

Forty Club's first tour of Australia, the Millennium tour, was deemed a success in February of last year even if the results were poor. A programme of thirteen fixtures crowded into seventeen days and that was probably a too hefty list.

The opening game against a veteran side Hume and Hovell at Strath Creek, cut out of a mountainside, ended in a draw followed up by a crushing defeat against the Melbourne Grammar School and the first and only victory was against the Melbourne Cricket Club's 29ers at the Albert Reserve.

Alas, the remaining ten matches were lost in succession, surely a record for the Club! There were too many young, eager, opposing Aussies with the competitive urge who gave no quarter against opponents on the wrong side of fifty. Two features were the first century scored by the Club on tour, by Robbie Barker who was hampered by a hamstring and Gordon Potter's five-wicket haul. Ian Farthing recorded three half-fifties and averaged 37. The others had modest achievements. But it was an exceptionally well-organised visit to Melbourne and Sydney, two of the great cities in the world, and it was a memorable and unforgettable tour.

Monday, February 7 - Everyone arrives at Heathrow with Gordon Potter in charge on time at 19.30.

Tuesday, February 8 - Training starts at Kuala Lumpur's spanking new airport as the squad begins its warm-up by quick walking.

Wednesday, February 9 - Melbourne is cooler than expected. Just outside the city centre, the hotel overlooks the Australian Grand Prix circuit. Some of the players walk the four miles around the lake.

Thursday, February 10 - The temperature soars to 38 Celsius during the practice next to the hotel, and later in the evening the temperature was little more than 24 degrees. As the players tire members of the Brisbane Lions rugby squad take over the bowling duties.

The party go on a tour of the splendid Melbourne Cricket Ground and travel agent Brian Marks expresses his surprise to learn that so many players paid concessionaries for tickets for entry (over 60!). The museum is larger and more interesting than the Lord's museum and the MCC of Lord's has to do a lot of catching up. A busy day ends at the Moonee Valley racecourse. Big losses!

Friday, February 11 - The opening match is held sixty miles north of Melbourne. The scenery is impressive though the weather is typical English conditions, with a grassy, wet pitch and a lush outfield. Don McQueen, descended from Inverness, invested £400,000 on the site in 1994. The pavilion is unique with a polished wooden floor. The opposition, a team of cricket-loving Rotarians, bats through 53 overs to reach 151 and XL draws with 128-5 in 36 overs. It is a moral victory and the entertainment is provided by Don McQueen staging his Ode to Banjo Paterson's immortal poem "The Man from Snowy River".

On the way back the party stops at the Yerling Winery but the restaurant denies knowledge of their booking. The driver had driven the coach off and there was a feeling of panic. In the murky light, a sharp-eyed lady finds the new venue. Panic ends.

Saturday, February 12 - Skipper Charles Anderson is first to book a session with a physio. There are triplets in the Anderson family and Robbie is on the trip.

Sunday, February 13 - The fears about the quality of the schools sides are soon realised. Melbourne Grammar School's quick bowlers dismiss the XL for 77. Alan Luff survives being hit on a shoulder from a beamer and is top score with 30. The boys race to win with a margin of eight wickets and the coach was planned to return some three hours later. A quick call soon changed its timing.

An extremely pleasant dinner later at a restaurant overlooking the lake is rudely interrupted. Organiser Gordon Potter walks accidentally into a plate glass door and damages his nose. Paramedics advise a check up at the hospital and Gordon is released at 4.45 a.m. Later, opener Steve Coltman also crashes into the same plate glass door but is not hurt! Anxious members of the staff are put on guard at the offending glass door. Ian Farthing, a solicitor, promises a legal follow up!

Monday, February 14 - Gordon emerges to see the XL achieve their first and only win, beating the veterans who feature a former South Australian State skipper. On a rock hard pitch the Melbourne Cricket Club 29ers, known for their age 29 years or more, ended seven short of the XL side's 172-5 in 40 overs.

Three members of the Malaysia ICC squad, all in their twenties, run between the wickets at a phenomenal rate in the heat just short of 40 degrees. The victory celebrations last a long time.

Tuesday, February 15 - The boys from the Peninsular Grammar School win a close, hard fought match at Mount Eliza. Their immaculate behaviour was commended by the staff. Three run outs and three poor shots wrecked the XL innings, making just 127-8 in 50 overs, with the school winning by five wickets. #

Mark Foster, who organised the four matches in Melbourne, drove Keith Miller to the ground to meet Gordon Potter for a chat. For a personal note I was disappointed not to renew my long friendship with "Nugget". Unfortunately Keith, still as sharp as ever with his repartee, has had problems with a hip and a knee.

Later, Mark Foster hosts a magnificent party at his house overlooking the beach. His house is a museum of cricket memorabilia.

Wednesday, February 16 - A 6 a.m. departure for Sydney and the party are delighted to find the front facing rooms of the Manly Pacific Park Hotel right next to one of the world's great beaches. We meet Dickie Bird. The great Yorkshire umpire is spending a few days' holiday after his trip to the Australian Cricketer of the Year dinner.

Thursday, February 17 - The opposition, Sydney University Vets, are not either aged players or veterinary surgeons! Englishman Tim Lester, a former Exeter University opener, scores 105 in the total of 198-2 on a slow pitch. The boundaries were almost 100 yards and XL laboured to reach 140-8 in 45 overs.

Friday, February 18 - A two-hour coach trip to a beautiful ground near Manalunga. The Australians Irregulars score 167-8 and XL are scuppered for 55, our lowest total. Gordon Potter is given a fearful blow on the hand by a beamer and Dickie Bird said: "He'll break it, that lad."

Sunday, February 20 - A familiar story at Wahronga with the youngsters of Old Knoxians rattling up 239-9 in 40 overs. Chris Westbrook has creditable figures of 4-16. The Old Boys used ten bowlers and XL crept up to 102.

Monday, February 21 - I Zingari is a genuine veteran side at Campden Park, an outstanding venue, and their total is far too much at 290-9 on the best pitch of the tour. Mike Perkins claimed a 'catch' which isn't and also warns another player for backing up. The ICC are alerted. Norman Jones, promoted to three, scores 47. He is the only successful XL batsman in a dismal total. The sumptuous barbecue cheered everyone up later on the night.

Tuesday, February 22 - Morale improves in a close finish against the Mosman Masters XI at one of the outstanding grounds. Batting first for a change, the XL reaches 180-7 and the Mosman side wins with seven balls remaining and three wickets in hand. Gordon Potter claims a run out and the batsman says: "That was a bit lucky."

Wednesday, February 23 - This time it is an authentic veteran side from the NSW Cricketers Club and they win by 22 runs. They tot up 174 with Gordon Potter achieving the best figures of 5-27. Some sledging from Gordon but relations are restored by a presentation of a bottle of wine at the dinner at the Club later.

Thursday, February 24 - Three venues are picked against Manly Waratahs. The first is nominated as a ground near Rushcutters Bay only to be switched to Tania Park. They discover the second ground is dug up, although that is no fault of George Davis, the Headingley saboteur. On an artificial pitch the XL make 151-8 with two of the Anderson triplets, Charles retiring at 40 and Robbie out for 33. Two players of the Waratahs retire at 40 and they win by seven wickets with three overs remaining.

Friday, February 25 - The Kookaburra CC stage a high scoring game in cattle country, accompanied by hundreds of thousands of flies. On another artificial pitch, the XL end on 218-4 with Robbie Barker recording his first 100 on tour with 107. Pulling a hamstring, Robbie concentrates on boundaries and Ian Farthing, out for 58, takes the baton as runner.

The Kookaburra uses 8 ball overs and 21 runs scored from the 29th over enabled their tailenders to clinch success by three wickets with five balls left. Two features are a great one-handed catch from Geoff Richards, even better than Alan Luffs, and the canny slow bowling of Mike Perkins with 4-43.

Saturday, February 26 - After a stopover, the party visits the stunning Bradman Museum in Bowral.

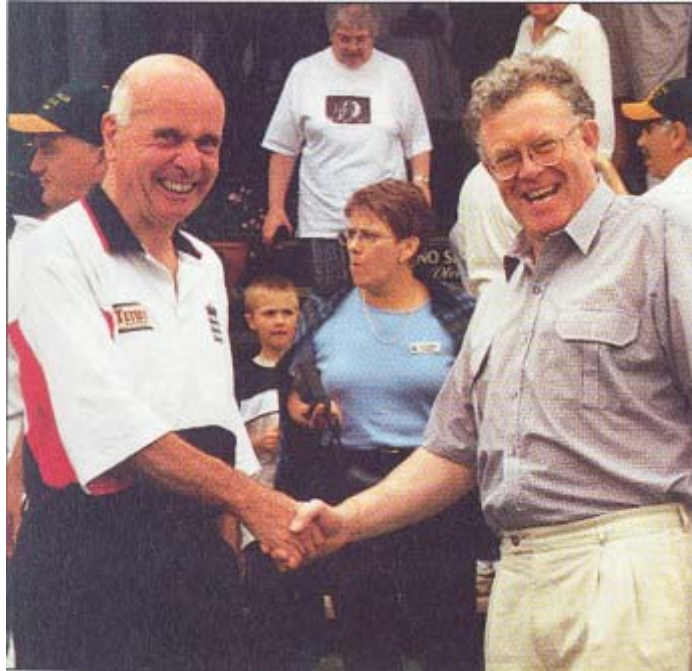
Sunday, February 27 - The thirteenth and final game is at Rose Bay, close to the seaplane former base and the opposition are Old Cranbrookians. The Old Boys have regular tours of England and prove one of the most popular hosts.

They agree to a declaration match, scoring 190-6 from a wettish outfield. XL are never in with a chance although Barry Smith hit a hard unbeaten 69 off 80 balls. XL lasted ten extra overs and were bowled for 153. The final rite sees Mike Perkins disputing a catch. Perky finishes up with 10 wickets at 17.5 in the tour after missing several games because of a back problem. Charles Anderson and Gordon Potter take 11 wickets apiece.

The end of tour dinner at the Manly Pacific Hotel features a short thanks from skipper Charles Anderson and a half an hour of punishing fines delivered by Brian Scovell. There are renderings from Mike Perkins and Hazel Clark, accompanied by the harmonica player Barry Hunter and the pianist Chris Westbrook. Very satisfying. Well done.

Monday, February 29 - By the circuitous route from Sydney back down to Melbourne, the tired players and ladies voyage on the thirty hour journey via Kuala Lumpur to Heathrow, arriving at a blustery Heathrow at 5.31 a.m. The day before it was 28 degrees. At London it is 3 degrees.

A number were already signing on for the next tour to India in 2001.



In the opening game a shamefaced Brian Scovell apologises to Steve Coltman after he runs him out. It was the only totally veteran side XL played against



XL look the part under Ron Hart's captaincy



The victorious side against the Melbourne CC 29ers



A view of Manly Beach, one of Australia's finest. We were quartered there in the Sydney leg



XL umpires on Manly Beach, Graham Hargrave-Smlth, Peter McGough, Phillip Clark, Claude Kensett and David Spyer with Dickle Bird



Scorers Jan Spyer(R)and Jill Bracken
at Wahranga. Note there are 8 nets
at 'a third oval



Fines Officer Brian Scovell raises £160 for
a Manly charity for disadvantaged boys.
Travel Agent Brian Marks watches on