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AMPTHILL'S AUSSIE

'One of Australian cricket's forgotten heroes' was the description given to George Moore, sometime worshipper with Ampthill Union Church (combining both Congregational and Baptist), Bedfordshire, later deacon at West Maitland Congregational Church, New South Wales, and the man responsible for inflicting the first ever defeat upon an English touring side.¹ Little is known of the first thirty years of George Moore's life, before he emigrated to Australia, but he was probably born around 1822, in Ampthill, then a small market town of 1,500, in which his father, James, was based as a journeyman baker.² The absence of church records makes it impossible to place precisely Moore's first contact with Ampthill Union, whether he joined the Sunday School, or whether he became a full member. The austere chapel had been constructed at the same time as George's birth and was led from 1808 until his death in 1841 by the 'amiable' Congregationalist, Samuel Hobson. Never an affluent church, it was not until 1858 that Ampthill could afford a harmonium. In the meantime, the church utilized various means of leading the hymn singing, including elements of the Ampthill Band, formed in 1837, in which Moore played the trombone.³

At some point in the late 1840s George married and the scanty records suggest that his wife, Jane, was part of a family with a strong association with Ampthill Union Church. There are few records of his involvement in local cricket but the restrictions imposed by long working hours would have significantly reduced his chances of a game. Another Ampthill Baptist, Stuart Peer, who was apprenticed as a grocer in Ampthill in the 1860s, recalled that cricket matches - such as 'Grocers v. Drapers' - were played between five and seven *in the morning*. Reports that do appear in the local newspapers indicate that Moore was an outstanding bowler, rarely failing to take wickets. He had worked with his father before his marriage, then set up as a confectioner, a few doors further down the street from his parents. In the 1851 census he is listed as such but when he makes a rare appearance in the parish records a year later, there appears to have been a change: at the baptism of one daughter, Elizabeth, George's occupation was listed as a 'gardener'. If there had been a downward turn in fortunes, George Moore did not hang around for long. Still playing cricket for Ampthill with his younger brother, James, in the summer of 1852, he emigrated for Australia later that year. James probably accompanied him, the Moores becoming part of the first wave of English people of his type who were to head for a new life in the colonies or the United States from this time onward. Indeed, sometimes ministers left for life in the New World taking a significant proportion of their congregations with them. More research on the Australian part of Moore's very long life (he died in 1916) would be most welcome. He settled in Maitland, New South Wales, running a successful confectionery business and being noted as a keen gardener. George was a deacon at West Maitland Congregational Church for more than thirty years, whilst Jane served as the church organist and as

a home visitor. The Moores' home, at Horseshoe Bend, was named 'Amphill Villa'. George now had time to perfect his sporting skills. Until 1864 round arm and under arm were the only permissible means of delivering a cricket ball, and it was as a bowler that the middle-aged George Moore was to make his name: 'his right hand round arm slows and medium pacers dominated local cricket' observed Jack Pollard.⁴ Together with James, George was establishing a cricketing dynasty.

Both Moores played against the first ever English touring side to Australia.⁵ Captained by the Surrey wicket-keeper, H. H. Stephenson, the twelve English cricketers sailed from Liverpool on Brunel's *SS Great Britain* in the autumn of 1861, arriving in time to play the first ever Anglo-Australian (against a twenty-two⁶ of Victoria) on 1 January 1862. The English won that game, and although there was evidence of the considerable potential in colonial cricket, the tourists, containing 'Terrible Billy' Caffyn, 'Farmer' Bennett and the powerful hitter 'Ben' Griffith, were demonstrating their superiority in most aspects of the game. James had already played for a Victoria and New South Wales twenty-two in a drawn match, before teaming up with his older brother in a purely NSW twenty-two for a game against the tourists before a crowd of 23,000 at Sydney. Although James Moore took the first English wicket to fall, the Surrey batsmen, Griffith, Caffyn and Billy Mortlock, then proceeded to plunder the hapless Australian bowling. When eventually his skipper turned to him, Moore put the breaks on the assault, taking 3-10 in 48 balls. Having taken the hint, the NSW captain let Moore bowl unchanged during England's second innings and George duly obliged, taking 4-20 as the visitors totalled just 66 runs. England won the game, thanks to the failure of the twenty-two's second innings to even match this (they scored 65) and the tourists continued their unbeaten run, battering a Bathurst twenty-two *en route* to a second meeting with George Moore at Sydney.

One can but wonder what the chapel-going Moore would have made of the famous double-edged compliment paid by one of the tourists, Yorkshireman Roger Iddison. In the broad accent of his native county, Iddison declared 'Ah doan't think mooch to their plaay, but they're a woonderful good lot o' drinking men'. There is little doubt also that by the time of the second game at Sydney, travel and the overwhelmingly generous Australian hospitality were beginning to take its toll upon Stephenson's men. Nor is there any doubt, however, as to the quality of Moore's bowling. Now playing for a combined twenty-two of Victoria and NSW he almost single-handedly destroyed England, compensating for frail home batting by bowling unchanged through both innings and recording returns of 4-22 and 6-39 as England were dismissed for 60 and 75, leaving the hosts victors by 12 wickets.

This milestone victory was the highpoint of George Moore's career, but he was not yet finished with the game. He played against Parr's England tourists in 1863-4, and W. G. Grace's side in 1873-4. By this time the middle-aged Moore had made his *début* for NSW, against Victoria. He played in a further two games for his state and finally retired from cricket at the age of seventy-five.⁷ James Moore also played

1863-4, and W. G. Grace's side in 1873-4. By this time the middle-aged Moore had made his début for NSW, against Victoria. He played in a further two games for his state and finally retired from cricket at the age of seventy-five.⁶ James Moore also played for NSW, as did his sons Leon and William, and his grandson Frederick Cummins.

Most famous of all the 'Mighty Moores', however, was George's grandson, Charlie Macartney. Macartney played thirty-five tests between 1907 and 1926, a career that was disrupted by World War One. Macartney established an individual Australian touring record by smashing 345 against Nottinghamshire in 1921 and, aged 40, scored a century before lunch against England at Headingly in 1926. He had this recollection of George Moore, coaching his grandson by taking him into his orchard and bowling apples at him when Macartney was around five years old:

He fashioned a little bat for me of cedar wood, which is still in my possession, and with this I did my best to beat off the attack of apples. He always maintained that he taught me all my off strokes, and whilst admitting that I was a better batsman than himself, he contended that he was much the better bowler and fieldsman!⁷

NOTES

- 1 Jack Pollard, *The Complete illustrated History of Australian Cricket*, Pelham Books, 1992.
- 2 Some sources give his date of birth as 1820. There are no known baptismal records for George, but his parents, James Moore and Rebecca Smith, were married at Ampthill in 1822.
- 3 Arthur Peer, *A History of Ampthill Union Church*, Ampthill, 1963. Stephen Bunker, *Seize The Day: A Bicentenary History of Ampthill Baptist Church*, Ampthill, 1997. Andrew Underwood (private collection), G and B 36.
- 4 Pollard, op.cit.
- 5 David Frith, *The Trailblazers*, Boundary Books, Cheshire, 1999. This excellent account contains a portrait of George Moore on p.116.
- 6 Harry W. Hedley, *At the Wickets: New South Wales versus Victoria* (Centennial Printing and Publishing, 1888). Ray Webster and Allan Miller, *First-Class Cricket in Australia, Volume 1, 1850-51 to 1941-1942*. Ray Webster, 1991. Jack Pollard, *Australian Cricket: The Game and the Players*, Hodder and Stoughton, 1982. Jack Pollard, *The Formative Years of Australian Cricket 1803-93*, Angus and Robertson.
- 7 'Charles Macartney: Cricket in the Blood' in Ken Piesse, *Great Australian Cricketing Stories*, Viking O'Neil, 1982.

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The Society congratulates one of its committee members, the Revd Ruth Gouldbourne, on the award of a PhD in history and theology from London University for a dissertation entitled 'Gender and Theology in the writings of Caspar Schwenckfeld'.