

1977 TOUR (11.6.77 - 25.7.77) - England, Wales

Tour Party:	Austen Hughes	Manager	
		Tom Cooke	Assist. Manager
		Michael Hill (c)	John Rogers (vc)
		Steve Bernard	Max Shepherd
		Denis Lynch	Kerry Mackay
		Paul Lee	Anthony O'Loan
		Rowan McGregor	David Oman
		Michael Hewett	Paddy Grattan-Smith
		Peter Tout	Jock Martel
		Greg Watson	Stephen Whitfield
		Max Fox	Brian O'Dowd
		Ray Hawkins	

Foreword

"In many, and in some cases unusual places, I have been asked whether I knew so-and-so who played cricket for Australia. The name many times was new to me and on closer questioning, I found it was the Australian Old Collegians' Cricket Association they were referring to. It mattered not whether it was indeed the full Australian team or the Collegians they referred to. What mattered was that they knew he was Australian and played cricket. Perhaps that has been the Old Collegians' greatest contribution and I salute them for their endeavours in taking cricket to so many far flung places. While I may honour them, I also feel a twinge of jealousy as I note their magnificent itinerary. Perhaps these days this jealousy is tempered somewhat when I am able to reflect on my own tours. It was real however, when I read of the Old Collegians' first World Tour in 1959. At that stage I was newly discarded from the Australian team and feeling a little sorry for myself. The Old Collegians tour made me envious but at the same time stiffened my resolve to make it back. Ever since, though I have never played for or seen an Old Collegians' match, I have felt an affinity to them and have been quick to talk to anyone wearing the distinctive Collegian tie. What memories a quick browse through the programme evoke. Names famous in history and cricket. In days when sometimes the spirit of cricket is endangered, I am sure the Old Collegians will play and enjoy this tour in the spirit in which cricket was meant to be played. My best wishes go with them."

Bob Simpson

Hard on the heels of the 1976 World Tour, this one-off six week UK tour was approved with some reluctance by AOC authorities as it broke the pattern of previous tours.

Its saving grace was the team's strength - 14 current Sydney 1st graders, with other 4 all having played at an equivalent level. Four players - the captain Michael Hill, vice-captain John Rogers, Steve Bernard and Kerry Mackay - had played Sheffield Shield cricket, and Greg Watson & Whitfield supported by the wily Mackay was at times awesome, the spin-bowling of Paddy Grattan-Smith, Hill & Whitfield always threatening, the keepers in Dennis Lynch and Mick Hewitt of high quality, and the batting of David Oman, Peter Tout, Rowan McGregor, Jock Martel, Max Shepherd, Max Fox, Tony O'Loan, Paul Lee, Hill and Rogers impressive to say the least.

Regular AOC tourist, Newcastle's Mick Hill was the instigator of the tour. His concept of a tour no longer than 6 weeks quickly finding plenty of quality cricketers. Then playing for Northern District, Mick persuaded the club's president Austen Hughes to manage the side, and no less than 7 other ND's players in Bernard, Shepherd, Lynch, Mackay, McGregor, Tout and Whitfield joined in, while Rogers brought in 3 of his premiership-winning University of NSW players in Watson, Grattan-Smith and Martel, with Mick Hewitt from Sydney Uni and Brian O'Dowd from Sutherland making up the 14 from Sydney Grade. Victorian country rep David Oman and QLD players Dr Tony O'Loan and Paul Lee completed the playing party, while Austy Hughes' colleague Tom Cooke acted as Assistant Manager, and Ray Hawkins came along as a very accomplished umpire. Brian O'Dowd of

Sutherland, a very fine 1st grader, had the unique distinction of accompanying the tour but being unable to play. Having been suspended from Sydney Grade cricket at the end of the season, the controversial Grumpy was bemused to find that AOC - because of its reliance on Australian Cricket Board approval for its tours - felt obliged not to include him as a player in any authorised match. Undeterred, O'Dowd still managed to have a wonderful time and found lots of cricket to play, often against AOC!

In cricket terms it was a highly successful tour, with just one loss - against the Midlands Club Cricket Conference in a game notable for the typical mid-tour dropped catches - 9 going down after 8 were dropped the previous day against the Birmingham League. The London CCC match finished in a draw, but morally much in favour of AOC. Every member of the team had his day, with nine batsmen averaging over 32 per innings.

Socially, it must rank with the best too, the partying being quite relentless. In this regard, Bernard, Grattan-Smith, Lynch, O'Loan, Oman, O'Dowd, Hewitt and manager Hughes were outstanding, with the others managing to stand up to the pace pretty well!

It was still winter in London on arrival on June 12th and it stayed that way until one wonderful day in Wales on Saturday July 2nd when suddenly it was Summer. The weather was mostly beautiful from then on.

First stop was Lords for practice (abandoned) and team photo, plus a walk through the Long Room and practice at Alf Gover's in Surrey. Official reception the next day at ANZ Bank Head Office with the Agent-Generals from the all Australian States, the chief of BHP, the Bedser twins etc. Freezing conditions at the Lords Test match watching the Australian-England 1st Test of what was to be the most unhappy tour ever - dominated by the Packer World Series threat. Doug Walters' marvellous 80 was a delight, and never again was he to get as close to scoring a century in England. The first four matches against Maldern Wanderers, Brondesbury, Solihull and Old Merchant Taylors were all around London and all affected in some way by the weather, but with AOC generally on top.

Next stop was Tonbridge and a marvellous game near Sevenoaks against Sennocke just outside the walls of the biggest castle in Southern England called Knole Castle - in a national park with deer wandering across the ground and an oak tree just behind the square leg umpire, which acting captain Rogers managed to hit, and being credited with 4. Local customs took AOC by surprise, the Sennocke captain expecting only one ball to be used for the match, and being most offended when after batting, AOC went out into the field with a new ball and with a Kookaburra ball at that, which he insisted would swing 7 seam too much and break their bats. All this was discovered after Sennocke had been rolled for 70 in reply to 7/200 by AOC ... The locals effectively having branded the tourists as cheats ! Nevertheless, peace was restored and a tremendous time was had by all afterwards, having changed in the castle walls in what seemed like a dungeon.

The next day it was back to Sevenoaks to the second oldest ground in England - Sevenoaks Vine - and wonderful hospitality. AOC responded in terrific style with 7 sixes onto the nearby road, and Martel, Rogers, Hill and Mackay all exceeded 40 in a score approaching 300 - to which the Vine managed 170 - Hill getting 5 wickets, supported by good feeling on a beautifully even outfield.

To Dover the next day via the Gray Nicholls factory, and a most undistinguished fielding effort with 8 players struggling with leg injuries - 11 players on 14 legs ! Chasing 194 team tyro Peter Tout (with 72 n.o.) ensured the win but not without palpitations. A great night was followed by a legendary drive home, driver O'Loan with plenty of syrup on board, running out of petrol, chatting up first a female hitchhiker, then at 2.00am an attractive policewoman, and for the last mile coping with Oman who had climbed out of the rear window at 50mph, perched on the roofrack and was attempting with one hand on the windscreen to obscure O'Loan's view of the road !

The itinerary saw the tourists playing two days later on the other side of Britain at Pembroke in West Wales - the first of seven games in Wales which from a cricketing point of view was generally disappointing. Accommodation was based at Mumbles near Swansea in South Wales. Cricket highlights included an even time century by John Rogers against Cardiff on a beautiful wicket at Glamorgan's County ground at Sophia Gardens, followed by a venomous spell from Bernard to have a strong Cardiff side 7/63 before rain save dthe day for home side. At Swansea on the famed St.

Helens Rugby ground, a seventeen year old West Indian named Jeff Dujon smashed the AOC all over the park until Kerry Mackay grabbed the ball and bowled yorkers outside off stump to tie him down and get him out.

Play was washed out at Gorseinon but the village choir made up for it with a performance in a typically drab Welsh club that confirmed every story about Welsh tables or on seats along the wall, humming the chords and then belting out the chorus. after "That Old Black Magic", and "Old Macdonald had a farm", the girls were invited to stay at their peril, and out came "Ramon the great French Lover" etc. Hill and Bernard provided an AOC contribution, and then back to the choir for a fabulous night.

Stage 4 was up to Birmingham for the three best cricket matches of the tour. At Smethwick the Birmingham League replied to AOC's 8 for 242 with 8 for 238. Martel, Oman, McGregor and Mackay amongst the runs, with Watson and Gratton-Smith amongst the wickets. The next day at Wolverhampton in the first of our 2 "test" matches - this one against the Birmingham club Cricket Conference who reached 214 for 8 in 68 overs, leaving AOC just 50 overs to bat. At 3 for 145, it was looking good, but were all out 171 - Rogers topscored with 59. They put on a disco where Greg Watson met his future wife, marrying her 3 years later in Perth and finally living permanently in the Birmingham area after playing for NSW, Western Australia and Worcestershire.

The next matches were against Coventry & North Warwick at Coventry against a strong side with 5 former county pros. On a slow turner they reached 172 for 9 from 70 overs, once again leaving the AOC about 50 overs. After a slow start Mick Hill played his best innings of the tour for 64, then Rogers with 47, plus a gem of an innings of 30 not out from the hitherto quiet man Paul Lee, got us home with an over to spare. They didn't expect to lose and were quite a sour lot - perhaps because they were former pros - and for the first time on tour departure was immediate. After a relatively easy match the next day against Knowle and Dorridge it was back to London for 13 matches in 14 days !

The first was real backblocks village cricket against West Drayton alongside a gypsy camp. Mill Hill was next on a beautiful, steeply-sloping ground, which despite the fact the opposition arranged lunch just for the AOC (they missed out !), they were perhaps the best overall group of blokes on tour.

The third match was the much anticipated Thames Valley Gentlemen fixture in Bushy Park near Hampton Court. At lunch TVG were 7/62 and then came a ninety minute lunch of pate, cold meats, roast vegetables, rockmelon and cheese - accompanied first by the usual pints, then beautiful French champagne and two big glasses of port - all served by a beautiful mother/daughter combination supplied by TVG Chairman Michael Welsh. On resumption, two recently arrived batsmen added 40 for the last wicket as the AOC struggled to remove the alcoholic haze. The ploy of comatozing the opposition failed, as the AOC reached the target with 4 wickets down, whereupon the roistering continued - The Badger (David Dukes), Vic Dodds, Robbie Syrett and Chris Brown prominent !

A good win the next day at Shepherd's Bush with West Indian Alf Langley, and soon-to-be West Indian Lindsay Bellhouse featuring in the social activities. At High Wycombe on a lovely undulating ground Greg Watson captured the last three with a hat-trick, in a bag of 6/54 in a total of 192. Two very accurate spinners on a turning track caused a scoreline of 4/61 in the chase. Rogers and Mackay used their experience to reach 135, whereupon Watson rounded off a memorable game by smashing 40 n.o. to win the match.

The second "test" against the London Cricket Conference at Ealing was played on a seaming pitch which proved difficult for everyone except Rowan McGregor who hit a marvellous 113 in a total of 216. CCC held out with 7/170, but as more overs were bowled by AOC, a moral victory was claimed.

The next day a two hour car trip led to Leigh-on-Sea at the mouth of the Thames in Essex where Holmes and Sutcliffe scored 555 half a century earlier. Lynch belted 83 out of 252. 7/171 was the reply.

After a free day, it was time to take on the "Parasites" - part of the London Cricketers Club - at a picturesque ground at Esher, which produced a damp, demonic wicket early, but also produced the

second best lunch (after TVG). - a huge roast organised by Covent Garden Wholesaler, Brian Harmer, accompanied by exquisite "reds" from Bordeaux. Tooty thankfully managed to keep his head and scored a great century enabling AOC to close at 4/210 - to which they replied with 9/202 a great game !

Robbie Syrett's club Hounslow, under the Heathrow flight path provided a superb track as David Oman scored AOC's fourth and final century of the tour in a total of 7/220. The rain-shortened chase reached 7/120.

A win against Police Association. A final match against South Hampstead saw Kerry Mackay get his highest score for the tour - an unbeaten 63.

The last two days were spent shopping and sight-seeing with a final AOC thankyou function at Shepherd's Bush where the English lack of refrigeration provided copious amounts of warm beer. Back to the pub for presentations to all and sundry by David Oman, and an hilarious farewell speech by Mick Hewitt to round off a very memorable tour.

John Rogers