.
- 6 and 7.—Half-Back on the right and left wings.
- 8, 9, and 10.—Centre Players.
- 11.—Centre Forward.
- 12 and 13.—Centre Forwards on the right and left wings.
- 14.—Centre Forward on Goal.
- 15 and 16.—Right and left wing Forwards on Goal.
- 17.—Goal Sweeper.
- 18, 19, and 20.—Followers when the ball is in motion; these also take it from out of bounds.

Plan of a typical football field showing recommended positions for a team of 20 players. From The Footballer, 1880



