

THE ASHES

PLAYER BY PLAYER

A COMPILATION OF THE GREATEST PLAYERS TO HAVE PLAYED IN THE ASHES



WRITTEN BY PAT MORGAN

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Introduction

Every couple of years, the cricket authorities of Australia and England assemble their best players to vie for what might be termed the tiniest 'trophy' in world sport. Although it resides permanently in the MCC museum at Lord's, the six-inch high urn said to contain the ashes of English cricket - done to death when Australia triumphed in an 1881 Test match at The Oval - embodies the colossal and continuing struggle for supremacy between the two countries.

It was something of a joke to begin with. After that momentous Aussie victory, in the ninth match played between the two nations, a tongue-in-cheek obituary appeared in *The Sporting Times* 'in affectionate remembrance of English cricket'. The body would be cremated, the notice informed readers, and the ashes taken to Australia. To prolong the joke, an urn - containing the charred remains of a bail, it's said - was presented to England captain Ivo Bligh near Melbourne in 1883, and 'The Ashes' have been fought over ever since. Nowadays, victorious captains hold aloft replicas of the real urn, but the contest itself is very real.



And what a contest this tussle for a largely symbolic prize has turned out to be. As we wait impatiently for the forthcoming series to unfold, England have their hands firmly on the 'trophy', having won the last two series. But they have some way to go if they are to overtake Australia's record of 123 victories in the 310 Ashes Tests played so far. England have claimed 100 wins and the remaining 87 matches have been drawn.



When Ivo goes back with the urn, the urn
Hudds, Steel, Read and Tylecote return,
The welkin will ring loud,
The great crowd will feel proud,
Seeing Barlow and Bates with the urn,
And the rest coming home with the urn.



Along the way, the Ashes have thrown up some of cricket's most heroic stories, have captivated and anguished huge crowds far beyond the borders of the competing countries, and have starred some of the greatest cricketers ever to strap on a batting pad. This book celebrates those cricketers.

It is, of course, devilishly difficult to choose just fifty players from each side to represent the many hundreds who

have valiantly given battle in The Ashes. The constraints of space mean that some giants of the game have had to be omitted. It must also be said that some cricketers who made their reputations in non-Ashes series failed to shine, for whatever reason, when it came to taking on the old enemy. But the stories of the players featured in this book compensate many times over for any omissions.

Cricket enthusiasts of recent decades have been privileged to witness the incredible contests of 1981 - dubbed Botham's Ashes following the all-rounder's extraordinary exploits with bat and ball - and 2005, when Andrew Flintoff threatened to eclipse even that sublime performance. Further back in Ashes history, the 1948 series shines out as one of the Australians' greatest moments; they left English shores unbeaten, acclaimed as the Invincibles and with Don Bradman having ended his Test career with a batting average of 99.94. Then there was the infamous Bodyline Tour of 1932/33, when England attempted to tame Bradman with dubious fast-bowling tactics.



The urn said to contain the coveted Ashes - but the ashes of what?

The history of The Ashes is, naturally, a history of a team game. But it is also a history of players whose stories will be told as long as cricket is played. Here are some of those players and their stories.

The Story of the Urn: 1877 – 1883

Was it a ball, was it a bail or was it even a veil? That is the debate that has endured since 1882, when the famous Ashes urn came into existence. What exactly was it that was incinerated and put in the receptacle that has become one of sport's most exotic and revered trophies? In fact, the Ashes urn never has been a trophy as such, for it is only the concept of the Ashes that has gone to the victor. The artefact itself never has, although in recent times a replica has been presented, as has a large Waterford Crystal representation of the urn itself.

The existence of the Ashes was no more than notional until they took on a physical existence in 1882. Matches between the two countries began on 15 March 1877 in Melbourne. The Australian captain Dave Gregory won the toss and decided to bat, so England's Alfred Shaw bowled the first ball in Test cricket to Charles Bannerman, who went on to become the first batsman to record a Test century. Allen Hill took the first Test wicket when he bowled Nat Thomson and held the first Test catch, to dismiss Tom Horan off the bowling of Shaw. Australia's Billy Midwinter (who was later to represent England) took the first five-wicket haul (five for 78 off 54 four-ball overs), and John Blackham the first stumping, in England's second innings. Remarkably James Southerton, who was 49 years and 110 days old when the game began, remains the oldest Test debutant and was also the first Test cricketer to die, a mere three years later.





The first official Australian cricket team to visit England, in 1878

Thanks largely to Bannerman's 165 before he retired due to injury, Australia reached 245 all out in their first innings. England replied with 196 before Australia scored 104 in their second innings, with Shaw taking five for 38. This set the tourists a target of 154 to win, but Tom Kendall, ironically born in Bedford, took seven for 55 to bowl England out for 108, leaving Australia winners by 45 runs. It was an amazing coincidence that exactly 100 years later, in a match on the same ground to celebrate the centenary of the first Test, the result was precisely the same: Australia won by 45 runs.

Back in 1877, England avenged their defeat, again at the MCG, the following month, in a match that featured another famous debutant: Fred Spofforth, who was to dominate the match of 1882 that led directly to the conception of the Ashes. This parity between the two cricketing nations

continued. Australia won the Test at Melbourne in January 1879; England won when Australia appeared at the Kennington Oval in 1880. Sydney became the third Test venue in cricket's history when four matches were played in 1881/82, with Australia winning two while two were drawn.

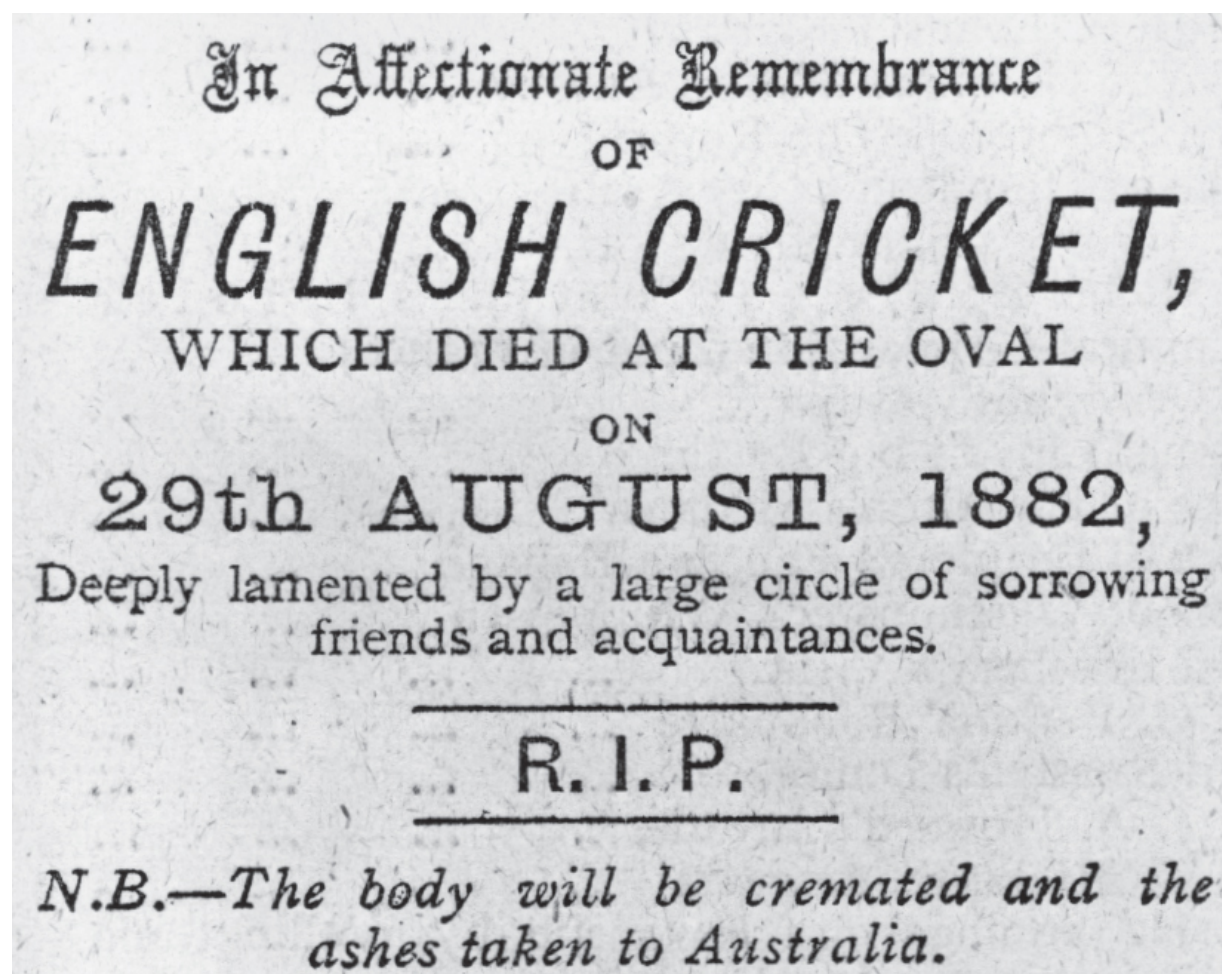
It was at the Oval in 1882 that the pattern of home superiority was broken. Billy Murdoch won the toss for Australia and decided to bat, but the left-arm medium pace of Lancashire's Dick Barlow proved too much for the visiting batsmen. Barlow took five for 19 as Australia were bowled out for 63, although they occupied the crease for 80 overs. Spofforth responded by taking seven for 46 as England took a first innings lead of 38. With the exception of Hugh Massie, who recorded his highest Test score of 55, Australia fared little better in their second innings to be all out for 122, leaving England to score 85 to win.

WG Grace opened with Albert 'Monkey' Hornby, the England captain. Grace remained to score 32 and, at 53 for three, England were on course to secure the victory. But then Grace went. The fifth wicket fell with 66 on the board and 19 runs still needed, but Charles Studd, one of the leading batsmen of the day, had been held back in the order to counter any crisis in the lower order. That crisis became vividly apparent when the scoreboard showed 75 for eight. Spofforth was bowling superbly, but with only ten runs to win and Studd striding to the wicket, the tension would surely be swept away. It was not. One spectator is reported to have died of a heart attack brought on by the excitement that caused another, reputedly, to gnaw through the handle of his umbrella.

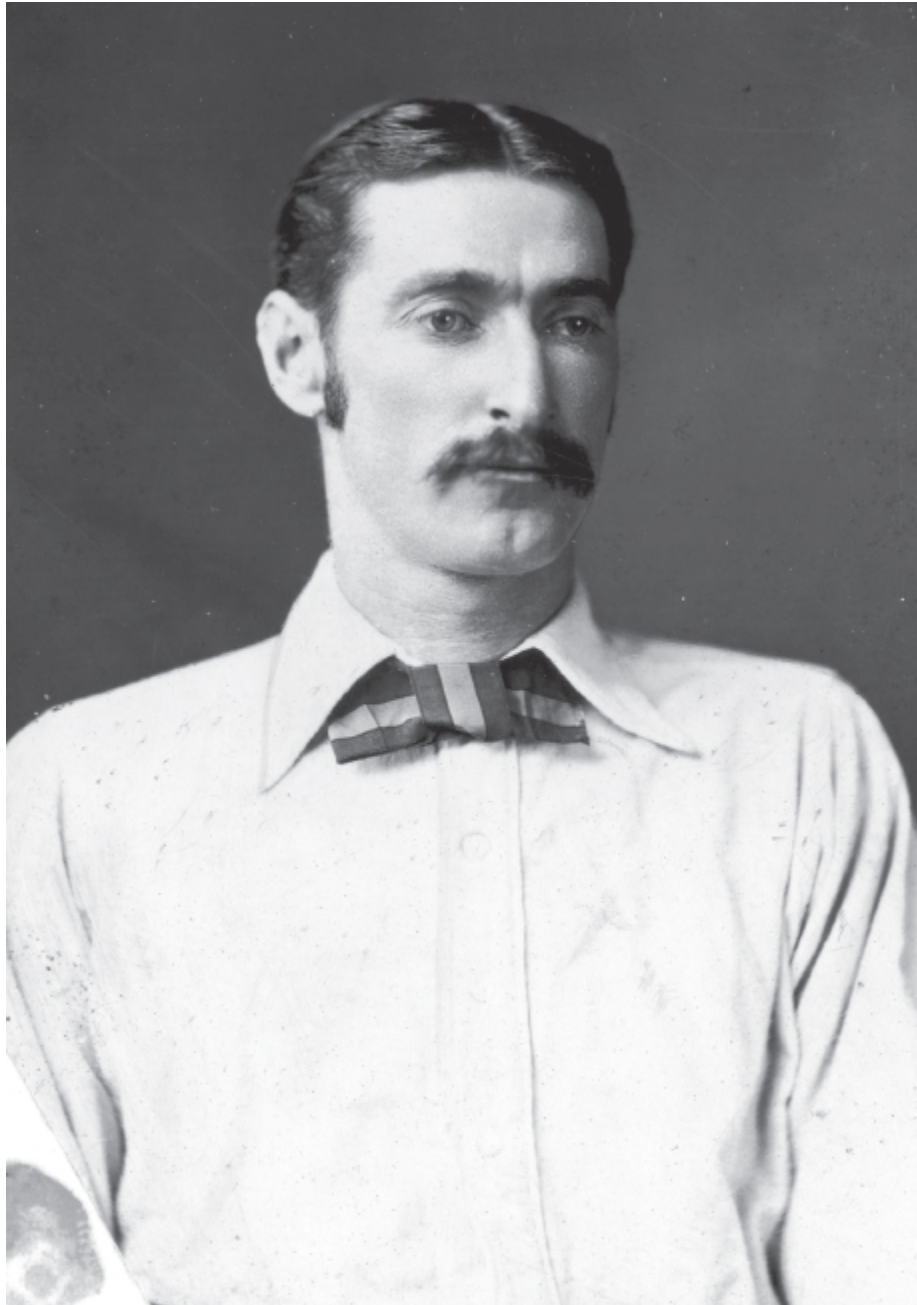
Studd's arrival came too late to influence the outcome. During the five minutes he batted, he did not face a single ball. Billy Barnes was caught off his glove before last man Ted Peate was bowled by Harry Boyle, and England were all out for 77, to lose by seven runs. For the first time (but certainly not the last), the England cricket team became the

subject of ridicule. As ever, the press turned to black humour to convey the national sentiment, with Cricket - a Weekly Record of the Game first off the mark on August 31 with a notice that read: 'Sacred to the memory of England's supremacy in the cricket field which expired on the 29th day of August at The Oval. The end was Peate.'

It was two days later that the famous mock obituary appeared in the Sporting Times (see image opposite).



The Sporting Times' mock obituary noting the death of English cricket, which appeared after England had lost the 1882 Oval Test match to Australia



A selection of historical cricket bats

It was the reference to the ashes being taken to Australia that sparked the whole sequence of events that produced the little urn. It was also a clever choice of words, reflecting the public debate being conducted at the time over the legality or otherwise of cremation. Woking's Crematorium, the first in the country, was founded in 1878, when a piece of land close to St John's Village was bought by Sir Henry

Thompson, surgeon to Queen Victoria and founder of the Cremation Society in 1874. The story of the Ashes could therefore be said to go all the way from St John's Village to St John's Wood.

There is a detour in the story covering some 12,000 miles to Rupertswood - a stately home at Sunbury, near Melbourne. It was the home of Sir William Clarke, a wealthy landowner who was returning to Victoria with his second wife, Lady Janet, aboard the P&O steamship Peshawur. Travelling from Gravesend with the Clarkes was the England team, led by the Hon Ivo Bligh. Many years later, while England teams still travelled by ship to Australia, P&O was the chosen line and Tilbury was the port of departure - directly across the Thames from Gravesend.



Fred Spofforth - central figure in the Ashes story

A month after embarking from England, the Peshawur reached Colombo, where Bligh's team played against 18 locals and then against the Royal Dublin Fusiliers before departing again for Adelaide. However, shortly after setting sail the ship was in collision and had to return to port for repairs. She was five days late arriving in Adelaide, where another fixture was completed, before the team continued to Melbourne, where the team arrived exactly two months after leaving England.



Ivo Bligh, captain of the first Ashes-winning team

In Melbourne, as everywhere else on the tour, the England team were feted lavishly, with Bligh responding to a toast to

the English team by saying that he intended 'to recover those ashes'. Two weeks after arriving, the eight amateurs in the touring party were invited to Rupertswood, where Sir William had just learned that he was the first Australian to be granted a hereditary title by Queen Victoria. The four professionals remained in Melbourne. At a dinner given in honour of the Australian team that had just returned from their tour of England, the captain, Billy Murdoch, gave a speech in which he too referred to the still mythical ashes, picking up on what Bligh had said earlier.

It was on this visit to Rupertswood that Bligh first met Florence Rose Murphy, the music tutor to Lady Clarke's children. Miss Murphy was not of noble birth, but despite the importance of social status at the time, Bligh, later to become the Eighth Earl of Darnley, was so taken with the lady that he decided she would become his wife, no matter about the class divide. Bligh was suffering from one of the more unusual injuries to befall a cricketer at the time. His arm was in a sling after it had been damaged during a tug-of-war on board the Peshawur. When a further injury, this time to his finger, befell him during a match in Melbourne, it was Florence Murphy who played Florence Nightingale to attend him.



WG Grace - his wicket led to defeat at The Oval

Bligh and his amateur colleagues returned to Rupertswood for Christmas, and it was then that the now celebrated urn took its important place in the history of cricket. There was no great planning, no elaborate ceremony. It was a spontaneous act dreamed up by Lady Janet, Florence Murphy and the other ladies of the house party while Bligh and his colleagues played a Christmas Eve game against a local team comprising estate workers in the main. According to Joy Munns, a leading researcher into the origin of the

Ashes at Rupertswood, one of those estate workers saw a bail being burnt at Lady Clarke's behest. She took a small pottery urn, perhaps from her dressing room, put the ashes of the bail in it and presented it to Bligh as a personal gift to mark his visit to Rupertswood, almost as a light-hearted gesture.



Rupertswood, on the outskirts of Melbourne - now a hotel but once the birthplace of the Ashes

The estate worker, Pat Lyons, was in no doubt about the origin. He made no mention of a ball or a veil, but others suggested that it was after the Third Test that a bail from the match was burned and put in the urn. There was also a tale that a housemaid at Cobham Hall in Kent, the home of the Darnleys, was one day dusting a mantelshelf and knocked the urn down into the fireplace, spilling the contents. In a panic, she dusted up some ashes from the fireplace, put them in the urn and restored it to its rightful place as if nothing had happened. When the urn was