1ST ANNUAL LECTURE

TOM BROCK LECTURE UNSW, 29 September 1999

Jimmy Devereux's Yorkshire pudding: reflections on the origins of rugby league in New South Wales and Queensland



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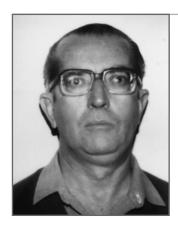
Jimmy Devereux's Yorkshire pudding: reflections on the origins of rugby league in New South Wales and Queensland

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Tom Brock Bequest Committee Sydney 2000



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TOM BROCK BEQUEST

The Tom Brock Bequest, given to the Australian Society for Sports History (ASSH) in 1997, consists of the Tom Brock Collection supported by an ongoing bequest. The Collection, housed at The University of New South Wales, includes manuscript material, newspaper clippings, books, photographs and videos on rugby league in particular and Australian sport in general. It represents the finest collection of rugby league material in Australia. ASSH has appointed a Committee to oversee the Bequest and to organise appropriate activities to support the Collection from its ongoing funds.

Objectives:

- 1. To maintain the Tom Brock Collection.
- 2. To organise an annual scholarly lecture on the history of Australian rugby league.
- 3. To award an annual Tom Brock Scholarship to the value of \$5,000.
- 4. To undertake any other activities which may advance the serious study of rugby league.
- 5. To publicise the above activities.

Activities:

- 1. The Tom Brock Lecture.
- 2. The Tom Brock Scholarship
- 3. Updating the Collection with new material published on rugby league.
- 4. Reporting to ASSH on an annual basis.

Acknowledgments:

Photographs courtesy of Tony Collins and Robert Grate.

The writing of this short monograph — stemming from the inaugural Tom Brock lecture in 1999 — caused me to reflect upon the life of its generous benefactor. Thinking about Tom Brock reminds me of a way I used to divide the world, between 'rugby league people' and the rest. Before the Super League debacle and its ongoing atrocities and heresies, a 'rugby league person' was, at least in my mind, synonymous with someone who was decent, honest, straight up and down, reliable, a no-nonsense bloke or bloke-ette. One lesson of the 1995 'Pearl Harbour raid' was that 'the greatest game of all' housed a number of people who imperfectly fitted this description. The likes of Souths' George Piggins, a genuine people's hero, were outflanked. Rupert Murdoch did not take over rugby league by himself. Willing accomplices like Peter 'Swamp Fox' Moore who led Canterbury-Bankstown into the News Limited camp and lent the rebel competition some credibility proved pivotal.

Tom Brock, however, was the quintessential good bloke and South Sydney supporter. He would have agreed with the wise advice of Mr Mark Carroll, 1999 Souths front row forward, that the foundation clubs, the likes of Souths and North Sydney, Wests and Balmain, and their traditions are vital to rugby league. You can't lose tradition — it's like foundations', 'Spud' Carroll advised, 'you can't take the foundations out of a house otherwise it'll fall over'.

I used to seek out Tom at book launches and conferences because of our common interests and because I enjoyed his chipper personality. As I write now I can see him adjusting his glasses and smiling. Our discussions invariably resulted in a small pile of photostats arriving by mail, gems of information generously shared. Club loyalty did not enter into the matter. The historians of South Sydney and North Sydney were much more collegiate than rival hookers, George Piggins and Ross Warner, in their playing days!

Tom's contribution to the historical memory of popular culture in the city of Sydney was a significant one. As an historian Tom was both a hedgehog and a fox. While he would have seen himself primarily as an empiricist, he supported the broader project of scholars within the Australian Society for Sports History of using sport as a vehicle, a window, for making sense of broader themes in Australian social history. Tom would have agreed with Nicholas Fishwick that 'social historians ought not to feel obliged to describe matches which they never saw or to engage in second-hand discussions of tactics and the like. The point ... is to study what football meant and why it mattered.'2

I hope, therefore, that Tom would appreciate my quest here, to locate the origins of rugby league in New South Wales and Queensland, in terms of an argument about the ties of kinship, allegiance and culture between Australia and England, the North of England in particular. Rugby league's English roots were social more than regional. But the game's split with rugby union in 1895 revolved around a north-south axis, such that league became part of both a gritty working-class culture and a more nebulous sense of 'Northern Identity', well described by Jeff Hill and Jack Williams as 'much a state of mind as a place'.³ A recent issue of a London rugby league fanzine, itself an apparent contradiction in terms, casts a sardonic eye on perceptions of rugby league's heartland. 'The North' is projected as

a wild sexy place where strange sports are invented and played by the flat cap wearing-hordes who consume barm cakes and those Wigan mintballs that 'keep you all aglow'. They smoke, drink and swear too much and live in terraced houses with a loft for their pigeons and a kennel for the whippet.⁴

My argument here is that strong bonds were established between Yorkshire and Lancashire, and parts of Cumbria, via rugby league, to the two antipodean rugby league states, New South Wales and Queensland, and especially to regional centres like Newcastle. Even more than that, the 'Yorkshireness' of Australia may help to explain the rather eccentric adoption of the thirteen-a-side code of rugby, about how and why the game put down such solid roots.

In this respect my paper might be seen as a mild rebuke to the historians of Australian immigration who rarely pause to examine regional variations in England, and the differing input, demographic and cultural, of immigrants from the various counties of England. Unthinkable it applied to the Scottish or the Irish, there is a strong tendency to treat England and English migrants as a monolith.⁵

In terms of sports history my paper sets out to examine the extent to which the recent reinterpretation provided by a new book about the origins of rugby league in northern England may help us to understand the start of rugby league in Australia. This is Tony Collins' *Rugby's Great Split. Class, Culture and the Origins of Rugby League Football.*⁶ I hope, too, that this exercise might shed light on one of the more difficult questions of football history. This is why did the workers of New South Wales and Queensland, replicate the rugby league schism which developed in the north of England, when their counterparts elsewhere, in Scotland, Ireland, Wales and

New Zealand and so on, did not, instead remaining true to rugby union? Clearly this is a complex matter. Perhaps, by way of an opening apology, I should point out that what follows is more a preliminary report than a final statement of research findings.

Because the argument has a few twists and turns, it is probably useful to introduce my talisman — the allusion in the title of my paper: 'Jimmy Devereux's Yorkshire pudding'. Jim Devereux was a foundation player with the North Sydney District RLFC, a diminutive but brilliant centre three quarter renown for his fancy stepping, born and bred in Crows Nest of Irish immigrant parents and one of the four great local legends that the club produced in its history, now, it seems, sadly a term that can be used in the past tense. A member of the first Kangaroo tour and the first Australian to score a try in rugby league against Great Britain, his skills probably exceeded those of 'Dally' Messenger. The manufacture and transmission of legends, however, embraces issues of power and hegemony. The Eastern Suburbs club and the Messenger family were able to stake Messenger's claim more energetically and with greater effect, such that Messenger's name is still commemorated by News Limited and Devereux is largely forgotten.8

Because of rugby league Jim Devereux became part of two communities, one a working-class maritime district in North Sydney, the other a much more heavily industrialised port and maritime city in East Yorkshire, Hull. At the conclusion of the first Kangaroo tour, when the promoter J. J. Giltinan ran out of money and some of the Australian tourists had to stay on in England, literally to pay for their passage home, Devereux turned out in black and white for Hull. On Humberside he was again a great success. In his first season he scored 21 tries. When he retired Devereux had scored 101 tries and four goals in 181 games for Hull.⁹ Eighty years later he remained enshrined in folk memory, alongside the remarkable Billy Batten, as a member of Hull's great 1913-14 cup-winning team. 10

Throughout the 1910s Devereux enjoyed or endured a peripatetic life style, sometimes playing for Hull, other seasons for North Sydney. (The length of time of the sea voyage precluded doing both simultaneously, as would later be common when the English rugby league competition was conducted in the Australian summer.) Sadly, when he reestablished himself back in North Sydney in 1921, from halfback Duncan Thompson to winger Harold Horder, the Shoremen boasted the best club back line in the history of rugby league. So even though he had been a central part of Hull's championship winning teams of 1920-21, Devereux had to play reserve grade for Norths.



The north of England and Hull remained special for Devereux. On 17 August 1918 he married Daisy Heath, a local Hull girl who returned with him to Australia. With other Australians, Sid Deane, Andy Morton and Dinny Campbell, he remembered his days in Hull with great affection. Visiting British rugby league tours occasioned hearty reunions of past and present Hull players. When Harold Bowman visited Australia in 1924 he reported attending 'the long awaited meeting of Hull's former Aussie players' the day after the tourists had defeated New South Wales. The dinner went for five and a half hours and '(a)ll the Australians asked to be remembered to the friends they had made in Hull during their time in England'. Later Bowman spent the day relaxing with Jimmy Devereux at

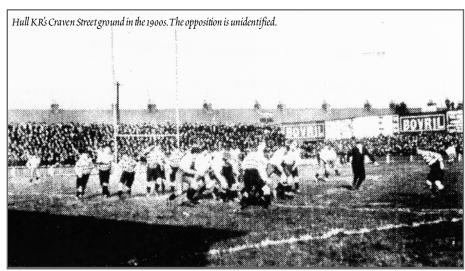
his house. The menu for dinner was perhaps unsurprising given Daisy Devereux's origins — it was Yorkshire Pudding.¹²

In some ways England was kinder to Jim Devereux than his own country. After an unsuccessful period coaching North Sydney, he lost a leg while working at the Milsons Point fabrication sheds as part of the construction of the Sydney Harbour Bridge. During the Depression he fell on hard times and had to be supported by the North Sydney football club. At a rather indeterminate time in the mid-1930s he returned to England, where he died. Here it is my purpose to follow Jimmy Devereux's fancy steps, to see what we can learn about rugby league's origins in England, and in particular to see what insights can be gleaned from the research of another boy from Hull, Dr Tony Collins.

A more comprehensive account of an argument introduced in several important articles, ¹⁴ Tony Collins' recent book, *Rugby's Great Split* is a cautionary tale to all who thought they understood the split which later took place in New South Wales and Queensland between rugby league and rugby union. Collins revisits the so-called 'big bang' theory of rugby league's gestation in Northern England, the mythical, perhaps mythological account of the famous meeting at the George Hotel in Huddersfield in 1895. According to one romantic version of events the split revolved around noble workers standing up for their rights. Demanding 'broken time' and injury compensation payments, the rugby league split was part of a broader challenge by the great and powerful British labour movement to demand industrial democracy at play as well as at work, a gesture towards making the world a fairer place. If it were a film, at this point violins would be playing and the Huddersfield pioneers would be marching off into the sunset with steely resolve and determined jaws.

This is the way we might like to remember the rugby split in 1895; unfortunately it is not true. Dr Collins shows us that rather than being a brave challenge from below, the rugby league split in England was more a preemptive strike from above. It was the culmination of a long campaign by members of the British Rugby Union hierarchy to rid themselves of the pesky workers from the north who had increasingly taken over their game. The George Hotel meeting was, therefore, less a strike by the workers than a response to a lockout. There was no sudden determination to introduce 'payment' or 'broken time payment'. The Rugby Football Union brought on the dispute, behaved like bullies, conducted purges of waverers, and effectively challenged the northerners to respond. Ultimately they did, epitomised by the George Hotel meeting, though the stand quickly proved a Pyhrric victory. In England, the early 1900s saw the ineluctable rise in the fortunes of soccer. Rugby league was marginalised to a few industrial towns in the Manchester concubation. Leeds and the West Yorkshire coal fields, a narrow corridor of support now defined by the M62 motor way. I am reminded that Claude Greengrass, that loveable roque of television's Heartbeat, periodically acts as a scout for the Wigan Rugby League Club, while the green, enchanting expanses of the Yorkshire dales and moors remain solid rugby union and Range Rover territory.

Given the problems Dr Collins has numerated in the legends that surrounded the George Hotel meeting, it is disconcerting, therefore, to note the existence of a parallel and similarly unchallenged mantra about the origins of rugby league in Australia. This unites the cadres of the New South Wales Rugby League when they first commemorated the feats of the game's



Dr Andrew Moore: Jimmy Devereux's Yorkshire Pudding...



. Hull KR v Hull at Hull KR's Craven Street ground, 22.3.1902.Hull won this second round Challenge Cup tie 10-5

pioneers,¹⁵ through to more contemporary News Limited propaganda which venerates the game's traditions while simultaneously destroying them.¹⁶ The orthodox view also embraces distinctly reputable sources such as the New South Wales Rugby League's official historian, 'Associate Professor' Ian Heads,¹⁷ as well as academic scholars of the calibre of Chris Cunneen, Murray Phillips and George Parsons.¹⁸

This oft-told story begins with the impending visit to Australia from New Zealand of A. H. Baskerville's so-called 'All Golds' in 1907, on their way to play in northern England, looking for someone to play. It meanders through a series of sepia images of candle light secret meetings in Victor Trumper Sports Store and the founding meeting of the New South Wales Rugby League at Bateman's Crystal Hotel, on the cold and windy night of 8 August 1907. The injury suffered by Glebe rugby union player, Alex Burdon, so grievously ignored by the rugby union hierarchy provided an 'emotional push towards establishing the new game'. While spending a large amount of money on their ground in Forest Lodge, it was clear that these bosses did not give a fig about the rank and file. So, prompted by entrepreneurial types

like Giltinan, the brave workers stood up for themselves, seized the initiative and formed the New South Wales Rugby League.

In all of these accounts there is no suggestion of a lockout by the elite. No one of course pretended that the process was easy. In 1958 S. G. Ball, one pioneer and then chairman of the League's management committee recalled 'that the Pioneers started the game going ... in the face of the strongest possible opposition'. Yet, by and large the rugby league split is cast as a heroic response by the battlers, albeit a politically muted one, to the 'tyrannies of the Establishment'. Comparisons were drawn with the achievement of the Eight Hour Day. The formation of a 'professional' rugby code, paying players for time lost while training or playing, and compensating them for injury, was part of a project for promoting 'humanitarianism' and 'democracy' in sport.21 While working men had increasingly dominated rugby union from the 1880s, and the sense of exclusion from above that directed events at Huddersfield was echoed in some sports in Australia — rowing for instance²² — there was little indication that the Australian rugger fraternity was keen to see the proletarians go, as were their British counterparts. More than likely the oft-cited remarks of one astute observer. H. M. Moran, a rugby union player at Sydney University, reflect the establishment's dismay at losing much of the strength and vitality from their game. Moran lamented:

For the students of Sydney University the establishment of professionalism in sport meant serious loss. In my time the undergraduates were in danger of all being stamped into a single mould. They were being given one uniform pattern in their prejudices and preferences. Sport provided an extramural course in a totally different discipline. We tussled with factory hands and firemen, with miners, wharf-labourers and carters. These players might have rougher manners, but in many of the elementary virtues of life they were our superiors. Above all they had a hard edge to their characters, and a robuster humour. By contact with them we gained immeasurably more than they. When professionalism came, University players were shut out from friendships with men in ranks called lower and their education suffered by it. Whatever polite scholarship they might possess they now were sentenced to be weaker in humanity.²³

Tony Collins' book deserves its considerable reputation, freely bestowed at the scholarly end of the Australian rugby league spectrum, but it is less helpful in explaining the basis of rugby league's antipodean popularity. Collins argues: 'Given the lower levels of social deference and the ostensibly more democratic norms of Australian society (at least for whites), it was clear that the imposition of the amateur ethos could not last'. ²⁴ Elsewhere he writes 'In Australia, the social strictures of amateurism were largely incompatible with the organisation of daily life ... ²⁵

Both assertions are debatable, especially the second. While class distinctions were less underpinned with caste-like rigidity, both claims smack of a 'Godzone' workers paradise ideology of early twentieth century Australia which few historians would now share. 26 Nonetheless, it is probably true that the strong roots established by rugby league in New South Wales and Queensland are partly attributable to the game's links with a powerful labour movement.²⁷ In world terms it was unusual for rugby league to share its major venue with the game more loved by the establishment, cricket, but this happened in Sydney as well as in Leeds. Rugby union became the minority game, retreating to the suburbs of the wealthy, a rite of passage for private school boys on their way to careers in business or the professions. Thus, for much of the twentieth century, for most people engaged in the popular culture of Australia's most populous city, Sydney, as well as in Brisbane and their related rural hinterlands, the word 'football' meant rugby league, a feat never accomplished even in Northern England. The game shaped sporting culture and community life. Its clubs created tribal loyalties. All of this is, of course, now very ancient history in the brave new world of franchises, moveable assets and merged identities.

The English sources do provide us with insights about the establishment of rugby league in New South Wales. It is instructive, for instance, to note that the standard bearer of the news of professional rugby's establishment in New South Wales was not J. J. Giltinan, but the Wellington postal worker, A. H. Baskerville. Published in the *Yorkshire Post* on 24 September 1907, a letter from Baskerville informed Joe Platt of the Northern Union that the formation of rugby league in Sydney had been a 'great sensation'. The intention is not to pay actual wages', Baskerville wrote, 'but to pay for broken time, to pay all ... out of pocket expenses when away from home, and to provide an ample insurance scheme in case of accident'. Players connected with the rebel league who had been threatened with a 'loss of billet' would be looked after. Already, Baskerville claimed that 'Most of the footballers in Bathurst are in sympathy with the professional movement in Sydney'. Baskerville conceded that rather than splitting with the New South Wales Rugby Union, many footballers would prefer that it changed its policies.

On 2 October 1907 the *Yorkshire Post* published a letter from Giltinan to Platt, announcing the general intention to form the breakaway rugby league.

Apart from requesting the despatch of 50 rule books and instructions Giltinan tentatively broached the prospect of international connections. 'Perhaps it is a bit premature to ask you to invite our League to play your Union a series of matches in your country', Giltinan tentatively wrote, but 'this would assist League in NSW'.²⁸

Among other things this suggests that the ill-fated Baskerville was even more significant than hitherto has been allowed. The reference to Bathurst — a railway town and rural service centre in the central west of New South Wales — as a cradle of rugby league is curious.²⁹ Nonetheless, and despite a long tradition of 'shamateurism' in Australian rugby union, perhaps in the final resort such evidence does not upturn the traditional understanding of rugby league's origins in Australia. As time went on rugby union's cadres were increasingly unwilling to put rugby's Humpty Dumpty back together again, but they did not induce the split of 1907-08. By and large, the antipodean split should remain cast as a strike by the workers rather than a lockout by the bosses. Moreover, the Australian split seems to have taken place in more or less complete isolation from events in England, neither anticipated nor brought on by the Northern Union and indeed taking them by surprise. As Tony Collins writes: 'One can only imagine the reaction of the marginalised and embattled Northern Union to the events which were unfolding around the world. Much to their surprise, they now found themselves at the head of a worldwide rugby revolution'.30

Here I need to return to Jimmy Devereux's Yorkshire pudding and in the process raise a further dimension — perhaps more of a tentative hypothesis — about traditional explanations as to why and how rugby league became so entrenched in the eastern states of Australia. This focusses on the strong bonds between 'Northern Identity' and the labourist world view of Australian workers, the commonalties of experience and ties of kinship which existed with Yorkshire and Lancashire in particular. One eminent rugby league and labour person, Dr H. V. Evatt, understood this when, as Australian Minister for External Affairs, he diverted to Leeds in 1945 to canvass support for the immediate recommencement of 'intercolonial' rugby league Test matches between Britain and Australia. Evatt knew that the return to post-war normalcy in diplomatic affairs would be hastened by reviving international rugby league contests. An historian of note, Evatt also understood that the histories of the former colonies were inextricably tied to the north of England, in part by rugby league. Indeed the minutes of the Rugby Football League specifically recorded that '(t)he close relationships that have been built up between Australia and N.Z. and the North of England is in the nature of a history, and the building of this history ought to be resumed as soon as possible in the best interests of Rugby League Football, and of the Empire'. 31

Pigskin was of course only one medium of this cultural exchange, at whose economic base was the wool industry. Since the days of John Macarthur, the Australian colonies had been part of an international division of labour whereby the Australian colonies provided wool to Yorkshire's textile mills. The Lord Mayor of Bradford, J. E. Fawcett, articulated this well when, in October 1908, he welcomed the first Kangaroo tourists to his city. Apart from expressing 'his pleasure at meeting such a fine lot of colonials', Lord Mayor Fawcett alluded to the long history of interaction between Bradford and Australia via the wool trade.³²

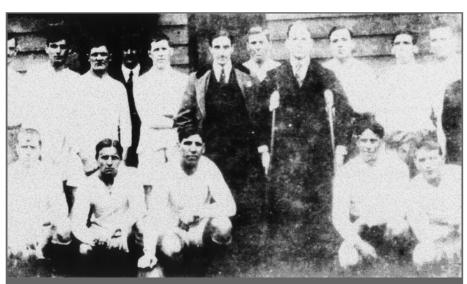
While most historians would acknowledge the importance of British models to Australian sport, none have ventured further into the complicated terrain of regional variations and their differing input. A similar lacunae exists in studies of Australian immigration. Only James Jupp's *The Australian People*, easily one of the most useful books ever published about Australia, alerts readers to the rich tapestry of regional variations within England which shaped the experience of immigration. The cultural specificities of Yorkshire, Lancashire, and the north of England generally influenced Australian society considerably. The two most obvious forms of cultural inheritance were fish and chips (reputedly invented in Oldham, Lancashire in 1861, temporarily discredited as a cultural form in Australia because of an association with Pauline Hanson) and rugby league.³³

In Australia the Irish are rightfully regarded as a founding and forming people. But the same holds true for northerners. After all, that farm boy from Great Avton and denizen of Whitby, Yorkshire, James Cook, the navigator and mariner, carved out a considerable niche for himself in relation to Australia in 1770 and 1772. Because it was the northern textile towns that experienced the full force of the traumatic level of disruption associated with the Industrial Revolution, the antipodean convicts contained a strong northern component, none more so than the First Fleet.³⁴ Yorkshiremen participated in the full spectrum of activities in early colonial New South Wales. The Methodist religious revival of the 1760s, which swept through places like Farsley, Yorkshire played a formative role in shaping the demons which exercised the mind of the Reverend Samuel Marsden, sectarian bigot, magistrate at Parramatta and congenital hater of the Irish. Conversely, numbered among the Irish rebels who stormed the antipodean Bastille at Castle Hill in March 1804 was a Yorkshireman, John Place, who had, hitherto, evinced no background of interest in republicanism or political militancy.³⁵

In a more respectable vein, the pages of the *Australian Dictionary of Biography (ADB)* are strewn with northerners, eloquent testimony as to their manifest contributions in many spheres of activities, in business especially,

but also in the professions, the arts and politics. Thus the early premier of New South Wales, 'Slippery Charlie' Cowper was from Lancashire. Australia's largest wool broking business, Goldsbrough Mort, linked for more than a century to Bradford, resulted from the collaboration of two Northerners, Thomas Mort from Bolton, Lancashire, and Richard Goldsbrough from near Bradford, Yorkshire. In the first twelve volumes of the ADB while those from Middlesex and London are the largest group of the English born (at 197 and 375 respectively), next highest are those born in Yorkshire (150) and Lancashire (135), while Cumberland's 31 is on a par with counties like Derbyshire.³⁶

Most relevant to this inquiry about the social origins of rugby league in New South Wales and Queensland are the waves of assisted migration which took place after 1875, ended abruptly by the 1890s Depression. Between 1876 and 1879 Northerners made up over 18 per cent of assisted migrants to Queensland. They included 859 from Lancashire and 819 from Durham, the largest totals for any county of origin in Britain or Ireland. Especially dramatic was the assisted migration of 10,524 Northerners to New South Wales between 1877 and 1887. These included 3379 from Yorkshire, and 2528 from Lancashire. Because of the downturn in local industry, a size-



East Riding v West Riding invitation match in aid of Steve Darmo dy (who had a foot blown off in Flanders), the Boulevard, 6.6.1916

Darmody is the one on crutches and the palyer on his right is Harold Wagstaff. Australian sprinter Jack Donaldson is next to Wagstaff. Billy Batten is crouching in front of Donaldson; to his right is Jonty Parkin and on Batten's left is former Easts player Albert Rosenfeld. Wagstaff, Batten, Parkin and Rosenfeld were all foundation members of the RFL Hall of Fame.



Hull's 1921 Championship-winning side — Jimmy Devereux is sitting on the bench, fourth from our right next to the Championship Trophy

able proportion of these migrants were coal miners and indeed many were bound for Newcastle where the coal industry was expanding. Mass emigration from Yorkshire, Lancashire and Durham was at its peak in Queensland between 1883 and 1885.³⁷

Of the political impresse of this pattern of emigration Dr Jupp concludes: 'It can hardly be coincidental that these large migrations from northern England were followed immediately by the formation of strong Labor parties in the two colonies most effected'. 38 Prominent northern socialists who made their mark in New South Wales included Percy Brookfield, the legendary leader of the Broken Hill miners³⁹ and John Simpson Kirkpatrick, more widely remembered as the homeric ambulance man of the First World War, than for his commitment to class-war politics.⁴⁰ By 1891 nine of the ALP MP's elected to parliament in New South Wales hailed from the North of England. One of Australia's more notorious 'Red Csars' of the Cold War period, trade union leader Ernie Thornton of the Federated Ironworkers' Association (FIA), was born in rugby league's English birthplace, Huddersfield,⁴¹ while at the other end of the scale of political radicalism within the FIA, John Ducker, that archetypal New South Wales ALP 'numbers man', emigrated from Hull with his parents aged eighteen.⁴² Rugby league centres such as Bradford where the Independent Labour Party was formed in 1893, or Fetherstone, the focus of the 1893 miners' strike where two miners were shot dead and sixteen more wounded, behaved very similarly to epicentres of labour militancy in New South Wales and Queensland. Such places as Balmain, the working-class suburb where the first branch of the ALP was formed in 1891, and Newcastle, in the 1890s a citadel of Australian anarchism and free thought, proved to be important rugby league centres. 43

In particular, Newcastle became the apogee of an antipodean city created in the north of England mould, similar in its transplanted 'Northern Identity' to the uprooted 'Irishness' so evident in places like Yass-Galong, on the southern highlands of New South Wales, or Koroit in Victoria. ⁴⁴ As a result in Newcastle, not only was Methodism pronounced, but the city repeated the English trope associated with the North-South divide. Historian Nancy Cushing reports that even the meagre distance separating Sydney and Newcastle (60 nautical miles north) allowed the 'perceived cultural, economic and social divide between north and south in England to be replicated'. Cushing claims:

In Great Britain, the northern metaphor stands for pragmatism, empiricism, calculation and puritanism while the Southern metaphor suggests romanticism, Anglicanism, aristocracy and belief in superior nature rather than superior effort. In New South Wales, the northern metaphor was applied to Newcastle while the southern metaphor was appropriated by Sydney. Newcastle became a separate place, the gateway to the north of the coalfields, the 'Land of the Working Class' and peripherality, while Sydney was further entrenched as the new London, the metropolis and the centre. ⁴⁵

Such distinctions were reinforced by patterns of popular culture in Newcastle. In the 1880s, for instance, rather than following Sydney's taste for rugby union, Australian Rules was the dominant football code in the regional city. As Ellen McEwen points out, in part this reflected patterns of internal migration within Australia whereby miners from Victoria had relocated to Newcastle, bringing their football allegiances with them. Also, given that the friendly societies that criss-crossed the Hunter would not pay compensation for injuries sustained while playing sport and miners had to be hail and hearty in order to work, the clear preference of wage labourers was for a safer game of football. The same imperative assisted soccer's rise to popularity in Newcastle in the 1890s.⁴⁶

In essence, here was a community on hold — waiting for a safer version of rugby — one that eschewed the dangerous practice of the maul and which incorporated an injured players fund, to emerge. As with soccer, for Newcastle, rugby league became, in common with pigeon racing, brass

bands, cheap housing, co-operative movements and traditions of labour militancy and industrial unrest, an expression of cultural links with the North of England. Local factors also shaped the emergence of 'professional' rugby. In Newcastle rugby league was formed in the maelstrom of events surrounding the so-called 1909 Peter Bowling strike on the Hunter River coal fields. Many coal mine owners were evidently connected with rugby union, and this reputedly assisted the cause of rugby league among Novocastrians, such that it was regarded as 'anti-union to even fraternise with the ruaby union players'. Newcastle competed successfully in the foundation year of the New South Wales premiership, despite not having a home ground and competing each weekend in Sydney, thus facing an overnight boat trip or 200 mile return rail journey. In 1909 a home and away system was introduced while officials attempted to secure a local ground. The first game of rugby league thus took place in Newcastle on 22 May 1909 on Broadmeadow Showground. A gala occasion against Easts, it featured a strategic double billing — a game of soccer was a warm-up. By 1910 the problem of distance caused Newcastle to withdraw from the Sydney competition and focus on an internal Hunter Valley competition. In 1911 a Northern Branch of the New South Wales Rugby League was established. Local newspaper reports tended to refer to the game as 'Northern Union'. Despite internal ructions which created a breakaway group in 1917 — appropriately enough dubbed the Bolsheviks — the Novocastrians gradually succeeded where the Northerners in England did not. They took King Soccer on — and won 47

It was not so much that every acolyte of antipodean rugby league spoke with the broad vowels of a transplanted Yorkshireman or Geordie. Indeed, some like John Fihelly, who played rugby union for Queensland and Australia before converting to the cause of rugby league in Queensland, spoke with an Irish brogue. Ecrtainly many of Irish-Catholic background played the game because of rugby league's class milieu. Perhaps the crowning moment in establishing rugby league's hegemony over rugby union came in 1926 when Marist Brothers announced their affiliation with the 'people's game'.

Though neither was in any way associated with the establishment of rugby league in England, it seems likely that many followed the trajectory of immigrants like Charles H. Ford and Harry 'Jersey' Flegg. Aged nineteen the former had emigrated to Australia in 1888 from Middlesborough, Yorkshire. In his youth Ford had played soccer. Finding himself in North Sydney in 1891, he played rugby union for the Pirates. When the 'professional' code began, Ford was quickly involved. A tall and burly figure with a bushy mustache, he was North Sydney's representative at the secret 1907 meeting at Victor

Trumper's sports store. Employed as a harbour ferry master he became a pivotal figure within the North Sydney club and the New South Wales Rugby League itself. Ford successfully organised a tour of Maori footballers in 1909. In the same year he became a vice-president of the New South Wales Rugby League and chairman of its management committee, helping to stave off an internal faction fight whose public ramifications threatened to destroy the credibility of the League. In 1911 he was appointed manager of the second Kangaroo touring team, presumably because of his administrative acumen, but perhaps also for his local knowledge of the North. No doubt Ford relished revisiting the places of his youth, but by and large, he was not in the habit of keeping in touch with home. In 1921 his distressed mother travelled from Middlesbrough to Harrogate where the Kangaroo team was staying. She hoped to elicit any news of her son's welfare. The Yorkshire Evenina Standard reported that Ford was reputedly then a government official, working at a place called 'Cambara' (sid, apparently the future site of the federal capital but which was 'yet to be built'. The colonies, it seemed, were remarkably fragile places.⁵⁰

'Jersey' Fleag's experience was comparable. Born in Bradford on 6 April 1878, Flegg emigrated with his family, aged six.⁵¹ One of Easts founding players and activists, indeed the very individual who booked the Paddington Town Hall for the club's foundation meeting, as well as president of the New South Wales Rugby League from 1929-60, Flegg derived his nickname from a chance meeting with the New South Wales governor Lord Jersey as a school boy at Plunkett Street, Woolloomooloo.⁵² Flegg quickly discarded any residual element of deference and eschewed the gruff egalitarianism more commonly associated with Australian social life and ruaby league, featuring in a famous exchange later on in life with another English lord. So the story goes W. J. McKell, the former Labor premier, governor general and patron of the New South Wales Rugby Legaue, once introduced the visiting Lord McDonald to Flegg. Not hearing correctly, Flegg greeted the English visitor, 'G'day Claude'. McKell corrected him: 'No Jerse, it's Lord, not Claude'. Without breaking stride Flegg reforted: 'We don't go with that bull — here. This is Australia '53

If the migration of individuals like Charles Ford and Harry Flegg perhaps assisted rugby league's ready acceptance in eastern Australia, local variables also influenced outcomes in relation to the parent body of rugby union. In New South Wales, as with northern England, social forces were influential. As the Marxist economic historian George Parsons argues: 'Class consciousness produced rugby league' when 'a conjuncture of historical forces ... reached its critical mass in 1907'. ⁵⁴ As a cultural phenomenon rugby league emerged from a period when the working class was recov-

ering from the defeats of the 1890s and reasserting itself industrially and politically. The debate about professionalism in sport was part of this broader working class challenge, a contribution to the project of civilising capitalism, as was the taking of the parliamentary road in the formation of the ALP. Apart from reflecting assertiveness and legitimate industrial relations concerns, the demand for 'broken time' and injury compensation payments, also expressed the growing self-confidence of the working class movement. This was also manifested in patterns of housing, consumption and general patterns of popular recreation, and given great impetus by the famous 1907 Harvester Judgement by Mr Justice Higgins about the need for a 'living wage'. In short the working people who were part of the football intrigues of 1907-08 were entitled to think that history was on their side.

Elsewhere the circumstances were less propitious for a change in football allegiance. In New Zealand A. H. Baskerville's 'Professionals' met a determined if sometimes inept response from the rugby union hierarchy who nonetheless had already appropriated the mantle of New Zealand nationalism — or more specifically imperial patriotism — for their game. 55 In Wales rugby union had also become an expression of Welsh nationalism and was seen as 'the national game' while a degree of 'professionalism' was tolerated in order to accommodate working men.⁵⁶ In Scotland, by the time the split between rugby league and rugby union became an issue, soccer was already established as the game of the working class. The middle-class administrators of rugby union were delighted that this was so. In France, rugby league's subordinate status in relation to rugby union was largely conditioned by events from a subsequent period — the Vichy government's war-time collaboration with both the Nazis and the Rugby Union hierarchy — together with a subsequent Cold War campaign which equated rugby league with the menace of international socialism.⁵⁷

As Jacqueline Dwyer's study of the Flanders region in northern France illustrates, ties of blood and commerce could create strong and enduring relationships between region and nation. Relations between Australia and northern England, too, were mediated by a shared sense of sporting identity with the North, through business interconnections and by the common blood sacrifice that took place at Gallipoli, with proud Northern England regiments like the Lancashire Fusiliers. Unsurprisingly the relationship was ambiguous. This was no mutual admiration society. The war historian, Dr Bean's dismissal of the fighting abilities of the British puny narrow-chested ... slum kids' was emphatic — and he may or may not have been referring to Londoners. Considering the ferocity of the so-called 'Rorke's Drift' Test in Melbourne played on the eve of the First World War, the working classes of both countries were able to fight on the one side.

By and large, however, the connections forged by sport and rugby league were more positive than negative. The northern 'Poms' were usually known locally as the 'Chooms', a parody of the Yorkshire accent, which perhaps held less approbation than the term 'Pom', though there remained, as with cricket, no doubt that the mother country had to be confronted and beaten. Both parties were complicit in sustaining the fiction that Australia (or rather two States) was confronting England (three counties). Following in Jimmy Devereux's footsteps, rugby league and the interaction between clubs and players created *de facto* citizens of two countries.⁶² and a sense of easy familiarity in eastern Australia with names like Wigan, Castleford and Hull. On the northern peninsula of Sydney one boy from Preston, Yorkshire, Malcolm Reilly, is remembered as fondly as any local, with the possible exception of the Warrington-born Bob ('Bozo') Fulton. When Reilly assumed his coaching duties with the Newcastle Knights he 'thought of how alike Newcastle was to some of the Yorkshire towns I knew, where the closing of mines and factories had snuffed out jobs and hope and changed these places forever'. 63 The Knights' 1997 premiership, spearheaded by two sons of a coal miner and strong trade unionist, was a real life version of 'Brassed Off'

Indeed, perhaps my argument is partly one about responses to accents, a subjective issue but real enough. Commentator Eddie Waring's broad Yorkshire accent is a treasured icon of my sporting youth. Briefly in the late 1960s, because the BBC had television rights to rugby league, British games were sometimes shown on the ABC. Monochrome and granular, my father and I were avid viewers. This coincided with Arthur Beetson's brief stint with Hull Kingston Rovers. Dad and I would repeat Eddie Waring's protracted rendition of big Arthur's surname — Bee-ee-ee-tson — to our hearts' content. In the Australian scheme of things the cultivated Southern English accent may seem like 'putting on the dog', false and pretentious. The Yorkshire accent on the other hand is welcome because it imparts more warmth, frankness and sincerity. Certainly, through police dramas and soaps, Australians are bombarded with Yorkshire accents on their television screens. I am reliably informed, by Tony Collins, that Leeds became the major call centre capital for England in part because polling showed a general trust in the Yorkshire accent, and partly because Yorkshire people are reputedly famous for their frugality and financial 'commonsense'.

Listening to Dave Russel speak at rugby league's centenary conference at the University of Huddersfield in 1995, it seemed that there was something very familiar about the attributes of the 'typical' Yorkshireman. Among other things this person was evidently 'blunt-brusque', 'sport-loving', 'egalitarian/meritocratic/useful', 'hard-working', 'independent', 'phlegmatic' and 'a

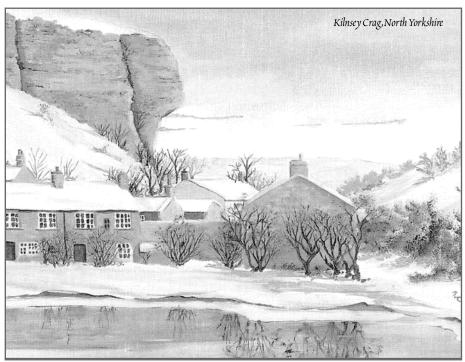
"race apart"/separate/distinctive'.⁶⁴ Comparisons with Russel Ward's mythic Australian character, invoked in his landmark book *The Australian Legend*, came quickly to mind. The 'Yorkshire Legend' shared many attributes with Professor Ward's bush democrats, anti-authoritarian, independent, hospitable, stoic and sardonic.⁶⁵

Over the years Ward's generalisations have been subject to vigorous reinterpretation, but if it is indeed true that Australians are 'knockers' of eminent people, 'unless, as in the case of ... sporting heroes, they are distinguished by physical prowess', 66 rugby league must surely have been an important conduit. Adrian McGregor is right when he refers to an 'intangible bond' created by the 'international brotherhood of rugby league'. 67 Rooted in a shared sense of historical memory and common values, remote from the rarefied circles of the London elite, in the final resort a shared allegiance to rugby league reflected the commonalties and the rich historical associations between the working-class cultures of Northern England and eastern Australia.

Endnotes

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- ⁴ London Calling: The Independent London Broncos Fanzine, 32, Mar. 1999, p. 9.
- See, for instance, Michael Roe, Australia, Britain and Migration 1915-1940, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 1995.
- ⁶ Tony Collins, Rugby's Great Split: Class, Culture and the Origins of Rugby League Football, Frank Cass, London, 1998.
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- See Andrew Moore, The Mighty Bears! A Social History of North Sydney Rugby League, Pan Macmillan, Sydney, 1996, pp. 25-6; unless acknowledged separately references to Devereux are drawn from this source.
- ⁹ Dave Hadfield, *Playing Away: Australians in British Rugby League*, Kingswood Press, London, 1992, p. 6.
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- ¹¹ For details of Jim Devereux's marriage to Daisy Elizabeth Heath, daughter of George Heath at Hull I am grateful to George Franki, who uncovered this and other family information pertaining to Devereux in the Baptismal Register of St Mary's Church, Ridge Street, North Sydney.
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- See Max Solling, The Boatshed on Blackwattle Bay, Glebe Rowing Club, Sydney, 1993, pp. 19, 26 for disputes in the rowing fraternity.
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- ²⁵ Collins, Rugby's Great Split, p. 224.
- ²⁶ See, for instance, Ken Buckley and Ted Wheelwright, No Paradise for Workers: Capitalism and the Common People in Australia 1788-1914, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1988, Chs 11-13.
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