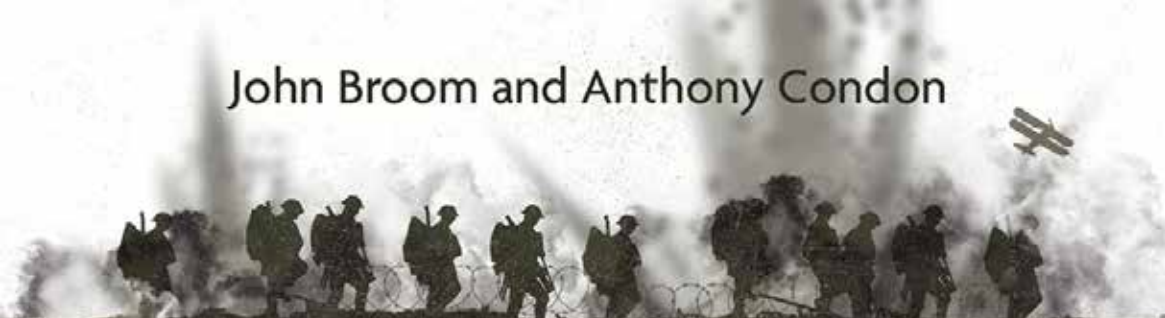


John Broom and Anthony Condon



FROM
DARKNESS
INTO
LIGHT



The War Heroes Who Helped
Save Cricket from Oblivion

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Chapter 1

LG Robinson's XI

Old Buckenham Hall, Attleborough on 14–16 May 1919

Result: Match drawn

THE FIRST match for the AIF XI was against LG Robinson's XI, played at Robinson's residence Old Buckenham Hall near Attleborough in Norfolk. This match provides a glimpse into an era that had already ended, even if those involved were unaware of it: country house cricket. Having a cricket field at one's country estate had become a status symbol, particularly through cricket's first big boom in the Victorian era. Originally part of the gambling side of cricket, where wealthy aristocrats would field two teams so they and their friends could have a bat and a punt, by the end of the 19th-century country house cricket had become

more about attracting the highest quality teams to your ground as a show of prestige and to host a prominent social event.

Lionel Robinson was born in Colombo, Ceylon, and educated at Scotch College, Melbourne. He initially tried his hand at a career in the public service, but found his temperament unsuited to government work and decided to give stockbroking a go. He was the right man in the right place at the right time. He had huge success during the mining boom of the 1880s and by the age of 22 had a seat on the Melbourne Stock Exchange. He found further business success in the Kalgoorlie mining boom of the 1890s, on the back of which he moved his base of operations to London, bought the estate at Old Buckenham Hall in 1906, and set about becoming a country gentleman.

One of Robinson's passions was his cricket field, said to be 'one of the finest in England', with a pitch made from imported Australian soil. And he set about scheduling games to match his social aspirations. His first major coup was getting the rights to host South Africa during one of their warm-up matches for the Triangular Tour in 1912. Old Buckenham Hall hosted several first-class fixtures in 1912–14 as Robinson set

about making his case to host big contests, particularly hoping to get a match featuring the Australians when they made Ashes tours. The match against the AIF XI was part of his attempt to secure the opening spot on Australian tours, and he was determined to demonstrate the highest levels of hospitality. In doing so, Robinson was trying to bring semi-regular first-class cricket to a corner of England which had hitherto been unable to field teams in the County Championship. Norfolk, as well as the neighbouring counties of Cambridgeshire and Suffolk, were restricted to Minor County matches only.

The side for the AIF 'XI' – this was a 12-a-side match – was largely as it was to be for most of the tour, with the notable exception of Hampden Love. Despite this being his sole appearance for the AIF XI, his story holds some interesting features that tell us more about the AIF XI and cricket in the inter-war period.

Hammy Love was a wicketkeeper; however, he was not selected as such in this match in favour of the proven Ed Long, himself eventually replaced as wicketkeeper when Bert Oldfield made the position his own later in the tour. This would be a common refrain for Love, as Oldfield would also frustrate his efforts to play in the New South Wales side and Love spent

the 1922/23–1926/27 seasons keeping for Victoria. His sole Test match appearance came in the fourth Test of the infamous 1932/33 'Bodyline' Ashes series, where he replaced Oldfield after the latter famously suffered a head fracture from the bowling of Harold Larwood in the previous Test. Love's reason for not continuing on the tour was he wished to return home for family reasons. However, he stayed behind in England to take advantage of one of the many training courses the AIF were providing for soldiers awaiting repatriation. Love took the opportunity to take a course in mechanics, quite the change from his pre-war career as a clerk. He eventually left England in November – after the rest of the team – although his direct route back to Australia saw him returning home first. His quest to be in the side was not helped by his batting performance at Old Buckenham Hall as he found himself beaten by a Pegler googly for a duck in the first innings and was trapped lbw by Woolley for 2 in the second.

But for the rest of the cricketing world this match was the first taste of what this Australian side could offer; a 'full dress rehearsal' on an 'alfresco stage'. A 12-a-side affair highlighted the friendly nature of the match, but, a look at the 12 men on the team list of LG

Robinson's 'XI' shows it was far from low quality. The bulk of the side was taken from Kent's county team: Jack Hubble, Jack Bryan, Lionel Troughton, Gerald Hough, Eric Fulcher, Jack Mason, Frank Woolley and Wally Hardinge were joined by Johnny Douglas and future England Test player Alec Kennedy, as well as two of the South African standouts of the Triangular Tournament, Sid Pegler and Herbie Taylor.

The hosts won the toss and decided to bat in front of the small crowd made up of Robinson and his esteemed guests, workers from the estate, and neighbours from the nearby village of Old Buckenham. The weather was glorious and the Australian soil under the wicket was fast. Taylor and Hardinge opened the batting but were soon gone. Hough top-scored with 30 as the hosts fell for 147 on the first afternoon. Cyril Docker, who had played one Sheffield Shield match for New South Wales in 1909, began answering the question of whether Australia's bowling stocks could be replenished with five wickets for just 34 runs. In response the Australians mustered 227, largely thanks to Herbie Collins' top score of 87 – Australia's haunted number – while Pegler was the chief destroyer on the bowling side, taking 5-54.

Robinson's XI dominated the second day's play. Hardinge held up an end all morning before being run out on 72, while Troughton and Hough sought to set the Australians a target with a stubborn 124-run partnership for the seventh wicket, Hough ending the day on 87 not out. The home team declared overnight, setting the AIF 282 to chase on the third and final day. Half-centuries from Willis and Taylor helped push the Australians to 274 for the loss of nine wickets – just eight runs shy of victory. However, in the big scheme of the tour, and low stakes of the game, it was decided at this point that the most sporting finish to the match would be a draw so the players could retire to the main house to enjoy the social features of a country house match.

The result was also great promotion for the tour. LG Robinson's XI was far from a bunch of boys, old men and second-class cricketers. This was a match worthy of international cricket. Although Kelleway had disappointed, names largely unknown to cricket like Docker and Taylor were lighting the beacons of hope for a new generation, and young pre-war talents Willis and Collins had shown their time at war had not dented their nascent abilities.

Robinson's scheme to bring big cricket to Old Buckenham Hall was ultimately successful; Old Buckenham Hall hosted the second match of the 1921 Australian tour of the British Isles. Unfortunately for Robinson he died of cancer in 1922 before the Australians could visit again and the property became a boarding school until 1956. The ground fell away during this time but was restored in the 1990s and now regularly hosts Old Buckenham in the Norfolk Cricket Alliance. A war memorial installed by LG Robinson in 1919 is still maintained by the Lionel Robinson War Memorial Trust.