



## JAMES E PHELAN'S WRITINGS



Between 1927 and his death in 1939, Jim Phelan wrote several literary contributions on football in Sydney in years gone by. Many of these were published in the Sydney Football Record between those years and appear here for your enjoyment.

**The History Society has gone to great lengths to research and copy articles on the game in Sydney by Jim Phelan. Some of his statements are not entirely accurate but still, these stories prove a fascinating read and are reproduced as he wrote them.**

### WHO WAS JIM PHELAN?

**Jim Phelan is the person after whom the Phelan Medal – the best and fairest player award in the Sydney senior competition – is named.**

It is said that Jim Phelan was born in Ireland in 1860 and came to Australia with his family as a small child, first to Bendigo then Ballarat where he learnt his football. Upon moving to Sydney he played with the Waratah Club in 1888-9. Then in 1892 Phelan re-emerged as Secretary and player of the East Sydney Club.

When the code was resurrected in Sydney following a ten year hiatus he became a founder and inaugural treasurer of the Newtown Club between 1903-6, then secretary of the club from 1907-14, until the outbreak of World War I.

During this time that Jim wrote on a casual basis about Sydney football for one of the many Sydney Sporting Publications, *The Arrow*. It is from his accurate and to the point reporting of the game of that period that we are able to now form a picture of what football was like in Sydney during those years.

Australian Football was riding high in Sydney prior to the great war. The league, through a number of influential business trustees even owned their own ground: the former (original) Rosebery Racecourse of 12 acres - with grandstand, which stood on the north west corner of Gardiners and Botany Roads, Alexandria. It now houses a substantial industrial complex.

The league also had a fulltime employee as league secretary.

The success football was enjoying was quickly lost when the league hosted an All States Carnival in 1914 played at the SCG.

Two weeks prior to the Carnival the announcement of hostilities was declared, beginning Australia's involvement in WWI. This gave the entire population an air of uncertainty resulting in failing crowds generally and poor numbers to this very significant interstate competition which was opened by the Prime Minister; It was mainly because of the failure of this carnival and overlapping of the war that the league lost a great deal of money and standing within the community.

By 20 August 10,000 men had enlisted in Sydney alone and by December, 52,561 men had joined up.

Employers panicked when war was announced. Prices rose rapidly in the expectation of shortages. Wholesale grocers in NSW, for example, raised prices of imported commodities of between 7½ and 20 percent during the month of August.

Between 10-31 August unemployment in NSW rose from 13,500 to 29,313 and although these are official figures, it is likely that they underestimate the true



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picture. Other workers were placed on half time instead of being dismissed.

By mid 1915 it was estimated that 1500 players of Australian Football in NSW had gone to the front although during the season 46 interstate clearances passed through the league and an astounding figure 1,340 players were registered in first and second grades as well as in schools. There is no doubt that the schoolboys bumped the number to this level.

In July and August 1915 Australia's enlistment totalled 62,289 men joining the 1<sup>st</sup> AIF. By May, East Sydney Football Club reported that 30 players had enlisted and because of the loss of players, the North Shore Club had withdrawn from the competition.

The situation of war and the burden of the carnival brought the league's financial position to a dismal state and the people of influence who were involved in the game at the highest level, virtually walked away from the organisation in droves.

They lost the Alexandria ground along with other assets leaving practically no administrators to conduct the competition.

Jim Phelan, a confectionary salesman, stepped into the breach. He was one of six who assumed responsibility to keep the game going in Sydney and as league secretary, proved a very capable administrator. **Enough can't be said for his efforts during this time.**

*"He is quite a worker. He rarely bustles, but gets on there all the same. In his new position as hon. Secretary to the League he has taken on a difficult task"* another sporting publication, *The Referee Sporting Newspaper* wrote of Phelan.

The league was *"reformed from the ashes of a bankrupt body after the Carnival crash of 1914, after it commenced operations with a nil plus and a legacy of debts. The League held a credit balance of £86 (\$172) at the end of the 1918 season."* Phelan later wrote.

Remarkably enough, Jim Phelan remained in the position of league secretary until 1925 and by that time the game was well back on its feet in Sydney.

He had four sons, two of whom played for the Newtown club and one, Jim or Bub, went on to represent NSW on several occasions. During this period he turned out for other Sydney clubs including, South Sydney and St George and later coached Sydney University in 1948 – their first year in the competition.

Jim Phelan was bestowed with life membership of the Australian National Football Council (now amalgamated with the AFL) in 1924 as a consequence of his long term affiliation as delegate for NSW following the first world war. (The ANFC did not operate during the war) He was also made life member of both the NSWAFU and the Newtown Football Club.

By trade, Jim was a confectionery salesman. He lived at 2 Binning Street, Erskineville and later became an alderman on the then Erskineville Municipal Council. He was also a member of the Catholic *Holy Name Society*. Phelan is mainly responsible for Australian Football's long tenure and almost 100 year



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association with Erskineville Oval (both the new and old grounds).

During the late 1930s when Erskineville Oval was rebuilt in a slightly different location, the reconfiguration of space provided for additional public housing in Erskineville; This was almost solely through the efforts of Jim Phelan. He consulted on and monitored it's development, and, despite his aging ill-health, was almost a daily visitor to the site during it's construction which subsequently became a ground dedicated and main centre for Australian Football.

He never gave up his affiliation with the game. He was still attending matches in the season preceding his death, writing for various publications on his experiences and was present at several meetings of the league in the city. Following these, late at night, he mostly probably caught a train to his home, and all this up until a short time before his demise in November 1939, aged 79 years.

Following his death the Australian National Football Council, the then controlling body for football in Australia, recorded in it's minutes:

*“Mr Phelan, a former Secretary of the NSW League, was one of the best workers for the National Game this State has ever produced. He has a lovable disposition and an intense enthusiasm for the success of Australia's national game, which is the richer because of his association with it” .. et al*

Winning the Phelan Medal, particularly in the early days hardly rated a mention and it wasn't until the late sixties and early seventies that due recognition began to be afforded to the effort of the recipients.

Those who renamed the medal, from the Provan Trophy during the mid 1930s, could not have chosen a more commendable manner to honour this man's commitment and dedication to the game in Sydney.

Men like Jim rarely pass our way twice.

### Article No. 1

7 June 1927 - Sydney Football Record - Australian Football News

## THE FIRST DAYS OF SYDNEY FOOTBALL

In penning, by request of the Editor, a series of short articles on the early days of the Australian game in Sydney I am mindful of somewhat difficult task I have undertaken. In the absence of absolutely reliable data these articles, compiled from memory, may be found wanting or imperfect in minor details.

How far the experiences of the past may be linked with the present or serve as a guide to the future is a matter which may be left to the conjecture of readers or administrators of the game.



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The game was first played in Sydney in or about 1880. From that year until 1894, when it came to an untimely end for the time being, the game was known only as the Victorian game. Just when or how the title Australian Rules came into being I do not know, but certain it is that it is both distinctive and needful.

During the period between 1880 and 1894 the game was strong in public favour, due largely to the fact that the game was a most supreme in and around Newcastle and Maitland and that annual fixtures in Sydney, Newcastle, Wallsend and Maitland were customary. Those games invariably drew attendances in thousands and were played with a keenness and skill which still carries pleasant memories to those who witnessed or participated in the games.

The Duguid brothers, Tobin, Giles, Bowers, Watson, Leon and W. Moore (relatives of C G Macartney, the famous international and Australian cricketer, and themselves cricketers who gained interstate honours) were but a few of the many brilliant footballers that Newcastle and its outlying districts could boast of while, if memory serves me right, Mr D Watkins, MHR and one of the oldest members of the Federal Parliament was a player of outstanding ability in those far-off days.

The rules of the game in those days provided for twenty a-side teams and the strength of the game in Newcastle and its district may be gauged by the fact that teams representing Newcastle City, Newcastle, Hamilton, Mereweather (sic), Northumberland, Wallsend and Maitland were in existence. In 1884 the Northumberland team visited Victoria playing matches at Melbourne and Bendigo with a fair measure of success.

In Sydney the following clubs were in existence:- Sydney, Waratah, East Sydney, City, West Sydney, Redfern, while the game had been espoused by St Ignatius College (Riverview) and St Josephs College (Hunters Hill).

With such favourable conditions and the game commanding public patronage equal to rugby union (rugby league was then unknown) and considerably in advance of soccer, it will probably seem puzzling to the present day follower of the game whose knowledge of the vicissitudes of the game in Sydney would not, in most instances, extend as far back as the inception of the present NSW League in 1903, why the game fell from its then high position and came to an inglorious end in 1894.

The years between that date and the re-introduction of the game in 1903 found the prominent players going over to rugby union and they so enriched that code that the names of some of them will live imperishable in the annals of rugby union.



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Club rivalry and bitterness engendered and fostered by a system which permitted the more favoured clubs to fatten their ranks at the expense and in cases, extinction of other clubs was the cancerous microbe which killed the game in Sydney at a period when its popularity was undoubted. At its demise, 'there was none so poor as to do it honour'. This pity of it all lies in the fact that with basic structure crumbling the game flickered out in Newcastle and on present indications revival in that seems remote. [ENDS]

### Article No. 2

13 June 1927 - Sydney Football Record - Australian Football News

## NSW v SOUTH AUSTRALIA

(Note: We have not trace of this game)

So as to more properly convey to readers the favourite conditions for the game which prevailed in Sydney from 1881 up to 1895 I intend, before briefly reviewing the games and players during that period, recording the names and some of the patrols, well wishers and workers for the game in those days.

The names, and they are but a few of many that come most readily to mind are: Messrs. C W Beal (manager of the 1882 Australian XI), Dave Gregory and E. Sheridan (of cricket fame), J. Toohey (founder of Toohey's Brewery and a most generous patron), A. Flagagan (donor of the ill-fated Flanagan Cup), L. and O. Ballhausen, Agar Wynne, A. Griffiths, T. Nash, W. Marshall, G. Young, G. Crisp, J. O'Meara, W. Berkeley and H. Hedger.

Many of those in later life gained parliamentary honours, while nearly all gained prominence in the business and civic life of Sydney.

Apart from the annual fixtures with Newcastle teams, visits from Victorian and South Australian team were by no means infrequent. Up to date the present N.S. Wales League has not yet (outside carnival games in 1914) been honoured by a visit from a representative South Australian team.

On the then Association Ground (now the Sydney Cricket Ground) South Australia beat New South Wales by 9 goals 8 behinds to 5 goals 7 behinds, the teams being:- **New South Wales**: Crisp (Capt.), Toohey, Finn, Fitzgerald, Fairfax, O'Neil, Munro, Kirke, Mair, McHerg, Pierce, Goer, McKellar, Fletcher, Williamson, Hedger, Butler, Bailey and Gordon. **South Australia**:- A. Mahrtens (Capt.), Bushell, Busby, Broderick, Colby, Dixon, Casey, Evans, Eames, Fry, Kerr, Merrigan, T. Mahrtens, Middleton, Fitzgerald, Rowley, McKenzie, Smith, Wallling and Taylor.



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Carlton, Geelong, South Melbourne, Melbourne, Port Melbourne, Ballarat, Port Adelaide and South Adelaide visited Sydney at intervals, and thus provided patrons of those days with that variety which is both essential and necessary to the development of a particular sport and the body representing it.

Present day followers of the game could not reasonably be expected to appreciate an account in full of a N.S.W. – Victoria match played at the Melbourne Cricket Ground in 1886 and won by Victoria by 8 goals to 3. For the purpose of comparison with recent fixtures of a similar character the following press excerpts may prove interesting: "The crowd of spectators, estimated at over 15,000 were most impartial and enthusiastic in their applause," and another, 'Good judges of the games say that it was the best intercolonial match yet played in Victoria, and that any future team coming from New South Wales would be safe to have an enormous attendance". The best players for Victoria were: Tankard, Strickland, Powell, Houston, Baker, Wookey and Roy and for N.S. Wales: Goer, Hedger, Duguid, Bower and Sullivan. The Victorian players mentioned were stars in the football firmament of those (to old timers) wonderful days.

[ENDS]

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### Article No. 3

18 June 1927 - Sydney Football Record - Australian Football News

## CLUB GAMES & VICTOR TRUMPER

To recount the club games play in Sydney during the period referred to in previous articles, viz., 1881 to 1895, would afford little interest to present day followers. The names of prominent players during that period, and a few press excerpts dealing with players and games should, however, not be out of place. W. Goer (ex captain of Carlton [Vic.] Club), H. Hedger (well known to many present day patrons of the game), W. Barry (who earned high fame in Rugby Union circles), W. Butler, A Young, G. Crisp, D. McKellar, P. Scott, P. Hume, P.J. McNamarra, T. Nash, H. Neate, J. Gavin, W. Berlely, A. Newell, Cl Royal, T. Rosman, T. Tobin. S. Johnson, C. Shipton, T. Clune, H. Gill. J. Tooker, Frank and Fred Rounswell, G. Rosser, T. Booth, F. Corti, W. Glenister, J. Holdsworth, R. and W. Arnold, W. Arthur, E. Reynolds, H. Wilson, D. and M. Sullivan, J. Byrne, J. Abbott, A. Ashton, C. Church, C. Merchant, R. Dawes, W. O'Neil are names of prominent players in those days which come readily to mind.

Club games were mainly played at Moore Park, though Wentworth Oval, larger then in playing area then it is to-day, was largely used while the Association Ground, now known as the Sydney Cricket Ground and Agricultural Ground (Sydney Show Ground) were trysting places for many games.



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Visiting inter-colonial teams rated Sydney form as distinctly good in those days and overtures to Sydney players to transfer to other colonies were not wanting. Frank Rousenwell, H. Neate and E. Reynolds are players that come to mind as having joined up with Fitzroy (Vic.) Club; Reynolds becoming one of that club's most brilliant half-backs. In W. Goer, H. Hedger, W. Barry and D. McKellar, Sydney possessed a quartette (sic) of players probably unsurpassed in any centre where the game was then being played. Then there was Tommy Tobin – lean, lank lissome, untireless and brilliant. Every visiting intercolonial club sought to secure his services but irresponsible, careless and mayhap, carefree Tommy was wooed by never won. When the game was revived in 1903, Tommy could always be seen among the onlookers at the game in Moore Park. Old-timers remembering his brilliant qualities as a footballer, never evaded him while, perhaps recalling to mind that among the saddest words are those "what might have been".

### **TRUMPER THE INCOMPARABLE, PLAYS**

H. ("Dodger") Wilson, who before coming to Sydney had been offered a permanent position as ground bowler to the Melbourne Cricket Club, combined football with his cricket ability.

Being a mate of his in Waratah Club, I can speak with certainty of his brilliance as a footballer. An almost inseparable companion of his, when on Moore Park, was a knickerbockered youth, Victor Trumper, destined to gain everlasting fame as a cricketer.

In those early days Wilson was guide and mentor to the coming cricket champion. With the practical extinction of the Waratah Club through the then existing pernicious club system, the game in 1893 became practically confined to Sydney, West Sydney, East Sydney and Redfern Clubs.

Trumper, still in his early teens, played for Sydney in a match against Redfern, the latter winning by 7 goals to 3. Of Sydney's 3 goals, Trumper scored two. How he scored them is described in these press excerpts: "V. Trumper, securing a mark at a difficult angle, put up Sydney's first goal;" and "M. Sullivan sent the ball to the centre, and Trumper getting hold, dodged Thomas and scored Sydney's second goal".

Trumper was a beautiful kick and when the game petered out he played rugby union with the Newtown Pioneer Club in 1895 and later with the Newtown Club (Rugby Union) and in both was noted for his fine kicking. When the game was revived in 1903, Trumper became an official of the Paddington Club, but some years later attached himself to the rugby league code – an attachment which must have brought him, in after years anything but pleasant memories.



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"Dodger" Wilson who is still in Sydney was a fine cricketer. At the early age of 17 he played with South Melbourne in company with J.J. Lyons and C. and R. McLeod. In Sydney he played with the old Mansfield Club which later on became merged into the Carlton Club.

Another fine cricketer who played the game in those days was Andy Newell, whose mysterious disappearance some years ago has never been elucidated. Andy played with West Sydney and was an elusive and dashing footballer. A splendid bowler he gained inclusion in representative N.S.W. cricket teams on many occasions. Andy's brother, Jack who was then curator of Wentworth Oval, was also a capable footballer.  
[ENDS]

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### Article No. 4

13 August 1927 - Sydney Football Record - Australian Football News

## St IGNATIUS & St JOSEPHS COLLEGES

A prominent player referred to in my previous articles was George Searle, the amateur champion boxer of his day. Contemporary with the finest galaxy of boxing talent that he has ever graced any period in the history of the boxing ring in Australia, belief was general that he was equal in skill to the best of the professional boxers of his day.

Be that as it may, he was an ardent devotee of the Australian game and when players foregathered at night to witness bouts in which such boxing champions as Frank Slavin, Martin Costello, George Dawson, Peter Jackson and the incomparable Griffio figured, there was always time for a word about the game with George Seale - a sportsman to his finger tips.

Fearing that old-time associations in the game might have warped judgement, the writer interviewed "Solar Plexis", the well known boxing writer of the "Referee", who said: "You did not go far enough. Was there ever a greater boxer? He was the daddy of them all".

A.N. Gregory was another keen follower and lover of the game in those days. Father of that talented but unlucky cricketer, the late Charlie Gregory, he is still in the land of the living and only as late as last year wrote an article for the 'Sydney Mail' about the first meeting which was convened to establish the game in Sydney in 1880.

In the competition games for the Alexander Trophy, teams from St Ignatius and St Josephs Colleges were participants and many fine players donned the jersey as representatives of the colleges named. The fixtures alternated between the college grounds and Moore Park, which was at that period a favourite playing area for all codes, concrete cricket pitches



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being then most uncommon. When the game became taboo at the Colleges, through an unfortunate happening which need not be recounted, it sustained a heavy loss and one which had an important bearing on the ultimate early decease of the game in Sydney.

Preparatory to the opening competition games of the season, clubs vied with each other to secure a practice game at Riverview where Father Gartlan, the then principal, dispensed hospitality in royal fashion. The writer retains vivid and pleasant memories of his first trip to the college with the Waratah Club. So far as the Australian game is concerned, Dave Noonan was on of the best products of St Ignatius, although after his college days, his attention was turned more to cricket, he eventually becoming a great all-rounder in Petersham club. Bennie Dwyer was another promising footballer from the College and was nearly cajoled into playing for Newtown club previous to his leaving for England, where he became a professional for the Sussex County Cricket Club.

Some of the speediest runners of the period had a great penchant for the game. Bob Watson, Arthur Phillips and Charlie Marchant being real topnotchers. The latter was an employee of the "Referee" newspaper for many years, in company with his workmate, Bob Dawes (old-timer), who can always find time, be he ever so busy, to talk of the game he played so well in his halcyon days in Tasmania and Sydney.

Tommy Clune was another sterling player in those good old days and the years appear to have passed lightly over his head. Rarely, if ever, now seen at the game, the fact can probably be accounted for that he is interested in the "Sport of Kings", and is the owner of the excellent racehorse, Chateau Tanundra, which lately returned to the winning list.  
[ENDS]

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**Article No. 5**

22 June 1935 - Sydney Football Record - Australian Football News

## FROM OUT OF THE PAST

At Trumper Park on Saturday, June 8 as I was picking out a vantage spot to enjoy the incidents of play, away from the madding crowd of partisan supporters, I hear a cheer "Hello Jim!" and to my pleasant surprise found the greeting had come from Tom Rees, an ex-South Australian, who captained Paddington in 1923 and in that same year led a representative N.S. Wales team to victory over a strong Victorian League team at Erskineville Oval.



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It marked the one and only occasion that N.S. Wales has triumphed over a Victorian League team and as two points was the victorious margin when the final bell sounded there is no need to recall the exciting incidents which marked the final ten minutes of play as A. Lang, Victoria's captain, led his accomplished band in characteristic bursts.

But the backs of N.S. Wales stood firm with J. Foskett resplendent because of the manner in which he outmastered J. Freake, Victoria's crack goal sneak.

A sterling player and prince among good fellows, Tom left Sydney later on to take up farming in South Australian but after the venture is now back again in Sydney but with no desire to again enter the playing arena.

My lucky star was apparently in the ascendant as shortly after, Tom and I had cast a backward glance adown "the aisle of time" I said down unknowingly alongside J. Armstrong, the former ex-St Kilda player who played with Sydney club in or about 1923. Again the storehouse of memory was unlocked and pleasing incidents recalled.

Working as he is, in the Taxation Department, I asked him how was Bob Powers faring these days and he answered "well". After touching upon the great deed of the Powers-McKoy combination (it is hard to realise that almost a decade has passed since it was in operation). Mr Armstrong remarked that eh attendance did not appear as good as when he was an active player. Perhaps I should not say so, said he, for this is my first appearance at a game for 12 years and if all retired players are like me, there is small wonder attendances are diminishing instead of increasing. Mr Rees also expressed opinion that attendances were greater in the early twenties. However, attendance statistics were taboo as far as I was concerned and the opinion expressed brought no response from me.

One feels that he could add much to the article written by Tom Fitzmaurice, which appeared in the "Sporting Globe" of June 5, anent the efforts of D. Baird, the former South Melbourne and St Kilda players to revive the almost defunct North Shore team in 1921. One can, however pass on to the fact that Tom Fitzmaurice, then in the heyday of his career as a footballer, takes pride in the fact that he, with other ex-Victorian star players, to wit, Les Charge (South Melbourne), Brian Rush (Collingwood), Dave Baird (St Kilda), G. Ryan (South Melbourne) and a few others, as he puts it, brought premiership honours to North Shore in 1921.

Te reverse side to that pen picture is that, though the victory was well merited and a well won one, North Shore's galaxy of ex-interstate stars had but little to spare in the final games with Newtown, the latter's inaccuracy at goal being one of the factors in its defeat.



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1921 season witnessed many fine games at Erskineville Oval, chief among them being the defeat of a very fine Tasmanian representative by a New South Wales team. The latter's narrow victory was mainly due to the fine kicking at goal of Tom Fitzmaurice.

Sydney followers of the game were unlucky that Horrie Gorringe, through an injury sustained at Albury while the Tasmanian team was en route to Sydney, did not play in that match. A writer in the 'Sporting Globe' of June 5, classes Horrie Gorringe as the greatest Tasmanian footballer of all time.

[ENDS]

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### Article No. 6

21 September 1935 - Sydney Football Record - Australian Football News

## PROGRESS IN TWO DECADES

Having shown conclusively in my article of 7/9/'35, that the occasional use of the Sydney Cricket Ground has not been confined solely to the past two decades and that its use, desirable as it is for certain classes of game, bears no relativity to the progress as inferred by the writer of "Progress in Two Decades" in the 'Record'.

I will briefly comment on his other statements. "In older days there were no reserve grade teams. Now we field strong second grade teams, together with a Metropolitan Junior Association. Interstate matches have increased from nil to four or five per season".

True it is that the fielding of present day reserve grade teams in addition to the junior teams in the Metropolitan Junior Association indicates progress in the direction named yet there will be many conversant with the game and its 'golden days' who would gladly welcome a revival of the Young Australia League which before the outbreak of war in 1914 comprised teams from Newtown, Paddington, East Sydney, Balmain, Marrickville, Illawarra, Drummoyne, Ryde and Northern Districts and from which graduated fine players in the persons of A. Ratcliffe (inter-state footballer and cricketer), B. Chapman (wood and won by St Kilda), B. Ellis, R. Blackburn, R. Foster, W. Tennant, E. McConville, A. Beed, M. Mahony, the McLaren brothers and numerous others most of whom rose to inters\-state honours. The principal matches were played as early games to the League fixtures.

Re inter-state games increasing from nil to four or five per season. Such a statement leaves no other inference than the writer of "Progress in Two Decades" has chosen the war period, 1915-18 to make comparison. If not



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so he is still in error, as from 1903 up to 1914, inter-state games were more often played than is the case today. From 1915 to 1918 not a single inter-state game was played throughout Australia. The Australian Football Council did not function from November 1914 until the end of 1919.

The South Australian League ceased active operations early in 1916 and the writer moved a motion that the N.S. Wales League follow the example set by South Australia and that operations be confined to schools and ex-students. The motion was carried but was subsequently rescinded at a specially convened meeting of the League. The main factor in bringing about the change of front was that the Rugby League was carrying on through in a modified form.

How fared the League in the war period? Re-formed in 1915 from the ashes of a bankrupt body, after the Carnival crash of 1914, it commenced operations with nil plus a legacy of debts and receiving but a sum total of forty pounds (£40) from the Australian Football Council for the four years 1915 to 1918 it held a credit balance of £86 at the end of the 1918 season. By paying off old debts it had restored the good name of the League. It was during that dark period that a wonderful spirit of co-operation manifested itself. Officials of the League and participating clubs, umpires and players worked in almost perfect unison and with one common resolve to keep the game going until war's dark cloud had disappeared.

In each year a trophy was given to each individual player of a winning school team (which in 1915 included Roman Catholic schools) and at the end of that same year the whole of the net proceeds of the League premiership final games was handed over to the 'Australia Day War Fund'.

How well the schools had been catered for can be gleaned from the fact that within 12 months from the cessation of war, Mr Rupert Browne took a combined schools team to Melbourne and after winning the full series of three games against selected Victorian teams it was pitted against a Melbourne High School team and a Geelong High School team, meeting as only to be expected with defeat in each game.

The securing of a lease of Erskineville Oval in 1919 paved the way to uninterrupted use of that ground from then until now. Its value for the playing of early and late seasonal games has been of inestimable benefit to the League apart from relieving the League of the worry of securing a ground for final games.

The reference by the writer of 'Progress in Two Decades' to the Australian Football Ground I could pass over without comment but hold opinion that it was a magnificent conception in connect with the game in Sydney and well worthy of Sir Hugh Denison and the fine body of men who worked with him at the time.



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As to a progressive period of the game in Sydney, I assert that such was from 1915 to 1923, which paradoxically covers in a sense, the darkest and brightest period.

My assertion is based on recorded facts and figures.  
[ENDS]

Article No. 7

25 July 1936 – Sydney Football Record

### FROM OUT OF THE PAST

**Note:** Readers of the Sporting Globe will have noticed that of late years incidents of the past connected with famous names, players and umpires have become a popular feature of that publication. That is as it should be for there are many close followers of the game who delight in linking the past and present. It is in and of the past that traditions are created.

Followers of the game in Sydney who were present at the Agricultural Ground (Sydney Show Ground – now Fox Studios) on June 8, 1907, will assuredly recall to mind the thrilling game between Port Adelaide (South Australian premier team) and a Metropolitan 18 composed as follows:

R Robertson (capt), R Errol, J Delaney, G Porteous, H Welch, J Quirk, T Varman, A Dartnell, J Woods, Goldie Thomas, W Thomas, S. Rothery, J Matthews, F Gardiner, E Jones, B Sheeley, J Deakin, A McPhail.

**Port Adelaide:** J Corston (capt), Dorraghy, Mack, Tomkins, Dickson, Davies, Earle, Soar, Jones, Quinn, Strawn, Selby, Pope, Beare, Frazer, Wicker, Cocks (2 - players with the name of Cocks).

In the twenty nine years which have elapsed since then, selected Metropolitan Teams have, on occasions, recorded some fine performances, notably, victory at Erskineville Oval, over a Victorian League team, but for brilliant collective individual effort the match on June 8, 1907 stands out in the writer's mind.

For the home team Ralph Robertson (Prince of Captains and who led the NSW Carnival Team in 1908-11-14) stood out above his team mates, by superb play, although the side, as a whole, performed ably. Woods, Newtown's champion goalkicker of 1906, was at his best, while Gardiner and Errol, were also to the fore. For Port Adelaide, Donaghy, Corston,



## JAMES E PHELAN'S WRITINGS



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Wicker, Mack, Tomkins, Pope and Quinn played brilliantly. In a stirring final quarter the home side scored 2.3 to Port Adelaide's 3 behinds and finally won with 8.9 to 5.14.

At the date the match was played the rugby league game had not been introduced into NSW and the attendance was estimated at 8,000. It may be mentioned that in 1907 the Agricultural Ground was leased for the season to the NSW Australian National Football League and club seasons tickets, as on the lines in vogue this season admitted holders to the ground there was then also an additional playing area covered by pavilions and buildings. Time marches on.  
[ENDS]

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**Article No. 8**

2 May 1936 – Sydney Football Record

### LOYALTY AND IT'S REWARD

Apart from the fact that last Saturday's contest between Eastern Suburbs and Newtown at Erskineville Oval, will take rank with the many fine games played between these clubs under the auspices of the NSW League, there were incidental happenings which one opines will bear mention in the official 'Record'.

The game was played in a fine setting – good weather conditions, both teams well uniformed and play admirably controlled, on the whole, by field umpire Alan Bouch and capped by an attendance which, while giving inspiration to the players must have gladness and hope, to the hearts of old and loyal members of the league and patrons of the game in Sydney.

In groups throughout the pavilion and enclosure one came across R Dawes the ex-Tasmanian, and one time club mate of Charlie Eady the international cricketer and interstate footballer. On taking up residence in Sydney in the early ninnies (1890s), Rob Dawes played with the Waratah Club, and later wrote for the Referee (sporting newspaper) under the pen title of *Old Timer*.

Old Paddingtonian and East Sydney players in coach Ryall, H M McPhail, G LePlastries, H Falvet and T Cawood were also noticed with D Bennett, R Blackburn, A Gloster, J Cunneen and J Hall, each of whom gave Newtown good service in years gone by as players and officials.

In his accustomed position in the pavilion was G Turner, an official of the Balmain Club, long since defunct, while together J Flanagan of the cheery smile, ex-Richmond and Sydney player, and Charlie Rowland, the old



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Carlton player, who in his palmy days as footballer and pedestrian was well known in Victorian and Western Australia. Charlie finished his football career as a player for the YMCA club (Sydney) previous to its exclusion from league ranks upon the advent of the District System in 1914.

Reminiscences of great games and players of the past were fruitful topics throughout the afternoon, and regret was general as word passed along of the death of W A Lone during the week, the once popular and cheery honourable secretary of the defunct YMCA club.

One visualised this future improvements at Erskineville Oval which would provide a reservation for old and loyal workers for the game during its many years of travail in Sydney.

If Saturday's attendance be as one hopes, .the forerunner of further increased patronage the may become "something more than visual"  
[ENDS]

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**Article No. 9**

2 May 1936 – Sydney Football Record

## CRICKETERS AND FOOTBALLERS

In the states of the Commonwealth where the Australian code of football stands pre-eminent in public favour notable cricketers have found the lure of the game attractive.

A cursory review of notable cricketers who have played the game without prejudice to their cricketing career indicates that South Australia provides the finest example. George Griffen (who kicked the first goal scored by the famous Norwood Club), E Jones, Clem and Roy Hill, A Gehrs, J Reedman, Vic Richardson, L Chamberlain, are but a few of the many whose names will go down in history as great footballers. In Victorian memory fondly lingers around the football deeds of J Worrall, W W Armstrong, R (Dicky) Houston, P G McShane, W Carkeek, D Smith, J Rosser, J Michin and others. In Tasmania, C Eady, K Burn, E A McDonald played the game and all found places in representative Australian cricket teams.

NSW can also show it's quota of great cricketers who identified themselves with the game.

Arthur Gregory (of that great cricketing family of the past) convened a meeting to establish the game in Sydney in 1880 [ed. - *must be football*]  
Since then C W Beal (manager of the 1882 Australia XI) Leon and W



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Moore (relatives of C G Macartney), B Dwyer (who died in England while fulfilling an engagement with the Sussex Country Team), A Newell, D Noonan, Tibby Cotter, W Witty and Victor Trumper all played the game [Australian football] for varying periods.

Victor Trumper gave early promise of becoming a champion at the game.

In 1893, while in his early teens, he played with Sydney in a match against Redfern, the latter winning by 7 goals to 3. Of Sydney's 3 goals Trumper scored 2.

Club bickerings, in which the Sydney and West Sydney clubs were the chief wranglers brought about the downfall of the game [of football] in Sydney. Later on Trumper played for the Newtown club (rugby union, in which he was noted for his fine kicking and handling).

In 1898 he made a triumphant entry into the cricket world where the memory of his great deeds still live.

Had there existed in 1894, or the year immediately prior thereto, a body similar to the present Australian National Football Council, it is certain the game would have gone on to pre-eminence in NSW, as at that period, the game vied with rugby union for the first place of public patronage [this is untrue - Ed] (rugby league being then unknown). The years between then and the revival of the game, by the formation of the present league, in 1903, found many of the leading players transferring to rugby union in which code they have left imperishable records.

"*Pity, 'tis, tis true,*" but with the decrease of the game in Sydney the magnificent edifice which had been built up in the Newcastle District, where the game was almost supreme, [drawing a long bow here - Ed.] also crumbled.

The lesson from the foregoing is that firm administration to the utter exclusion of anything approaching rabbit 'clubism', is the only road to progress.  
[ENDS]



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Fate and faulty administration during crucial periods, has played a big part in connection with the Australian game in Sydney. To old time followers who can recall the period between 1881-93 it seems almost incredible that no mastermind came to light to save the game from the destroying forces of club rancour of bitterness as exhibited in the latter year by the then Sydney and West Sydney clubs, and which unfortunately brought the game to an untimely end – players and public being heartily sick of the win, tie, or wrangle methods.

How effective the methods of the clubs named had been can be instanced by the fact that the late Dan Hutchinson (Carlton player and captain) came to Sydney early in 1894 and made an attempt to revive the game by advertising that a scratch match would be played at Moore Park. The effort failed lamentably.

Present day followers of the game will, probably, be surprised to read that in the period between 1884-89 teams from Newcastle and St Ignatius and St Josephs Colleges were regular participants in games at Moore Park and, alternatively, at the College grounds.

The playing standard of the senior clubs was excellent, and when Victorian clubs visited Sydney (which they did more frequently then than now) they invariably made offers to some leading players. Among several who went to Victoria was E Reynolds who shone as one of Fitzroy's best half backs and gained inter-colonial honours in games against South Australia.

The most memorable inter-colonial game that took place in Sydney during the period 1886-91 was that between Carlton Club (Victoria) and Tasmania in 1890 at the SCG. In that game Bob Dawes (a regular attendant at present day games) was in the Tasmanian side and was one of the youngest players in the team. Later on he took up residence in Sydney, and as an employee of the *Referee Newspaper*, for very many years, he has rendered wonderful service to the game by his writings, apart from the period he played the game in Sydney with the old Waratah club.

Incidentally he acted as field umpire in that bitter game between Sydney and West Sydney which marked the demise of the game in 1893. It is worthy to note that after many disagreements between the clubs as to the choice of field umpire, both agreed on the choice of Bob Dawes.

Reverting to the match between Carlton and Tasmania it was a pleasurable sight to find an attendance of 15,000 each of whom thoroughly enjoyed the fine play with the match produced and which was graphically described in the Sunday Times of the following day by A G (Smiler) Hales who later became a successful book writer, eventually migrating to South Africa and there to England where he died.



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On the following Saturday, South Melbourne, who had gone on to Brisbane to meet a Queensland team, led by Jack Gibson (an ex-South Melbourne player) were to meet Carlton at the SCG, and the most pleasurable anticipations reigned in my mind during that week of the coming clash between those great rivals. And for many reasons. Not yet thoroughly weaned from the glamour and excitement of the stirring games I have witnessed in Melbourne in the early eighties (1880s) I was all agog to see my early Ballarat pals, Peter Burns and Harry Purdy in action again, as I had oft seen them both in Ballarat and Melbourne. Again, had not Peter Burns brought discomfiture to Carlton when, in 1889, he kicked that wonderful goal on the Melbourne Cricket Ground. Would we in Sydney have the pleasure of seeing him repeat it?

On the Friday Night while the Carlton and South Melbourne teams were being entertained rain commenced to fall, and continued throughout the night and all day on the Saturday, with the result that the match had to be abandoned.

On the following morning, as the sun shone brightly, it was a disconsolate party composed almost wholly of South Melbourne, which sat in Hyde Park lamenting with Peter Burns, Harry Purdy, "Dabber" Decis and others over the vagaries of fate, and the 'might have beens' of life.

Fate and faulty administration had much, if not all, to do with the loss of the Australian Football Ground situated on the boundaries of Alexandria, Mascot and Waterloo Municipalities [*in those days these and other suburbs had their own municipalities - This was changed in 1947 when the government amalgamated several of these small municipalities throughout the state - Ed.*].

The possession of that magnificent ground, in its original state, would today be of almost untold value to the league and the game.

It was a glorious conception on the part of those responsible for the early moves in connection with the acquirement of the ground, but, unfortunately, later movements nullified the work.

In a future article I shall deal with all the aspects in connection with the ground, as they appear to me.  
[ENDS]

**Article 11**

16 July 1938 - Sydney Football Record

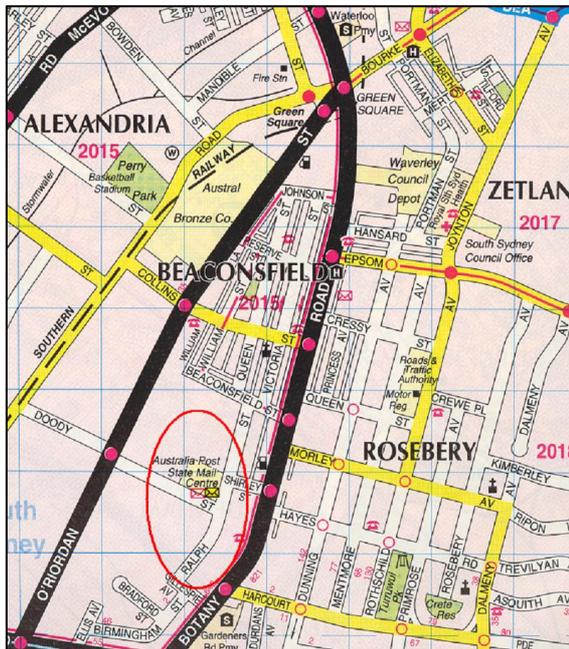
## **THE AUSTRALIAN FOOTBALL GROUND**



## JAMES E PHELAN'S WRITINGS



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The Australian Football Ground. A title and location probably unknown to the present generation of followers of the game, but to those of an earlier period – a dream of football Empire unfulfilled.

With the limited space at command it is difficult to set out in proper detail the complete history of the venture. Suffice therefore, that in 1910 the NSWFL being duly apprised of a scheme to purchase the old Rosebery Racecourse vested full control of it finances and other incidental auxiliary powers in the hands of a

selected body of men whose work and love for the game was beyond question and reproach. Styled "The League Trustees", the body consisted of H.R. Denison (later Sir Hugh), H.C. Harte, A.E. Nash, J.J. O'Meara, L.A. and Otto Balhausen and J.J. Jagelman (solicitor), all prominent men in the business and commercial world of Sydney.

Then, as now, the carping critic, both inside and outside the league was to be found attributing unworthy motives such as business considerations to one, or other, of that fine body of men whose vision, enterprise and courage stands forth as the finest example in connection with the game in this or any other state of the Commonwealth.

So as to give full effect to my opinion, which time has strengthened rather than lessened, I shall have to introduce a personal touch by stating that I was, at that period, and for many subsequent years, the writer for the game to the "Referee" (a weekly) and "Sunday Times" newspapers and though I voiced opinions both through the papers mentioned, and at League meetings, disagreeing with the early lavish expenditure on the ground by the Trustees, the cardinal fact remained that each respected the other's views as in the interests of the game and we became, in anything, firmer friends.

The purchase of the ground, on the boundaries of the Mascot, Waterloo and Alexandria municipalities (Botany and Gardeners Road), consisted of close upon 12 acres was effected at a cost of roughly one hundred and eighty pounds per acre.



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*[An electric tram, with duplicated line operated from Circular Quay and city railway along Botany Road to Botany as well as from Kingsford along Gardeners Road, intersecting at Botany Road. These two roads were boundaries of the complex.- Ed (Tramway of Sydney - David Keenan)]*

Within a very brief space of time it's valuation had risen to over four hundred pounds per acre. Meanwhile the Trustees had opened negotiations for the purchase of the land from the football area covering the whole of the frontage to Botany Road, with the idea of building shops and dwelling houses thereon.

Unfortunately a settlement as to terms was not reached. **What a glorious vista had the scheme reached fruition.**

Let any reader of this brief article visualise the position today (written in 1938) of the ownership of a beautiful ground within easy access to any of the present league clubs, North Shore excepted. So I turn with a sigh from vision to reality.

Go to this site to read more about the Australian Football Ground:  
<http://nswfootballhistory.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/History-of-the-Australian-Football-Ground.pdf> You will have to cut and paste the URL

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### Article 12

3 September 1938 - Sydney Football Record

... Continued from a previous article which is unavailable

In the same year a team of second grade players from Sth Australian visited Sydney under the managerial reigns of Mr Fred Adams, a well known football identity of those days.

The local junior association was a virile and powerful body, its president being Mr E.W. Quinn, who for the past 20 years or more, has been located in Victoria, where he is a leading light in the Timber Employees Assn. Mr A.D.S. Provan was Hon Secretary of the local body.

There was keen rivalry between the opposing teams and a stirring contest resulted in a narrow victory for the local team.

And so high hopes was centred on the 1914 season. The Australian Football Ground had received its playing baptism. It was acclaimed by all who had played on it as the best football ground in Australia. Enthusiasts were agog. Would the Carnival games be played on the ground? Cold reasoning however, pointed to the then poor facilities for transport of anticipated crowds that would flock to see the game.



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Eventually it was decided to hold the carnival games on the SCG. The carnival was due to open on August the 6th. On August 4, when all the state teams were assembled at the Australian Football Ground for the purpose of distance contests at the carnival games, the news was flashed by cable that England had declared war against Germany. Fate had stepped in and dealt a cruel blow. Had England's declaration of war been made a few weeks earlier or later, all might have been well as regards the continuity of ownership of the Australian Football Ground by the NSW Football League.

Sensing that a greater game had to be played, the players of the various state teams in the 1914 carnival played brilliantly throughout the full series. Medals donated by the "Referee" newspaper, Sydney, were awarded the following as being the best players for their respective states:

G. Heinz (Vic), J. Pennicott (Tas.), A Tapping (W.A.), J.W. Robertson (S.A.), R. Robertson (NSW), P.W. Jones (Qld).

The financial loss from the carnival was irreparable, and in due course the league trustees tendered their resignations. That step resulted in the Australian Football Ground passing into the hands of Sir Hugh Denison who had generously relieved his co-trustees of their financial obligations in connection with the ground.

With the advent of the 1915 season, a small body of enthusiasts met in the Sports Club, Sydney. Mr H.C. Harte, eventually decided to carry on. The principal executive officers appointed were Mesrs. E.W. Butler - President, H.C. Harte - Treasurer and Mr J.E. Phelan - Secretary.

With the flower of our football talent overseas, and death's cloud resting heavy and black of the homes and in the hearts of the people the outlook was a dark one, but due to splendid co-operation on the part of everybody concerned the league successfully weathered the storm and at the end of the war period had reached a state of comparative affluence by its own efforts, as the Australian Football Council was not functioning and the propaganda amount received from that source amounted to but forty pounds from 1915-19.

During a part of the war period the ground was tenanted by a gun club for pigeon shooting purposes and the once beautiful grand stand became almost a wreck. In 1922 the late Mr Con. Hickey, who was a great admirer of the ground as a playing area, and who also visualised its future possibilities, had an earnest talk with myself over the position. After a lengthy debate at the Australian Football Council held in 1922 a motion, "That all profits made at Carnival games be held in trust by the Council to finance Carnivals in which losses may occur, or to acquire ownership of playing grounds" was carried on the casting vote of the chairman, the late Mr Charles Brownlow. That was encouraging to Mr Hickey and myself.



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On my return to Sydney I secured an interview with Sir High Dennison and subsequently, on March 19, 1923, he wrote me that he was agreeable to the offer I had submitted him for the use of the ground for that season with the option of purchase later on.

On March 23, the NSW FL gave the proposition short shrift. Looking back over the years I cannot recall any decision of the NSW Football League that hurt me so much. I felt that the labour of years on behalf of the game in Sydney had been in vain; That vision had departed to be replaced by petty present-day considerations.

In 1925 or 1926 the ground passed into the ownership of the YMCA Society at a figure which was well within the powers of the NSW Football League on the proposals submitted to me by Mr Hickey in 1922.

In 1927 or 28 the YMCA Society sold the ground to a dog racing company at a reputed figure of twenty three thousand pounds (\$46,000). It is now known as Shepherd's Bush. One well may quote Shakespeare and say, "None so poor as to do honour" to the sincere old time enthusiasts who put the Australian game before petty and personal considerations.  
[ENDS]

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[We are researching additional editorial material written by Jim Phelan and expect to post more of his writings in the near future. If you have access to any publications which contain Phelan's stories we would appreciate a communication from you.](#)

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