

**Foundation Narratives in Rowing, Cricket and Australian Rules**

**Football: Sport in Footscray 1859-1886**

**Darren Arthur**

**A thesis submitted for a Masters by Research degree at Victoria University**

**Institute for Health and Sport**

**Victoria University**

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## **Abstract**

How does a sporting club come to life? What and who are the drivers behind it and what are the forces that shape its development? This thesis examines the town of Footscray through the lens of three local sporting clubs during the period 1859–1886. The study attempts to answer the above questions and considers the reasons each entity came into prominence and what hindered their progress or allowed them to grow. The major focus of this thesis is the Footscray Football Club whose precise origins have not been formally identified, despite conjecture that the club was founded in 1883. Two other local sporting clubs are closely scrutinised, namely the first incarnations of the Footscray rowing and cricket clubs, whose histories have not been properly documented. The intertwined histories of these organisations will not only assist in providing wider contexts for understanding the birth of the local football club, but will, more broadly, illuminate the important role that sport plays in the building of local communities.

## **Declaration**

I, Darren Edwin Arthur, declare that the Masters by Research thesis entitled, “Foundation Narratives in Australian Rules Football: The Footscray Football Club and its Local Community 1859-1886” is no more than the required word length including quotes and exclusive of appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work.

**Signature:**

**Date:**

## Acknowledgements

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction: Australian Rules Football, Cricket and Rowing in Footscray

### 1.1 Overview

Ian Syson said it best when he called it the ‘Chimera of Origins’.<sup>1</sup> In an examination of the origins of Association football (soccer) in Australia before 1880, Syson, found that not only were held truths regarding the code’s origins (given as historical facts) unreliable to begin with, but that the actual game itself was even more clouded and confusing due to the similarities between football codes at the time. The various codes, rugby, Association football and Melbourne Rules (later, Victorian and Australian Rules football) were borne from English roots, creating some sort of ‘code chaos’, as to which game was being played, or what club played what game.<sup>2</sup> Syson’s article highlights the enormous task facing historians in deciphering fact from fiction. This becomes particularly pertinent when myths infiltrate the origins of prominent sports and are perpetuated down through the history of time as if they are a fabled truth.

Ultimately, as Syson has asked, how does one decipher fact from fiction in determining the true narrative of origin stories and is there such a thing as an origin story? Do origin stories come from an evolving set of events or circumstances having what could be deemed as merely turning points, effectively chosen by historians as the starting point for an origin story? In assessing the origins of Australian Rules football, Geoffrey Blainey found that historians are prone to look for a ‘simple theory’ such as a ‘dramatic event’ or

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<sup>1</sup> Ian Syson, ‘The “Chimera” of Origins: Association Football in Australia before 1880’, *International Journal of the History of Sport*, vol. 30, no. 5, 2013, pp. 453-68.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. For more on this subject see three articles from the same author Roy Hay, ‘The Codes Diverge: The Establishment of Victorian Football, Rugby and Soccer in Australia, 1860-1900’, *Soccer & Society*, vol. 19, no. 1, 2018, pp. 59-74; Roy Hay, ‘A Tale of Two Footballs: The Origins of Australian Football and Association Football Revisited’, *Sport and Society*, vol. 13, no. 6, 2010, pp. 952-969 and Roy Hay, ‘Football in Australia Before Codification, 1820-1860’, *International Journal of the History of Sport*, vol. 31, no. 9, 2014, pp. 1047-1061.

single defining moment that etches itself into origin folklore.<sup>3</sup> In reality though, there could be a range of influences and adaptations that combine as equally important reasons for the development or invention of a game, sport or club.

The constant quest for sporting origins led Tony Collins to devote an article to what he saw as the invention of sporting tradition. According to Collins, ‘these invented traditions acquired their power and resilience because they articulated the desires of each sport for special social significance.’<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, these invented traditions ‘play an important role in the business of sport’, often influencing the ‘shaping of sporting history and heritage.’<sup>5</sup> False truisms in the history of Australian Rules football, according to Gillian Hibbins, have long been accepted into what she calls, ‘the popular consciousness.’<sup>6</sup> Often these misleading truisms are handed down as fact, while conflicting and contradictory data is provided or even worse, missing, which is particularly so in the early explanations of these games or their origins in the mid-nineteenth century.

Trevor Ruddell found similar problems when investigating ‘the first game of Australian football’, noting that the origins and origin stories ‘often germinate slowly and evolve haphazardly.’<sup>7</sup> As Ruddell has shown, ‘the first game of football’ played between public schools, Scotch College and Melbourne Grammar in 1858, was actually not the first game, but rather preceded by other football games or forms of football in Melbourne, dating back to the 1840s.<sup>8</sup> The argument over the Indigenous origins of Australian Rules football concerning Indigenous influences on the game, recently brought to a head, are

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<sup>3</sup> Geoffrey Blainey, *A Game of Our Own: The Origins of Australian Football*, Black Inc.: Melbourne, 2010, p. 202.

<sup>4</sup> See Tony Collins, ‘The Invention of Sporting Tradition: National Myths, Imperial Pasts and the Origins of Australian Rules Football’, in Stephen Wagg (ed.), *Myths and Milestones in the History of Sport*, London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011, pp. 8-31. Tony Ward also discusses the validity of what he deems ‘creation stories’ in, ‘The Start of Australian Rules: Creation of a Dominant Sport’, *Sporting Traditions*, vol. 31, no. 1, 2014, pp. 17-34.

<sup>5</sup> Collins, ‘The Invention of Sporting Tradition’, pp. 25-26.

<sup>6</sup> Gillian Hibbins, ‘Myth and History in Australian Rules Football’, *Sporting Traditions*, vol. 25, no. 2, 2008, pp. 41-53.

<sup>7</sup> Trevor Ruddell, ‘An Origin Myth Engraved in Stone’: Scotch College, Melbourne Grammar and Australian Rules’, *Sporting Traditions*, vol. 33, no. 2, 2016, pp. 57-78.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 70-71. Ruddell notes that this was the ‘prevailing academic position’, citing, as examples, similar views held by noted academic and sports historians, Geoffrey Blainey, Rob Hess, Matthew Nicholson, Bob Stewart, Gregory de Moore and Tony Ward.

also mired in deep controversial debate.<sup>9</sup> Much of Australian Rules football's early origins – since the blowtorch of academic involvement – have been discredited, revised or turned on its head under the weight of scholarly research.<sup>10</sup> The origin conundrum does not stop at the game itself though. The published histories of Victorian and Australian Football League (VFL/AFL) clubs are littered with examples of questionable origins where no simple formation date exists or has been discovered.<sup>11</sup> The examples above only serve to show how convoluted and controversial the path can be. The main focus of this thesis, the Footscray Football Club, is proof of this.

Continuing search for the early evidence of the origins of the Footscray Football Club has led the author to take on this dissertation.<sup>12</sup> This task will be undertaken from a unique perspective. To understand the background to the origins of the Football Club, the social, leisure and sporting culture of the suburb during the time period covered by this thesis, 1859-1886, will be constructed. The starting point, the year 1859, represents the inauguration of Footscray as a municipality and the end point, 1886, as the year Footscray Football Club entered the Victorian Football Association (VFA).

To find out why and how the Footscray Football Club came into existence and survived when others did not, a broader consideration of the evolving landscape of football clubs and other relevant sports, such as cricket and rowing, in the Footscray area

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<sup>9</sup> For an example of this, see Gregory de Moore, 'Tom Wills, Marngrook and the Evolution of Australian Rules Football', in Rob Hess, Matthew Nicholson and Bob Stewart (eds), *Football Fever: Crossing Boundaries*, Melbourne: Maribyrnong Press, 2005, pp. 5-15. See also, Gillian Hibbins, 'Wills and the Aboriginal Game: "A Seductive Myth"', in James Weston (ed.), *The Australian Game of Football: Since 1858*, Melbourne: GSP Books, 2008, p. 45. The validity of indigenous and gaelic (Irish) football claims in influencing the origins of Australian rules football is also discussed in, Rob Hess, Matthew Nicholson, Bob Stewart and Gregory de Moore, *A National Game: The History of Australian Rules Football*, Camberwell: Penguin Group, 2008, pp. 53-60. Noted historian, Geoffrey Blainey, has also tackled some of the misconceptions about the early origins of Australian Rules football and devotes a chapter to the Gaelic and Aboriginal origin myth in his third edition of, *A Game of Our Own: The Origins of Australian Football*, Black Inc.: Melbourne, 2010, pp. 187-212. Some key proponents advocating an Indigenous influence on the origins of the game include, Jim Poulter, 'Marn-Grook - Original Australian Rules', in Peter Burke and Leo Grogan (eds), *This Game of Ours. Supporters' Tales of the People's Game*, Melbourne; Eatwarflemsd, 1993, pp. 64-67, and Martin Flanagan, *The Call*, St Leonards: Allen and Unwin, 1998.

<sup>10</sup> As one example, see Roy Hay and Athas Zafiris, 'Australian Football's Indigenous History: Towards a New Understanding', *Meanjin*, vol. 76, no. 3, Spring 2017, pp. 196-202.

<sup>11</sup> The Victorian Football League was re-named the Australian Football League from season 1990.

<sup>12</sup> John Lack, Chris McConville, Michael Small and Damien Wright, *A History of the Footscray Football Club: Unleashed*, Footscray: Aus-Sport Enterprises, 1996. As the researcher and stakeholder in the publishing company formed to produce this book, the publication was referred to as '*Unleashed*' by all those involved and continues to this day. This was due in part to a public competition run through the local paper requiring entrants to suggest a title name for the book. The winning entry was '*Unleashed*', so I will refer to this as the abridged version of the title throughout this thesis. The Footscray Football Club became the Western Bulldogs from season 1997, the season following the release of the book.

will be undertaken. The thesis will also provide a social context to the backdrop of how these clubs were able to form and conduct their activities, the forces in play and the key personnel within the community driving these interactions. This will help contextualise why these particular sporting clubs were formed when and how they did, and what were the influences or factors that drove this. Therefore, this thesis will contribute to knowledge by providing a greater understanding and insight into the foundation and development of local sporting cultures and sporting bodies in embryonic suburban towns during Melbourne's colonial period.

The origins of the Footscray Football Club is used as the main case study, and by doing so the township of Footscray and the issues faced by that community that may have helped or hindered the organisation of sport locally will be explored. Moreover, this thesis will also fill a gap in knowledge by providing insights into previously untapped histories of the inaugural Footscray Rowing Club and the changing face of Footscray's main cricket club. Both clubs existed for a period of close to 20 years or longer before disbanding and being resuscitated for the 1894 season.<sup>13</sup> Their histories, interweaving connections and importance to the town's progression have been generally neglected and remain largely unacknowledged with no formal research having been undertaken. This study seeks to correct that imbalance by providing further clarity regarding the foundations and development of these important social institutions that are the focus of each case study.

Within the framework of the above examination of the various sports and social life of the community there are several aims. First and foremost, a foundation narrative which explores the origin and early development of the Footscray rowing, cricket and football clubs is investigated and constructed. As part of this examination, the key factors and influences associated with the above three clubs and whether they are inextricably linked are identified. A complimentary aim is to interrogate available archives to construct a snapshot of the sporting landscape and the social aspects of community life in Footscray during its formative years as a town and suburb on Melbourne's periphery.

There is an impressive array of literature detailing the history of Australian Rules football, not to mention the key clubs of the game. Yet these histories rarely provide a

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<sup>13</sup> Both the inaugural versions of the Footscray cricket and rowing clubs were established in the 1860s and 1870s respectively, existing and re-organising until disbanding in the early 1890s with both re-forming as separate entities for the 1894 season. Neither club recognises an historical linkage with the former body.

detailed examination of the concurrent sporting culture or other sporting activities within the local community. While, for example, *Unleashed* provides a social context to its narrative history, it lacks any evaluation of the contemporaneous sporting culture within the district, save for a short reference to the ‘Clarke Cup’ rowing victories of the local rowing club. This thesis aims to begin the process of contextualising the emergence of Australian Rules football clubs within the sporting (and leisure) cultures of their locales.

In the remaining sub-sections of this opening chapter, the existing literature is surveyed before an outline of the methodology used and a summary is provided.

## 1.2 General Histories of Australian Rules Football

Tim Hogan has detailed the 30 year boom in the production of club histories and football related material at AFL level with the trend also flowing down to other minor leagues and clubs.<sup>14</sup> The 1980s and 1990s, in particular, saw an increased interest in the history of the game and dedicated groups were formed to fill this void. One such group is the Australian Football Heritage Group who have met regularly since forming in 1996. The members of this group includes, among others, club historians, journalists and academics. The group has encouraged the production of football literature and has an enviable record in adding to the corpus of literature available today.<sup>15</sup>

However, it took a century of football before the first attempt at recording the game’s history was produced by C.C. Mullen in 1958. The book, *History of Australian Rules Football, 1858-1958*, was written with the use of topical issues as a chronological and narrative guide.<sup>16</sup> Tim Hogan notes that Mullen’s work ‘lacks footnotes, a bibliography and an index.’<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, it is an important piece of work that should

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<sup>14</sup> Tim Hogan (ed.), *Reading the Game: An Annotated Guide to the Literature and Films of Australian Rules Football*, Melbourne: Australian Society for Sports History, 2005, p. 3. During the writing of this thesis, Hogan released an updated version of this book, see, Tim Hogan (ed.), *Reading Australian Rules Football: The Definitive Guide to the Game*, Sydney: Walla Walla Press, 2017.

<sup>15</sup> Members of the Australian Football Heritage Group have been responsible for more than 30 football books since 1996.

<sup>16</sup> C.C. Mullen, *History of Australian Rules Football, 1858-1958*, Carlton: Horticultural Press, 1958. It should be noted more recent research has brought into question some of the information in the book being passed off as fact, in particular, Mullen’s nominations of ‘The Champion of the Colony’.

<sup>17</sup> Hogan, *Reading the Game*, p. 116.

be acknowledged for its boldness in attempting to capture football's origins and history long before it emerged as a serious field of study.

After a decade of minimal publishing activity, further attempts by journalists Dunn and Fiddian in the 1970s were a welcome addition in capturing the game's history, but these also suffered from an absence of referencing. Jack Dunn's, *Australian Rules Football: An Illustrated History*, has many fine illustrations from the game's infancy and traces the origins of the game and development in the main footballing states.<sup>18</sup> Marc Fiddian, a prolific writer and publicist for the VFA wrote two books encapsulating the history of the VFA, its clubs and personalities since inception but they lose some academic appeal because of the lack of endnotes, bibliography and index. Fiddian's later editions make an attempt to correct part of this oversight by incorporating footnotes.<sup>19</sup>

The early 1980s saw the first academic offering with Ian Turner and Leonie Sandercock's pioneering work, *Up Where, Cazaly? The Great Australian Game*.<sup>20</sup> Hogan notes that it was 'the first serious attempt to explore the social and economic history' of the game covering a wide range of themes including origins, professionalism, barrackers, media, sponsorship and marketing.<sup>21</sup> The authors also endeavoured to answer questions about football's place in Australian society and their breakthrough book was well received, providing a platform for future scholarly work in the field.<sup>22</sup>

Another important work focusing on the origins and early evolution of football in the nineteenth century was released in 1990 by one of Australia's most respected historians, Geoffrey Blainey. The book, *A Game of Our Own: The Origins of Australian*

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<sup>18</sup> John Dunn (ed.) and Jim Main, *Australian Rules Football: An Illustrated History*, Lansdowne Press: Melbourne, 1974.

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, Marc Fiddian, *The Pioneers*, Jolimont: Victorian Football Association, 1977; and Mark Fiddian, *The VFA: A History of the Victorian Football Association, 1877-1995*, Melbourne: Mercury Printteam, 2004.

<sup>20</sup> Leonie Sandercock and Ian Turner, *Up Where, Cazaly? The Great Australian Game*, London/Sydney: Paladin/Granada, 1981.

<sup>21</sup> Hogan, *Reading the Game*, p. 119.

<sup>22</sup> Despite the book's wide acclaim, Rob Hess has expressed reservations concerning the 'limitations' and 'problems associated with co-authorship,' in particular, the inconsistent nature of their referencing. There is also a noticeable shift in style from Turner's earlier chapters concentrating on the formative years of football with Hess indicating that Sandercock's later chapters are more 'polemical' or controversial in approach. For more specific comments, see Rob Hess, 'Case Studies in the Development of Australian Rules Football, 1896-1908', Doctoral thesis, School of Human Movement, Recreation and Performance, Victoria University, 2000, pp. 4-5. It should be noted that Ian Turner died after writing the first seven chapters of the book and it was his partner, Sandercock, familiar with the project, who took up the challenge to complete the remainder of the chapters.

*Football* tackles the vexing question of how the game originated and developed. Blainey's research indicates the game is 'essentially an Australian invention' borrowing from English games, especially Rugby, and dismisses the notion that Gaelic football was a precursor to the Australian game. In the third edition he finds there is virtually no evidence that the game started from Aboriginal roots, a recent theory pressed by some academics and journalists in the football media. The book is supplemented with an appendix outlining the early formalised rules and offers a comparison to South Australian and Gaelic rules.<sup>23</sup>

The last 20 years has seen a growing number of histories that have built on the last two academic offerings mentioned, along with explorations of particular themes in the history of Australian Rules football, such as the multi-faceted notion of 'community' that have developed around the game.<sup>24</sup> Robert Pascoe's, *The Winter Game*, explores the origins and development of the game through its history and a major feature of the book is why 'Aussie Rules' took off in Melbourne and not Sydney but as Hess points out, 'his chapters on the early years of football rely almost entirely on secondary sources and therefore it is inevitable that his analysis of press commentary on the game is somewhat muted.'<sup>25</sup> Hess states that it was these deficiencies and a 'desire to utilize original research' that led to the production of *More Than a Game: An Unauthorised History of Australian Rules Football*.<sup>26</sup> The book delves into the history of the game from its origins – where discussion on the different facets of the code are peeled back to their core and analysed – to the mid-1990s, but offers a slightly different orientation to other works given it has been written by a number of 'football scholars' who each had their own area of expertise and research methodology. The result is a captivating presentation of the game's social history.

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<sup>23</sup> Geoffrey Blainey, *A Game of Our Own: The Origins of Australian Football*, Melbourne: Information Australia, 1990. Blainey's original edition covered the period up until 1880. His two subsequent revised editions added further chapters covering another 20 years.

<sup>24</sup> Ian Andrews, 'The Transformation of "Community" in the Australian Football League. Part One: Towards a Conceptual Framework for Community', *Occasional Papers in Football Studies*, vol. 1, no. 2, August 1998, pp. 103-114 and Ian Andrews, 'The Transformation of "Community" in the Australian Football League. Part Two: Redrawing "Community" Boundaries in the Post-War AFL', *Football Studies*, vol. 2, no. 1, April 1999, pp. 106-124.

<sup>25</sup> Robert Pascoe, *The Winter Game: The Complete History of Australian Football*, Melbourne: Text Publishing, 1995; For comments on Pascoe's book, see Hess, 'Case Studies in the Development of Australian Rules Football, 1896-1908', p. 9.

<sup>26</sup> Rob Hess and Bob Stewart (eds), *More Than a Game: An Unauthorised History of Australian Rules Football*, Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1998.

To commemorate the centenary of the first 100 years of the VFL/AFL competition, a compendium style of book, *100 Years of Australian Football 1897-1996*, was issued in 1996 that has a small focus on the origins of the game but revolves mainly around a season by season summary of the main issues.<sup>27</sup> While these type of books lack depth from an academic viewpoint, in this case there is at least a comprehensive index as a reference guide. In 2008, the AFL commissioned a coffee table style book to celebrate the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first recorded game. The result, *The Australian Game of Football: Since 1858*, covers many aspects of the game since its beginnings including an overview by Bernard Whimpress of the origins of football in each state and territory outside of Victoria.<sup>28</sup> Gillian Hibbins' contentious chapter in the same book and her follow up journal article, 'Myth and History in Australian Rules Football,' challenges perceptions of the game's origins and by extension, its own history.<sup>29</sup> Academic Roy Hay has also devoted various journal articles to the origins of the game, both on Association football (Soccer) and Australian Rules football that are pertinent to this thesis given the timeframe of investigation, with his observations being particularly useful to the present study and understanding of the general football culture in Melbourne.<sup>30</sup>

Another book to coincide with the game's 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary, *A National Game: The History of Australian Rules Football*, deals with the 'economic, social and political' history of the game viewed through the eyes of some of the leading academics on the subject.<sup>31</sup> A key component of the study is the way it has chartered football's history through a narrative structure of interweaving themes, indicated in the book's introduction

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<sup>27</sup> John Ross (ed.), *100 Years of Australian Football 1897-1996*, Ringwood: Viking/Penguin, 1996.

<sup>28</sup> See James Weston (ed.), *The Australian Game of Football: Since 1858*, Docklands: Geoff Slattery Publishing, 2008 and Bernard Whimpress, 'Border Crossing' in James Weston (ed.), *The Australian Game of Football since 1858*, Docklands: Geoff Slattery Publishing, 2008, pp. 60-69. For a more in-depth comparison on the origins and early development of football in other states see Bernard Whimpress, *The South Australian Football Story*, West Lakes: South Australian National Football League Incorporated, 1983; Murray Bird, *Athenians and Red Invincibles: The Origins of Queensland Football*, Morningside: Sports Publishing Pty Ltd, 2015; Geoff Christian, *The Footballers: From 1885 to the West Coast Eagles*, Perth: St George Books, Revised Edition, 1988 and Ken Pinchin and Allan Leeson, *A Century of Tasmanian Football 1879-1979*, Hobart: Tasmanian Football League, 1979.

<sup>29</sup> See Hibbins, 'The Founders', pp. 31-44; Hibbins, 'Wills and the Aboriginal Game', p. 45 and Hibbins, 'Myth and History in Australian Rules Football', pp. 41-53.

<sup>30</sup> See Roy Hay, 'The Codes Diverge', pp. 59-74; Roy Hay, 'A Tale of Two Footballs', pp. 952-969 and Roy Hay, 'Football in Australia Before Codification', pp. 1047-1061.

<sup>31</sup> Rob Hess, Matthew Nicholson, Bob Stewart and Gregory de Moore, *A National Game: The History of Australian Rules Football*, Camberwell: Penguin Group, 2008.

as ‘Origins’, ‘Diffusion’ (spread of the game), ‘Development’ and ‘Maturity’ (consolidation of the sport at a national and international level) of the code.

Mark Pennings has recently undertaken a huge research project through his *Origins of Australian Football* series in providing a comprehensive account of the game’s early history in Victoria. The series features each season since 1858 and includes the first 20 seasons of the VFA competition from 1877 up until the formation of the VFL in 1897. During the writing of this thesis, Pennings released the last three of his series of five volumes.<sup>32</sup> In the first volume, Pennings provides a social history essay as his introduction and a full synopsis of each season follows in each volume with a statistical breakdown of matches played. The books do not have an index but this is probably due in part to the extensive coverage devoted to the scores and ladders of each season making such a task almost insurmountable. Statisticians are more likely to regard these works, once finished, as the equivalent of the ‘Bible’, in statistical and player terms, given it helps piece together previously unknown information about that particular era of the game’s history. Unfortunately, a project of such magnitude does not have the scope to shed any further light on the origins of individual clubs such as Footscray.

### 1.3 Club Histories

Lionel Frost notes that quite often a club history has to overcome a range of obstacles and the quality of work may depend on the author’s own skills, approach and training. Therefore, different types of histories written by journalists, amateur historians, club officials and academics can display ‘considerable variety in length, presentation and levels of description or analysis.’<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Mark Pennings, *Origins of Australian Football: Victoria’s Early History. Volume 1: Amateur Heroes and the Rise of Clubs, 1858 to 1876*, Ballan: Connor Court Publishing, 2012; Mark Pennings, *Origins of Australian Football: Victoria’s Early History. Volume 2: A Golden Era Begins: Football in ‘Marvellous Melbourne’, 1877 to 1885*, Brisbane: Grumpy Monks Publishing, 2014 and Mark Pennings, *Origins of Australian Football: Victoria’s Early History. Volume 3: Covert ‘Professionalism’: The Power of the Wealthy Clubs, 1886-1890*, Brisbane: Grumpy Monks Publishing, 2015; Mark Pennings, *Origins of Australian Football: Victoria’s Early History. Volume 4: Tough Times: Victorian Football Loses its Way, 1891 to 1896*, Brisbane: Grumpy Monks Publishing, 2016; Mark Pennings, *Origins of Australian Football: Victoria’s Early History. Volume 5: Players and Clubs: The Complete Record 1858 to 1896*, Brisbane: Grumpy Monks Publishing, 2016. Pennings’ first three volumes are the most relevant to this thesis.

<sup>33</sup> Lionel Frost, ‘Clubs - Major Leagues’, in Tim Hogan (ed.), *Reading the Game: An Annotated Guide to the Literature and Films of Australian Rules Football*, Melbourne: Australian Society for Sports History, 2005, p. 30.

This is the case when surveying the landscape of AFL club histories. There has been an array of histories using the year by year format, notably three from Brian Hansen covering Richmond, Collingwood and his substantive version of Carlton's history.<sup>34</sup> Likewise, Essendon's comprehensive, *Flying High*, and its subsequent editions follow the same format but also includes a copious statistical section for the football lover to digest and perhaps is the envy of all other clubs that see a statistical overview as an important adjunct to their own history book.<sup>35</sup> Before these, a new benchmark in club histories was set in 1983 with the release of *The First One Hundred Seasons*, a well researched piece of work capturing the history of the Fitzroy Football Club.<sup>36</sup> Another club that produced a similar style of history along the lines outlined above, was North Melbourne. Gerard Dowling's, *The North Story*, was originally produced in the 1970s and updated again after the club won the AFL's 'Centenary' premiership in 1996.<sup>37</sup> One of the major problems faced by an author using the yearly format is that it can restrict the exploration of broader themes pertinent to their club's history.

Frost states that the work 'that did most to establish the football club as a serious field of historical research,' was Richard Stremski's *Kill for Collingwood*, which provided a new approach to the traditional club history by 'examining the football club as an important part of the community's social fabric.'<sup>38</sup> Other scholarly works worth noting covered two of the oldest football clubs in Australia – namely Lynda Carroll's work on Melbourne and Frost's impressive study of Carlton – whose histories are closely linked to the origins and early development of the game.<sup>39</sup> More recently, Rhett Bartlett

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<sup>34</sup> Brian Hansen, *Tigerland. The History of the Richmond Football Club from 1885*, Burwood: Richmond Former Players and Officials Association, 1992; Brian Hansen, *The Magpies: The History of the Collingwood Football Club from 1892-1992*, Cheltenham: Brian Hansen & Carla Senna, 1992, and Brian Hansen, *The Blue Boys: The History of the Carlton Football Club From 1864*, Melbourne: Brian Hansen, 2002.

<sup>35</sup> Michael Maplestone, *Flying High: The History of the Essendon Football Club*, Melbourne: Essendon Football Club, 1983.

<sup>36</sup> Mike Sutherland, Rod Nicholson and Stewart Murrphy, *The First One Hundred Seasons: Fitzroy Football Club, 1883-1983*, Melbourne: Fitzroy Football Club, 1983.

<sup>37</sup> Gerard Dowling, *The North Story*, Revised edition, Sydney: Playright Publishing, 1997.

<sup>38</sup> Comments from Frost, 'Clubs - Major Leagues', p. 31, and Hogan, *Reading the Game*, p. 3. Richard Stremski, *Kill for Collingwood*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1986. For a more critical review of the book, see Chris McConville, 'Review of R. Stremski, *Kill for Collingwood*', *Sporting Traditions*, vol. 3, no. 1, November 1986, pp. 119-123.

<sup>39</sup> See Lynda Carroll, *The Grand Old Flag: The History of the Melbourne Football Club*, South Yarra: Hardie Grant Books, 1999, and Lionel Frost, *The Old Dark Navy Blues: A History of the Carlton Football Club*, St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1998.

has provided a fascinating account of the early years of the Richmond Football Club.<sup>40</sup> Through the use of selected newspaper excerpts and interviews, Bartlett has unearthed some first-hand accounts and anecdotal insights of how the game was played from the early years in Richmond paddock up until the last decade that makes for compelling reading.

Prominent among the bevy of club histories are those produced on the back of some ‘high quality research’ by club historians that help place the historiography of AFL club histories, as a whole, on a pedestal far higher than most other competing sports.<sup>41</sup> One of these involves a book that is the major case study of this thesis, the Footscray Football Club. Researched by the author of this thesis as the ‘club historian’ and written in the main by leading academics John Lack and Chris McConville, *A History of the Footscray Football Club: Unleashed*, is a unique presentation of a working-class club.<sup>42</sup> The book incorporates special features on important figures or events in club history and provides a compact but detailed statistical section.

Footscray’s origins and fortunes as a club are scrutinised in the opening chapter of *Unleashed* using a number of local newspaper sources and Footscray council correspondence along with the authors’ intimate knowledge of the history of the town.<sup>43</sup> The research also draws upon recollections of one of the early pioneers of the local footballing fraternity, in Charlie Lovett, long regarded as ‘the first captain of the Footscray Football Club.’<sup>44</sup>

Appropriate to this study, and a conundrum in itself is the Footscray Football Club’s 1983 publication, *The Bulldog Book: Sons of the ‘Scray 1883-1983*, celebrating

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<sup>40</sup> Rhett Bartlett, *Richmond F.C., ‘The Tigers’: A Century of League Football*, Docklands: Geoff Slattery Publishing, 2007. Bartlett’s book is complemented throughout with historical essay pieces from MCC Librarian and historian, Trevor Ruddell.

<sup>41</sup> Frost, ‘Clubs - Major Leagues’, p. 31. For examples of these, see Jules Feldmann and Russell Holmesby, *The Point of It All: The Story of the St Kilda Football Club*, Sydney: Playright Publishing, 1992; Harry Gordon, *The Hard Way: The History of the Hawthorn Football Club*, Sydney: Lester Townsend Publishing, 1990; and Russell Stephens, *The Road to Kardinia: The Story of the Geelong Football Club*, Sydney: Playright Publishing, 1997.

<sup>42</sup> John Lack, Chris McConville, Michael Small and Damien Wright, *A History of the Footscray Football Club: Unleashed*, Footscray: Aus-Sport Enterprises, 1996. For reflections on the writing of Lack *et al.*’s history, see Chris McConville, ‘Footscray, Identity and Football History’, *Occasional Papers in Football Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1, January 1998, pp. 48-58.

<sup>43</sup> See Lack, McConville, Small and Wright, *Unleashed*, pp. 2-15.

<sup>44</sup> The reminiscences of Charles Eldred Lovett on Footscray’s early history including most of its major sporting institutions were published in the *Footscray Mail*, 1935-36. These articles were reproduced in John Lack (ed.), *Charlie Lovett’s Footscray*, Footscray: The City of Footscray Historical Society, 1993.

what was thought to be the centenary of the club's existence. While more a pictorial snapshot of the club's history featuring its heroes, best players, Brownlow medallists and finals sides among other things, it importantly reproduces an insert feature of the twenty page '50 year' history book of the club (1883-1933) published by the *Footscray Advertiser* in 1933.<sup>45</sup> The title of both productions strongly suggests 1883 as the birth date of the club. The ambiguity posed by the continual reference to 1883 will be tackled later in this thesis.

#### 1.4 Other Relevant Histories

Central to this study will be local and social histories involving the township of Footscray. *Footscray's First 50 Years*, produced as a celebration of the jubilee of the municipality in 1909, provides an overview of the history of most facets of Footscray life to that point in time.<sup>46</sup> Similarly, *Footscray & Yarraville: A Pictorial Record* provides a snapshot of Footscray's history of events, people, sport, industry, public institutions and more through archival photographs. Both books are important in that they provide context for the topics relevant to this project.<sup>47</sup>

Other examples include John Lack's commissioned account of *A History of Footscray* and his brief yet pertinent offering, *Charlie Lovett's Footscray*, mentioned in the previous section.<sup>48</sup> Lack's in-depth history of the city of Footscray traces the suburb's rich past even before settlement and provides an absorbing account of its development into a major industrial hub. While Lack touches on many of the local sporting and leisure organisations, he does not have the scope to provide a more complex analysis on the subjects of this study. The series of reflective articles by Charlie Lovett on the history of Footscray and its clubs and institutions, published by *The Mail* newspaper in 1935-36, were reproduced and edited by Lack in book form as *Charlie Lovett's Footscray*, with

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<sup>45</sup> Greg Hobbs, *The Bulldog Book: Sons of 'Scray, 1883–1983*, West Footscray: Footscray Football Club, 1983 incorporating Jamieson, Syd (ed.), *Fifty Years of Football: Incidents in the Fifty Years History of the Footscray Football Club 1883-1933*, published by the Footscray Advertiser in 1933.

<sup>46</sup> Hugh Michell (ed.), *Footscray's First 50 Years*, Footscray: *The Advertiser*, 1909. An updated version was produced for the centenary of Footscray in 1959. See, *Footscray's First 100 years: The Story of a Great Australian City*, Footscray: Footscray Advertiser/Footscray City Council, 1959.

<sup>47</sup> *Footscray & Yarraville: A Pictorial Record*, Footscray: Footscray Historical Society Inc., 2005.

<sup>48</sup> John Lack, *A History of Footscray*, North Melbourne: Hargreen Publishing Company, 1991, and Lack, *Charlie Lovett's Footscray*.

added interpretations, comments and footnotes. While the book gives some great insight and first-hand accounts of life in early Footscray, factual inaccuracies creep into Lovett's version of events because he is basing his recollections largely on memory.<sup>49</sup>

Margaret Indian's important doctoral thesis on leisure in Melbourne during the period 1880-1900, with her comparative analysis focusing on working-class Footscray and middle-class Hawthorn, is of instrumental value to this thesis for its coverage on many areas of culture within the community.<sup>50</sup> Indian's study surveying the different aspects of leisure in great depth provides a ready comparison and useful resource to the findings in this thesis. She concludes that the consolidation of regular leisure activities in the 1880s was a significant factor in people's identification to their locale, particularly in Footscray, and that the suburbs played a fundamental role in shaping the 'urban character of Melbourne'.<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, she found that work and leisure was closely related in Footscray, providing a 'depth of social interaction' that strengthened local pride, while the 'weekend' was reserved for sport (particularly working-class games and sports), shopping and outdoor activities.<sup>52</sup> She also notes that there was little class hostility or division in the suburb.<sup>53</sup> This lack of class division and amplified local pride resonates with the findings of this thesis.

Somewhat surprisingly, given its importance as early Australian sport, there is a dearth of literature in the field of rowing historiography, with rowing's academic cognoscenti a rather small but select group.<sup>54</sup> The early history of amateur rowing in Victoria, and in particular its major event of the era – the Annual Melbourne Regatta – has received little acknowledgement of the role it played in the culture of rowing in the colony. This general malaise was borne out in the 1990s, when Daryl Adair, reviewing Max Solling's book on NSW's Glebe Rowing Club, noted that, 'Australian rowing and

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<sup>49</sup> As the football research consultant to the book, the author of this thesis was able to make a number of corrections that appear in the footnotes.

<sup>50</sup> Margaret Indian, 'Leisure in City and Suburb: Melbourne 1880-1900', Doctoral thesis, Australian National University, 1980. See also, Margaret Indian, 'Formalisation of Urban Leisure: Melbourne 1880-1900', in Richard Cashman and Michael McKernan (eds), *Sport: Money, Morality and the Media*, Kensington: New South Wales University Press, 1981, pp. 272-288.

<sup>51</sup> Indian, 'Leisure in City and Suburb', p. 297.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 181.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> It should be noted that rowing enthusiast, Andrew Guerin, is currently seeking to redress the lost history of Australian rowing in order to provide a permanent record of the sport through his website, <http://www.rowinghistory-aus.info/about.html>.

sculling have had few historians.’<sup>55</sup> Adair’s comment though, still holds sway some 20-odd years later.

The most important piece of work relating to the rowing section in this thesis was produced nearly a century ago by John Lang, long affiliated with the Henley-on-the-Yarra as secretary and a committee member of the Victorian Rowing Association, whose landmark book, *The Victorian Oarsman with a Rowing Register, 1857 to 1919, 62 years*, was the forerunner for future comparison.<sup>56</sup> The book provides a comprehensive overview of the history of the formative years of rowing in Victoria and the Victorian Rowing Association, the oldest rowing association in the world and one in which the Footscray Rowing Club was an inaugural member.<sup>57</sup>

The Victorian Rowing Association commissioned a centenary history to be written for the 1976 season. The book, *Rowing in Victoria: The First 100 Years of the Victorian Rowing Association, 1876-1976*, was long on promise but disappointing in delivery. In the foreword, the author advises that due to the time involved in producing such a history, he regrets ‘that a large section of the early history of rowing in the colony had to be discarded as a separate lengthy chapter.’<sup>58</sup> The result, he says, is a brief history of rowing captured through the events and histories of the metropolitan and regional clubs which he gives greater ‘predominance’ to in the book. Relying on Lang’s book and material gained from interested club secretaries, the book fails to provide any references such as footnotes and should be viewed with trepidation by academics.

Perhaps the best of Victorian rowing’s club histories is that of the Melbourne University Boat Club titled, *Well Rowed University: Melbourne University Boat Club: The First 150 Years*.<sup>59</sup> Founded by Martin Irving in 1859, the University Boat Club’s

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<sup>55</sup> Daryl Adair, ‘Review of M. Solling, *The Boatshed on Blackwattle Bay, Glebe Rowing Club 1879-1993*’, *Sporting Traditions*, vol. 10, no. 2, 1994, p. 177.

<sup>56</sup> John Lang, *The Victorian Oarsman with a Rowing Register, 1857-1919, 62 Years*, Melbourne: A.H. Massina, 1919.

<sup>57</sup> For a more academic perspective on the early days of rowing and sculling in Australia and its issues see, Stuart Ripley, *Sculling and Skulduggery: A History of Professional Sculling*, Petersham, NSW: Walla Walla Press, 2009, and Martin Crotty, “‘Separate and Distinct’?: The Manual Labour Question in Nineteenth-Century Victorian Rowing”, *International Journal of the History of Sport*, Vol 15, Issue 2, 1998, pp. 152-163. For a version on rowing’s social history in England see Neil Wigglesworth, *A Social History of Rowing*, London: Frank Cass, 1992.

<sup>58</sup> Field Rickards, *Rowing in Victoria: The First 100 Years of the Victorian Rowing Association, 1876-1976*, Kew: Victorian Rowing Association, 1976.

<sup>59</sup> Judith Buckrich, *Well Rowed University: Melbourne University Boat Club: The First 150 Years*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Boat Club Inc., 2009. For further reading on 150 years of sports,

history runs virtually parallel to the history of the sport in Victoria with the club playing a ‘pivotal role’ in the formation of the Victorian Rowing Association. Although borrowing largely from Lang’s *Victorian Oarsman*, for its early history, the book provides its fair share of social commentary mixed in with the club’s historical narrative. Academically written, the book is well presented with some of the earliest illustrations of rowing regattas and it supplies generous notes, a bibliography and an index. However, the author Judith Buckrich offers scant recognition to the years when the Melbourne Regatta, the major regatta in Victoria, was held on the Lower Yarra and Saltwater River at Footscray. This aspect will be a central focus of the case study on the Footscray Rowing Club.

Cricket has seen a multitude of books produced down through the years. One of the most important works in the field of cricket historiography in Australia was published in 1996 with the release of *The Oxford Companion to Australian Cricket*.<sup>60</sup> At over 600 pages, this audacious attempt to cover the spectrum of cricket history in Australia provides a great starting point for any cricketing historian. An extraordinary array of contributing authors was assembled for the project which allowed for comprehensive coverage and commentary that includes feature and thematic articles on many enduring aspects of the game. A reference book of this magnitude and scope provides for over 1250 entries including, among others subjects, player biographies, records, anecdotes and statistics, controversial incidents, women’s cricket, and of course, the game’s history. Thus, it proves a welcome addition to the corpus of literature that relates to the sport.

Jack Pollard was a respected journalist, prolific writer, editor and publisher on various sports, who specialised in cricket literature through his series covering the history of the game, and other history related offerings.<sup>61</sup> Another journalist, Robert Coleman, covers the history of Victorian cricket in his seminal book, *Seasons in the Sun: The Story*

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including rowing, at the University, see June Senyard, *The Ties that Bind: A History of Sport at the University of Melbourne*, Petersham: Walla Walla Press, 2003.

<sup>60</sup> Richard Cashman, Warwick Franks, Jim Maxwell, Brian Stoddart, Amanda Weaver and Ray Webster (eds), *The Oxford Companion to Australian Cricket*, South Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1996.

<sup>61</sup> Jack Pollard, *The Formative Years of Australian Cricket, 1803-1893*, Sydney: The Book Company, 1995; Jack Pollard, *The Turbulent Years of Australian Cricket, 1893-1917*, Sydney: The Book Company, 1995; Jack Pollard, *The Bradman Years: Australian Cricket 1918-1948*, Sydney: The Book Company, 1995; Jack Pollard, *The Packer Years: Australian Cricket 1948-1995*, Sydney: The Book Company, 1995. See also, Jack Pollard, *Australian Cricket: The Game and The Players*, Melbourne: Angus & Robertson, 1982 and 1988, and Jack Pollard, *The Complete Illustrated History of Australian Cricket*, Ringwood: Pelham Books, 1992.

*of the Victorian Cricket Association*.<sup>62</sup> The author notes that the Victorian Cricket Association or a like body had many false starts, with the first such attempt beginning in 1864, before an Association finally became firmly established in 1895. The continual practice of endeavouring to set up a governing body for the sport in Victoria follows similar attempts made in other sports, such as rowing, and parallels the situation occurring at club level in Footscray during this colonial period.

While cricket books abound, there are very few histories that relate to suburban Melbourne cricket clubs. One, for example, is *Our Proud Heritage: A History of the South Melbourne Cricket Club from 1862*, based on one of the oldest and most prestigious of all district clubs.<sup>63</sup> The author notes that the first organised ‘game’ of sport after the settlement of Melbourne was cricket and that nearby suburbs formed clubs such as Emerald Hill (1853) and Williamstown (1852). Samuel English, a one-time intercolonial cricketer and leading South Melbourne player of the 1860s and 1870s, became one of the influential figures in the development of cricket in Footscray. Despite the depth of cricketing literature and the few examples mentioned above, there is still much to learn about early community cricket clubs and how they evolved and related to their local district in terms of social significance and relationships with other sporting bodies. Thus, the Footscray Cricket Club will be the feature of my fourth chapter.

## 1.5 Methodology and Conceptual Framework

This project will concentrate on one community, particularly by identifying one unique community – Footscray – in Melbourne’s inner west, during one period in time by drilling further into the available resources to establish a broader picture of how the sporting environment was founded and developed locally. This will involve archival, triangulated research using case studies into the origins and development of Australian Rules football, rowing and cricket within the Footscray community including interrogation of records associated with key personnel, the status of other related sporting bodies, their location or geography and other factors that may link these clubs. Chris

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<sup>62</sup> Robert Coleman, *Seasons in the Sun: The Story of the Victorian Cricket Association*, Melbourne: Hargreen Publishing, 1993.

<sup>63</sup> Robert Grogan, *Our Proud Heritage: A History of South Melbourne Cricket Club from 1862*, Melbourne: South Melbourne Cricket Club, 2003. See also, Alfred Clarke (ed.), *East Melbourne Cricket Club: Its history 1860 to 1910: Jubilee Year*, Melbourne, George Robertson & Co., 1910.

Gratton and Ian Jones suggest that triangulation ‘using different data collection techniques can strengthen the validity of the research.’<sup>64</sup> As a means of cross-checking and verifying information, this method proved invaluable. The findings of research associated with this project have been recorded or ‘coded’ on an excel spreadsheet and allocated a subject topic relevant to the case studies identified in this thesis. Gratton and Jones define coding as ‘the first stage to providing some form of logical structure to the data.’<sup>65</sup>

Gratton and Jones state that the overall ‘blueprint’ that guides the researcher in data collection is determined by the type of research design chosen. In adopting a narrative approach, this will be complimented by using case studies as the basis for research design. Gratton and Jones say that:

Case study research is based upon the argument that understanding human activity requires analysis of both its development over time, and the environment and context within which the activity occurs. Case study designs are used to gain this holistic understanding of a set of issues, and how they relate to a particular group, organisation, sports team, or even a single individual.<sup>66</sup>

With this in mind, this dissertation will seek to make use of a range of archival and primary source material. These include use of newspapers, early football, rowing and cricket journals, council minute books and correspondence where available. Other archival material available, such as diaries and photographs, made available in the Footscray Historical Society holdings, will also be consulted.<sup>67</sup> The interrogation of maps of Footscray will also be an important factor in providing a visual context to the geography of the area for the period discussed.

In terms of newspaper research, a systematic analysis of the National Library of Australia’s Trove website using the search word ‘Footscray’, or variations thereof, for the period 1859-1886 pinpointed just over 2600 articles of interest to this thesis. In his study on the football press of nineteenth century Melbourne, Robin Grow stipulates that there

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<sup>64</sup> Chris Gratton and Ian Jones, *Research Methods for Sports Studies*, London: Routledge, 2010, pp. 119-121.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 240.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 107.

<sup>67</sup> Footscray Voter’s Rolls for this period, where available, will also be consulted adding to background knowledge.

were three types of media coverage: Metropolitan; local or suburban; and specialist sporting press. These were not without their own bias or agendas but he notes ‘the relationship between a fledging sport in a booming colonial city and the various sectors of the print media had proven to be mutually beneficial.’<sup>68</sup> One of the disadvantages of this method is that the newspapers scanned are only those that have been digitised to this point in time and offers only a small coverage of the total newspaper sources available. Therefore their views or reporting could be skewed. This deficiency underlines the importance of triangulation.

An impediment to the thesis research occurs because the holdings of particular local newspapers are not complete. An example of this is the *Williamstown Chronicle*, which has only spasmodic coverage in the 1860s. Newspaper holdings for the years 1861-66 and 1868 do not exist. The critical foundation years of the Footscray Football Club also suffer the same fate, as the Footscray *Independent* does not commence until March, 1883, likewise the Footscray *Advertiser* in 1884, and the *Williamstown Chronicle* has few holdings for the crucial period of 1880-1882, with none at all in 1881.

## 1.6 Summary

While this research project seeks to shed light on the origins of the Footscray Football Club as its main purpose, it does not profess to provide an answer where evidence does not exist. While evidence may in fact conclude that the year 1883 marks the birth of the club, there is contrary evidence that a club playing under the Footscray name was in motion as far back as the mid-1870s. *Unleashed* has presented a more complex historical narrative, in effect disputing the notion that the club was formed in 1883, and thereby providing an ideal case study for the academic analysis of the origins and early development of football in Footscray. Yet *Unleashed* does not provide a detailed sense of the broader sporting (and leisure) culture of football, and of the way this shaped the emergence of the Footscray Football Club.

The literature review in this chapter has shown that although there is now adequate coverage of football in general, there is also considerable scope to hone in on particular areas of the game’s history. In this instance, the early development of the Footscray

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<sup>68</sup> Robin Grow, ‘Nineteenth Century Football and the Melbourne Press’, *Sporting Traditions*, vol. 3, no. 1, November 1986, pp. 23-37.

Football Club have only been properly tackled in *Unleashed* but questions still remain as there is no definitive answer to the club's exact foundation and the events surrounding it, thus providing further scope for analysis. Moreover, general histories of Australian Rules football tend to focus on the code's origins while neglecting most club origins and it is the reverse effect when consulting club histories, where loyalties remain with the particular club. Most importantly, perhaps, the histories of Australian Rules football have not provided a detailed examination of the broader sporting (and leisure) cultures from which the game emerged.

By redressing this absence, the thesis will also provide an understanding of how two other prominent sports – rowing and cricket – developed in Footscray during a time of growth in burgeoning Melbourne. Both sports could lay claim to being Australia's national sport in colonial times, while football in Victoria was fast becoming the state's most popular sport. There is virtually no previously published history or historical articles surrounding the early local rowing and cricket clubs in Footscray, therefore, this thesis will provide a substantial offering to fill this gap in the literature.

Thus, this thesis will be unique in that it covers the formative years of three of Australia's most popular type of sporting clubs – football, rowing and cricket – by placing them in perspective to each other, and in a social context with the community they belong. The following four chapters are separated according to their subject. Chapter Two will start with an exploration of the social and cultural aspects of Footscray life during the study period in a bid to provide a context to the remaining three chapters on the origins and development of the three key sports mentioned. A chapter examining the early history of each of these sports in Footscray will follow. Rowing, as will become evident was significant in introducing the Footscray community to large scale sporting events – but also, class discrimination and tension through the amateur-manual labour issue. The period of this study was critical for the game of cricket (the subject of my fourth chapter), with the first tours of British cricketers taking place, an eventual outcome which helped pave the way for Australian Rules football to flourish, particularly from the 1880s. Australian Rules football is then the focus of the final chapter, where the origins and myths of the Footscray Football Club are delved into, before final conclusions are made.

## Chapter 2

### ‘A Wretched Village’: The Borough of Footscray, 1859-86

There is no spot in Victoria so utterly devoid of the picturesque as Footscray.

*Australasian*<sup>1</sup>

#### 2.1 Introduction

When reflecting on the year he spent at the Footscray Football Club in 1993, writing *Southern Sky, Western Oval*, journalist Martin Flanagan noted that, ‘you cannot understand a football club unless you understand its history and you cannot understand a football club unless you understand the history of the area it represents’.<sup>2</sup> In order to lay the groundwork for an examination of the origins of football and other key sports in Footscray, this chapter explores the backdrop of town life including the issues and social aspects in play during the period of study, 1859-1886. The aim, therefore, is to gain an understanding of the issues facing this community that may have impacted on the establishment of sporting clubs and leisure pursuits during this particular timeframe.

The era of colonial life spanned by this study was significant in the growth of Melbourne. The gold rush era of the 1850s saw an influx of immigrants seeking their fortune and a new way of life.<sup>3</sup> The wealth generated through this period of time placed Melbourne on a par with some of the richest cities in the world, helping establish its reputation as a vibrant, confident and often brash metropolis.<sup>4</sup> The subsequent population explosion along with the formation of transport systems afforded the opportunity for

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<sup>1</sup> *Australasian*, 15 June 1867, p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Martin Flanagan, ‘A Year with a League Club’, in Bob Stewart and Robert Pascoe (eds), *Oval Logic*, Melbourne: Faculties of Arts and Human Development, Victoria University of Technology, 1994, p. 26. For his book on Footscray’s 1993 season, see Martin Flanagan, *Southern Sky, Western Oval*, South Yarra: McPhee Gribble, 1994.

<sup>3</sup> James Grant and Geoffrey Serle, *The Melbourne Scene: 1803-1956*, Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1957, pp. 73-74.

<sup>4</sup> Leonie Sandercock and Ian Turner, *Up Where, Cazaly? The Great Australian Game*, London/Sydney: Paladin/Granada, 1981, pp. 6-7; Grant and Serle, *The Melbourne Scene*, pp. 73-74 and Lewis, Miles, *Melbourne: The City’s History and Development*, Melbourne: City of Melbourne, 1994, p. 61.

social mobility and led to the rapid expansion and urbanization of Melbourne's metropolitan area.<sup>5</sup>

During this period of time, Footscray grew from a small township on the banks of the Saltwater River into a manufacturing centre of increasing importance. While rapid expansion would occur to the east and south of Melbourne in particular, Footscray, and by extension the western corridor, was largely left behind due to the problematic nature of its isolation caused by Batman's Swamp and limited communication with the outside world.<sup>6</sup> This Swamp extended from the fringes of the north-western portion of Melbourne city to virtually Footscray's doorstep at the Saltwater River.<sup>7</sup>

Under the first three sub-headings of this chapter, the day to day issues of the town in general will be examined, from everyday life and its inconveniences, to the increasing industrialisation and manufacturing progress being made. The noxious trades that mushroomed along the Saltwater River gave rise to Footscray's unwanted reputation as a place of unsavoury smells. Most of the issues facing Footscray in this period provided a barrier to the formation and proliferation of sports in the district for more than its first decade as a municipal town, while the push for public works' projects proved a far more critical need than the want of recreational pursuits.

Further examination of other themes affecting the local community is detailed in the remaining two sub-sections. A broad analysis of sport and leisure in Footscray will be outlined in one sub-section. Within this topic, examination of how British ideology and attitudes played out in Footscray's sporting milieu will also be undertaken. Reflecting its more established status as a close-knit community during the 1870s and 1880s, Footscray witnessed an explosion of pubs, lodges, societies (charitable and otherwise) and the formation of local sporting clubs similar to other suburban communities, and probably more-so because of its isolation.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, the development of the suburb is emblematic of Richard Cashman's observation – 'More than any other form of culture,

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<sup>5</sup> Victoria's population increased from 76,000 to 222,000 in the first three years of the gold rush alone. See, Hugh Anderson, *Victoria: From Discovery to Federation*, Adelaide: Rigby Limited, 1974, p. 116.

<sup>6</sup> John Lack, *A History of Footscray*, North Melbourne: Hargreen Publishing Company, 1991 pp. 46, 54.

<sup>7</sup> Melbourne itself was surrounded on all sides, except to the north, by swampland. *Age*, 18 May 1864, p. 4; Batman's swamp or the West Melbourne swamp was a 'beauty spot and hunting ground' in the early years of settlement, 'but in time became a public nuisance.' Lewis, *Melbourne*, p. 28.

<sup>8</sup> For an example comparing the suburbs of Footscray and Hawthorn, see Margaret Indian, 'Leisure in City and Suburb: Melbourne 1880-1900', Doctoral thesis, Australian National University, 1980.

sport became the social cement which bound together the many new communities that formed Australian society.<sup>9</sup>

This chapter also explores the role of local church groups and the religious edicts of the various religions, in particular the Anglican Church of England, and how they influenced the community's social and sporting conscience. Footscray's demographic was largely protestant, working-class and British, and like other new settler communities it embraced the inherited British penchant for sport and leisure.<sup>10</sup> Robert Pascoe noted that this strong connection to the 'homeland' was reflected in the Footscray Football Club's colours and nickname of the 1880s, which 'imply genuflection to things British and monarchist.'<sup>11</sup> The final two sub-sections will investigate these topics before conclusions are made.

## 2.2 Across the Swamp: An Isolated Community

The people of Footscray, and the municipality itself, was involved for the first fifteen years or so in an elemental battle for survival.

John Lack<sup>12</sup>

In 1848, Footscray was chosen as the name for a township at the government village reserve on the Saltwater River, three and a half miles west of Melbourne. One year later, a survey plan of just 65 acres of the Footscray village was made on a portion of the government reserve abutting the west side of the river. This plan comprised just six streets and was bounded by the river to the east, a swampy marshland to the south and by a steep hill to the north.<sup>13</sup> This area would form the nucleus of the town centre for the next few decades.

In *A History of Footscray*, John Lack points out that Footscray was a service town and stopover point, capturing most of the trade of travellers passing through the town on

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<sup>9</sup> Richard Cashman, *Paradise of Sport: The Rise of Organised Sport in Australia*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 34.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 33, 152.

<sup>11</sup> Pascoe, Robert, *The Winter Game: The Complete History of Australian Football*, Melbourne: Text Publishing, 1995, p. 56.

<sup>12</sup> Lack, *A History of Footscray*, p. 77.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 36-40.

their way to or from Melbourne, for much of the 1850s.<sup>14</sup> Descriptions of Footscray's sprawling terrain are often not complimentary. Beyond the embryonic town centre, Footscray appeared as an unforgiving barren wilderness populated by thistles, boulders and devoid of any vegetation. The vastness and dreariness of the open plains leading to the western district extended as far as the eye could see.<sup>15</sup>

The great want of the Footscray district during the 1850s and beyond was for a more direct road to Melbourne's city centre. The route to the city in 1857, via Flemington, was a circuitous one covering a distance of five miles around Batman's Swamp.<sup>16</sup> The road was in appalling condition and laborious to traverse. Consequently, agitation among residents for the construction of a direct road to Melbourne, prompted by a series of public meetings, reached fever pitch by the late 1850s. Locals felt neglected as large tracts of Crown Land sold by the government in Footscray's locality had netted the colony coffers £50,000 by 1857, yet according to one aggrieved resident, government had not expended 'a single penny' on roads 'to, or around the locality'.<sup>17</sup>

At a meeting at the Church of England school room attended by prominent citizens in February, 1858, it was stated, 'that the increasing importance of the township of Footscray demands the immediate formation by the Government of a direct road to Melbourne.'<sup>18</sup> The push for a direct road fell on deaf ears with the proposal shelved for a short period of time, although the continual debate over the costs of maintaining an open road to Melbourne would weigh heavily on the council's treasury for decades. The new railway line, through Footscray to Williamstown, partially completed and operating since 1858, virtually torpedoed Footscray's claim for government assistance in providing the much needed construction of a direct road to the metropolis as the government felt the town requirements of communication had been met once railway access was achieved.<sup>19</sup> The road agenda, however, would soon be replaced by a move for self-government.

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 53-54.

<sup>15</sup> *Argus*, 3 August 1866, p. 6; *Geelong Advertiser*, 23 April 1867, p. 2; *Australasian*, 15 June 1867, p. 12; *Bendigo Advertiser*, 10 February 1868, p. 3; *Williamstown Chronicle*, 3 April 1880, p. 3.

<sup>16</sup> *Argus*, 22 October 1857, p. 6; *Age*, 3 February 1858, p. 5.

<sup>17</sup> *Argus*, 22 October 1857, p. 6; *Age*, 17 September 1857, p. 6. Even a decade later, resident's complaints had not changed, as exemplified by a quotation from the *Williamstown Chronicle*, 3 July 1869, p. 6: 'Government coolly pockets the money and spends it elsewhere.'

<sup>18</sup> *Age*, 3 February 1858, p. 5.

<sup>19</sup> *Age*, 16 March 1858, p. 5.

To great fanfare, the railway lines running south to Williamstown and Geelong, and west to Sunbury, through the junction at Footscray, were officially unveiled on 13 January 1859, opening up vital communications with other country and suburban networks including the city terminal at Spencer Street.<sup>20</sup> Melbourne's railway systems spread throughout the expanding suburbs bringing the metropolis closer and facilitating a new era in transport convenience. Government-owned railway lines serviced the north and west routes, including Footscray, and terminated at Spencer Street, while the southern and eastern suburbs were serviced by private enterprises terminating at Flinders street.<sup>21</sup> The high cost of rail fares and timetabling issues did not endear themselves to local residents in the formative years. The costs of rail fares were, by the late 1870s, still considered 'too high for the class of people who live in Footscray'.<sup>22</sup> The desire for a connecting road therefore remained strong.

The municipal movement of the 1850s after the introduction of the 1854 *Municipalities Act* had provided Footscray with the impetus and opportunity for self-government.<sup>23</sup> The push for the township and surrounding district to be officially declared a municipality required petitioning government, and was two-fold. The government's lucrative endowment attached to the awarding of a district as a municipality was needed for funding connecting roads and bridges (of paramount concern to any new community) while the land spruikers and speculators saw an opportunity to enhance their property values, hence profit, and thereby improving their lot should Footscray have good road access to Melbourne and the greater metropolis. In a letter to the *Argus* on 14 April 1859, one Footscray resident wrote, 'Here we are living in such a state that positively would not be tolerated on the most distant and uncivilised gold-fields'.<sup>24</sup>

Following the lead of many inner suburbs of Melbourne, Footscray and its surrounding district was proclaimed a municipality on 10 June 1859.<sup>25</sup> Seven councillors

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<sup>20</sup> H. Michell (ed.), *Footscray's First 50 Years*, Footscray: *The Advertiser*, 1909. It is worth noting that Melbourne's two main railways stations, Spencer Street and Flinders Street, were not joined together by a connecting viaduct until the 1890s.

<sup>21</sup> Graeme Davison, *The Rise and Fall of Marvellous Melbourne*, Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2004. pp. 188-189.

<sup>22</sup> *Williamstown Chronicle*, 27 April 1878, p. 3.

<sup>23</sup> Grant and Serle, *The Melbourne Scene*, p. 76. Captain Clarke's *Municipalities Act* 'was a fundamental instrument of community development.'

<sup>24</sup> *Argus*, 14 April 1859, p. 5.

<sup>25</sup> Lack notes that, 'strictly speaking, the application for a municipal district was probably illegal, for the population of the designated area [of Footscray] does not appear to have satisfied the conditions of the Act.'

were voted to council chamber from ten nominations.<sup>26</sup> The new municipality was entitled to an initial government endowment attracting a payment of £5,000 to subsidise council for the necessity of public works.<sup>27</sup> The downside for landowners was the expectation that rates on land would be collected and payable to council.

Despite being at the junction of two railway lines and two rivers, Footscray, at its formation as a borough in 1859, was an isolated community, cut off like a virtual island from the rest of the metropolis. It would remain that way for much of the nineteenth century with the costs associated with maintaining a road to Melbourne a continuing burden. The sheer size and irregular shape of the Footscray district at six and a half square miles ranked it larger than any other suburban municipality created in Melbourne between 1855 and 1860.<sup>28</sup> By dint of this isolation and the vast area it covered, Footscray was slow to progress in terms of infrastructure. In a retrospective on local cricket, appearing in the *Independent* newspaper in 1886, pioneer Frederick Humphrey confirms the relative isolation of Footscray at the time, comparing it to living ‘on an island’ where the only punt across the Saltwater River was closed after dark and the trains did not run past 6.00 pm, except on a Saturday.<sup>29</sup>

Occasionally, the Melbourne press cast their eyes westward to comment on a few events that placed Footscray in the spotlight. This provided, at least momentarily, the recognition the municipality craved. For example, the opening of the Footscray Bridge over the Saltwater River in 1863 was cause for celebration and was seen as a ‘red letter day’ in the history of Footscray.<sup>30</sup> Opened by His Excellency, the Governor of Victoria, Sir Henry Barkly, the bridge officially established a connection between Footscray and adjoining North Melbourne, albeit, via an unmade road.<sup>31</sup> The rowing fraternity conducted a series of amateur boat races in conjunction with the formality of the day’s

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For a claim to be made as a municipality, the Act required petitioning government by a district containing a population of at least 300 householders, within an area of nine square miles. It appears the Footscray deputation’s ‘loose’ definition and application of what constituted 300 householders was accepted by a Government equally ‘loose’ in its approval of Footscray’s application. Lack, *A History of Footscray*, pp. 59-60. See also, *Argus* 13 July 1858, p. 5.

<sup>26</sup> *Argus*, 2 July 1859, p. 5.

<sup>27</sup> *Argus*, 13 July 1858, p. 5.

<sup>28</sup> Lack, *A History of Footscray*, p. 66.

<sup>29</sup> Fred Humphrey, ‘Early Cricket’, *Independent*, 1 May 1886, p. 3.

<sup>30</sup> *Ballarat Star*, 2 March 1863, p. 2.

<sup>31</sup> *Age*, 2 March 1863, p. 6; *Argus*, 2 March 1863, p. 5; *Ballarat Star*, 2 March 1863, p. 2.

festivities, all of which were covered extensively in the press.<sup>32</sup> Another prestigious event that shone the spotlight on Footscray was the holding of the Melbourne Annual Regatta from 1862 on the Saltwater River. This was an annual rowing affair, originally commenced on the Upper Yarra River in 1860 and will be more closely scrutinised in the next chapter.

In 1867, extraordinary scenes greeted the royal visit of Queen Victoria's son, Prince Alfred, Duke of Edinburgh, during his five month long tour of Australia.<sup>33</sup> When the Prince visited Melbourne in November 1867, some 100,000 Melburnians lined the streets of the city to catch their glimpse of royalty.<sup>34</sup> One month later, the Prince stopped at Footscray for a brief ceremony given by the mayor in front of a large crowd of local burgesses. Hundreds of children sang the national anthem before the Prince's entourage continued by train on their way to Castlemaine and Sandhurst' for the opening of the Mt. Alexander railway line.<sup>35</sup>

Besides the lack of a viable road, much of the problem retarding Footscray's settlement throughout the 1860s and into the 1870s was self-inflicted. Greed, in-fighting and the self-interest of local councillors in the 1860s led to civic neglect, which stifled the community's progress and paralysed the town for the best part of the decade.<sup>36</sup> It was reported by the *Argus* in 1860, that the town clerk, had absconded from his civic duties and had embezzled council funds.<sup>37</sup> Council 'shenanigans' reached new heights by the mid-1860s when warring parties split council with two mayors and two town clerks acting in simultaneous opposition to each-other.

Footscray's standing as a suburb after its early attempts at self-government left it open to derision and ridicule through the daily and suburban press. The *Argus* was particularly scathing,

Footscray, among boroughs, has almost passed into a proverb. A town council divide against itself; a place from which rival mayors perform legal

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<sup>32</sup> See for example, *Bell's Life in Victoria and Sporting Chronicle*, 7 March 1863, p. 2.

<sup>33</sup> Brian McKinlay, *Sweet & Simple Pleasures*, Blackburn: Collins Dove, 1988, pp. 96-98.

<sup>34</sup> *Argus*, 27 November 1867, p. 1.

<sup>35</sup> *Bendigo Advertiser*, 18 December 1867, p. 3.

<sup>36</sup> For a more in-depth account of council in-fighting, see Lack, *A History of Footscray*, pp. 68-70 and Michell, *Footscray's First 50 years*.

<sup>37</sup> *Argus*, 14 September 1860, p. 4.

assaults on each other before the courts; possessed of a treasury which is rich only in promises to pay; a community which has exhibited so little capacity for government...<sup>38</sup>

After a series of council resignations towards the end of the 1860s and early 1870s, one correspondent was driven to despair, suggesting that as soon as one council body ‘fell to pieces’, another had ‘been built on its ruins.’<sup>39</sup> The continual saga involving council upheavals made Footscray something of a laughing stock among other municipalities and the rest of Melbourne. The factional fighting and quarrels borne out of selfish interests caused differences and divisions but eventually led to a campaign to split the borough into wards. The division of council into wards in 1877 was a progressive move appeasing the various representative interests of each part of the borough.<sup>40</sup> Before that happened, Council reached a temporary hiatus of sorts – in the interests of the district – by having a number of planned building projects in the pipeline. In 1876, Footscray unveiled one such project – a newly built Town Hall at a major cost that would act like a noose around the neck of the public purse strings for years to come.<sup>41</sup>

No amount of ‘council goodwill’ could mask the dire traffic worries of the district. With council funds continually at a low ebb, roads, bridges and footpaths were always on the agenda. The deplorable state of the roads and street formation in the district was blamed on council ineptitude and inaction. It was common for locals to not be able to distinguish where roads stopped and started or even where they led to. The nomenclature of naming streets proved baffling as certain main roads continued as one but had different names along their route.<sup>42</sup> The high cost of tolls on the roads leading into and out of the district proved burdensome for many and the *Williamstown Chronicle*’s influential Footscray correspondent, believed it retarded settlement.<sup>43</sup> The more direct ‘Swamp’ road to Melbourne was a toll road between 1864 and 1876 but maintenance of the road ultimately overshadowed the revenue it gained.

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<sup>38</sup> *Argus* cited in, *Kilmore Free Press and Counties of Bourke and Dalhousie Advertiser*, 28 December 1865, p. 3.

<sup>39</sup> *Williamstown Chronicle*, 26 March 1870, p. 6.

<sup>40</sup> A petition to split council into wards had been mooted as early as 1870. The initial split saw council divided into representatives from the North, South and Middle wards.

<sup>41</sup> *Williamstown Chronicle*, 27 May 1876, p. 3.

<sup>42</sup> *Williamstown Chronicle*, 21 July 1877, p. 3.

<sup>43</sup> *Williamstown Chronicle*, 29 January 1870, p. 6.

Local newspaper commentary often proclaimed that Footscray was long neglected in parliamentary terms in its formative years through its representatives in the shared electorate of West Bourke.<sup>44</sup> The *Argus* was sympathetic to West Bourke's electorate noting that it was regrettable 'that such an aggregation of political incapables should have been concentrated in the representation of one unfortunate district.'<sup>45</sup> It was not until Footscray became a separate electoral constituency in 1877 that it gained some 'grunt' in government circles, particularly from 1879 when W.M. Clark was elected as the local member in the Legislative Assembly.<sup>46</sup>

Clark's influence was profound as he defied all challenges during his sixteen year unbroken reign as Footscray's M.L.A. As joint-proprietor, he helped establish Footscray's first truly local newspaper, the *Independent* in March 1883. The new proprietors believed that the time had 'arrived' for the people of the rapidly growing townships of Footscray and Yarraville to demand their own voice, no longer needing to rely on the 'semi-local assistance of the two papers published in a neighbouring town.'<sup>47</sup> This was a clear dig at Williamstown's two local papers. Prior to 1883, most of the local happenings went unreported, the town relying on the Footscray editions of the *Williamstown Advertiser* and *Williamstown Chronicle* for local news.<sup>48</sup> The new journal promised to be fiercely parochial in pushing local interests and issues for the advancement of the district. Clark used the local organ to push many Footscray causes and to an extent, it provided a platform to air his editorial and political thoughts publicly, thus keeping his own profile at the forefront of his constituents.

There had been a few previous attempts at starting a local paper, some as early as the formation of the municipality itself. In 1859, the *Footscray Advertiser* and *Footscray Observer* were short-lived journals lasting only a matter of weeks.<sup>49</sup> Another newcomer in 1884, the politically motivated *Advertiser*, an offshoot of the *Williamstown Advertiser*

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<sup>44</sup> For example, *Williamstown Chronicle*, 8 February 1879, p. 3; *Williamstown Chronicle*, 30 October 1869, p. 6 and *Williamstown Chronicle*, 30 March 1867, p. 5.

<sup>45</sup> *Argus* cited in, *Kilmore Free Press and Counties of Bourke and Dalhousie Advertiser*, 28 December 1865, p. 3.

<sup>46</sup> Clark would hold office as Footscray's representative until 1894. Michell, *Footscray's First 50 Years*.

<sup>47</sup> *Independent*, 31 March 1883, p. 2.

<sup>48</sup> By 1869, there were nine to ten suburban newspapers in Melbourne and within a decade, the *Devon Herald* listed 138 suburban and regional newspapers throughout the colony. *Newcastle Chronicle*, 25 March 1869, p. 2 and *Devon Herald*, 11 June 1879, p. 2.

<sup>49</sup> John Lack, *Charlie Lovett's Footscray*, Footscray: The City of Footscray Historical Society, 1993, p. xiii.

provided local opposition to the *Independent*, giving Footscray two local papers within the space of a year. A glance through the pages of these local Footscray papers provides more intimate insights into the web of established culture and the functioning of local society than can be gleaned through the Williamstown and daily newspapers. The adjunct of two local papers provided a vehicle for greater social discourse and was further validation that Footscray was reaching a new level of sophistication amongst Melbourne's suburban throng.

In other aspects of town life, Footscray households had to wait a little longer than the rest of Melbourne for the finer things in life. Melbourne was first supplied with Yan Yean water at the end of 1857, while Footscray only gained piped water in 1865 and gas lit up the night sky on the streets of Melbourne city in 1856, but not until 1878 in Footscray.<sup>50</sup> Footscray's correspondent to the *Williamstown Chronicle* was bullish about the borough's progress by 1878, declaring that, 'gas in your houses, the Yan Yean in your kitchens, and three banks in the borough to receive the money you're coining – this looks like advancement.'<sup>51</sup>

From an economic viewpoint, Footscray's early years as a municipality relied heavily on the quarrying industry, with bluestone used for road metal, or earmarked as a building stone for construction and ballast for ships.<sup>52</sup> Lack credits quarrymen with being 'the backbone of Footscray's contractor class,' who made influential businessmen and councillors and were a great social force locally.<sup>53</sup> By the 1870s, there was a shift in the social dynamic. Quarrying as the town's main economy made way for a burgeoning increase in industry. The tentacles of industry took hold of Footscray by the 1880s despite the town's brief flirtation as a ship building port during the middle of the decade.

Attracted by the cheap land, water frontage, river access and suitable conditions for their manufactories, industrialists moved in, lining either side of the riverbank, and the vast array of chimney stacks in the 1870s and 1880s was a stark reminder to any visitor of Footscray's contribution to the colony's economy. The effect of this industrial boom would secure Footscray's future prosperity and importance within the colony. The

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<sup>50</sup> Grant and Serle, *The Melbourne Scene*, p. 75; Anderson, *Victoria*, pp. 160, 184; Lewis, *Melbourne*, p. 48, and Lack, *A History of Footscray*, pp. 64-65.

<sup>51</sup> *Williamstown Chronicle*, 12 October 1878, p. 3.

<sup>52</sup> Lack, *A History of Footscray*, pp. 77-78.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.

captains of industry soon became the most prominent and influential members of society whether taking seats at the council chamber or patronising local sporting teams, friendly societies and clubs.

During the 1870s, Footscray's birth-rate was higher than any other suburb in greater Melbourne. The reason given by the *Argus* was that new suburbs like Footscray 'are being populated to a great extent by young couples, who have swarmed off from the parent hives, and who have settled there because land is cheap.'<sup>54</sup> In the Victorian census of 1881, almost 70 per cent of Footscray's population was aged under 30, with less than 3 per cent aged over 60. As Margaret Indian points out, 'It was a suburb without grandparents.'<sup>55</sup> She states that the implications are clear for leisure with relatively large numbers of single young males seeking leisure pursuits and social meetings.<sup>56</sup>

In a social context, the growth in the formation of sporting and social clubs, lodges and societies locally in the 1870s and 1880s reflected the highly interwoven and reliant community that Footscray had become due to its isolation. The social aspect of town life will be explored later in this chapter. In his examination of cycling in the Canadian town of Edmonton, Rob Hess points out that, 'it is far more beneficial, albeit more difficult, to examine the social conditions and attitudes which brought about the need for clubs, be they sporting or otherwise.'<sup>57</sup> With this in mind, this chapter provides the detail needed to achieve this goal.

### 2.3 'Sloughs of Despond': Mud and Pedestrian Locomotion

The superlative tenacity of our mud is a thing to be proud of.

*Independent*<sup>58</sup>

For the most part of this period of study, Footscray's inhabitants lived in harsh conditions. One of the most infuriating problems facing the early inhabitants was the mud.

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<sup>54</sup> *Argus*, 18 October 1884 p. 13.

<sup>55</sup> Victorian census figures reproduced in Indian, 'Leisure in City and Suburb', p. 125.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 127.

<sup>57</sup> Rob Hess, 'A Social History of Cycling in Edmonton, 1890-1897', Master's Thesis, University of Alberta, 1991, p. 21.

<sup>58</sup> *Independent*, 31 March 1883, p. 3.

This issue though, was not confined to Footscray alone. Many infant suburbs and towns throughout the colony faced the same prospect of having to wade through ankle deep mud and slush during the winter months as councils struggled to find funding for major works such as footpaths and roads.<sup>59</sup> The Footscray correspondent to the *Williamstown Chronicle* in 1879 suggested, ‘the Councillor who would promise to give us decent paths and means of crossing from one to the other would deserve knighthood.’<sup>60</sup> In a letter to the *Independent* in 1883, an exasperated resident posed the question, ‘When will the council wake up to the fact that it is the mud and the general nastiness which surrounds Footscray, that keeps it back in the suburban race?’. The writer wryly gave the nom de plume, ‘The Gluepot.’<sup>61</sup> In summer, it was the reverse effect, mud turned to dust and wind-blown dust became the common enemy.

Even the Melbourne Amateur Regatta, held on the Saltwater River, did not escape the wrath by the outside press. The *Geelong Advertiser* correspondent lambasted the state of affairs stating that the course, although loved by the rowers was,

anathematised by all spectators – cheerless and unpicturesque in situation, the spectators stand, or huddle together ... before them the tide breaks up upon dismal mud banks; behind them is a conduit of dust in summer, a series of mud puddles in winter.<sup>62</sup>

While the civic leaders lavishly ploughed council monies into the erection of a Town Hall in 1876 at a time when there was ‘not a respectable footpath or road in the district,’ many rate-payers felt their need for the construction of roads, pathways and bridges too often neglected.<sup>63</sup> Yet as extravagant the drain of the Town Hall was on local coffers, the Melbourne press heaped great praise on the grandeur of its Town Hall building, noting it was ‘worthy of any city in the colonies.’<sup>64</sup> To rub insult into the

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<sup>59</sup> Indeed, the same fate befell Melbourne’s city centre. For example, through-fares such as Flinders and Collins streets, were quite often a quagmire in the city’s formative years. See Anderson, *Victoria*, pp. 82-83.

<sup>60</sup> *Williamstown Chronicle*, 2 August 1879, p. 3.

<sup>61</sup> *Independent*, 9 June 1883, p. 3.

<sup>62</sup> *Geelong Advertiser*, 26 March 1877, p. 3.

<sup>63</sup> *Williamstown Chronicle*, 29 April 1876, p. 3.

<sup>64</sup> *Williamstown Chronicle*, 12 October 1878, p. 3.

wounds, council-made asphalt footpaths were being constructed in neighbouring Williamstown and Emerald Hill by the mid-1870s.<sup>65</sup>

To step out after nightfall in Footscray was positively dangerous as locals were faced with the added peril of quarry holes and large boulders that populated the landscape, with no lamps to guide residents home. One wag suggested that council did not want lighting as it would ‘show how dirty the place was.’<sup>66</sup> However, matters were made a little easier in the borough when the newly formed Footscray Gas Company introduced gas lighting - on a small scale - to the principal streets in 1878, relieving the tedium of the ratepayers’ ‘rayless misery.’<sup>67</sup> Footscray’s correspondent to the *Williamstown Chronicle* had declared one year earlier that, with the addition of street lighting and clean footpaths, ‘the attraction of Footscray as a place of residence will be increased ten-fold.’<sup>68</sup> An earlier attempt to light the district by kerosene lamp failed when the council could not find the funds to buy the oil.<sup>69</sup>

Another problem that led to the chopping up of roads and footpaths was the issue of daily locomotion. The stampeding hooves of horses being ridden as a public conveyance, horse drawn drays and other vehicles often boycotted the standard routes to take shortcuts across footpaths or criss-cross paddocks to avoid the sea of mud confronting them, thereby further exacerbating the situation. Added to the woe, wandering animals such as sheep, goats and cattle often roamed the borough at will. A decided nuisance, these animals, numbering in their hundreds, would also destroy household gardens and cause much damage but, as one correspondent pointed out, ‘it is one way of mowing the grass in the streets!’<sup>70</sup>

Inadequate funding and ‘past and present mismanagement’ of municipal affairs by council led to a continuous state of unmade roads, channelling and unconstructed footpaths, while bridges were left in a state of disrepair.<sup>71</sup> In truth, council had been left with a major headache, as early land speculators and developers had left Footscray with

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<sup>65</sup> *Williamstown Chronicle*, 29 April 1876, p. 3.

<sup>66</sup> *Williamstown Chronicle*, 20 May 1876, p. 3.

<sup>67</sup> *Williamstown Chronicle*, 2 June 1877, p. 3. A total of 31 kerosene street lamps had been introduced to illuminate the borough in 1876 but, ultimately, council could not afford to continually keep them alight.

<sup>68</sup> *Williamstown Chronicle*, 3 November 1877, p. 3.

<sup>69</sup> *Williamstown Chronicle*, 21 July 1877, p. 3; *Williamstown Chronicle*, 4 August 1877, p. 3.

<sup>70</sup> *Williamstown Chronicle*, 6 January 1877, p. 3.

<sup>71</sup> *Independent*, 16 June 1883, p. 3.

a patchwork of privately divided and sub-divided pockets of settlement in haphazard patterns ‘without concern for public convenience or health.’<sup>72</sup> These ‘cul-de-sacs’ offered no uniform connection to each other, thus it was no easy task establishing a correlating network of pedestrian communication or drainage. Footscray in reality was a well spread out borough with a scattered community and, by 1884, just ‘two inhabitants to the acre.’<sup>73</sup> The Footscray *Advertiser*, in its editorial of March 1884 noted that:

The vexed question of passable roads and footpaths is one that has become a thing of ridicule with the ratepayers of this borough.<sup>74</sup>

The winter months caused havoc on the unmade roads and in particular the main through-fares into and out of Footscray. The *Australian* commented in 1875, that ‘Footscray has no approaches except by rail, and when one gets there he only finds mud and bad beer.’<sup>75</sup> Both the Swamp Road and road to Williamstown were rendered almost impassable during these wet months. It was not uncommon for transport to become bogged, making any trip hazardous and fraught with danger. The Swamp Road, in particular, proved a drain on public funds with the cost of maintaining it far outweighing the revenue it achieved, especially after tolls were abolished in the mid-1870s. The burgesses of Footscray had demanded from government a direct road to Melbourne as early as the late 1850s, but because the obvious route (Swamp Road) fell under the province of five municipal districts and was only 20 metres into the boundary of Melbourne City Council at one end, government was loathe to contribute any more than a limited grant of funds.<sup>76</sup>

Each new council-elect had also carried the burden of financial debt from their previous civic leaders. The cost of building the Stoney Creek Bridge and its direct route to Williamstown, the continuing repairs required to Swamp Road and the costs associated with maintaining bridges in general weighed heavily on the public purse. The government offered free prison labour for the Stoney Creek Bridge project but the experiment

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<sup>72</sup> Lack, *A History of Footscray*, p. 103. See also, pp. 47, 70 and 104.

<sup>73</sup> *Argus*, 18 October, 1884, p. 13.

<sup>74</sup> *Advertiser*, 28 March 1884, p. 2.

<sup>75</sup> *Australasian*, 5 June 1875, p. 12.

<sup>76</sup> *Argus*, 13 July 1858, p. 5.

backfired as the salaries being paid to warders to watch over them sent costs spiralling, leading to a stagnation of works during the mid-1870s.<sup>77</sup>

It was not until well into the early to mid-1880s that provision was made to have asphalt laid down throughout portions of the borough. Council initially went for a temporary fix, laying ash on footpaths in preference to asphalt but, combined with the mud, footpaths became quagmires. In its editorial of 13 June 1885, the *Independent* urged council to take out a loan to cover the cost of good paths, street metalling and channelling as ‘the only equitable way out of our present difficulties.’<sup>78</sup> The local paper felt that increasing rates would only drive settlers away from the district, but expenditure invested in pedestrian locomotion would attract sufficient ‘additional population’ to meet the requirements of servicing such a loan.

It seems council took heed of the local paper’s plea. By early 1886, rapid improvements to footpaths were being made with asphalt ‘extending from the Town Hall to Geelong Road, and radiating everywhere.’<sup>79</sup> On the declaration of Footscray as a town in 1887, the *Independent* had great pleasure in trumpeting, ‘that old dread and reproach, “Footscray mud,” is not the terror and nuisance it was in by-gone days.’<sup>80</sup>

## 2.4 ‘Stinkopolis’: A Perfumed Existence

By the mid-1870s, every aspect of Footscray – landscape, economy, population, social relations – was being fundamentally transformed by the rise of the factory.

John Lack<sup>81</sup>

According to James Grant and Geoffrey Serle, there were no industrial suburbs in Melbourne at the start of the 1860s. Much of the established industry was ‘mainly concentrated in the city itself.’<sup>82</sup> As the population of the city swelled and manufacturing

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<sup>77</sup> *Australian Town and Country Journal*, 3 July 1875, p. 33, and *Williamstown Chronicle*, 11 September 1875, p. 3.

<sup>78</sup> *Independent*, 13 June 1885, p. 2.

<sup>79</sup> *Independent*, 9 January 1886, p. 3.

<sup>80</sup> *Independent*, 5 March 1887, p. 2.

<sup>81</sup> Lack, *A History of Footscray*, p. 86.

<sup>82</sup> Grant and Serle, *The Melbourne Scene*, p. 77.

increased, these industries spewed out their odours, at times casting a pall of effluvia over the settlement of Melbourne. Thus, the city had a problem, ‘the town authorities liked the prosperity, but did not savour the side-effects.’<sup>83</sup> Something had to be done to rid the southern capital of such a nuisance.

The Melbourne Corporation stepped in, and with the co-operation of the Victorian Government, embarked on a long campaign to banish the offending nuisances westward by the non-renewal of Yarra river leases.<sup>84</sup> Footscray was seen as one suburb ideally suited to the construction of manufactories. The attraction was obvious to enterprising industrialists. With its close proximity to Melbourne, it offered river frontage, cheap land and railway communication. Industries quickly found a home along the banks of the Saltwater River, proliferating from the late 1860s onwards, Davison noting that Footscray’s river access ‘simultaneously solved the problems of transport, water supply and waste disposal.’<sup>85</sup>

Footscray soon gained a reputation as a home to manufactories and noxious trades, earning it many sobriquets, some of them self-proclaimed, such as the ‘Birmingham’, ‘Liverpool’, ‘Manchester’ or ‘Cologne,’ of Victoria when compared to other famous ‘old world’ industrial cities. With the pending commencement of operations at the large Woollen Mill in the early 1870s, the *Geelong Advertiser*, quoting a local church minister, stated that Geelong’s aspirations for being the largest manufacturing town in the colony ‘is to be surpassed by Footscray – Footscray, the township of crabholes, quarries, and thistles. Who could have believed it?’<sup>86</sup>

Indeed, Footscray grew rapidly throughout the 1870s, ‘stretching out in the direction of the plains’ and south towards Yarraville, where, for the adventurous industrialist, ‘Every prospect pleases.’<sup>87</sup> As the industrialists moved in, manufactories multiplied significantly, prompting the *Geelong Advertiser* to predict, that ‘so must the population increase.’<sup>88</sup> The factories afforded employment, and as a consequence of that, there was a need for ancillary trades such as, ‘carpenters, masons, bricklayers, smiths,

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<sup>83</sup> Cited in Lack, *A History of Footscray*, p. 34.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 34-35.

<sup>85</sup> Davison, *The Rise and Fall of Marvellous Melbourne*, p. 58.

<sup>86</sup> *Geelong Advertiser*, 15 November 1871, p. 2. The Woollen Mill was expected to employ 300 hands.

<sup>87</sup> *Williamstown Chronicle*, 28 December 1872, p. 4; *Williamstown Chronicle*, 12 April 1873, p. 6.

<sup>88</sup> *Geelong Advertiser*, 15 November 1871, p. 2.

grocers, bakers, butchers and landlords.’<sup>89</sup> Coupled with cheap land and the building of workers cottages, the explosion of manufacturing in the area helps explain the doubling of Footscray’s population in the first half of the 1870s.<sup>90</sup>

The prosperity and employment opportunities created by the manufacturing industry though, came with one major downside. As a by-product of the activities by certain manufacturers, Footscray became a ‘stinkpot’ of detestable smells. The suffocating stinks emanating from a wide variety of noxious trades, particularly the piggeries and boiling-down establishments, was a constant companion for the inhabitants of the district. The following extract from ‘X’, Footscray’s correspondent to the *Williamstown Chronicle*, described the situation in the late 1870s before council took measures to control the problem:

When the wind was from one direction the stink was wafted over the river from the Boiling-Down Works, so that you could almost cut it with a knife. It was so rich and full of all that was abominable that the inhabitants of the place risked their lives in trying to avoid breathing. When it was from another quarter the concentrated essence of all that is vile was borne in upon us from the northern piggeries, and when it came from the south the lower district had its sea breeze laden with the nauseating colours emanating from a certain manure factory. At all seasons of the year, in all weathers, the atmosphere of Footscray was poisoned by the vile odours with which it was impregnated.<sup>91</sup>

Still, as the *Williamstown Chronicle* pointed out years earlier, the smells at night were ‘better than, empty pockets, empty houses and no employment.’<sup>92</sup> In *Unleashed*, the authors’ observe that, ‘By the 1880s, Footscray and Yarraville hosted about half of Melbourne’s “noxious trades”, their stomach-churning odours proclaiming to the world that the quarrying suburb “Stoneopolis” had become “Stinkopolis”’.<sup>93</sup> The noxious trades issue again reached a peak in 1883, the same year, Footscray’s first continuous newspaper was published and the year nominated as Footscray Football Club’s first

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<sup>89</sup> *Williamstown Chronicle*, 29 January 1870, p. 6.

<sup>90</sup> The Town Clerk’s population figures for Footscray show an increase from 1989 persons in 1871 to 5619 people in 1875. The figures were reproduced in the *Age*, 6 July 1876, p. 3.

<sup>91</sup> *Williamstown Chronicle*, 10 May 1879, p. 3.

<sup>92</sup> *Williamstown Chronicle*, 17 December 1870, p. 6.

<sup>93</sup> John Lack, Chris McConville, Michael Small and Damien Wright, *A History of the Footscray Football Club: Unleashed*, Footscray: Aus-Sport Enterprises, 1996, p. 5.

season. The local paper fairly bristles with letters to the editor from concerned residents regarding the vile and perennial miasma of smells.

The widespread condemnation of the stinks and the threat to public health led to public meetings and a movement to suppress the noxious trades in 1883. The subject of their initial ire was the centrally located Bone Mills of Messrs Blythe, Irvine & Binney, which was seen as openly flouting regulations to keep them in check and a decided nuisance, ‘greatly detrimental to the Borough.’<sup>94</sup> ‘Simpleton’ of the *Williamstown Advertiser* weighed in on the saga warning against a complete abolition of ‘those delicately odoriferous bouquets, which are prepared daily for the delectation of favoured Footscray.’<sup>95</sup> The *Independent* also cautioned against any dramatic action suggesting the town had grown and strengthened by their presence and ‘a large proportion of our wage-earning ratepayers would be thrown on the streets to beg and starve.’<sup>96</sup> Besides the bone mills, the chemical and manure works, meat preserving works, wool-washing establishments, abattoirs, candle works, tanneries, fell-mongers and even the sugar refinery constantly spewed their offending odours skyward.<sup>97</sup>

Anecdotal evidence elucidates the dissatisfaction with the situation. For example, a visiting Richmond cricketer was compelled to write to the local newspaper expressing his indignation at being approached whilst on the ground during the progress of a game against Footscray by ‘persons with a petition asking for our signatures against certain manure works.’<sup>98</sup> The *Footscray Advertiser* reported that even the local church was forced to close its doors during a Sunday sermon and that ‘the singing of the church choir was considerably interfered with by the noxious fumes.’<sup>99</sup> The residents from the lower side of the railway line down to the river were particularly exposed to the ‘abominable stinks’. Local industry often carted vile effluvia through the main streets, poisoning the air and invading homes. One resident from Napier Street wondered why Footscray ‘should be made a depot for all kinds of noxious and detestable matter, and a receptacle for putrid

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<sup>94</sup> *Williamstown Chronicle*, 10 March 1883, p. 2.

<sup>95</sup> *Williamstown Chronicle*, 10 March 1883, p. 3.

<sup>96</sup> *Independent*, 7 April 1883, p. 2.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid. Independent*, 28 April 1883, p. 3.

<sup>98</sup> *Independent*, 21 April 1883, p. 3.

<sup>99</sup> *Advertiser*, 25 April 1884, p. 2.

offal from other colonies, so that six thousand people shall suffer for the enrichment of a few.’<sup>100</sup>

It is possible that the impromptu sporting fields of Lower Footscray were moved further west in the late 1870s and early 1880s to escape the embarrassment of the vile smells confronting visiting teams. Footscray’s early sports were conducted along the banks of the Saltwater river but with the encroachment of industries and an increasing population by the late 1870s, it is little wonder the local sporting fraternity sought grounds and fresh air west of the railway line in Upper Footscray as a means of escaping the shrinking space for reserves and noxious vapours.

Derided for its own self-government issues, muddy streets and isolation, the smells made Footscray the ‘stinkpot’ of the metropolis and did much to damage its already sullied reputation as a suburb of substance on Melbourne’s periphery. Railway passengers were even heard to cry ‘shame,’ and observed to ‘hold their noses’ when passing through Footscray territory.<sup>101</sup> In discussing Footscray’s manufacturing past, Martin Flanagan summarized that, ‘Footscray was not a pretty place, at least not to outsiders, but that was part of its pride.’<sup>102</sup> The barbs directed at Footscray about its stinks and noxious trades only served to mould a unique community spirit. As Indian confirms, the ‘industrial development changed the sounds, sights and smells of the area’ and through the effects of the noxious trades, ‘affected the reputation and self-esteem of Footscray’ which gave rise to a ‘distinctive community spirit.’<sup>103</sup> In *A History of Footscray*, Lack observes that, ‘such aspersions stimulated the growth of a perverse local pride in Footscray’s noxious trades as the identifying badge of an industrial working-class community.’<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> *Independent*, 2 June 1883, p. 3.

<sup>101</sup> *Williamstown Chronicle*, 17 March 1883, p. 2.

<sup>102</sup> Flanagan, *Southern Sky*, p. 12.

<sup>103</sup> Indian, ‘Leisure in City and Suburb’, p. 129. For more on Footscray’s community pride and spirit in particular, see pages 130, 133, 146, 154, 164-166 and 169, in her thesis.

<sup>104</sup> Lack, *A History of Footscray*, p. 100.

## 2.5 Sport and Leisure in Footscray

Man cannot exist without amusement and relaxation of some kind or the other.

*Bells Life in Victoria and Sporting Chronicle* <sup>105</sup>

With over half of Australia's population originating from the United Kingdom by 1861, it is not surprising that British social and sporting culture resonated strongly in the colony.<sup>106</sup> Footscray reflected this scenario with its distinctly British demographic. New townships and suburbs, such as Footscray, were virtual “suburbs” of Britain, being founded on ‘British values and traditions.’<sup>107</sup> Richard Cashman observes that the ‘close ties between the motherland and the colonies were reinforced through the successful transplantation of British culture,’ including games such as cricket and football, along with the more aristocratic pursuits, such as hunting and horse-racing.<sup>108</sup> Rowing, a ‘purely and almost peculiarly British sport,’ also vied for recognition as one of the colony’s earliest national sports.<sup>109</sup> Ian Turner further emphasised that the new colonists, in bringing with them ‘the sports and recreations’ from England, found Victoria’s climate and conditions favourable to their leisure pursuits.<sup>110</sup>

The ethos of British imperial sport was underpinned in the late 1850s by several developing ideologies. According to Cashman, this Victorian era of British history was preoccupied with ‘health and purity.’<sup>111</sup> This obsession in British thinking helped determine the types of sports diffused to its antipodean colonies. Most of the British sports characterised by athletic or physical exercise such as cricket, football, rowing and rifle shooting were linked to the compatible English ideologies of muscular Christianity,

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<sup>105</sup> *Bells Life in Victoria and Sporting Chronicle*, 23 April 1859, p. 2.

<sup>106</sup> Cashman, *Paradise of Sport*, p. 152.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22. Robin Grow, ‘From Gumtrees to Goalposts, 1858-1876’, in Rob Hess and Bob Stewart (eds), *More Than a Game. An Unauthorised History of Australian Rules Football*, Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1998, p. 5.

<sup>108</sup> Cashman, *Paradise of Sport*, pp. 114, 152. Albeit, Australian Rules football in the new colony was something of a local concoction it was still developed in the manner similar to that of British football codes at the time as Tony Collins details in ‘The Invention of Sporting Tradition: National Myths, Imperial Past and the Origins of Australian Rules Football’, in Stephen Wagg (ed). *Myths and Milestones in the History of Sport*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, pp. 8-31.

<sup>109</sup> *Bells Life in Victoria and Sporting Chronicle*, 12 May 1866, p. 2.

<sup>110</sup> Sandercock and Turner, *Up Where, Cazaly?*, p. 7.

<sup>111</sup> Cashman, *Paradise of Sport*, p. 54.

Athleticism and Social Darwinism (survival of the fittest).<sup>112</sup> The motto *mens sana in corpore sano* ('a healthy mind in a healthy body') came to represent the overarching sentiment of these doctrines.

Influenced by fictional novels published by Charles Kingsley in 1855 (*Westward Ho!*) and Thomas Hughes in 1857 (*Tom Brown's Schooldays*), the English doctrine of muscular Christianity became an underlying force in the teaching philosophies of the English public school system and the overwhelming element associated with the promotion of particular sporting pursuits. Hughes' novel is regarded as 'the ultimate expression in print of the sentiments' comprising the muscular Christianity doctrine.<sup>113</sup> According to Rachel Winterton, muscular Christianity was 'prominent in Australian society by the late 1860s' and 'was based on the premise that organised sport imbued its participants with moral character and nationalistic duty through sportsmanship, team spirit and obedience to the rules.'<sup>114</sup>

The character building quality of 'manliness' and by extension 'manly' sports, were fundamental to the muscular Christian doctrine. It was felt that desirable traits such as self-discipline, courage and team-work espoused by the doctrine would 'elevate the moral and physical stature of the Australian.'<sup>115</sup> These attributes had militaristic undertones and, along with notions of imperialism and patriotism, it was thought that adherence to these ideals would produce better individuals and thus, a better equipped nation should war arise and service in the field of battle be required.<sup>116</sup> As David Brown contends, 'there was a pronounced relationship between the practice of athletic sports and

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<sup>112</sup> Prominent among the articles and books on these ideologies are those written by academics such as Bob Stewart, David Brown and J. A. Mangan. For examples in this field, refer to Bob Stewart, 'Athleticism Revisited: Sport, Character Building and Protestant School Education in Nineteenth Century Melbourne,' *Sporting Traditions*, vol. 9, no. 1, November 1992, pp. 35-50; David W. Brown, 'The Legacy of British Victorian Social Thought: Some Prominent Views on Sport, Physical Exercise and Society in Colonial Australia', in W. Vamplew (ed.), *Sport and Colonialism in Nineteenth Century Australasia*, Adelaide: Australian Society for Sports History, 1986, pp. 19-41; David W. Brown, 'Muscular Christianity in the Antipodes: Some Observations on the Diffusion and Emergence of a Victorian Ideal in Australian Social Theory', *Sporting Traditions*, vol. 3, no. 2, 1987, pp. 173-187; and J. A. Mangan, *Athleticism in the Victorian and Edwardian Public School: The Emergence and Consolidation of an Educational Ideology*, Cambridge: Frank Cass, 1981.

<sup>113</sup> Stewart, 'Athleticism Revisited', p. 37.

<sup>114</sup> Rachel Winterton, "'Feats of Fancy" and "Marvels of Muscle": A Social History of Swimming in Late Colonial Melbourne', Doctoral thesis, School of Sport and Exercise Science, Victoria University, 2010, p. 56.

<sup>115</sup> Brown, 'Muscular Christianity in the Antipodes', p. 177.

<sup>116</sup> Denis Molyneux, *Time for Play: Recreation and Moral Issues in Colonial South Australia*, Mile End: Wakefield Press, 2015, p. 146.

the physical demands required in war.<sup>117</sup> It was no surprise then, that the push to provide colonial militia in the 1860s drove the formation of local military corps and rifle-companies. Rifle shooting itself was seen as a ‘manly exercise,’ with Footscray at the forefront of this movement and its volunteer division formed as early as 1860. For many years competition rifle shooting involving other volunteer corps took place on the Footscray Butts, and by 1863, intercolonial rifle matches were being held on the banks of the Saltwater River at Footscray.

As Indian notes, ‘Opportunities for leisure-time escape were severely limited by Footscray’s isolation.’<sup>118</sup> Therefore, Footscray’s earliest sports in the mid-late 1850s were relatively rough and ready in nature with pedestrian and horse races, in particular, catering to the amusement of local partisans. Starting where the Yarraville Gardens now stand, pedestrian races followed a rough track, skirting the tea-tree along the river before venturing up a bush path, now Napier Street, and finishing at the Railway Hotel.<sup>119</sup> The impromptu horse race meeting of 1860 at Footscray attracted a crowd of three hundred people. The course, run on the Melbourne side of the Saltwater River, featured a makeshift grandstand made from the hull of an empty ship.<sup>120</sup>

Old ‘English games’ featured in advertisements to attract patronage of local public houses while the horse races at Flemington proved a lure for those that liked a bet. The more aristocratic English sport involving the hunt by horse and hound, particularly chasing red deer, was a common sight in the streets of early Footscray. The Flemington Hounds club often set out through Footscray where; ‘its endless plains and long lines of stone walls’ held ‘charms’ for the huntsman.<sup>121</sup> Fishing was another popular pastime on the Saltwater River where bream and mullet were plentiful during the 1860s and early 1870s before illegal netting, increased boating and pollution from the manufacturing sector saw the quality and quantity of fish decrease markedly, with the river deteriorating into an open sewer by the mid-to-late 1880s.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Brown, ‘Muscular Christianity in the Antipodes’, p. 175.

<sup>118</sup> Indian, ‘Leisure in City and Suburb’, p. 131.

<sup>119</sup> Michell, *Footscray’s First 50 years*.

<sup>120</sup> *Argus*, 3 January 1860, p. 5.

<sup>121</sup> *Australasian*, 15 June 1867, p. 12.

<sup>122</sup> A bounty was even offered to fishermen to rid the river of sharks. Five were reported caught at Footscray in a short period during 1877. See *Warwick Express*, 19 May 1877, p. 5.

As will be explored in a later chapter, Footscray's first foray into inter-suburban sporting competition occurred with the inception of Footscray's first formalised sporting club, the Footscray Cricket Club in 1860 – just weeks before the formation of the rifle-company.<sup>123</sup> Two years later, Footscray played host to the Annual Melbourne Rowing Regatta, but it was not until the mid-1870s that Footscray was able to institute a rowing club of its own and field a representative football side. The *Williamstown Chronicle* determined that cricket, football, and rifle shooting were 'an outcome of muscular Christianity.'<sup>124</sup> As noted previously, through necessity and a lack of municipal prosperity, 'the finer things of life – public gardens, a library, literary societies – could not enjoy a priority above basic public works, schools and churches.'<sup>125</sup> And thus, by extension, recreational space and sporting clubs made way for the initial need for town infrastructure.

A factor in the slow development of football in the area was the lack of a suitable reserve set aside for the purpose. According to Indian, 'few public reserves were set aside in the new suburbs.'<sup>126</sup> With Government owning large tracts of land within the municipality, Footscray council were restricted in their powers to approve use of public land for sporting purposes. This, at times, forced clubs to play in makeshift paddocks. Applications to the Lands Department by council for use of land was a regular necessity. Footscray's earliest reserve for sport was located riverside, east of Whitehall Street and running along the Saltwater River near the junction with the Lower Yarra River.<sup>127</sup>

Indian notes that, 'the aldermen saw the city's sports grounds and representative sporting teams as (external) symbols of Footscray's mature civic standing.'<sup>128</sup> Councillors therefore dominated the presidency of the Footscray Football Club, in particular, for well into the twentieth century. By the mid-1880s, the football club had become the most high-profile sporting team in the district, assuming the mantle from the rowing and cricket clubs. In his paper delivered on 'Understanding Colonial Australia through Football', Robert Pascoe eloquently points out that 'the local football club' played an important role

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<sup>123</sup> Council representatives were prominent in initiating these early movements.

<sup>124</sup> *Williamstown Chronicle*, 30 November 1878, p. 2.

<sup>125</sup> Lack, *A History of Footscray*, p. 77.

<sup>126</sup> Indian, 'Leisure in City and Suburb', p. 26.

<sup>127</sup> This was often referred to as the Southern Reserve.

<sup>128</sup> Indian, 'Leisure in City and Suburb', p. 142.

in providing ‘oil for the community’s wheels.’<sup>129</sup> This was evident in Footscray, especially from the time of the club’s entry into the VFA from 1886.

The first recorded newspaper item referring to a ‘Footscray’ football team appeared in the *Williamstown Chronicle* in 1876.<sup>130</sup> According to Charlie Lovett, the early football games were played on a paddock bounded by Cowper, Hyde and Bunbury streets in the old part of town.<sup>131</sup> The authors of *Unleashed* indicate that Footscray’s first football teams ‘emerged from street, factory, and neighbourhood scratch matches.’<sup>132</sup> Gradually more and more local clubs formed from the mid-1870s onwards, and while they provided for competitive games locally, by the early-1880s the multiplicity of makeshift clubs diluted the potential strength of having one strong representative team.

One of the many factors that led to the establishment and advancement of a sporting and leisure culture in Footscray was the suburb’s isolation. Footscray’s condition, as an isolated and insular community, contributed greatly to the fostering of social and sporting needs, but initially hindered the progress of representative sporting bodies in the district. Indian noted ‘there was a continuity between work and leisure in Footscray which strengthened community feeling and contact.’<sup>133</sup> Due to its working-class status, isolation, noxious trades and history of council blundering, Footscray was often a target for ridicule by outsiders and branded with an unenviable reputation that it found hard to live down. It was in these working class suburbs that a deep sense of ‘tribal’ loyalty and identification flourished in support of the local sporting club. Sporting success provided a platform to rise above any preconceived negative connotations and to, fleetingly perhaps, boost a suburb’s reputation. According to Ian Turner, during the 1880s, in particular, there was ‘...a close and often fanatical identification of the football clubs and their local communities.’<sup>134</sup> In his view, ‘nowhere was this more so than in the inner working class suburbs.’<sup>135</sup> As will be detailed in a later chapter, Footscray Rowing Clubs’ Clarke Cup victories of 1880-81-82 at the Annual Melbourne Regatta proved that

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<sup>129</sup> Robert Pascoe, ‘Understanding Colonial Australia through Football’, (transcribed text of a talk provided to the Royal Historical Society of Victoria, 17 September 2002), *Victorian Historical Journal*, Vol. 74, no. 1, April 2003, p. 81.

<sup>130</sup> *Williamstown Chronicle*, 15 July 1876, p. 3.

<sup>131</sup> *Mail*, 16 November 1935, p. 7.

<sup>132</sup> Lack, McConville, Small and Wright, *Unleashed*, p. 6.

<sup>133</sup> Indian, ‘Leisure in City and Suburb’, p. 130.

<sup>134</sup> Sandercock and Turner, *Up Where, Cazaly?*, p. 40.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*

such feelings and perceptions of suburban social inferiority could be overcome by the achievement of success in the sporting arena.<sup>136</sup> Thus, the suburb's pride was manifested through the feats attained by its local rowing club. The Rowing Club was then held up as a measure of success – an inspiring example to other sporting teams in the district that the glory of victory brought positive endorsement from the outside world.

At this point it is worth drawing on an article that appeared in the local paper reporting that a football match was to be played between the football and rowing clubs of Footscray. The importance of this match can be gleaned from the names representing the Footscray Rowing Club team. Whilst it was not uncommon for the Rowing Club to dabble in other sports, having played a cricket match and held athletic sports meets, it was unusual that it had enough club members willingly transfer their energies into fielding a team against the local club in such a sport as combative as football, where the risk of injury was profound. Both the *Independent* and *Advertiser* made reference to this match. The *Independent* reported:

The competition for to-day in connection with the Footscray Rowing Club will take place on the Footscray football ground, when 'our boys' try their skill at football against the local club. The following are the names from which the team will be chosen: H. West, C. West, G. West, R. Wood, T. Wood, J. Fotheringham, G. Pattinson, W. Clark, W. Hunter, A. Cleghorn, W. Warren, J. Findlay, A. Anderson, J. Warnecke, Huxtable, Saunders, Lucas, Mills, Spence, W. Long, M. James, R. Pattinson, Tucker, Vernon, Irving, and Schild. **Footscray football team:** Andrews, Brown, Boyd, Brian, Comben, Cant, Charles, Dawson, Emmerson W., Griffiths, Harrison, Henderson, Kelly, Lucas, McDonald (2), Coplestone, Roberts, Wright, Sheppard, and Williams. Players are requested to be on the ground behind Scotch church not later than 3 o'clock.<sup>137</sup>

Unfortunately, no report of the match or result was published. Many of the Rowing Club names such as West, Wood, Fotheringham, Pattinson, Hunter, Cleghorn, Warren, Findlay, A. Anderson, Warnecke, Lucas and Spence would feature prominently in Footscray Football Club's early history indicating that there was a strong transference

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<sup>136</sup> Even here, jealousies emerged in the middle-class press. For examples of this, see the chapter on rowing in this thesis.

<sup>137</sup> *Independent*, 20 September 1884, p. 1.

of skills and respect between the two sports. Given the rowing club's revered and exalted status within the community, it was highly likely the representatives of the rowing club were seen as 'manly' and capable recruits, worthy of upholding the district's honour on the football field, just as they had done so on the water in numerous Annual Melbourne Regatta conquests. Rowing's season mirrored that of the cricket season, being held over summer, therefore it did not impinge on the winter game of football. This match is one example of the collaboration and respect that existed between kindred clubs of the district at this time.

The Footscray community clearly worked together, played together and socialised together which further enhanced the social fabric of the locality and ultimately fostered a distinctive civic pride.<sup>138</sup> In Janet McCalman's unique portrait of Richmond's working class community, *Struggletown*, she noted that a similar local pride was engendered as each victory of the Richmond Football Club, 'brought a moment of triumph over feelings of social inferiority.'<sup>139</sup> Likewise, Robin Grow noticed that 'working-class communities' hopes and aspirations often came to rest on the performance of the local football team.<sup>140</sup> Turner identified that, 'active participation in sport was seen as an important social cement, a once-a-week camouflage of differences of income, property and status.'<sup>141</sup> Indian surmised that, 'Footscray residents were particularly sensitive to feelings of inferiority'<sup>142</sup> and 'the need to prove that their suburb was as good as any other spurred local people to establish and strongly support' any well-equipped sporting teams.<sup>143</sup>

With diminishing working hours and greater leisure time available by the 1880s, the working-class of Footscray were seeking opportunities for social contact and sporting participation.<sup>144</sup> In its first edition, the local *Independent*, promised that 'outdoor sports

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<sup>138</sup> For further analysis of the social and leisure habits of Footscray life during the 1880s and 1890s, see Indian, 'Leisure in City and Suburb'.

<sup>139</sup> Janet McCalman, *Struggletown: Portrait of an Australian Working-Class Community*, Ringwood: Penguin Books, 1984, p. 140.

<sup>140</sup> Robin Grow, 'The Victorian Football Association in Control, 1877-1896', in Rob Hess and Bob Stewart (eds), *More Than a Game. An Unauthorised History of Australian Rules Football*, Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1998, p. 54.

<sup>141</sup> Sandercock and Turner, *Up Where, Cazaly?*, p. 11.

<sup>142</sup> Indian, 'Leisure in City and Suburb', p. 154.

<sup>143</sup> Margaret Indian, 'Formalisation of Urban Leisure: Melbourne 1880-1900', in Richard Cashman and Michael McKernan (eds), *Sport: Money, Morality and the Media*, Kensington: New South Wales University Press, 1981, p. 286.

<sup>144</sup> Indian, 'Leisure in City and Suburb', p. 86.

in which our young men indulge will also receive a fair share of space and attention'.<sup>145</sup> With the advent of the new journal in March 1883, the means of advertising this intent helped spark an increase in activity. Local institutions such as the Church, the pub, the Mechanics' institute, and the friendly society helped facilitate much of this social interaction.<sup>146</sup> Footscray's early sporting institutions such as the cricket, rowing and football clubs often held their meetings in the town's many hotels. In a self-perpetuating role, these meetings which included sporting and social activities, then provided newsprint to fill the columns of local and daily newspapers. Other than the Mechanics Institute (established in 1859), Footscray had very few meeting halls on which to call on. An assembly hall attached to Lovett's Royal Hotel and accommodating 700 people, provided much needed relief when built in 1878, but the premises were generally let to private concerns.

To compensate for the lack of meeting facilities, pubs played important and varied roles, conducting social and sporting meetings of significance while at other times they were used as temporary morgues.<sup>147</sup> In a bid to boost numbers, various hotels in the district helped to play a key role in signing new members for the Footscray rifle company in 1860 by playing host to the militia meetings.<sup>148</sup> Hotels were an important part of social life drawing the community together for common purposes, not just for drinking but social gatherings and other activities.<sup>149</sup> Hotel publicans willingly opened their doors to meaningful local pursuits and, in some cases, held prominent positions within that club or provided trophies and prizes encouraging participation. The benefits were obvious: What was good for the community, was good for business.

One hotel that provided a core of activity for locals in the 1880s was the Buckingham Hotel, located in Upper Footscray. The hotel made use of an adjoining paddock or 'athletic ground' by conducting coursing (every Saturday), pigeon and sparrow shooting (during intervals), pigeon races, brasses (an old Yorkshire game) and quoits, besides the usual recreational billiards and pool.<sup>150</sup> At the height of its popularity

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<sup>145</sup> *Independent*, 31 March 1883, p. 2.

<sup>146</sup> *Indian*, 'Leisure in City and Suburb', p. 122.

<sup>147</sup> Footscray had 29 hotels by 1884. See *Fitzroy City Press*, 5 April 1884, p. 3.

<sup>148</sup> For further information regarding the formation of a Footscray Rifle Company, see *Argus*, 10 October 1860, p. 5; 13 October 1860, p. 5; 20 October 1860, p. 4; 2 November 1860, p. 5.

<sup>149</sup> *Indian*, 'Formalisation of Urban Leisure', p. 282.

<sup>150</sup> *Indian*, 'Leisure in City and Suburb', p. 144.

in the 1880s, the Buckingham Hotel was a favoured fixture for a number of these outside games and sports. Coursing had been ‘acclimatised as a colonial sport’ by the mid-1870s.<sup>151</sup> Regular coursing events involving rabbits, greyhounds and fox-terriers took place upon the grounds. The publican, James Howard, was not shy in seeking patronage to his ‘grand coursing tournament’ and via an advertisement in the local *Independent*, cheekily declared that ‘coursing was more interesting than politics.’<sup>152</sup> The Melbourne and Footscray Fox Terrier Club was also formed at the Buckingham Hotel during this time, based on the growing interest for the sport.

The early 1880s also saw the explosion of quoiting clubs within the district and Melbourne generally, which is useful to explore for the insights it reveals into the various factors which helped shape Footscray’s emerging sporting culture, in particular the role of the media and leading citizens. With the advent of the *Sportsman* in 1882, Melbourne’s first newspaper devoted purely to sports, certain sporting pursuits were more prominently promoted, particularly those of a ‘manly’ nature. The *Sportsman* regularly pushed the quoiting scene in Footscray and covered many of the various club matches and individual challenge matches. The sport, catering to the working-class and attracting all ages, particularly the ‘older set’, blossomed in a short space of time in Footscray during the early to mid-1880s. Clubs formed and re-formed and attached themselves to prominent hotel venues such as the Buckingham (West End), Mona Castle, Albert (North End) and Mrs Fernandez’s Court-House Hotel (Footscray/Footscray Select) with regular club, stake, trophy and championship events showcasing the abilities of local quoit players to all-comers.<sup>153</sup>

Hotel publicans were not averse to advertising their wares through the local press, or providing quoiting grounds or other ‘old English’ games as a means of attracting patronage to their business. The working men of the tanneries, bone-works and candle works formed their own club at the Apollo Hotel on Swamp Road with Mr Dalley, the club president, laying down the quoit ground at his own expense.<sup>154</sup> Quoiting grounds and clubs were also established at nearby Yarraville and Braybrook, with Williamstown

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<sup>151</sup> *Ovens and Murray Advertiser*, 17 April 1875, p. 5.

<sup>152</sup> *Independent*, 6 September 1884, p. 2.

<sup>153</sup> Some games were even played according to the representative counties the players originated from in the motherland. As an example, the *Sportsman* (25 October 1882, p. 4) reported games between pairings of Cornishmen and Yorkshiremen in Footscray.

<sup>154</sup> *Sportsman*, 13 June 1883, p. 4.

Bowling Club joining the craze in 1883.<sup>155</sup> By the end of 1883, the borough of Footscray could boast six active quoiting grounds.<sup>156</sup> Competitions between suburban rivals were a social affair with the day's proceedings extending to supper at the host's hotel and the provision of late night entertainment which invariably paid homage to the motherland with the singing of the national anthem and *Auld Lang Syne*.

The Court-House was the leading quoit ground in Footscray and home to the Footscray Select Quoit Club. According to the *Sportsman*, the Select Quoiting Club was worthy of meeting any club in the colony.<sup>157</sup> Offering three rinks at the rear of the hotel and seating for an inner-ring of spectators by 1882, the Court-House facilities were some of the best in Melbourne and catered to large crowds of up to 300 spectators. One of its players, Harry 'Old' Garner, contested for the Championship of Victoria against Sandhurst captain, F. Bolam, in 1884.<sup>158</sup> The match created a great deal of excitement amongst the 'knights of the ring' and attracted considerable betting on the result.<sup>159</sup> One of the prime movers in instigating participation in quoiting at the Court-House Hotel was a 'determined' Cornishman, Jack Williams. As a keen quoter and club treasurer, Williams was said to have laid the quoiting ground at his own expense. Williams simultaneously held administrative roles in the Church of England and various sporting bodies, including the Footscray Football Club. His service to the football club extended over a decade of involvement and he acted as treasurer and secretary from at least 1883 to 1896.

It was not uncommon for quoiting rinks to be occupied until sundown in the summer months or played under candle-light at other times of the year. By 1886, the *Independent* noted the increasing popularity of the pastime at Footscray with large numbers attending the rinks every Saturday afternoon, 'in spite of the races at Flemington.'<sup>160</sup> As a pointer to its popularity, the Footscray cricketers in 1882, after defeating Ascot Vale earlier in the day, made an appearance at the Court-House quoiting

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<sup>155</sup> James Hickey, proprietor of the Railway Hotel at Yarraville, laid down a quoit ground in 1883.

<sup>156</sup> *Sportsman*, 28 November 1883, p. 4.

<sup>157</sup> *Sportsman*, 11 July 1883, p. 4.

<sup>158</sup> Harry Garner's life in quoits in England and Victoria is recorded in a newspaper article, see, 'Reminiscences of a Veteran: Seventy Years with Quoits', *Barrier Miner* (Broken Hill), 25 November 1905, p. 6.

<sup>159</sup> *Independent*, 12 July 1884, p. 3.

<sup>160</sup> *Independent*, 23 January 1886, p. 3.

grounds. The *Sportsman* credited some of the cricketers with being amongst the ‘best quoiters in the colony,’ their skills in the cricketing field transferring to the quoiting rink.  
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As was common practice in those days, prominent citizens of the district came forward to offer inducements including trophies or prizes thereby, encouraging competition and participation. These inducements helped clubs attract new members and were often provided by publicans, councillors, doctors, businessmen or the local mayor, their patronage to the various sporting clubs being highly sort and paramount to success. Usually, the well-esteemed members of the community could also be relied upon for a financial donation and any such offer of support automatically entitled him, or her, to the title of club patron. At a dinner in 1884, given in honour of Footscray’s champion rower, Thomas ‘The Demon’ Wood, the health of the Borough council was toasted as ‘they were a body of gentlemen who deserved credit for the support they give to all classes of athletics.’<sup>162</sup>

In 1883, councillor and former mayor, John Currie (J. C.) Johnson Esq. offered the prize of a copper kettle trophy, valued at two guineas and manufactured by his Tyne Foundry, to be played for by the members of the Footscray Select Quoiting Club.<sup>163</sup> Several leading quoiters in the district used the steel quoits moulded specifically at his Yarra bank Foundry. The competition for the trophy was highlighted by some of the best exhibitions of quoiting seen in the district.<sup>164</sup> In the same year, Johnson provided the Footscray Football Club with a silver trophy cup for the ‘best all-round player’. J. Mansfield, Esq., offered a gold medal for next best and Barkly Street jeweller, P. Berrick, two silver medals, for the player with the best place kick and drop kick.<sup>165</sup> E.J. Emery, of the Belgravia Hotel and Dr James George Beaney also regularly patronised local district sporting clubs by donating trophies for competition.

But what of the more social pursuits attracting members of the Footscray community? Indian contends that ‘because Footscray was a suburb of public leisure

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<sup>161</sup> *Sportsman*, 6 December 1882, p. 4.

<sup>162</sup> *Independent*, 26 April 1884, p. 2.

<sup>163</sup> *Williamstown Chronicle*, 6 January 1883, p. 2.

<sup>164</sup> ‘Old’ Garner was the lucky recipient of the copper kettle trophy.

<sup>165</sup> Charlie Lovett, as ‘best all-round player’ of 1883, chose Johnson’s silver cup over Mansfield’s gold medal while J. Bennett, as next best player, automatically won the gold medal. The best place kick medal was won by W. Warren, with W. Kelly winning the best drop kick.

pursuits; community interest was easily aroused and conspicuous.<sup>166</sup> Whilst this was true in the sporting arena, the social side of Footscray also flourished. A Presbyterian Church sermon at Footscray in 1883 indicated that people of the era were more discerning than their forebears; ‘this is an age of taste – taste in business, taste in pleasure.’<sup>167</sup> Locals were offered a wealth of options including Bachelor and Quadrille assemblies, Amateur Dramatic Clubs, Minstrel troupes, self-help/mutual improvement, Benevolent and temperance societies, Friendly societies and Lodges, Progressive Unions and various bands of music. Indian described the friendly societies as ‘centres of social activity’ for an ‘active minority of members.’<sup>168</sup> For the more intellectual members of society, debating classes, ‘Amateur Parliament’ and the Mechanics Institute with its School of Design, stimulated ‘the cultivation of their tastes and improvement of their minds.’<sup>169</sup> The choice was seemingly endless.

Concerts, bazaars and teas were a common fundraising activity for churches, friendly societies and sporting clubs while local dances and theatre productions were also popular. Adding to this, Saturday (late) night shopping was in vogue for a period of time during the 1880s which allowed locals to confine their entertainment, business and trade to Footscray, without the need to travel to the city markets on weekends.<sup>170</sup> The gas lights of the shopping hub along Nicholson, Hopkins and Barkly streets lit the scene as crowds thronged the footpaths seeking out the many attractions on offer. Sunday was regarded as church day. The rapid progress Footscray was making by the mid-1880s can be largely attributed to community prosperity gained through the establishment of these local institutions, clubs and societies.

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<sup>166</sup> Indian, ‘Leisure in City and Suburb’, p. 143.

<sup>167</sup> *Independent*, 9 June 1883, p. 2.

<sup>168</sup> Indian, ‘Leisure in City and Suburb’, p. 170.

<sup>169</sup> *Williamstown Chronicle*, 8 May 1880, p. 3.

<sup>170</sup> *Independent*, 1 November 1884, p. 3.

## 2.6 The Influence of the Churches on Sport in Footscray

In the 1860s Victoria went through a religious awakening. This wild, rush-about, brawling society of the 1850s almost knelt in the aisles in the 1860s.

Geoffrey Blainey<sup>171</sup>

Footscray had four well-established religious denominations during this period of study – Anglican (English), Presbyterians (Scottish), Wesleyans (USA/UK) and Catholics (Irish). Perhaps the most intriguing influence on the early origins of sport in the area and central to the origins of the Footscray Football Club, in particular, is evidence linked strong Protestant involvement, namely through the Anglican and Presbyterian churches.<sup>172</sup> The St John's (Anglican) Church of England, situated at the corner of Cowper and Bunbury streets from 1864, became the first of the established churches to take root at Footscray in 1855.<sup>173</sup> The 'Scot's' or 'Scotch' Presbyterian Church, built in 1867, adjoined the Market Reserve in Barkly Street, which was the home ground of the football club from the late 1870s to mid-1880s. St Monica's Catholic Church, also built in 1867, still stands on its original site in Hopkins Street, not far from the original Church of England site, while the Wesleyan Church was located in Hyde Street.

Judith Buckrich notes that with the discovery of gold, the 1850s were the making of Melbourne, and that particular decade 'saw the construction of more than 800 churches built under the newly revised *Church Act* of 1853.'<sup>174</sup> According to Geoffrey Blainey, 'from the late 1850s to perhaps 1890s the churches in Victoria increased their influence to a remarkable degree. 'This was the age of the pulpit.'<sup>175</sup> He further adds, that 'the churches strengthened society in many ways' providing much needed support in education, welfare or through the encouragement of individual responsibility and were

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<sup>171</sup> Geoffrey Blainey, *A History of Victoria*, Port Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2006, p. 111.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 116-117; Cashman, *Paradise of Sport*, pp. 152-153.

<sup>173</sup> Catherine Reichert, *Anglican Parish of Footscray: Notes Towards a History, 1855-2005*, Footscray: Self-Published, 2005, pp. 1-3. Originally services were conducted from the Railway Hotel, Nicholson Street, and then the Church of England School room in Cowper Street from 1857, before the church was built on site in 1864. Church services were moved to a hall in Pickett St by 1888 while the building of a new church at Paisley Street took place.

<sup>174</sup> Judith Buckrich, *Well Rowed University: Melbourne University Boat Club: The First 150 Years*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Boat Club Inc., 2009, pp. 2, 4-5.

<sup>175</sup> Blainey, *A History of Victoria*, p. 112.

leaders in the temperance movement and other social institutions.<sup>176</sup> Ecclesiastical differences between the various church denominations were somewhat stifled during Footscray's formative years as common goals, such as schooling and fundraising, took precedence.

Many women at this time were committed church members through activities such as church teas, bazaars, choral singing, concerts and general church fundraising pursuits.<sup>177</sup> These fundraising activities, such as bazaars, teas and art unions, had a flow on effect benefitting the local sporting clubs in which their husbands, partners, brothers and sons participated, helping provide financial aid when the cause required. Women could call on their experience and know-how of holding similar fund-raising events through the church and, often found the church as a feeder venue for such activities. With the emergence and increase of male larrikinism in the district from the 1870s, women contributed to the making of financially sustainable sporting clubs as a means of providing adequate alternatives or outlets for the male youth of Footscray.<sup>178</sup>

It is difficult to pinpoint any direct involvement of adherents to the Wesleyan Church (circa 1870) to the Footscray Football Club. Likewise, the Catholic Church devotees appear to have had little or no influence on the fortunes of the club. This situation is in direct contrast to neighbouring North Melbourne and other inner-city VFA clubs like Richmond and later, Collingwood, who had strong Catholic beginnings.<sup>179</sup> Indian contends that proprietors of local newspapers were generally Anglicans and Protestants, therefore this might explain the lack of information on Catholic activities in Footscray.<sup>180</sup> The antagonism between Protestant and Catholic denominations could be one reason to explain why there was very little association between representative sporting teams of North Melbourne and Footscray, at least until the formalisation of controlling bodies provided a set fixture of matches. However, the more likely reason Footscray teams did not venture to Hotham/North Melbourne too often was because of the status of their respective sporting teams and not necessarily because of perceived secular differences.

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<sup>176</sup> Ibid., p. 116.

<sup>177</sup> Indian, 'Leisure in City and Suburb', p. 172.

<sup>178</sup> For more on the Larrikin element of society see, James Murray, *Larrikins: 19<sup>th</sup> Century Outrage*, Melbourne: Lansdowne Press, 1973; and Melissa Bellanta, *Larrikins: A History*, St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2012.

<sup>179</sup> Pascoe, *The Winter Game*, p. 22.

<sup>180</sup> Indian, 'Leisure in City and Suburb', p. 172.

North Melbourne teams were more advanced in their formation and development, achieving ‘senior’ status far earlier than those of neighbouring Footscray. North Melbourne generally leant towards its northern, and also largely Protestant neighbours, Carlton and Brunswick for competition matches at Royal Park, while Footscray favoured local and Williamstown opponents when seeking competition.

In deference to the Church of England, who provided the bulk of the playing members and office-bearers in the formative years, the Presbyterian Church provided the club with patronage and prestige. This general sentiment is confirmed by Richard Cashman, who states that many of the Scottish emigrants to Australia ‘were from the commercial middle classes or gentry background.’<sup>181</sup> Furthermore, Cashman observes that the Scots ‘contributed more to Australian sport through their patronage of particular sports’ because there was ‘limited incentive’ to maintain their Scottish sporting traditions given they assimilated better into business, political and professional life in the new colonies.<sup>182</sup> He points out that some of the more affluent Scots, comfortable with English culture, even ‘gravitated from the Presbyterian to the Anglican Church’.<sup>183</sup> Scottish-born, James Cuming, councillor, mayor and later, long-term president of the Footscray Football Club, had strong affiliations with the St John’s Anglican Church.<sup>184</sup>

As indicated by figures taken from the 1891 census, reproduced in Indian’s thesis, at least 40 percent of Footscray’s population gave their preference as Anglican.<sup>185</sup> This was a strong reflection of Footscray’s English demographic. The influence of the Church of England was paramount in the instigation and continued success of many sporting and cultural movements in the district from the time Henry Forde (H.F.) Scott took over as the incumbent minister in 1877. Born in Ireland and left orphaned at seven, Scott was an energetic and self-made man, rising from a ‘penniless gold-digger to the respectability and status of the cloth.’<sup>186</sup> In October 1883, Scott chaired a benefit concert for the purposes of preparing a turf wicket and erection of a pavilion for the Footscray Cricket

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<sup>181</sup> Cashman, *Paradise of Sport*, p. 152.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 153.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 152.

<sup>184</sup> Cuming, in his role as mayor, laid the foundation stone of the new Anglican Church in Paisley Street in 1891. Michell, *Footscray’s First 50 Years*.

<sup>185</sup> Indian, ‘Leisure in City and Suburb’, p. 172. Indian states that ‘these percentages remained fairly constant from 1881 to 1901.’ Presbyterian and Catholic percentages were roughly about 15 percent each in Footscray by 1891.

<sup>186</sup> Lack, *A History of Footscray*, p. 146; Reichert, *Anglican Parish of Footscray*, p. 15.

Club. In a speech to the crowd of more than six hundred people, Scott advised, ‘that his presence as a clergyman showed his interest in the athletic sports of the young, and that the church was not averse to pure sports.’<sup>187</sup> A month earlier, the Reverend Scott had presented a donated silver medal for bowling at the club’s annual meeting, and at times, he would even officiate as the club umpire.<sup>188</sup> In the winter of 1884, Scott gave a series of free lectures at the St John’s Church including one on ‘Athletics’.

To his male followers, the Rev. Scott played a fundamental role in propagating his version of the virtues of ‘muscularity’ and ‘manliness’. He embraced the playing of what he saw as ‘manly’ sports, having a significant impact on his male adherents through his lucid encouragement and personal involvement in particular sporting offerings. As an example of this, Scott initiated the formation of a St John’s Cricket Club in his first year at the helm of the church for the benefit of the young boys of the St John’s Sunday school.<sup>189</sup> Scott was the obvious choice as club president and according to the *Williamstown Chronicle*, took ‘a hearty interest in its success’.<sup>190</sup> By 1878, a St John’s football side was in action and featured many names that would become synonymous with the Footscray Football Club.

The authors of *Unleashed* have also acknowledged the connection of ‘several key families associated with St John’s Church of England.’<sup>191</sup> So, who were these key families and who made up the congregations? Among the Anglican brethren is a ‘who’s who’ of early Footscray Football Club personnel. Church members dominated the office bearers and committees of the club from 1880 to 1885, the year before Footscray entered the senior VFA competition.<sup>192</sup> William Meeke Fehon, prominent among the church sphere and a one-time church treasurer, was president of the Footscray Football Club from 1880-82. Dr James Clarke Morton, a guardian of the Church, followed in Fehon’s presidential footsteps. Harry Scott, son of the reverend Scott, was secretary 1880-82 and 1884 while Harry Lovett, brother to club captain, Charlie Lovett (1881-1883), assumed the roles of

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<sup>187</sup> Meaning those that were ‘manly’ and free from the taint of money or gambling. *Independent*, 6 October 1883, p. 2.

<sup>188</sup> *Williamstown Chronicle*, 22 September 1883, p. 2.

<sup>189</sup> The ground was situated at the rear of the St John’s Church.

<sup>190</sup> *Williamstown Chronicle*, 10 November 1877, p. 2.

<sup>191</sup> Lack, McConville, Small and Wright, *Unleashed*, p. 10.

<sup>192</sup> Noting that a full list of office bearers is only available from the year 1880 onwards and that the club was known as Prince Imperial in 1880 and 1881. From council correspondence, the secretaries for the years of 1877-79 are also known. The author’s compilation notes have been used in this respect.

treasurer and secretary between 1880 and 1885 before his ultimate death from a footballing injury. Families with prominent playing members during this period included those of Lovett, Scott, Cleghorn, Copplestone, English, Kelly, McLean, Spence, French, Larritte, Warren, Roberts, Williams and others. A glance at the 1880 Prince Imperial Football Club playing list provides a virtual mirror image of the 1878 St John's Football Club list. The St John's Football Club appears to have only lasted for seasons 1878-79 which probably explains why so many of the players, on the verge of being young adults, gravitated towards the Prince Imperial club from 1880.<sup>193</sup>

The *Williamstown Chronicle* published a report on the Presbyterian annual congregational meeting held in 1880.<sup>194</sup> What can be derived from this report are some of the names influential in not only the early history of the Footscray Football Club, but the town itself. On the church board were well-known and respected figures in business, council and politics with links to the club, including William Mitchell, David Mitchell, John Currie Johnson, William McGregor Clark and Peter Langwill. David Mitchell could lay claim to being the 'father' of the club given he held the presidential office from 1886, steering the club through its first eight years in the VFA.

Indian also points out that, 'all churches were involved, to varying degrees, in the provision of broader cultural and entertainment opportunities.'<sup>195</sup> This was particularly so with the Church of England. The Rev. H.F. Scott, as the main instigator, was involved in the formation and encouragement of a number of community institutions. Scott's influence oversaw the establishment of such institutions as the Footscray Mutual Improvement Society, St John's Progressive Union, and the extremely successful Footscray Ladies' Benevolent Society, while he was prominent in the activities of the Mechanics' Institute and local Board of Advice. Catherine Reichert states that Scott was a 'firm believer in the church being a place central to the life of its people' and that he encouraged the young parishioners to participate in social activities.<sup>196</sup> Whereas, some church denominations cautioned against certain facets of sport, he was a strong advocate for the general benefit derived from such activities. Many clerics, though, believed that

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<sup>193</sup> There is just the one reference to the club in 1879, in that of a fixture to play North Williamstown on 24 May. See, *Williamstown Chronicle*, 17 May 1879, p. 4.

<sup>194</sup> *Williamstown Chronicle*, 24 April 1880, p. 3.

<sup>195</sup> Indian, 'Leisure in City and Suburb', p. 172.

<sup>196</sup> Reichert, *Anglican Parish of Footscray*, p. 15.

sport could play a positive role in promoting desirable social goals and values.<sup>197</sup> According to Brian Stoddart, ‘religious organisations in Australia have long been interested in sport creating a focus of unity.’<sup>198</sup> The Rev. H.F. Scott provided significant leadership and spiritual guidance in cultivating a sporting mindset and socially responsible brethren during his twenty-year reign as head of the local Anglican Church (1877-1896).<sup>199</sup>

## 2.7 Conclusion

As detailed in this chapter, Footscray’s predicament – that of an isolated community – was unique in comparison to Melbourne’s other suburbs. Cut off from the rest of suburbia like a virtual island for the most part of the nineteenth century by Batman’s Swamp, Footscray evolved into a distinctive close-knit community. Strongly British, working-class and protestant, Footscray became an industrial haven, parochially proud of its place in Melbourne’s pecking order. Footscray was a fertile home to many of Melbourne’s noxious trades who were attracted by cheap land and river access, which led to an unwanted reputation for detestable stinks and smells.

The scope of this thesis (1859-1886) represents a period of flux where the town had to overcome innumerable difficulties in transforming itself from a small settlement on the banks of the Saltwater River to a significant quarrying, and later manufacturing hub, on the fringe of Melbourne. First, and foremost came the need for basic infrastructure at the expense of recreation. Despite being declared a municipality in 1859, Footscray was a sprawling wilderness of barren plains, later pock-marked by quarries and characterised for the most part by primitive living conditions. Numerous factors impeded the progress of the district. Most prominent among these was the lack of a direct route to Melbourne. The shortest route via the Swamp Road was virtually inaccessible during winter and of great cost to the community through maintenance and tolls. Even the formation of train lines and the opening of Footscray station in 1859 added to the financial

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<sup>197</sup> Cashman, *Paradise of Sport*, p. 42.

<sup>198</sup> Brian Stoddart, *Saturday Afternoon Fever: Sport in the Australian Culture*, North Ryde: Angus & Robertson Publishers, 1986, p. 43.

<sup>199</sup> Reverend Scott moved to Sale in 1896 where he exchanged parishes with the incumbent minister. See Lack, *A History of Footscray*, p. 149.

impost of locals with fares deemed too high for such a working-class area. Lack of funds, self-interest and mismanagement often plagued the local council to the town's detriment. Unmade roads and footpaths, mud in winter and dust in summer created further hazards conducive to progress in such a scattered community.

There was, however a positive side to Footscray's slow and perhaps unorthodox progress. For a community that worked, played and socialized together, it provided a strong feeling of attachment and pride, quite often in the face of external ridicule. As more factories became established, people were attracted by the increase in employment opportunities and cheap land. The 1870s saw the population of Footscray double within the decade. By the mid-1870s, the socially and culturally conscientious were motivated to form clubs, lodges and societies that represented varied interests, moving away from pubs or hotels as their main form of entertainment and enlightenment creating a vibrant community. The pubs and churches were still strong conduits to social life in the district though, and were often used as meeting places for all realms of society. As noted, the Reverend Henry Forde Scott of the St John's Anglican Church of England, played a leading role in the development of a sporting culture and socially responsible brethren. The advent of late night shopping in the 1880s also added to the opportunities for social interaction. The establishment of local newspapers from 1883 encouraged further social discourse and gave a voice to local issues while promoting cultural opportunities such as sporting activities.

Moreover, the lack of communication with the outside world provided a severe impediment to the formation of representative sporting clubs in the district. The very nature of Footscray's isolation, in comparison to the rest of Melbourne, posed problems for any potential inter-suburban sporting contests. The harsh conditions, lack of suitable infrastructure and, in particular, transport difficulties facing the residents of Footscray in this period, provides evidence of the initial struggles that had to be surmounted to participate in suburban sporting contests. Footscray's early sporting contests took the form of challenges on a more social scale, rather than the formalised and structured manner in which sporting competitions were conducted throughout Melbourne from the late 1870s and 1880s. As sport opened up to the working-class in the 1870s and 1880s, Footscray's small strata of social elite encouraged participation through their business acumen, patronage and donation of trophies for competition. Success in the sporting

arena, served to compensate for feelings of social inadequacy or helped ameliorate class differences, and perhaps led to an improved sense of civic standing. Therefore, by providing an overview to the backdrop of town life in Footscray and the issues it faced the groundwork has been provided for a closer investigation into the origins of the rowing, cricket and football clubs.

## Chapter 3

### A ‘Truly National Sport’: Rowing in Footscray

In the 'sixties [1860s] the athletic amusements were confined practically to Cricket, Football, and Rowing, and the last named was well patronised.

Thomas Colles<sup>1</sup>

#### 3.1 Introduction

It was through sport, and rowing in particular, that Footscray achieved its first positive endorsement as a suburb. Success in the ‘W.J.T. Clarke Challenge Cup’ at the Melbourne Regatta in three consecutive years from 1880 had catapulted the Footscray Rowing Club to the pinnacle of the rowing world in the colony, and in the process, helping it achieve widespread acclaim (and notoriety) for their feats. In recalling the feat years later, the *Independent* stated that ‘the electric wires’ of the day had sent intelligence throughout Australasia, ‘The Footscray Rowing Club has beaten everything.’<sup>2</sup> They had won the ‘Clarke Cup’ in 1882. In his historical memoirs published in the *Footscray Mail* between 1935 and 1936, Charlie Lovett declared that winning the Clarke Challenge Cup had given Footscray ‘the greatest advertisement of all.’<sup>3</sup>

Rowing had appealed to the very essence of British settler societies, especially with its purported noble and manly qualities, and professional and amateur versions of the sport flourished in the new colonies of Australia, the natural waterways in each city providing a ready playground for aquatic activity. Moreover, at an international level, it was rowing’s Edward Trickett, who in 1876, provided Australia with its first world champion in sport.<sup>4</sup> Rowing’s great amateur event, the Melbourne Regatta, staged on the Saltwater River at Footscray from 1862, was an important conduit in facilitating Footscray’s entry into representative sport. The subsequent regattas introduced the sport

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Colles quoted in John Lang, *The Victorian Oarsman with a Rowing Register, 1857-1919, 62 Years*, Melbourne: A.H. Massina, 1919, p. 44.

<sup>2</sup> *Independent*, 24 April 1886, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Reproduced in John Lack (ed.), *Charlie Lovett’s Footscray*, Footscray: The City of Footscray Historical Society, 1993, p. 55.

<sup>4</sup> David G. Lane and Ian F. Jobling, ‘For Honour and Trophies: Amateur Rowing in Australia, 1888-1912’, *Sporting Traditions*, vol. 4, no 1, 1987, p. 2.

of rowing and a taste for competition to the local community on a grand scale, thereby helping shape Footscray's first formal entry into the world of aquatics a decade later.

The history of this event on the Saltwater and Lower Yarra river's (1862-1886)<sup>5</sup> will be closely investigated and used as background in a chronological and narrative format to provide an understanding of the important role it played in the development of not only a sporting mentality but a fierce local pride. The middle sub-section looks at the origins and formative years of the Footscray Rowing Club. This is followed by an in-depth examination of the club's important Clarke Cup success and its central involvement in the manual labour-*bona fide* amateur debate. Concentrating specifically on the Melbourne Regatta during the years 1880-1886, the third sub-section of this chapter analyses the issues and selected newspaper vitriol surrounding the blue-ribbon Clarke Cup event for eight-oared boats during a divisive era in rowing history. It therefore provides background to the context in which the Footscray Rowing Club was involved in the amateur-manual labourer debate that flared in club competition in Melbourne during the early 1880s.<sup>6</sup>

The perceived disparity between the two classes of rowers during this time generated tensions that threatened to derail rowing's standing as a legitimate sport at an important juncture in the sport's history. Whilst the deeds of the Rowing Club in the Clarke Cup were well-known in Footscray sporting folklore, the story of Footscray's momentous victories had been lost in the annals of mainstream sporting history, mainly due to the discontinuation of the event after Footscray's third and last victory in the race during 1882. The winning of the Clarke Cup in lasting perpetuity by the Footscray eight came to symbolize working-class triumph over upper and middle-class domination. The win allowed the lower strata of society to thumb their collective noses at the 'scions of society' and middle-class controllers of the sport, reversing the natural dichotomy of past years.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The Regatta would return to the Upper Yarra River for the years 1868-1873.

<sup>6</sup> Preliminary research on the issues surrounding the amateur-manual labourer debate in rowing at this time, highlighted in this introduction (and incorporating other parts of this chapter), forms the basis of a journal article written by the author. See Darren Arthur, 'A "Dirty Moleskin Crowd": The Footscray Rowing Eight, Amateurism and the Manual Labour Issue at the Melbourne Regatta, 1880-1886', *Sporting Traditions*, vol. 35, no. 1, May 2018, pp. 1-21.

<sup>7</sup> 'Scions of Society' was a term used by the *Sporting Globe* to refer to the social elite or middle and upper class rowing clubs some 50 years after the event. See Frank Hart, 'Epic Story of River Rivalry; Footscray Toilers Defeated Scions of Society', *Sporting Globe*, 23 May 1931, p. 5.

This chapter will provide an understanding of the cultural and sporting synergy of the era, particularly in this case, through a detailed examination of a kindred association such as the local rowing club and an analysis of the colony's flagship event, the Annual Melbourne Regatta. It will also help contextualise the important role other rival sporting codes can play in the foundations of local sporting clubs, and relevant to this study – the Footscray Football Club.

### 3.2 The Annual Melbourne Regatta Comes to the Saltwater River in 1862

The village of Footscray periodically emerges from the chrysalis condition in which during the greater part of the year it lies dormant, and puts on a butterfly effect.

*Age*<sup>8</sup>

The literature on Victoria's premier rowing carnival – the Annual Melbourne Regatta – as held on the Footscray course in two intervals between 1862 and 1886 is rather thin. Rarely, and despite its importance, is this event captured in any detailed form or critically analysed in the historiography of rowing, be it club or general histories. For example, Lang's early twentieth century bible on rowing in the colony, *The Victorian Oarsman*, devotes a mere three pages to an overview of the event, but places a greater emphasis on recording the statistical results of the feature races. Buckrich's account of Melbourne University's Boat Club's history, although providing a social backdrop as context, follows the usual club history narrative and contains excerpts from Lang's *Oarsman* to compliment the story but largely ignores the impact this race had on Footscray, its rowing club or rowing in general. The following analysis of this critical event in the formative years when rowing was establishing itself within the colony as a *bona fide* sport will go some way to filling this gaping hole in rowing historiography and opens up the possibility for further research.

Whilst not much is known about the rowing activities in Footscray prior to the district becoming a municipality in 1859, it is likely that some leisure time rowing did take place on the great waterway at the town's doorstep, the Saltwater River. In 1859,

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<sup>8</sup> *Age*, 22 April 1867, p. 6. This quotation from the *Age* correspondent describes Footscray's metamorphosis as a town during the regatta weekend.

Footscray's Punt Hotel and Stanley Arms Hotel sold tickets to a match race between two contestants that started on the Upper Yarra River and finished downstream from Footscray at Spottiswood's Ferry, indicating local interest in the sport.<sup>9</sup>

It was somewhat fortuitous that Footscray was suddenly cast into the rowing world's spotlight in 1862. The Melbourne [Rowing] Regatta committee, seeking an alternative venue to the often flooded, snaking but narrow Upper Yarra course of previous years, voted to use the more expansive Lower Yarra and Saltwater River at Footscray as its preferred course for its annual carnival, the Melbourne Regatta. The township of Footscray was given a great impetus by this decision, achieving a prominence and recognition within the Melbourne press and general society that it had not obtained previously, however slighted that view was.<sup>10</sup>

The Annual Melbourne Regatta for amateurs, the brainchild of Oxford University graduate, Professor Martin Howy Irving, founder of the University Rowing Club, was first instituted on the Upper Yarra course in May 1860.<sup>11</sup> It was the first regatta for amateurs in Australia and followed three earlier but unsuccessful attempts (since 1857), at establishing an aquatic regatta in Melbourne. The amateur sporting ideology, with its strong British roots, emphasised playing for sport's sake while spurning any form of monetary gain, a distinction, according to Baker, that 'elevated the motivation and behaviour of the amateur over that of the professional.'<sup>12</sup> This ideology was diffused to the colonial frontiers of the British world.<sup>13</sup> As Cashman has noted, amateurism 'became the core and enduring ideal which dominated Australian sport for over a century.'<sup>14</sup>

Managed by the Melbourne Regatta organising committee and held under the patronage of influential citizens including esteemed inaugural Committee President and

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<sup>9</sup> *Bell's Life in Victoria and Sporting Chronicle*, 5 February 1859, p. 2.

<sup>10</sup> Footscray hosted rowing's major event, the Annual Melbourne Regatta, from 1862-1867 and 1874-1886.

<sup>11</sup> Lang, *The Victorian Oarsman*, p. 25. The University Rowing Club was founded on 3 September 1859 and remains the oldest rowing club in Victoria. See, Judith Buckrich, *Well Rowed University: Melbourne University Boat Club: The First 150 Years*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Boat Club Inc., 2009.

<sup>12</sup> Norman Baker, 'Whose Hegemony? The Origins of the Amateur Ethos in Nineteenth Century English Society', *North American Society for Sports History*, 2003, pp. 34-35. Cited from the abstract.

<sup>13</sup> For more on the importation of amateurism to Australia see, Richard Cashman, *Paradise of Sport: The Rise of Organised Sport in Australia*, Oxford University Press, South Melbourne, 1995, pp. 57-71. See also, Daryl Adair and Wray Vamplew, *Sport in Australian History*, South Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1997, pp. 37-39.

<sup>14</sup> Cashman, *Paradise of Sport*, p. 54. For a thorough analysis see Erik Neilsen, *Sport and the British World, 1900-1930: Amateurism and National Identity in Australasia and Beyond*, Palgrave Macmillan, Houndmills, 2014.

Governor of Victoria, Sir Henry Barkly, the Regatta became an immediate success and was soon recognised as the premier aquatic event on the rowing calendar.<sup>15</sup> The Melbourne Regatta Committee also ‘became the arbiter of rowing matters in Victoria’ until the inauguration of the Victorian Rowing Association in 1876.<sup>16</sup>

Interest in rowing manifested itself with the advent of the Melbourne Regatta and the number of rowing clubs based on the Yarra River consequently flourished. By the time the 1862 regatta came to Footscray, six clubs – University, Elswick, Melbourne, Ariel, Leander and Magenta – were in ‘vigorous operation.’<sup>17</sup> The *Argus* believed that, ‘there is every reason to expect, that rowing will claim more attention this year than hitherto, and that it will, to some extent, divide public interest with the more generally patronized pastime of cricket.’<sup>18</sup> (Australian Rules football, was still finding its feet as a spectator sport after formal games commenced during the late 1850s, and was yet to generate the interest in Melbourne that cricket and rowing had.)<sup>19</sup>

The decision by the Regatta committee to nominate the Lower Yarra and Saltwater River course at Footscray over the city’s Upper Yarra course was a controversial one given all rowing clubs were based on the Upper Yarra River. Yet the serpentine nature, narrowness and resultant fouling caused during races at the Upper Yarra course – only two boats could be rowed across its breadth – greatly limited its potential as a venue for regatta races.<sup>20</sup> A sub-committee was formed to report on the advantages of both courses and the regatta committee debated long and hard over the merits of each. Eventually, the Footscray course won out on the deciding vote of the Regatta Chairman, but the decision caused great dissatisfaction in the rowing world and split the regatta committee.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Barkly Street in Footscray, is believed to be named after Governor of Victoria, Sir Henry Barkly. *Bell’s Life in Victoria and Sporting Chronicle*, 1 November 1862, p.3; Lang, *The Victorian Oarsman*, p. 125.

<sup>16</sup> Lang, *The Victorian Oarsman*, p. 27.

<sup>17</sup> *Age*, 9 June 1862, p. 5; *Argus*, 19 September 1862, p. 5.

<sup>18</sup> *Argus*, 19 September 1862, p. 5.

<sup>19</sup> For more on the origin question in Australian Rules football see, Trevor Ruddell, ‘An Origin Myth Engraved in Stone?: Scotch College, Melbourne Grammar and Australian Rules’, *Sporting Traditions*, vol. 33, no. 2, November 2016, pp. 57-78.

<sup>20</sup> *Bell’s Life and Sporting Chronicle*, 6 September 1862, p. 2.

<sup>21</sup> Of the 22 gentlemen comprising the Regatta Committee, thirteen were present on the night of the vote. The motion to decide the Regatta course was locked at six votes each before Graham Carrick, Chairman, cast his vote in favour of the Lower Yarra and Saltwater course. The influential Professor Irving who favoured the Upper Yarra course was not at this meeting. Several further attempts to overturn the original

Delayed by ‘a variety of causes,’ including a spell of drenching rain and a flooded Yarra River in 1862, the date of the initial regatta at Footscray had to be postponed from its usual late autumn meeting until late spring to allow for practice and confirmation of the course after several attempts to overturn the decision.<sup>22</sup> The date chosen coincided with the proclamation of a Monday public holiday in celebration of the Prince of Wales’ twenty-first birthday. It proved an opportunistic but shrewd decision by the regatta committee.

Melburnians liked to indulge their favourite pastimes and social entertainment on public holidays and turned out in force for the Regatta. Special trains from Spencer Street were ‘beseiged with ardent pleasure hunters’ and ran at fixed intervals during the day, ferrying the ‘excurtionists’ on a nine pence return ticket, a cheap fare for the day.<sup>23</sup> The *Ballarat Star* declared, ‘Foremost amongst the attractions in the suburbs was the regatta at the junction of the Saltwater and Yarra Yarra rivers, at Footscray’ where an estimated 10,000 people helped swell Footscray’s population ten-fold.<sup>24</sup> It was the biggest crowd to ever attend a regatta in the colony, making the day an impressive success for all concerned.<sup>25</sup>

Given the paucity of local newspaper reports, it is hard to decipher what impact staging the race had on the local community or how they viewed such an event, with perspectives of the day provided only by the middle class daily press (city) and regional press.<sup>26</sup> There is no doubt that Footscray had seen nothing like it previously. The town put on a display, decorating the river with a ‘glorious jumble’ of bunting and flags and ‘without the slightest regard to position’, hinting at Footscray’s exuberance for the occasion, but inexperience at hosting such an event.<sup>27</sup>

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decision were defeated. The Proxy votes, once revealed, increased the margin in favour of the Footscray course. See, *Age*, 11 October 1862, p. 4.

<sup>22</sup> *Age*, 9 June 1862, p. 5; *Bell’s Life in Victoria and Sporting Chronicle*, 23 August 1862, p. 4. As most clubs were housed on the Upper Yarra, the flooded state of the river meant that practice for the Regatta was nigh on impossible until the waters subsided.

<sup>23</sup> *Age*, 11 November 1862, p. 5.

<sup>24</sup> *Ballarat Star*, 11 November 1862, p. 1; *Bendigo Advertiser*, 11 November 1862, p. 2. Footscray’s population in 1861 was 1070. Jill Eastwood, *Melbourne: The Growth of a Metropolis, Commentary and Documents*, Melbourne: Thomas Nelson Australia, 1983, p. 47.

<sup>25</sup> Attendance figures varied from paper to paper with the lower end of the scale estimating 7000 persons.

<sup>26</sup> There were no Footscray papers operating during the 1860s and the Williamstown papers are no longer extant for the greater portion of this period.

<sup>27</sup> *Age*, 11 November 1862, p. 5.

The carnival atmosphere of the event attracted all classes and commanded the attention of ‘aristocracy’. As Hess points out, vice-regal attendance and support of social and sporting events provided the upper class imprimatur to the significance of such occasions and was important in keeping alive the ‘cultural, civic and imperial bonds’ with the British Empire.<sup>28</sup> The party, including His Excellency, the Governor of Victoria, regatta committee dignitaries and the Mayor and councillors of Footscray, were accommodated by a specially erected marquee and were surrounded on the banks of the river by, as the *Age* observed, ‘the elite of Victoria, the fairest and the bravest of our adopted land.’<sup>29</sup> Loyalty to the homeland ensured the public holiday was conducted with true British fervour. In the festive atmosphere that pervaded the scene, the Union Jack, the flag that ‘braved a thousand years’, could be seen among the crowd fluttering in the breeze on either side of the river.<sup>30</sup>

According to the *Age*, the rowing races were almost secondary to the fashionistas and the social mingling as far as the ladies were concerned. The ‘fairer sex’, in particular, were dressed to impress in their petticoats and bonnets, happily discussing the ‘female “news of the day”’ while the rowing events took place.<sup>31</sup> The *Ballarat Star* declared that, ‘those who prophesied all sorts of difficulties and disasters have been disappointed or agreeably mistaken in the opinion that the Salt Water River would not do.’<sup>32</sup> The regatta, held on the back of horse racing’s spring carnival at Flemington, virtually replicated that event from a social perspective with the mixture of sport and the social set attracting the throng.

The regatta maintained its standing the following year, attracting a crowd of 5000 people before a late squall brought an abrupt end to proceedings. ‘Footscray, so dull and unattractive in her ordinary attire, had put on her holiday suit’, declared the *Geelong Advertiser*.<sup>33</sup> Proof that Footscray had taken the regatta to heart lay in the introduction of two new prize races in 1863, namely the Footscray Cup and Footscray Plate, both events being sponsored by the people of Footscray. In the presence of the new Governor, Charles

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<sup>28</sup> Rob Hess, ‘Case Studies in the Development of Australian Rules Football, 1896-1908’, Doctoral thesis, School of Human Movement, Recreation and Performance, Victoria University, 2000, p. 61.

<sup>29</sup> *Age*, 11 November 1862, p. 5.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *Star*, 11 November 1862, p. 1.

<sup>33</sup> *Geelong Advertiser*, 10 November 1863, p. 3.

Darling, Lady Darling, Miss Darling and several dignitaries, the large crowd witnessed a ‘good day’s sport.’<sup>34</sup>

With the Prince of Wales’ birthday a regular public holiday by 1864, the *Australasian* was moved to announce that the Melbourne Regatta, held on the same day, had become ‘an institution in this city.’ Indeed the regatta had quickly become one of the chief attractions on the sporting calendar, if not the social calendar for Melbourne’s leisure-set, as indicated by the comment in the *Ballarat Star*, ‘boating appears to have become a favourite amusement for the fair sex of the metropolis, as well as for the sterner sex.’ Its social-like atmosphere was the place for ‘seeing and being seen.’<sup>35</sup>

A major shake-up of the event took place in 1865. With floods having washed away the Elswick club in 1864 and fearing patronage would drop because of other attractions on the public holiday in November, the Melbourne Regatta Committee voted to move the event to the Easter Monday holiday of 1866. The Committee preferred moving the event to the end of summer to avoid clashing with cricket and to allow the University rowing club to compete. Previously, the University club were precluded from contesting the Regatta, with students sitting exams during November.<sup>36</sup> With the beauty of hindsight, the Regatta Committee’s hasty decision to seek an alternative date was probably altered to appease the influential University club. Ironically, press reports of the 1866 Annual Regatta indicate that attendance was well down on past regattas due to other attractions on the day.<sup>37</sup> Lax management, a scarcity of funds and a program that ran up to three hours behind schedule also left many with a sour taste in their mouths, according to the *Age*.<sup>38</sup>

By 1867, rowing was on the wane. Fewer clubs existed on the Yarra River than before – floods had destroyed the Elswick, while the Ariel and Leander clubs could not sustain their former glory and disbanded. The switch of dates for the Annual Regatta to the Easter holiday period had backfired on the Committee, and the sport and its clubs were stagnating. It did not help that wind, rain and the Footscray ‘mud’ conspired to make

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<sup>34</sup> *Argus*, 10 November 1863, p. 5.

<sup>35</sup> *Star*, 10 November 1864, p. 2.

<sup>36</sup> *Australasian*, 7 October 1865, p. 6.

<sup>37</sup> The Sunbury encampment, Collingwood Sports and the National Gathering in the Zoological Gardens were all given as reasons ‘militating’ against a larger turnout of spectators. See, for example, *Bell’s Life in Victoria and Sporting Chronicle*, 7 April 1866, p. 2, and *Age*, 3 April 1866, p. 6.

<sup>38</sup> *Age*, 3 April 1866, p. 6.

the 1867 regatta, ‘the most miserable’ on record.<sup>39</sup> A dull season of rowing precipitated the re-formation of a specialised committee to arrange the Melbourne Regatta for 1868.<sup>40</sup> With several influential members on the committee, including Professor Martin Irving, a resolution was passed to move the Melbourne Regatta from the Footscray course to the Upper Yarra course.<sup>41</sup> The new committee was made up of two representatives of each of the rowing clubs and all were based on the Upper Yarra River.<sup>42</sup>

Among the objections to Footscray’s Lower Yarra course, was the flotilla of boats interfering with the competing crews, the lack of accommodation for crews and their boats, the squally nature of the weather at Footscray, its distance from Melbourne, and the general ‘naked filthiness of Footscray and its surroundings,’ compared to the beauty of the Upper Yarra venue.<sup>43</sup> The increasing prevalence of, and Footscray’s reliance on the noxious trades industries was perhaps another reason deterring patronage of the Regatta. In a letter to the *Australasian*, ‘Argonaut’ asked,

Who that has had the misfortune to go down the Lower Yarra can forget the perfumes of that delectable locality – bone-mills and tanneries, tanneries and bone-mills? Why, the competitors would have to row with respirators on.<sup>44</sup>

The editor agreed with Argonaut’s sentiments, further commenting that ‘the horrible smells on ... the Lower Yarra are sufficient to deter all but those who have no olfactory organs from witnessing rowing there.’<sup>45</sup>

After an absence of five years, the Annual Melbourne Regatta returned to ‘the sheltered waters of the Yarra’ in 1868.<sup>46</sup> The *Australasian* was in no doubt the correct decision was made in transferring the course to the Upper Yarra River after comparing the previous Melbourne Regatta held on the Saltwater River:

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<sup>39</sup> *Australasian*, 12 October 1867, p. 11.

<sup>40</sup> *Australasian*, 8 February 1868, p. 12; *Leader*, 22 February 1868, p. 15; *Australasian*, 22 February 1868, p. 12.

<sup>41</sup> In a letter penned to the *Australasian*, Irving provided his weight to the committee’s right to change the course back to its original home on the Upper Yarra River. See, ‘Upper or Lower Yarra?’ *Australasian*, 7 March 1868, p. 12.

<sup>42</sup> *Australasian*, 14 March 1868, p. 12.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *Australasian*, 16 May 1868, p. 12.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> *Leader*, 11 April 1868, p. 22.

About three hundred people, embracing the lowest riff-raff, thimble-riggers, and card-sharpers *ad nauseam*, hung about that miserable public house at Footscray ... One could scarcely expect any other wind-up to the proceedings, from such a gathering, than the general scramble which took place towards nightfall, in which two policemen were assaulted in a most cowardly manner. What a contrast to the scene at the Botanical gardens bridge and thereabouts on Saturday last.<sup>47</sup>

The Regatta would, however, return to the Footscray waters again, but not until 1874. Despite its rejection as a Regatta course, the Saltwater and Lower Yarra Rivers played host to the first inter-colonial university boat race between the universities of Melbourne and Sydney in 1870, an attempt to establish a rival event replicating that of Oxford and Cambridge universities of the mother country.<sup>48</sup> The *Australasian* viewed the event as a success, and proposed it would in future lead to ‘generous rivalry and spirited emulation’ as ‘a series of aquatic contests alternately on the broad bosom of the Parramatta [River] and on the dirty waters of the Lower Yarra.’<sup>49</sup> Other events of importance continued to be rowed at Footscray. In 1873, the Intercolonial Gig Race featuring crews from Sydney, Hobart, Geelong, Ballarat and Melbourne contested for the ‘Championship of Australia’, the first such time in Victorian waters.<sup>50</sup> Influenced by their Sydney visitors who stayed and trained at Footscray during the Intercolonial Gig Race, the people of Footscray were determined to turn out a crew for future competitions. A public meeting held in the Mechanics’ Institute led to the formation of the Footscray Rowing Club in September 1873.<sup>51</sup> The Banks Rowing Club was also re-invigorated when it instituted a Challenge Cup which was rowed for by members on the Saltwater River course for several years.<sup>52</sup>

The Melbourne Regatta of 1873 received widespread criticism in the press with the *Australasian* hoping ‘that the late regatta is the last that will ever take place on the

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<sup>47</sup> *Australasian*, 18 April 1868, p. 12.

<sup>48</sup> *Argus*, 24 December 1870, p. 7.

<sup>49</sup> *Australasian*, 24 December 1870, p. 11. Melbourne easily won the inaugural contest.

<sup>50</sup> *Australasian*, 29 March 1873, p. 11; *Australian Town and Country Journal*, 29 March 1873, p. 27.

<sup>51</sup> For the formation of the Footscray Rowing Club, see *Age*, 8 September 1873, p. 3, and *Australasian*, 29 November 1873, p. 12.

<sup>52</sup> *Argus*, 23 June 1873, p. 6.

Upper Yarra.<sup>53</sup> The committee agreed and the decision was made to switch the race back to the Saltwater and Lower Yarra River course for 1874. The *Age* cited a host of reasons including increased entries, an abundantly ‘dense growth of the willows’ along the river bank and the planting of eucalypt trees which effectively obstructed the view for spectators.<sup>54</sup> The 1874 regatta on the Saltwater River course went off without a hitch but the following year’s regatta would change the course of Australian rowing and Footscray was central to this change, in more ways than one.

The Melbourne Regatta of 1875 boasted a new ‘novelty’ event featuring the first eight-oared boat race for amateur oarsmen in Australian waters.<sup>55</sup> This type of racing was so popular that it instantly became the premier race on the regatta programme.<sup>56</sup> The eight-oared race was subscribed to by the people of Footscray at the instigation of the Mayor, James Reid, with the winner to receive the ‘Footscray Challenge Cup’.<sup>57</sup> Therefore, Footscray can lay claim to playing a critical role in the introduction of this ‘blue ribbon’ event to Australian rowing. Despite testing the personnel resources and funds of clubs, the introduction of eight-oared boat races was hailed as a great success and administrators pined for the day intercolonial contests would become a reality.

It was not long before the rowing bodies of Victoria and NSW agreed to an annual Inter-colonial match race. By 1878, NSW accepted Victoria’s challenge to meet on the Saltwater River, with Victoria taking out the inaugural championship, and alternating contests followed on the Parramatta River in Sydney. Footscray Rowing Club’s Clarke Cup victories between 1880 and 1882, ironically in the same eight-oared event that Footscrayites had helped to inaugurate at the 1875 Melbourne Regatta, placed greater scrutiny on the manual labourer-amateur rower debate so prevalent an issue in rowing circles at the time.<sup>58</sup>

Adverse weather and ‘suspicions of foul play’ marred the 1876 Melbourne Regatta. The prevalence of betting men among the ‘miserably small’ crowd left an

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<sup>53</sup> *Australasian*, 12 April 1873, p. 11.

<sup>54</sup> *Age*, 23 March 1874, p. 3.

<sup>55</sup> The first eight-oared boat was launched in Victoria on 23 October, 1869. See, Buckrich, *Well Rowed University*, p. 17.

<sup>56</sup> The eight-oared race is still considered the ‘blue-ribbon’ event of any regatta.

<sup>57</sup> Sometimes referred to as the ‘Footscray Plate’.

<sup>58</sup> The Clarke Cup victories and the manual labourer-amateur rowing debate will be looked at in further detail later in this chapter.

‘unsavoury odor’ to proceedings amid rumours that the Maiden Gig race had been tainted.<sup>59</sup> Rowing had largely been a professional sport until the advent of the Melbourne Regatta and gambling on races was common. The Melbourne Regatta, an amateur event, was immune to this activity until 1864, when ‘numerous attempts’ were made to ‘introduce the element of gambling.’<sup>60</sup> The re-surfacing of ‘heavy wagering’ on the event since then tested the patience of the sport’s moral guardians in the press. The regatta committee also came in for criticism for holding its annual tryst at the wrong time of the year when unsuitable weather conditions prevailed.<sup>61</sup> The *Leader* boldly proclaimed, ‘The sooner some radical change is introduced the better for the progress of rowing in Victoria.’<sup>62</sup> That change came swiftly.

At a meeting of the regatta committee on 7 October 1876, discussion quickly turned to the formation of a Rowing Association to replace the existing cumbersome body consisting of 32 rowing club representatives. Moved by Mr J.H. Hood, a new body was formed – the Victorian Rowing Association (VRA) – consisting of the main rowing clubs of Victoria, including Footscray, and holding ‘all the powers and privileges of the Melbourne Regatta Committee.’<sup>63</sup> Comfort for spectators was one of the first things organised for the first Melbourne Regatta held under the auspices of the new controlling body in 1877. A newly erected grandstand built upon a mud heap along the Footscray Esplanade, and covered by the shielding effects of canvas and tarpaulin, greeted the ladies and ‘bloated aristocrats’ who could afford to pay. The signature eights event for the Footscray Plate was a walkover to the Melbourne crew, the boat for another entrant, the Civil Service club, not arriving in time.<sup>64</sup>

Rowing and Footscray would again take centre stage in 1878 with the advent of an annual Intercolonial eight-oar boat race between Victoria and NSW for the Australian

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<sup>59</sup> *Leader*, 15 April 1876, p. 12.

<sup>60</sup> *Age*, 10 November 1864, p. 5.

<sup>61</sup> *Australasian*, 22 April 1876, p. 13.

<sup>62</sup> *Leader*, 15 April 1876, p. 12.

<sup>63</sup> The Victorian Rowing Association pre-dated the formation of the New South Wales Association (1878) and Amateur Rowing Association of England (1882). Rickards, Field, *Rowing in Victoria: The First 100 Years of the Victorian Rowing Association, 1876-1976*, Kew: Victorian Rowing Association, 1976, p. 8. Affiliation with the new Victorian Rowing Association was open to all major clubs however, only five came forward with the required subscription monies to guarantee their place as part of the association. See, *Australasian*, 14 October 1876, p. 12. Those clubs were, Banks, Civil Service, Footscray, Melbourne and University. See, *Argus*, 1 October 1877, p. 6, for a report of the Victorian Rowing Association annual meeting.

<sup>64</sup> *Geelong Advertiser*, 26 March 1877, p. 3.

Championship. It appears horse racing had a good hold on the many thousands of ‘lovers of sport’, for the Rowing Association wisely moved the race from its original timeslot on Saturday 2 March (St Leger day at Flemington), to Wednesday 6 March, in an effort to avoid a probable loss in crowd numbers on the Saltwater River course.<sup>65</sup> In the return match race on the Saltwater River in 1880, a large crowd estimated at 15,000 people swelled the riverbanks and witnessed Victoria salute the judge for the second time in three attempts. The event would go on to become a permanent annual feature and one of the most important championships on the Australian rowing calendar.

Melbourne Rowing Club’s third consecutive victory in the eight-oared race at the Melbourne Regatta in 1878 entitled it to permanently retain the ‘Footscray Challenge Cup’ trophy. In consequence of the loss of this trophy, the Rowing Association president, W.J.T. Clarke, a wealthy landowner, offered a 100 guinea cup to all eight-oared boats for the 1879 regatta.<sup>66</sup> The ‘Clarke Cup’ as it was known, became the principal event on the programme and the property of the Footscray Rowing Club after the club secured its third consecutive win in the race (1880-81-82), from as many tries. Footscray’s winning of the premier rowing trophy in the land (if not the world), would have far greater ramifications for amateur rowing in Australia creating class tensions in the sport.<sup>67</sup> The 1880s also saw the blurring of the lines between ‘amateur’ and ‘professional’ rowing.<sup>68</sup>

It is now appropriate to turn my attention to the Footscray Rowing Club and examine in more detail its history by charting the years since formation in 1873 to 1886. This will be done in two sections. The first will look at the machinations of the issues faced during the 1870s, a time which saw the club stave off potential threats to its existence by absorbing and then merging with other local operations, including the move from club only events to regatta competition, thereby stabilising itself by the end of the

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<sup>65</sup> *Australasian*, 16 February 1878, p. 13.

<sup>66</sup> *Australasian*, 31 August 1878, p. 12.

<sup>67</sup> This issue is looked at in the context of the Footscray Rowing Club in the following sub-section.

<sup>68</sup> For an example, see the discussion involving champion scullers, Arthur Fittes, W.G. Brett and Footscray’s Thomas Wood in the *Australasian*, 2 August 1884, p. 22. For further reading on some of the more significant academic outputs concerning amateur and professional rowing including the manual labour issue, see, Stuart Ripley, *Sculling and Skulduggery: A History of Professional Sculling*, Petersham, NSW: Walla Walla Press, 2009; Crotty, “‘Separate and Distinct’?”, pp. 152-163; Lane and Jobling, ‘For Honour and Trophies’, and Daryl Adair, “Two Dots in the Distance”: Professional Sculling as a Mass Spectacle in New South Wales, 1876-1907’, *Sporting Traditions*, vol. 9, no 1, 1992, pp. 52-83.

decade for a chance to make a challenge for Clarke Cup glory at the Melbourne Regatta from 1880, which will be the feature of the last sub-section.

### 3.3 Footscray Rowing Club: A Club is Formed

Our noble Footscray has only been respected as the leading manufacturing town in the colony, but we are also formidable on the water.

*Williamstown Chronicle*<sup>69</sup>

The Footscray Rowing Club was formed at a public meeting in the Footscray Mechanics' Institute on Friday, 5 September 1873. The *Age* was the first newspaper to report on the meeting declaring that Footscray had 'been thinking of turning out a crew.'<sup>70</sup> The article was brief but hinted as the reason for its inauguration on the influence from a visiting Sydney crew down for the Intercolonial Gig race,. By late November, the *Australasian* had declared that the maiden Footscray Rowing Club was a '*fait accompli*' having 'put up a new shed' stocked with boats.<sup>71</sup> While the club elected its office-bearers for the coming season, the daily press did not publish the results, with secretary, James Macmeikan, son of a local manufacturer, the only known official of the inaugural season.

In its first season, a Footscray crew faced several challenge races against another local crew, namely the *Myrtle Bank*, who were representative workers from Henderson's Piggery, a ham and bacon curing establishment based on the west bank of the Saltwater River.<sup>72</sup> Footscray's crew contained several notable names who would become influential members of local society. In crew order, Footscray's representatives were James Irving (bow), Arthur Burrows, James Morton, John Campbell (stroke) and John Carter (cox).<sup>73</sup> In the second challenge, James Cleghorn replaced Archibald Burrows. Despite losing the

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<sup>69</sup> *Williamstown Chronicle*, 22 January 1876, p. 3.

<sup>70</sup> *Age*, 8 September 1873, p. 3. The *Age* subsidiary, the *Leader*, also reprinted the same article on 13 September 1873, p. 11.

<sup>71</sup> *Australasian*, 29 November 1873, p. 12. It is likely this boatshed bordered Samuel Henderson's Myrtle Bank property.

<sup>72</sup> Myrtle Bank was the location name given to Henderson's complex.

<sup>73</sup> *David Yuiles' Diary*, Footscray Historical Society, p. 23. See also, *Age*, 12 May 1874, p. 3.

first challenge race, the Footscray Rowing Club had welcomed the *Myrtle Bank* crew as members of their own club by the second challenge.<sup>74</sup>

At the club's first annual meeting in September 1874, James Cleghorn replaced James Macmeikan as secretary for the 1874-75 season.<sup>75</sup> At a special meeting of the club in April 1875, Cleghorn was then succeeded as secretary by Charles Batson, while James Morton was elected president. The meeting decided to 'hold a concert in aid of the funds of the club' in the Borough Chambers.<sup>76</sup> Batson would later report that the concert was a success helping provide the new club with a strong financial footing.<sup>77</sup> There was further proof the club was making headway at a meeting in July when it was decided that Morton, Batson and Mayor James Reid, who had helped institute the eight-oared race at the Melbourne Regatta, would represent the club as delegates on the Melbourne Regatta committee.<sup>78</sup> However, secretary Batson declared that the club had seen a major drop off of members by the second annual meeting in October, 1875. This, according to the report of the meeting, 'was accounted for by the supposition that a number of gentlemen had connected themselves with the Club simply to give it a start.'<sup>79</sup> It is clear through this statement that the Rowing Club received the necessary community support it needed as impetus to get the club up and running.

Despite the drop off in members in the second season, the club had successfully made its 'first public appearance at the Geelong Regatta, and a few days later at the Melbourne Regatta.'<sup>80</sup> It had also held scratch and trial fours during the season and was favourably positioned, financially, to order a four-oared gig boat from prominent Melbourne boat-builder, Mr W.T. Greenland. The newspaper report of the meeting provided a clearer picture of the individuals involved in the club with the names of the office bearers and committee members being published.<sup>81</sup> Later reports showing the

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<sup>74</sup> *Age*, 12 May 1874, p. 3.

<sup>75</sup> Macmeikan would remain involved with the club as vice president.

<sup>76</sup> *Age*, 10 April 1875, p. 5. The concert became an annual source of income for the club in the formative years.

<sup>77</sup> *Australasian*, 12 June 1875, p. 12.

<sup>78</sup> *Age*, 7 July 1875, p. 3, 21 July 1875, p. 4.

<sup>79</sup> *Williamstown Chronicle*, 9 October 1875, p. 3.

<sup>80</sup> *Weekly Times*, 9 October 1875, p. 4.

<sup>81</sup> Nominated committee members were listed as follows; G. White, C. Stanlake, H.W. Hobkirk, F.A Lang, S. Brett and E. Langwill. See *Williamstown Chronicle*, 9 October 1875, p. 3 and *Weekly Times*, 9 October 1875, p. 4.

make-up of scratch four crews for club events also helps in providing a snapshot of the member's roll call and rowing community within Footscray.

From its second season, through to the 1870s, the Rowing Club was being served by a triumvirate of officials who were influential members of the community. This helped provide the club with stability and respectability within Victoria's rowing community. Doctor James Clarke Morton headed the club as president while Archibald Burrows and Charles Batson were treasurer and secretary, respectively. Morton aligned himself with many great causes in the district and had an affinity for local sporting clubs. Importantly, he held the presidency of the three major sporting clubs in Footscray at one time or another. He was installed president of the Footscray Cricket Club towards the end of his reign at the rowing club in the 1870s and then held the presidency of the cricket and football clubs in the same year, 1883. He was an integral member of St Johns Church of England, being one of the church guardians.<sup>82</sup> The wealthy doctor was not only a respected figurehead for sporting clubs, he offered monetary support to the rowing club, paying Footscray's affiliation fees to the VRA in that body's first year and offered trophies for club events. 'Argomene', the rowing correspondent for the *Williamstown Chronicle*, wrote in 1877 that, 'Doctor Morton is the mainstay of the club; the interest he takes in rowing matters, local or otherwise, is unflinching – always ready and willing.'<sup>83</sup> When he died during the 1886 football season, some nine years later at the age of 36, the Footscray Football Club wore crepe armbands as a mark of respect for their vice-president.<sup>84</sup>

Treasurer, Archibald Burrows, was owner and manager of a successful timber yard based at the junction of Barkly Street and Geelong Road.<sup>85</sup> Burrows and club president, James Morton, members of the inaugural crew that faced *Myrtle Bank*, acted as starter and judge, respectively, in all club events. Burrows became a local councillor in 1882 and was a patron of the rowing club in the mid-1880s before being elevated to mayoral duties in 1887. By virtue of his office as a city councillor, he was also listed as a vice-president of the Footscray Football Club in 1883 and offered prizes to the footballers

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<sup>82</sup> *Williamstown Advertiser*, 15 May 1886, p. 2.

<sup>83</sup> *Williamstown Chronicle*, 13 October 1877, p. 3.

<sup>84</sup> *Independent*, 15 May 1886, p. 3.

<sup>85</sup> By the early 1880s, Burrows had moved his timber yard to the vacant land beside the Royal Hall in Barkly Street, opposite Albert Street.

in seasons 1884-85. Secretary, Charles Batson, whose ‘indefatigable exertions’ helped steer the club away from the possibilities of becoming defunct during its earlier years was always at the forefront of promoting ‘the welfare of the club.’<sup>86</sup> Batson was described by ‘Argomene’ as ‘obliging, so energetic’ while, ‘his gentlemanly demeanour has made him a great favorite.’<sup>87</sup> The rowing club was indeed fortunate to have such respected figures administering the club.

Footscray faced its first great competition on the water when Williamstown Rowing Club threw down a challenge to compete in a four-oared match race in January 1876, over the regatta course. The race proved a one act affair as Footscray showed it was a ‘formidable’ force dominating their under-trained challengers.<sup>88</sup> While the 1876 Melbourne Regatta proved a disastrous affair with the weather and betting influencing the meeting, Footscray scored its first victory in major competition with a win in the maiden fours. It was a historic year for the Club with two competition wins, and for rowing in general. With the establishment of the Victorian Rowing Association in October as the arbiter for all rowing matters, including the Melbourne Regatta, rowing finally had a controlling body.

At the fourth annual meeting, held at the Ship Inn adjoining Footscray’s boatsheds, where friends of the rowing club would socialise over drinks to celebrate a day’s rowing on the river, the club reported a financial deficit on the year and a member roll of just 26.<sup>89</sup> Secretary Batson, in exasperated tone at the dwindling numbers declared that the previous season had been one of disappointment.<sup>90</sup> Rowing performances, finances and signed members were all down while the Annual Concert and Annual Ball had achieved varied success. An appeal for funds was launched whereby circulars were sent out to ‘influential residents of the district asking them to become honorary members’.<sup>91</sup> To encourage more rowing practice, and thereby improve the performances of the club, an effort would be made to engage a ‘coach’.

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<sup>86</sup> *Williamstown Chronicle*, 10 March 1877, p. 2.

<sup>87</sup> *Williamstown Chronicle*, 13 October 1877, p. 3.

<sup>88</sup> *Williamstown Chronicle*, 22 January 1876, p. 3.

<sup>89</sup> *Australasian*, 6 October 1877, p. 12.

<sup>90</sup> His report is republished in full, see, *Williamstown Chronicle*, 13 October 1877, p. 3.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

Early in 1878, the Footscray Rowing Club faced competition when a second rowing club was formed in the district. Calling itself the Crown Rowing Club, it wasted no time in purchasing some boats from the Footscray club and signing twenty members. The *Williamstown Chronicle's* correspondent 'Outrigger' was circumspect about having two clubs in Footscray:

If the rivalry which will sure to exist between the clubs will cause a greater interest to be taken in muscular Christianity, the club will not have been started in vain, but I think it would have been much better had they joined the F.R.C.<sup>92</sup>

The new club enjoyed several novelty scratch four races among members during its first season and captured the attention of the press at the expense of the Footscray club.<sup>93</sup> Later in the year 'Outrigger's' suggestion that a merger of the two clubs would have been better outcome for the district became a reality. At a meeting at the Royal Hall in November 1878, it was decided that the two clubs should merge and the original name, Footscray, be retained. Dr Morton and Arthur Burrows were kept on as president and treasurer, while G. White replaced Charles Batson as secretary, who had left to take up an offer of employment in Sydney. Former mayor and councillor, David Newell, and Footscray *Independent* proprietor, W.M. Clarke, added respectability as vice-presidents. The committee was made up of a combination of members from both rowing clubs. The formation of a stronger club had the desired effect of increasing the members roll to 'between forty and fifty'.<sup>94</sup>

At the Melbourne Regatta of 1879, the climax of the 1878-79 rowing season, Footscray's new found strength resulted in several significant victories. The Johnstone brothers, Rae and Robert, W. Sneddon, Thomas Wood and Frank Vernon (cox), were successful in the Junior Fours before taking out the Grand Challenge Cup. The Maiden Fours, in string test gigs, rowed by a crew largely made up of former Crown Rowing Club members, were first past the post only to lose on protest to Williamstown. At this time, rowing was regaining its popularity in Victoria and the success of locally made boats over imported boats from England at the 1879 Regatta gave the local boat-building industry a great shot in the arm thereby, easing the potential financial burden clubs faced of having

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<sup>92</sup> *Williamstown Chronicle*, 9 March 1878, p. 3.

<sup>93</sup> A study of the names of rowers reveals a number that were connected to the Footscray Rowing Club such as W. Sneddon, Thomson and Wood.

<sup>94</sup> *Williamstown Chronicle*, 30 November 1878, p. 2.

new boats built and delivered.<sup>95</sup> One of Footscray's strengths was that it was well stocked with a variety of locally made boats.<sup>96</sup>

The end of the 1870s saw Footscray Rowing Club poised on the brink of sustained success that would soon thrust it into the spotlight in more ways than one. The following discussion analyses the issues and newspaper vitriol surrounding the rowing club during a divisive era in rowing history (the early to mid-1880s) and provides a background to the context in which the Footscray Football club would seek 'senior' status by joining the Victorian Football Association in 1886.

### 3.4 A Class Apart: Clarke Cup Success and the Manual Labour Issue, 1880-86

The highest eminence which can be attained by any club is to place its eight at the head of the river, and the dearest object of an oarsman's ambition is satisfied when he can say that he held a seat in the winning boat.

Lang, *The Victorian Oarsman*.<sup>97</sup>

The start of the 1880s decade signified the emergence of the Footscray Rowing Club as a new power and benchmark in rowing. The club elected to enter the blue ribbon event, the Clarke Challenge Cup for eights at the Annual Melbourne Regatta, first contested and won by the Corio club in 1879. The *Leader* newspaper's rowing correspondent in putting down their style prophesied doom for the Footscray eight:

The Footscray are, it seems, going for the Clarke Challenge Cup after all; they slash away at a terrible number of strokes a minute, but it is not rowing, it's mere plugging and scrambling, and I think their rowing will not do for a race nearly two miles and a half.<sup>98</sup>

The *Leader* claimed in the same column that there would be 'a great outcry against manual labourers' if Footscray's rumoured pair-oar crew who row 'to the gasworks every

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<sup>95</sup> See, *Sydney Mail and New South Wales Advertiser*, 5 April 1879, p. 540.

<sup>96</sup> At the annual meeting in October 1877, the club reported it owned over one-hundred pounds of boating property including three four oar, two pair and two sculling boats.

<sup>97</sup> Lang, *The Victorian Oarsman*, p. 27.

<sup>98</sup> *Leader*, 7 February 1880, p. 12. 'Aquarius' of the *Weekly Times* also claimed Footscray's style 'will hardly pull them through.' See, *Weekly Times*, 7 February 1880, p. 20.

morning' before turning 'spade and shovel' all day were to defeat the 'gentlemen' or *bona fide* amateur Melbourne pair-oared crew of Tunbridge and Umpleby.<sup>99</sup> Any such success, the *Leader* believed would bring forward the question of whether manual labourers were eligible to compete at regattas under the VRA banner.<sup>100</sup> The comments received a terse response from Footscray's secretary, J. Waters. Feeling slighted, Waters rebuked the connotations directed against the club, stating that there was no intention to enter a crew for that event and that the *Leaders* comments were simply made with 'the express purpose of lowering the club in public estimation.'<sup>101</sup> Having raised funds to purchase a newly built eights boat, the Footscray Rowing Club's eyes, though, were firmly fixed on securing the most coveted amateur prize in Australian rowing, the Clarke Cup.

The *Leaders* comments however, reflected the brewing controversy over the definition of an 'amateur' and with no national body to oversee the sport, a state of confusion existed. It did not help that the definition of an amateur in rowing during this period was not a universal one and a conundrum in itself, creating much debate among the rowing fraternity. Whereas a manual labour amateur represented the working class whose bodies were honed by physical strength and were said to have 'muscles like steel,' the '*bona fide*' or 'gentleman' amateur were terms used to represent the genteel or well-heeled of society.<sup>102</sup> Those fitting the latter description generally belonged to the elitist Upper Yarra rowing clubs and usually involved the more sedentary job descriptions such as bank officer, clerk and government worker, those that were termed 'slaves of the pen and the ledger.'<sup>103</sup> While English and New South Wales (NSW) rowing authorities barred manual labourers from competing against the *bona fide* amateur, the lines of demarcation were not so obvious in Victoria.<sup>104</sup> Victorian rowing had largely been immune from this class discrimination as it allowed working men or manual labourers to compete in the same events (unless stated) with their non-manual labourer or 'gentleman' amateur counterparts meaning that a degree of harmony existed between the two classes before

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<sup>99</sup> *Leader*, 7 February 1880, p. 12.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> *Leader*, 14 February 1880, p. 12.

<sup>102</sup> *Australasian*, 1 May 1880, p. 12; *Leader*, 13 March 1880, p. 13; *Australasian*, 25 September 1875, p. 13.

<sup>103</sup> *Australian Town and Country Journal*, 8 May 1880, p. 35.

<sup>104</sup> For a discussion on the amateur debate in England, see, Eric Halladay, 'Of Pride and Prejudice: The Amateur Question in English Nineteenth-Century Rowing', *International Journal of the History of Sport*, vol. 4, no. 1, 1987, pp. 39-55.

the 1880s. At least, that was, until the manual labour element started winning. Furthermore, the amateur ideal that decreed effort and ‘strenuous participation’ was ‘more important than the outcome of any contest’ would be sorely tested with the success of manual labour oarsmen in future events.<sup>105</sup>

At the 1880 Melbourne Regatta, Footscray created history by defeating favourites and the champion of the previous year, Corio, by three lengths to win the first of its three consecutive Clarke Cup events for eight-oared boats. Footscray’s comprehensive victory over the ‘scions of society’, would highlight the looming spectre of the ‘manual labourer’ in rowing circles. According to Lynne Strahan, ‘a “miserable exhibition of class feeling” was detected after Footscray’s win in the Clarke Challenge Cup.’<sup>106</sup> Footscray’s coveted victory came at a cost for the greater aquatic community; Victorian rowing was forced to confront its class issues. The *Argus* was quick to shift the blame of defeat of the beaten crews in downplaying Footscray’s success by reminding the reader of the winning crew’s working class roots:

The Footscray crew carried off the principal eight-oared race, and proved themselves the strong men of the day. It was stated that five of the eight were employed on the silt punts by the Harbour Trust, so that the vigour of muscle they displayed was not remarkable.<sup>107</sup>

It was a different story with Footscray, its proud correspondent to the *Williamstown Chronicle* glowing in his praise and highlighting Footscray’s diligence in training as the main reason for its success.

Well, ‘our boys’ have achieved the high honour of whipping all comers, and taking away the big Clarke Challenge Cup, the blue ribbon of the river. They deserve every credit for the way in which they rowed ... They practised assiduously, and the proficiency thus acquired together with their own strong arms and sound lungs enabled them to whip the best crews the colony can bring against them.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Richard Holt, ‘The Amateur Body and the Middle-Class Man: Work, Health and Style in Victorian Britain’, *Sport in History*, vol. 26, no. 3, 2006, p. 355.

<sup>106</sup> Lynne Strahan, *At the Edge of the Centre: A History of Williamstown*, North Melbourne: Hargreen Publishing, 1994, p. 166. Strahan has used an unacknowledged source.

<sup>107</sup> *Argus*, 23 February 1880, p. 7.

<sup>108</sup> *Williamstown Chronicle*, 28 February 1880, p. 3.

The metropolitan press on the other hand, driven by its bourgeois attitudes and amateur ideals, were keen to belittle the achievements of a working-class manual-labour club. Indeed the success of the ‘manual labour’ element in rowing events at the Melbourne Regatta, caused much agitation among certain sections of the press, not to mention the ‘soft-handed’ *bona fide* amateur rowing clubs of the Upper Yarra, placing the issue of what constituted an ‘amateur’ firmly on the agenda of rowing authorities.<sup>109</sup> The Sydney based *Town and Country Journal* chimed in, claiming that it was ‘unfair to ask those who get their living by sedentary occupations to compete with men whose muscles are hardened by manual labour.’<sup>110</sup> The journal went further, broaching the subject of possible exclusion of the working man, stating that ‘now that the Challenge Cup is held by a crew composed entirely of working men, it is felt in Melbourne that it is necessary to consider the situation.’<sup>111</sup>

The Footscray Rowing Club annual meeting alluded to tensions between the ideals of the middle-class press and amateur rowing clubs stating that ‘every obstacle was surmounted’ in forming its winning eight-oared crew and that fortune had smiled on them ‘despite the unfavourable criticism of the knowing ones.’<sup>112</sup> Significant class resentment had surfaced for the first time in club competition with the distinct possibility that the manual labourers from Footscray, or ‘horny-handed sons of toil’ as the press also called them, might soon, as the upper and middle-class controllers of the sport feared, have a permanent grip on rowing’s ultimate amateur prize, the Clarke Cup.<sup>113</sup>

The *Argus* also painted Footscray’s Saltwater River venue as anything but complimentary, noting that the hindrance caused by the increase in idle and decaying vessels resting in portions of the river had prompted the regatta committee to move the grandstand a quarter of a mile below the previous spot.<sup>114</sup> The *Geelong Advertiser* described the scene at Footscray as less than picturesque, the ‘social picnic charm’ offered

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<sup>109</sup> For more on the amateur-manual labourer debate see, Martin Crotty, “‘Separate and Distinct’? The Manual Labour Question in Nineteenth-Century Victorian Rowing”, *International Journal of the History of Sport*, vol. 15, no. 2, 1998, pp. 152-163.

<sup>110</sup> *Town and Country Journal*, 8 May 1880, p. 35.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>112</sup> *Williamstown Chronicle*, 9 October 1880, p. 2.

<sup>113</sup> This term ‘horny-handed sons of toil’ was commonly used in this era to refer to working men. See, for example, *Leader*, 13 March 1880, p. 13, and the *Australasian*, 1 May 1880, p. 12.

<sup>114</sup> *Argus*, 23 February 1880, p. 7.

by the former Upper Yarra course being ‘entirely wanting’ at the current venue.<sup>115</sup> The crowds though, lured by the occasion, continued to patronise the Regatta in good numbers and flocked to the Intercolonial eight-oared boat race on the Saltwater River between NSW and Victoria in April of the same year.<sup>116</sup>

Another incident that led to a widening of class divergence came in the wake of Footscray’s famous victory and provided further ammunition for the metropolitan press to marginalize the club. Seeking a trial to test their ‘metal’ before the Intercolonial eight-oared race against NSW, it was proposed that the Victorian team should meet Footscray’s champion Clarke Cup winning crew on the Intercolonial course at Footscray. According to the *Australasian*, ‘there were, however, some absurd obstacles in the way, each objecting, for some occult reason, to meet the other.’<sup>117</sup> Ultimately, no such meeting took place and the *Weekly Times* squarely placed the blame on the shoulders of the Footscray Rowing Club, claiming their decision in declining to row the Victorian eight showed ‘an unpatriotic spirit’, which, ‘reflected little credit on them.’<sup>118</sup> One can only speculate over the reasons for the stand-off between the warring parties. Was there a class distinction made at the Victorian selection table? Footscray’s superior eight crew had been neglected in selection for positions in the Victorian team and this could be one explanation for their non-commitment to any such request. Certain rowers from otherwise defeated amateur clubs who competed against the Footscray eight in the annual regatta and with strong links to the VRA assumed coveted positions within the Victorian eight crew. None of Footscray’s superior eight-crew had been selected or even considered for the Victorian team. Perhaps this was due to an agreement that Crotty states was in place since the mid-1870s, between the two rowing bodies of NSW and Victoria, not to include working men in their respective intercolonial eights.<sup>119</sup>

The non-selection of Footscray rowers could be one explanation for why the Footscray club was reluctant to help the Victorian team prepare for the race, or perhaps it

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<sup>115</sup> The Footscray course, though, was favoured by the competitors as superior to that of the Upper Yarra due to its relative straightness. *Geelong Advertiser*, 23 February 1880, p. 3.

<sup>116</sup> One paper estimated the crowd at 15,000 people. See, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 April 1880, p. 6.

<sup>117</sup> *Australasian*, 10 April 1880, p. 12. The Victorian crew trialled against a crew from Hawthorn Rowing Club for the first half of the race before a combination crew from the Melbourne Rowing Club took up the contest for the second half of the race.

<sup>118</sup> *Weekly Times*, 10 April 1880, p. 5.

<sup>119</sup> See, Crotty, ““Separate and Distinct”?”, pp. 156-157.

was a simple case of Footscray's captain, Thomas Wood, making a promise to the NSW team manager as implied by crew member, Robert Johnstone, some 50 years later?<sup>120</sup> Whatever the case, the Footscray club was seen as betraying Victoria's cause by helping the NSW team prepare. However, the appearance of the NSW and Footscray crews on the water on the day of the Victorian trial 'added some colour to the rumour' that they would trial their interstate friends instead.<sup>121</sup> Under the eyes of the metropolitan press, Footscray were seen to provide a trial to NSW, taking a small head start at the beginning and extending their lead to comfortably beat their NSW counterpart. Representative crews from NSW had long patronised the suburb with their preference to stay at local hotels, rather than in Melbourne, and practice on the local waters of such Intercolonial contests, forming an allegiance of sorts with members of the Footscray club. Again the *Weekly Times* was quick to shoot down Footscray's performance and perhaps protect Victoria's reputation should it lose the Intercolonial, declaring NSW brought about its own defeat because 'it is only fair to state that the steering of their own coxswain is said to have been simply wretched.'<sup>122</sup>

Whether the manual labour issue caused tension or a rift within the Footscray Rowing Club is unknown. The *Australasian* reported in May 1880, long before the annual meeting, that club president Dr Morton had been replaced by John Campbell, manager of the local sugar works, and secretary Waters by Rae Johnstone, a crew member of Footscray's famous eight.<sup>123</sup> This came one week before a meeting of rowing men representing the manual labour clubs carried a motion proposed by the Footscray delegate, Mr Langwill, to form an alternate association in competition to the VRA if manual labourers were debarred from competing on the 'same footing as other members' at the annual regattas, as was the case in NSW and England.<sup>124</sup> As Crotty points out,

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<sup>120</sup> Robert Johnstone indicates that the NSW crew had specifically made a request to Thomas Wood, stroke of the Footscray eight, for a practice match race. See, Hec de Lacy, 'Bob Johnstone's Story: How the "Mudpunchers" Won Clarke Cup', *Sporting Globe*, 2 September 1936, p. 12.

<sup>121</sup> *Australasian*, 10 April 1880, p. 12.

<sup>122</sup> *Weekly Times*, 10 April 1880, p. 5.

<sup>123</sup> *Australasian*, 29 May 1880, p. 12.

<sup>124</sup> Clubs represented at this meeting were Footscray, Williamstown, Lake, Hawthorn, Richmond, Albert Park and Yarra Yarra. *Argus*, 7 June 1880, p. 7.

Victoria had a stronger manual labour element permeating through a number of clubs and this fact alone presented a very real threat to the amateur ideals of the establishment.<sup>125</sup>

The *Australasian* poured scorn on the suggestion of having a breakaway organisation, declaring ‘the idea of having two associations in so limited a rowing community as ours is simply an absurdity.’<sup>126</sup> ‘Cloanthus’ of the *Australasian* though, claimed to be the first to suggest that it was time ‘some distinction was drawn between the two classes’ by the VRA as it was unfair that one class should compete on level terms with the other given the decided advantage or otherwise ‘brought about by the nature of their occupations.’<sup>127</sup> The *Weekly Times* sided with the manual labourers ‘in the interests of rowing,’ as it did not wish to see Victorian rowing ‘split up into hostile sections.’<sup>128</sup> The controversial motion moved by Mr Colville, of the Civil Service club, at a VRA meeting in July to debar manual labourers from competing at regattas was defeated when over 300 young men voted strongly against the proposal.<sup>129</sup>

The bubbling agitation over the issue threatened to cause a split in Victorian rowing. The glaring gulf between the two classes of thought, one representing manual work by physical strength and working class, the other sedentary office workers and middle-class, was further exacerbated when the Footscray eight romped to back-to-back Clarke Cup success in world record time at the 1881 Melbourne Regatta.<sup>130</sup> The *Argus* described the runners-up, Corio, as being ‘ludicrously overmatched’ having, as an amateur crew, to contend with the strength and condition of Footscray’s ‘killing stroke’, the comment suggesting that amateur crews could not possibly match the brawn of Footscray’s short, sharp and high rate of strokes per minute.<sup>131</sup> References reinforcing the Footscray eight as stereotypically ‘manual labourers’ were continually promoted by the

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<sup>125</sup> Crotty nominates that along with Footscray, other clubs with a manual labour component were Lake, Hawthorn, Williamstown, Albert Park and Yarra Yarra. See, Crotty, “‘Separate and Distinct’?”, p. 155. It should also be noted that many Victorian country-based rowing clubs were generally born of manual labour interests.

<sup>126</sup> *Australasian*, 17 July 1880, p. 13.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>128</sup> *Weekly Times*, 5 June 1880, p. 5.

<sup>129</sup> *Launceston Examiner*, 27 July 1880, p. 3. See also Crotty, “‘Separate and Distinct’?”, pp. 157-158. A similar motion was proposed by Mr A. F. Ross, of the Civil Service club in 1875, but this was also defeated. See, *Australasian*, 25 September 1875, p. 13.

<sup>130</sup> John Lack, *A History of Footscray*, North Melbourne: Hargreen Publishing Company, 1991, p. 101.

<sup>131</sup> The Footscray eight were timed at rowing 52 strokes per minute at the start of the race and as high as 48 strokes for much of the remainder of the race. *Argus*, 28 February 1881, p. 7.

Melbourne press.<sup>132</sup> Footscray's style of rowing had also been labelled anything but copybook. When the Footscray Four were defeated by their Corio counterpart at the 1880 Regatta, the *Argus* lauded the 'even style of Upward [Corio] over the rapid slapdash stroke of the Footscray captain [Thomas Wood].'<sup>133</sup> Conversely, when the Footscray Four reversed the result in 1881, the *Australasian* claimed their style defied all logic 'according to modern notions of rowing' and was 'simply erratic' while declaring the Clarke Cup victory as hardly coming 'within the category of rowing at all.'<sup>134</sup>

The fallout generated by the overall dominance of manual labour crews at the 1881 Regatta continued to be felt in the corridors of rowing's power brokers. At a meeting of the VRA, the predominantly amateur Upper Yarra clubs pushed for their own exclusive regatta (for amateurs) whilst also wanting to separate the class of events at the Melbourne Annual Regatta. A working committee was formed to consider a re-programming of events but the Footscray Rowing Club proposed that this should be 'composed equally of the two classes of rowers.'<sup>135</sup> In the meantime, a committee comprising representatives of the leading metropolitan clubs including Civil Service, Banks, Melbourne, University, Yarra Yarra and Victoria formed an alliance to establish an amateur Upper Yarra regatta whereby working men and professionals were excluded.<sup>136</sup> 'Cloanthus' of the *Australasian* felt it was 'more satisfactory' to see the manual labour clubs competing against each other than the 'unvarying spectacle witnessed at past regattas of the manual labourer first, the *bona-fide* amateur nowhere.'<sup>137</sup> The Upper Yarra Regatta became a reality, to the exclusion of the manual labourer, and was inaugurated under the adverse conditions of a flood – in December 1881.<sup>138</sup>

At the 1882 Melbourne Regatta, Footscray Rowing Club created history in winning the Clarke Cup for a third consecutive time, thereby claiming the trophy as its permanent possession. Perhaps expecting victory, the township of Footscray had presented a 'gay appearance', a vast array of bunting complimented a flotilla of boats and

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<sup>132</sup> For examples, see, *Argus*, 21 February 1881, p.6, *Argus* 28 February 1881, p. 7.

<sup>133</sup> *Argus*, 23 February 1880, p. 7. Thomas Wood was the stroke in all of Footscray's Clarke Cup victories.

<sup>134</sup> *Australasian*, 5 March 1881, p. 12.

<sup>135</sup> *Australasian*, 11 June 1881, p. 12.

<sup>136</sup> See *Argus* 1 June, 1881, p. 10 and 1 July, 1881, p. 3; *Australasian* 11 June 1881, p. 12 and 30 July 1881, p. 14.

<sup>137</sup> *Australasian*, 11 June 1881, p. 12.

<sup>138</sup> It would be a decade before the bar on manual labourers was lifted for this Regatta.

steamers in what the *Sportsman* deemed the ‘Melbourne Cup Day’ of Footscray.<sup>139</sup> The *Sportsman* noted that local interest generated high expectations and led to an ‘array of Footscray “barrackers”’ rushing the steamers to witness the event, while the ‘howling began’ as soon as the race started and ended in a tumult of shouts and cheering where the local ‘partisans literally rent the air.’<sup>140</sup> The reporter, who boarded one of the steamers to witness the event, had been told by a friend not to “say a word against Footscray this trip, or you may have to swim for it.”<sup>141</sup> In describing the behaviour of local barrackers he observed that ‘if the [losing] Melbourne and City (late Hawthorn) Crews had been Fenians, Chinamen, Russians or Boers, they could not have been treated to more abuse.’<sup>142</sup>

In recording his memoirs of the event for the *Sporting Globe* in 1936, Footscray’s No. 7 in the boat, Robert Johnstone, recalled the greeting and the fact the crew were spent after the race but:

The reception we received soon revived us. Whistles shrieked, sirens screamed, hysterical women and men kissed, strangers congratulated each other, and the crowd in their well-meant enthusiasm nearly dragged us limb from limb as they tried to chair us into the shed.<sup>143</sup>

Johnstone also confirmed the role the press played in ostracising the Footscray crew for the manual labour work they performed with the Harbour Trust, stating:

A bad feeling was engendered by a section of the press who had somewhat parallel ideas to the English Amateur Association about barring men who worked manually from competing as amateurs. They called us the ‘Mudpunchers’ because the majority of the crew were employed wheeling silt from the dredge barges to fill up the low lying portions of the river bank. This rather annoyed the people of

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<sup>139</sup> *Sportsman*, 22 March 1882, p. 2. See also, *Argus*, 20 March 1882, p. 10. For a first-hand account of the day, see John Lack (ed.), *Charlie Lovett’s Footscray*, Footscray: The City of Footscray Historical Society, 1993, pp. 55-60.

<sup>140</sup> *Sportsman*, 22 March 1882, p. 2; *Australasian*, 25 March 1882, p. 13. For an eye-witness account of the crowd reception received by the Footscray eight in winning their third consecutive ‘Clarke Cup’ see, Lack, *Charlie Lovett’s Footscray*, pp. 56-59.

<sup>141</sup> *Sportsman*, 22 March 1882, p. 2.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>143</sup> Hec de Lacy, ‘Bob Johnstone’s Story: How the “Mudpunchers” Won Clarke Cup’, *Sporting Globe*, 2 September 1936, p. 12.

Footscray, and I think that 75 per cent of the 20,000 present were cheering for us.<sup>144</sup>

The *Leader* conceded that it was ‘pluck’ that got the Footscray eight through this time, however, the columnist strongly protested against:

... the blackguardly manner in which the Melbourne and City [formerly Hawthorn] crews were received at the finish of the race by misguided Footscray supporters, and to express an opinion that such ebullitions of feeling should be avoided in future.<sup>145</sup>

Ironically, describing Footscray’s ‘manual labour men’ as ‘rowing in the most peculiar style’ the paper observed that many crews were willing to copy ‘the Footscray style of rowing’ with the result being ‘anything but favourable to good rowing.’<sup>146</sup> The *Australasian* continued the disparaging commentary over the Footscray rowing style, observing that the captain Wood was ‘almost falling over his oar at the finish of the stroke’ while the rest of the Footscray eight showed ‘equally bad form.’<sup>147</sup> The ungainly action of the Footscray rowers, highlighted by the middle-class press, conflicted with one of the central tenets of amateurism which required the amateur to display ‘style’ and ‘grace’.<sup>148</sup> In the mind of the newspaper correspondent, the purity of the rowing stroke was being hijacked by plebeian methods employed to gain victory. Interestingly, Scott Bennett, in reviewing Halladay’s book on English rowing, notes that ‘the debate over amateurism also became intertwined with debates over rowing style.’<sup>149</sup> Though not necessarily efficient, the style of the *bona fide* amateur was thus adjudged aesthetically

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> *Leader*, 25 March 1882, p. 14.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid. For first-hand knowledge and an explanation on Footscray’s unique rowing style, see, Hec de Lacy, ‘Did Mudpunchers Inspire Fairbairnism? Bob Johnstone on Noted Footscray Rowing Style’, *Sporting Globe*, 15 July 1936, p. 11, and Hec de Lacy, ‘Mudpunchers Were Always Very Fit; Physical Jerks – Barrow Pushing Helped the Crews’, *Sporting Globe*, 22 July 1936, p. 11. It is of interest that Johnstone compares the Footscray rowing style as similar to that of contemporary 1880s Canadian world champion sculler, Edward Hanlan. For more on Hanlan, see Andrea Brown, ‘Edward Hanlan, the World Sculling Champion Visits Australia’, *Canadian Journal of History of Sport and Physical Education*, vol. 11, no. 2, December 1980, pp. 1-44, and Adair, “Two Dots in the Distance”, pp. 52-83.

<sup>147</sup> *Australasian*, 25 March 1882, p. 13.

<sup>148</sup> Richard Holt, *Sport and the British: A Modern History*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1989, pp. 99-100. Holt’s article discusses neglected factors and influences in the understanding of the rise of amateurism including work, health and aesthetics.

<sup>149</sup> Scott Bennett, ‘Review of E. Halladay, *Rowing in England: A Social History. The Amateur Debate*’, *Sporting Traditions*, vol. 8, no. 1, 1991, p. 99.

pleasing to the eye, as opposed to Footscray's working-class oarsmen whose style almost 'defied' description.<sup>150</sup>

Further Footscray Rowing Club success with a walkover in the Grand Challenge Cup for four-oared boats and a win in the Junior Sculling Cup by Robert Johnstone, franked Footscray's red-letter day in the sporting arena. Johnstone's victory earned a protest by the runner-up over the Footscray rower's eligibility as a *bona fide* amateur. The protest was dismissed after a VRA hearing heard that Johnstone had not been engaged in manual labour for two years.<sup>151</sup> The sculling race though, saw class differences surface with the *Australasian* admitting that C.P. Taylor, of the Boroondara club, had 'declined the honour of going for the Champagne Trophy, possibly on conscientious grounds.'<sup>152</sup>

Footscray's greatest sporting achievement, the winning of the Clarke Cup in perpetuity, sparked a series of events over the following decade that saw it lurch from one crisis to another. At a banquet to toast the 'Footscray Eight', presided over by vice-president and member for Footscray W.M. Clark, the Clarke Challenge Cup was presented to Footscray Council as 'a memento of the victory achieved by the Footscray crew.'<sup>153</sup> John Campbell, rebuffed at not being asked to host the banquet in favour of Clark, promptly resigned his position as president of the club. When the Clarke Cup was laid on the council table at a meeting of councillors in September, Campbell, a Footscray councillor, immediately left the council chambers taking no further part in proceedings.<sup>154</sup>

At its first meeting of the 1882-83 season, the VRA decided to move the date of the Melbourne Regatta from late-season March to early-season December, effectively fixing a second regatta for 1882.<sup>155</sup> The calendar move proved a decided flop with, according to the *Williamstown Chronicle*, only 200 spectators bothering to attend. The *Chronicle* felt it was the VRA, whose change of date and limited advertising of the event 'militated against the success of the Regatta.'<sup>156</sup> Its new programme of events featured

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<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>151</sup> *Leader*, 25 March 1882, p. 14. Johnstone was employed as a Foreman at the Harbour Trust.

<sup>152</sup> *Australasian*, 25 March 1882, p. 13.

<sup>153</sup> *Australasian*, 22 April 1882, p. 13.

<sup>154</sup> *Williamstown Chronicle*, 30 September 1882, p. 2.

<sup>155</sup> *Leader*, 14 October 1882, p. 22.

<sup>156</sup> *Williamstown Chronicle*, 23 December 1882, p. 2.

racers for ‘open’ (inclusive of manual labourers) and ‘amateurs’ (exclusive of manual labourers). With Footscray’s invincible eight ‘shorn of its beams’, and unable to compete in a race similar of status to that of the now defunct Clarke Cup, it fielded a vastly different crew and were beaten in the Senior Eights open race at the December regatta.<sup>157</sup> It was left to Thomas Wood to carry the colours of the club with victory in the Maiden Sculls.<sup>158</sup> Wood had been the stroke of the Footscray eight during its three Clarke Cup victories earning the moniker, ‘The Demon’, for his demon stroke that purportedly paralysed opposition crews into submission. Both Wood and another crew member from the ‘invincible eight’, Robert Johnstone, turned their focus to the single sculls, aborting further eights rowing and effectively ending the reign of the ‘Famous Eight’.<sup>159</sup> At a club concert in January, F. Johnson of the Footscray Rowing Club ‘attributed the club’s poor harvest of laurels to the fact that now-a-days there is nothing worth pulling for.’<sup>160</sup>

The ‘manual labour’ question arose again at the annual meeting of neighbouring manual labour club, Williamstown, in September 1883. Members were encouraged to give their vote that manual labourers should be allowed to compete in all races at the Melbourne Annual Regatta with the exception of a few that were set aside as *bona fide* amateur races. The *Williamstown Chronicle* declared that:

The absurdity of making a class distinction in rowing must be patent to everyone; if such distinctions were made in football or cricket it would certainly be treated with the contempt it deserved.<sup>161</sup>

At the formal opening of the 1883 rowing season on the Upper Yarra River, Footscray had failed to show to assume its No. 1 parading spot as the pre-eminent rowing club in Victoria. Whether this was a silent protest or simply absence is not known. The Footscray eight disbanded for reasons unknown after their third victory gained them rowing’s ultimate trophy. Although races were well contested at the 1883 Annual Regatta

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<sup>157</sup> At the second regatta of 1882, Footscray entered the Senior Eights race with only Frank Vernon (cox) as the remaining crew member of the previous Clarke Cup winning combination.

<sup>158</sup> *Williamstown Chronicle*, 23 December 1882, p. 2.

<sup>159</sup> Johnstone’s first-hand account of the Clarke Cup success is told in a number of newspaper articles in the 1930s. In particular, see Frank Hart, ‘Epic Story of River Rivalry; Footscray Toilers Defeated Scions of Society’, *Sporting Globe*, 23 May 1931, p. 5. Even 50 years on from the event, the title of the article emphasises the issue that class played out in the sporting arena.

<sup>160</sup> *Williamstown Chronicle*, 27 January 1883, p. 2. F. Johnson is likely Frank Johnstone, a brother to Robert and Rae of the Footscray Rowing Club.

<sup>161</sup> *Williamstown Chronicle*, 22 September 1883, p. 3.

(with the exception that Footscray won the Maiden Fours by six lengths), the *Williamstown Chronicle* noted ‘there was an absence of anything like enthusiasm among spectators.’<sup>162</sup> In its article covering the 1883 Regatta, the Footscray *Independent* also expressed some melancholy at the absence of the excitement the Footscray eight used to generate at past regattas, suggesting:

It will be seen by this short account that ‘Our Boys’ have not shown so well to the front as in former occasions, but the ‘Old Guard the Granite Wall’ is still in reserve, and there is not an Eight in the southern hemisphere that dare test the mettle of the ‘Demon’ with his brothers Johnstone and Snadden and other winners of the Clarke Cup. Anyway there is no cause for lament.<sup>163</sup>

The *Independent* took solace that, ‘should the great eight, like Alexander, have nothing more to conquer, youths spurred by their fame will yet bring such another trophy to the borough.’<sup>164</sup> The paper held out hope that the famous eight would once again come together if the right trophy was offered. According to the paper, ‘The members [of the Footscray Eight] have done more by their victories, in making Footscray known throughout the colonies, and even in England, than all the prominent men, factories and clubs put together.’<sup>165</sup>

The Footscray Rowing Club had a new star by 1884, revelling in the sculling success of captain, Thomas ‘The Demon’ Wood. Wood accepted a challenge from George Brett, champion of New South Wales, after beating South Australia’s champion David Green, to compete for the Amateur Sculling Championship of Australia.<sup>166</sup> At a complimentary banquet given to Wood before he left for Sydney, Footscray committee member Robert Pattinson proposed a toast eulogising the Mayor and councillors for their patronage stating ‘they were a body of gentlemen who deserved credit for the support they give to all classes of athletics.’<sup>167</sup>

At the 1884 Melbourne Regatta, with ‘the interest in aquatics decaying’, Footscray won every race it contested. By making a clean sweep of the 1884 Regatta, the

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<sup>162</sup> *Williamstown Chronicle*, 29 December 1883, p. 3.

<sup>163</sup> *Independent*, 29 December 1883, p. 3.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>165</sup> *Independent*, 2 February 1884, p. 2.

<sup>166</sup> This was an unofficial title as there was no National governing body at this time. Brett won the race.

<sup>167</sup> *Independent*, 26 April 1884, p. 2. See also *Williamstown Chronicle*, 26 April 1884, p. 2.

*Independent* declared Footscray Rowing Club had ‘once more asserted their supremacy proving themselves champions of the river, and winning easily in all races for which they entered’, their success further inflaming the manual labour debate.<sup>168</sup> Rough conditions on the river added weight to those wanting to move the regatta to smoother waters and a more favourable locality as the *Independent* begrudgingly predicted, ‘... such as the Albert Park, where the *habitués* of the projected Rotten Row [upper class] may loll and look.’<sup>169</sup> As early as 1884, the treasurer of the VRA argued unsuccessfully for the regatta course to be switched from the Saltwater and Lower Yarra rivers to the Albert Park Lake.

The establishment of another rowing entity, the Harbour Trust Rowing Club, in Footscray during 1884 placed added strain on the Footscray Rowing Club to attract and retain members, particularly as a number of them had changed club due to their employment with the Harbour Trust.<sup>170</sup> Both clubs existed harmoniously though, with the Footscray Rowing Club reporting that it was ‘in a very flourishing condition’ at its Annual meeting in October, 1884.<sup>171</sup> The two clubs first met in an arranged contest on Christmas Eve, one week after the Annual Regatta, for a trophy donated by rowing club patron, John Campbell. In September 1885, the Footscray Rowing Club proposed a written letter be sent to the Harbour Trust Rowing Club seeking an amalgamation of the two clubs to ‘form one good club.’<sup>172</sup> At the Harbour Trust Rowing Club annual meeting a few weeks later, the proposed amalgamation was not broached by the *Independent* in its limited report of the meeting.<sup>173</sup>

A suspicious fire a week later burnt through the Footscray Rowing Club boatsheds damaging the club’s stock of boats.<sup>174</sup> This followed the unexpected death of club secretary, Arthur Cleghorn, six months earlier and set in train a series of events that would

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<sup>168</sup> *Independent*, 27 December 1884, p. 2.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>170</sup> *Age*, 26 July 1884, p. 11. The Johnstone brothers (Robert and Rae), members of Footscray’s Clarke Cup winning crew switched allegiance, with Rae elected as the new club’s first captain. See *Age* 28 July 1884, p. 7. A bill had been passed through parliament to establish a Harbour Trust for the Port of Melbourne. Sir John Coode was engaged to advise the Harbour Trust and recommended cutting a canal from the mouth of Stony Creek to Victoria Dock. ‘The Coode Canal together with a general deepening and widening of the river, was completed in 1887, and resulted in a shortening of the voyage to Melbourne by a little more than one and half kilometres.’ See, Hugh Anderson, *Victoria: From Discovery to Federation*, Adelaide: Rigby Limited, 1974, p. 139.

<sup>171</sup> *Independent*, 25 October 1884, p. 3.

<sup>172</sup> *Independent*, 19 September 1885, p. 2.

<sup>173</sup> *Independent*, 3 October 1885, p. 2.

<sup>174</sup> *Independent*, 10 October 1885, p. 2.

severely impact the finances and influence of the Footscray Club. After hiring an eight-oared boat to practice in from the Civil Service club the Footscray Rowing Club found themselves liable for the cost of replacing the boat when a passing steamer “Excelsior” caused such a swell that it broke and sunk the boat in two near the junction of the Saltwater and Lower Yarra Rivers.<sup>175</sup>

The *Independent* got behind its local rowing club with a series of editorials in 1886 to help arrest the slide the club had taken in the years since the break-up of the famous eight, particularly from a financial perspective resulting from a series of unfortunate incidents that befell the club, and the two-pronged attack from the VRA.<sup>176</sup> Seeking to rescue the club and help bring it to the forefront of local residents again, the *Independent* declared:

Our Rowing Club, which has been the pride of the borough, the admiration and envy of other clubs, and has occupied the premier position in the colony for years, appears to have fallen on evil times.<sup>177</sup>

The broadsheet cited that for years since winning the coveted Clarke Cup, the club had suffered from a range of ‘sneers’ and jibes directed at them from beaten crews who ‘eased their humiliation’ with vindictive name calling.<sup>178</sup> The underlying ‘sabotage’ and views continually peddled by the middle-class press to downplay Footscray’s performances, working-class background and behaviour of its supporters, including its status as the pre-eminent venue for rowing’s greatest drawcard event, had riled the parochial *Independent* into action. The legacy of the Footscray Rowing Club’s success in some ways had become its ‘achilles heel’ and would eventually lead to its downfall with the issue of class discrimination underpinning its ultimate fall from grace. It had won the greatest amateur prize in world rowing, ‘a trophy that was never intended to be competed for by working men,’ and in doing so had offended rowing’s upper and middle-class

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<sup>175</sup> *Independent*, 13 February 1886, p. 2, *Williamstown Chronicle*, 13 February 1886, p. 2.

<sup>176</sup> The club had funding issues as far back as 1883. Of the 12 prominent citizens and councillors listed as patrons at the November 1883 Annual Meeting, only two had paid the required subscription by February 1884. See, *Independent*, 2 February 1884, p. 2. Williamstown Rowing Club’s financial situation was also in a depleted state at this time, with the club making an appeal for funds to local citizens through the local paper. See *Williamstown Chronicle*, 12 April 1884, p. 2.

<sup>177</sup> *Independent*, 30 January 1886, p. 2.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.* References such as ‘mud punchers’, ‘horny handed sons of toil’, ‘pick and shovel men’ or the ‘dirty moleskin crowd’ had liberally been used by the metropolitan press.

establishment headed by the staid amateur rowing club representatives of the Upper Yarra River.<sup>179</sup>

Another attempt by the VRA treasurer, Mr Upward, in late 1885 to have the Melbourne Regatta course moved to the Albert Park Lake had been defeated by one vote.<sup>180</sup> In consequence, the December regatta of 1885 was moved back to February 1886, to allow time for the push within the Association to gain the numbers to have the regatta moved to an inner city course.<sup>181</sup> The *Independent*, sniffing jealousy on the part of sections of the VRA, went in to bat for retaining the regatta on local waters declaring:

Everybody knows that there is no place in Victoria equal to our river frontage for these aquatic contests, but the aristocratic smooth water oarsmen appear to dread it as much as they dislike meeting ‘Our Boys.’ At one time it used to be the ‘pick and shovel men’ and the ‘dirty moleskin crowd,’ now the bad feeling is cloaked under financial loses, but if the thing were properly managed, that would be beaten also.<sup>182</sup>

The growing divide between the amateur and manual labour clubs threatened to derail the success of the regatta. The VRA’s selection of the Victorian eight crew to contest the annual intercolonial races had long neglected representatives from ‘manual’ rowing clubs such as Footscray, Williamstown and the Footscray based Harbour Trust, adding to the vilification these clubs felt, despite their success in eights rowing. ‘It is purile envy that keeps them out of representative matches,’ trumpeted the *Independent*.<sup>183</sup> Rowing, as a sport, was becoming mired in its own discriminatory class issue and rowing clubs such as Footscray felt ostracised by prejudices held by the sport’s upper and middle-class management. The Melbourne Regatta and the Footscray Rowing Club, as a representative of a working man’s club, had ultimately become pawns in the middle of an all-encompassing dispute between social classes being played out in Victorian waters.

The 1886 Melbourne Regatta on the Lower Yarra and Saltwater rivers would be the last one ever held on that stretch of water. With crowds dwindling – the social elite seemed reluctant to venture to Footscray anymore – the dominance of the manual

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<sup>179</sup> *Australasian*, 6 March 1880, p. 300, and quote cited in Crotty, “‘Separate and Distinct’?”, p. 157.

<sup>180</sup> *Independent*, 28 November 1885, p. 2; *Independent*, 12 December 1885, p. 2.

<sup>181</sup> The push did not succeed this time.

<sup>182</sup> *Independent*, 28 November 1885, p. 2.

<sup>183</sup> *Independent*, 20 February 1886, p. 3.

labourers, in particular, the Footscray club on their home waters, the state of the river and the increase of suburban and country regattas along with the introduction of intercolonial challenges had diluted the Regatta's standing as the principal aquatic event on the Victorian rowing calendar.

In late 1886, the *Independent* announced to its readers that the VRA have removed the Annual Regatta 'from the Saltwater River, to that aristocratic wash tub or duck-pond, Albert Park'.<sup>184</sup> In February of that year, the *Independent* had labelled the 'artificial sheet of water' at Albert Park as the preferred regatta course by the 'curled darlings' or 'scions of society' of the rowing world. In reference to the Lower Yarra and Saltwater river course at Footscray, the paper suggested the "'curled darlings" do not like the scene of so many defeats'. The broadsheet continued to poke fun at the 'curled darlings' declaring they would rather hear calls of, 'By Jave! the *University* have won!', than deal with the turbulent waters and 'cockle shells' of the Footscray course, nor be 'greeted with the manly cheers of those who believe in bone and muscle.'<sup>185</sup> Feeling snubbed by the decision to move the regatta, the paper, on behalf of Footscray and its rowing club, declared in accompanying defiant tone, "'Our Boys" have too much muscle and stamina, and their pace is simply murder for the "curled darlings."<sup>186</sup> Furthermore, the *Independent*, fearing rowing would be confined to an effeminate pursuit and reinforcing the masculine pride shown by the local rowers, stated that if the working men of Footscray were 'pushed out of it ... rowing in Victoria, so far as manliness and endurance are concerned will soon become a thing of the past.'<sup>187</sup>

Earlier in the year, the local broadsheet had lamented that 'the borough had become a 'synonym for foul smells, and Footscray ... was a place to be shunned and avoided.'<sup>188</sup> At a council meeting in February, 1886, councillors were asked by the VRA

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<sup>184</sup> *Independent*, 11 December 1886, p. 2.

<sup>185</sup> *Independent*, 20 February 1886, p. 3.

<sup>186</sup> *Independent*, 11 December 1886, p. 2. As a postscript to the removal of the event to Albert Park, the *Independent* informed its readers that it was 'unanimously decided to hold a public meeting ... to consider the advisability of holding a [their own] regatta' at Footscray as a means of replacing the Annual Regatta and to celebrate the coming change of the town's name. Both the name change and regatta failed to eventuate.

<sup>187</sup> *Independent*, 20 February 1886, p. 3. The columnist also pointed out the tiring commentary of the press, in this instance, made by 'Eagle' of the *Sportsman* concerning fellow manual-labour and neighbouring club, Williamstown. 'Eagle' labelled Williamstown's winning fours combination at the Richmond Regatta as 'some rather rough diamonds'.

<sup>188</sup> *Independent*, 24 April 1886, p. 2.

to dip into their pockets to help fund that year's Melbourne Regatta. As the infant Footscray *Advertiser* reported, 'Councillor Newell at once proposed the councillors each give one guinea towards the funds, "as the thousands who came to the regatta, and braved the stinks and other abominations *deserve* encouragement."'189 Unimpressed with the training facilities at Footscray for the 1882 intercolonial challenge, Sydney's *Daily Telegraph* complained aloud about the 'repulsive fetid mud' and 'noisome filth' facing its NSW squad, declaring that 'the stinks of Footscray and its neighbourhood are enough to turn the bile of a rhinoceros black.'190

This factor had increasingly played a large part in the VRA's decision to shift the Melbourne Regatta to calmer waters, away from the suffocating and nauseating 'perfumes' of the factories lining the banks of the Saltwater and Lower Yarra rivers.191 It was an intolerable state of affairs, no longer accepted by the social elite or 'curled darlings' of the rowing fraternity. By the late 1880s a 'Royal Commission into the Sanitary Condition of Melbourne' handed down a damning report stating that the 'Saltwater River is even more polluted by the noxious trades on its banks' with the result, that it was one of several waterways identified as openly 'offensive sewers.'192

With the exclusion of manual labourers from certain events, the dilution of competitors caused by the amateur-manual split for races, the decision by the VRA to move the Melbourne Regatta to Albert Park and the disbanding of the Clarke Cup winning 'eight', along with the unforeseen chain of events that damaged the bottom line, Footscray's dominance as the leading rowing club in the colony had been effectively eroded. By the late 1880s, the club was on shaky ground, a forlorn organisation teetering on the brink of exhaustion, only saved by a 'reorganisation' in 1887. The club continued its chequered history with interest waxing and waning through the depression years until it was newly 'resuscitated' as the Footscray City Rowing Club in 1894.193

This last sub-section has examined the important manual labour issue in Victorian club rowing and how it was brought to a head through the deeds of the Footscray Rowing

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189 *Advertiser*, 19 February 1886, p. 2. Emphasis added.

190 *Sydney Daily Telegraph*, 28 April 1882, p. 4.

191 Indian confirms in her thesis that the change of venue 'was motivated solely by concern for spectator comfort and convenience.' See Indian, 'Leisure in City and Suburb', pp. 42-43.

192 Grant and Serle, *The Melbourne Scene*, p. 187, quoting a copy of the report published within.

193 Footscray City Rowing Club counts its beginnings from this re-formation year.

Club eight, in capturing the Clarke Cup, at the Annual Melbourne Regatta held on the Lower Yarra and Saltwater Rivers. It is clear that the vexatious issue of the involvement of manual labourers in Victorian rowing circles during this era created a social divide between the manual labour element and the genteel amateur, represented by the upper and middle-class strata of society. It was not until the famed Footscray eight-oared crew claimed the Clarke Cup that the issue aroused resentment and evoked strong class feelings.

This class divide was ultimately played out in the sporting arena and publicly through the press. Running second to the manual labourer did not make for a healthy rivalry between classes, nor was it seen to uphold the prestige and dignity of the genteel amateur of upper class society. By the early 1880s, the Melbourne Regatta had become a bastion for manual labour dominance and middle to upper class discontent. Knocked from their pedestal, the *bona fide* amateur, unaccustomed to defeat and used to carrying off the prized events at each regatta, found the situation an intolerable one. Seeking to restore the natural order of society and to highlight their need for control, certain sections of the middle-class metropolitan press and upper-class controllers of the sport, waged a campaign to demonize and patronize the manual labourer oarsman. The resentment towards Footscray's victories at the Melbourne Regatta fuelled debates over the rights and amateur status of the working man in rowing. Deeply offended by the constant mocking and ridicule by the metropolitan press, the local press also took a strong stance on behalf of its working-class brethren over this, and wider issues, such as the behaviour of supporters, the masculinity and style of the Footscray oarsman and the much-maligned venue of the regatta. The working-class press, run by middle-class local sympathisers, responded to these 'invidious' claims and pointed to the virile and masculine nature of the working-class ethic, as something to be proud of, not embarrassed by.

While the crux of the amateur-manual labour debate at this time revolved around the interpretation of the term 'amateur' with middle and upper class concerns over the participation of the working-class in rowing circles, further contrasting differences and tensions surfaced in regards to the adherence of set principles of the amateur ideology. The proponents of amateurism espoused certain virtues such as style and grace, composure in victory or defeat and the rejection of hard training that were at odds with

the plebeian work ethic.<sup>194</sup> After all, according to the amateur ideal, ‘sport was supposed to be a celebration of the natural, unforced qualities of the human body’.<sup>195</sup> Footscray’s manual labour oarsmen and its supporting proletariat bucked some of these traditional values, arousing suspicion among the middle and upper class by challenging the amateur ethos that embodied the sport. As witnessed in England, ‘amateurism was of less interest in working-class culture’.<sup>196</sup> While not conforming to normal amateur conventions, the Footscray Eight won the Clarke Cup using an ‘unorthodox’ but efficient style and trained specifically for each race, its proletariat of ‘barrackers’ basking in the glory of victory much to the annoyance of their social superiors. As this sub-section has explored, the success of the Footscray Eight added further fuel to class divisions in rowing and more broadly, Australian sport at this time.

### 3.5 Conclusion

The discussion summarised in this chapter details Footscray’s first major success in the sporting world. First, it shows how the town embraced and played host to the Melbourne Annual Regatta, developing an almost exclusive ownership of such an important event and, secondly, through a general narrative outlines the formation and growth of the Footscray Rowing Club into the colony’s most formidable aquatic adversary that had its peak in the early 1880s. It is not unreasonable to assume that the prejudice experienced by the local community, at times conveyed expressively through the local broadsheet, persuaded them to seek senior status for the Footscray Football Club in the Victorian Football Association (VFA) competition from 1886 – appropriately in the same year that the Annual Regatta was removed from their doorstep – in a bid to maintain the town’s presence and standing in a sporting sense, and perhaps the respect achieved by the Footscray Rowing Club.

As is evident from the last two chapters, isolation and a working-class ethos had led to a strong sense of community, one that overflowed into a tangible civic pride. This pride was generated by the pillar in which the town gained its reputation, its

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<sup>194</sup> Holt, ‘The Amateur Body and the Middle-Class Man’, p. 365-366 and Holt, *Sport and the British*, pp. 99-100.

<sup>195</sup> Holt, ‘The Amateur Body’, p. 365.

<sup>196</sup> Mike Huggins, *The Victorians and Sport*, London: Hambledon and London, 2004, p. 52.

manufacturing industries, and as shown in this article and, just as importantly, through success generated in the sporting arena. The community were just as proud of their manual rowers who dethroned the might of the amateur world as they were of their working-class origins. The success of the rowing club, through the medium of sport, was an example of how the working-class could flex their muscles in a world dominated by middle and upper-class ideology. Through their achievements, the Footscray eight became a paragon of hope for the working-class masses in a colonial frontier dominated by upper and middle-class hegemony. The success of the rowing club was an example of how sport could bring a community together, generate civic pride and thereby encourage a pathway to further participation in cultural and sporting fields through the establishment of kindred clubs and societies. Moreover, this chapter has shown how the Footscray Rowing Club's strength to maintain an ability to remain solvent through challenging times was heavily reliant on the goodwill, leadership and financial assistance provided by the town's small strata of social elite. Highly respected, these individuals formed the nucleus around which local sporting clubs could build and flourish and clubs openly sought their patronage. Among them were successful businessmen, councillors and men in respectable positions of importance or power.

This chapter has also highlighted the importance that a comparative analysis of other major sporting events and sporting codes, in this case rowing, can provide when understanding the origins and development of rival sporting organisations or codes, such as cricket and football, in a community setting. The context in which the rowing club existed and the success that it could achieve will help provide a clearer picture to other sporting clubs featured in the following chapters. Perhaps, it was this feeling that persuaded the Footscray Football Club to enter a senior team in the VFA competition in 1886 to continue the town's prominence once enjoyed through the exploits of the Footscray Rowing Club.

## Chapter 4

### ‘Knights of the Flannel’: Cricket in Footscray

To go abroad in the green reserves of the metropolis on a fine Saturday afternoon is to see the youth and budding manhood of Melbourne hardening its muscle and lengthening its wind in the pursuit of the uncertain joys of cricket.

*Argus*<sup>1</sup>

#### 4.1 Introduction

Cricket can lay claim to being Australia’s first national sport. Rivalling horse racing as one of the new frontier’s national sporting passion, cricket was first played in Melbourne on Batman’s Hill in 1837, just two years after the city’s settlement.<sup>2</sup> The iconic Melbourne Cricket Club was founded one year later. If cricket wasn’t already the national sport by the first time an English cricket team toured Australia decades later in 1861, its popularity exploded after Australia’s first victory during the English tour of 1873-74, with young boys and men seeking every spare inch of turf to replicate their cricketing idols.<sup>3</sup> In his column in the *Williamstown Chronicle*, ‘Reaper’ noted the phenomenon in Williamstown where local boys ‘just out of their petticoats’ could ‘be seen imitating their favourites in the English eleven.’<sup>4</sup>

It was this link to the motherland and desire to recreate British culture in the antipodes that made the game appealing to the sporting public.<sup>5</sup> Other factors, such as its low cost, simple format, easy access to parklands, along with the favourable environmental and weather conditions in which it could be played, further endeared it to

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<sup>1</sup> *Argus*, 17 December 1883, p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> The match was played in the vicinity of where the current Southern Cross Station (previously Spencer Street station) now stands on the west side of the city. See, Robert Grogan, *Our Proud Heritage: A History of South Melbourne Cricket Club from 1862*, Melbourne: South Melbourne Cricket Club, 2003, p. 5.

<sup>3</sup> English teams first toured Australia in 1861-62 and 1863-64. A third tour English tour occurred in 1873-74. What became known as the first ‘Test Match’ between the two countries was played in Australia in 1877. The early English teams were predominantly represented by professional players. See, Richard Cashman, *Paradise of Sport: The Rise of Organised Sport in Australia*, Oxford University Press, South Melbourne, 1995, p. 48.

<sup>4</sup> Reaper, ‘Gleanings’, *Williamstown Chronicle*, 3 January 1874, p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> For more on the transference of British culture to the antipodes, see the chapter on ‘The British Inheritance’ in Cashman, *Paradise of Sport*, pp. 1-11.

the early colonists.<sup>6</sup> Cricket also had a more inclusive approach in Australia as opposed to the English tradition where teams were structured according to one's status or class. As highlighted in the previous chapter, rowing in Australia had issues of class distinction permeating through its core, in a way that cricket in Australia did not. In *Elysian Fields*, John Daly wrote that 'in the late nineteenth century it was evident that cricket provided for a blending of the classes.'<sup>7</sup> Cricket's inclusiveness only added to its charm and appeal for the majority of the Australian sports loving public. Furthermore, the cricket match was seen as a manly and respectable form of leisure in Australian society, while late in the century, civic importance and reputations could be earned or lost on such contests. This was particularly emphasised between opposing teams representing geographical towns or areas. W.F. Mandle, in his influential works in the 1970s, argued that cricket played an important role in establishing an Australian national identity.<sup>8</sup>

However, as the sport featured prominently in the early sporting pastimes of the Footscray community, it is far harder to uncover a precise chronological timeframe due to the unfettered nature of the establishment of the many cricket clubs and the extremely limited resources in which to trace the origins of the game in the suburb. Therefore, this thesis can only draw upon the surviving scant newspaper archives, council correspondence through the local papers and cricket annuals to try to piece together a snapshot of the cricketing landscape in Footscray. This further complicates matters, adding to the confusion in determining strict timelines and histories of particular clubs. A Footscray Cricket Club and Recreative Society was established as early as 1860, although its presence and formation was likely influenced by a cricket team representing Footscray even earlier that year, the first to do so in the district. What is clear locally, is the somewhat convoluted manner in which clubs come and go, are formed, re-incarnated, re-organised or re-formed again. This begs many questions when weighing through the available resources. What is the reason for this? Is this a common occurrence in

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<sup>6</sup> Leonie Sandercock and Ian Turner, *Up Where, Cazaly? The Great Australian Game*, London/Sydney: Paladin/Granada, 1981, p. 7.

<sup>7</sup> John Daly, *Elysian Fields: Sport, Class and Community in Colonial South Australia 1836-1890*, Adelaide, Self-published, 1982, p. 187.

<sup>8</sup> For discussion of how cricket contributed to an Australian national identity see, W.F. Mandle, 'Cricket and Australian Nationalism in the Nineteenth Century', *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, vol. 59, Part 4, 1973, pp. 225-246.

establishing a community sporting institution and what are the factors causing this? And, are these clubs consistent with the previous entity in terms of personnel and formation?

Of particular interest and importance to this thesis, is the Footscray Cricket Club. Knowledge of the activities of its predecessor, the 'Recreative Society', during the 1860s is somewhat sparse due to the small number of surviving newspapers from the local and surrounding districts. Also, it is not clear if the Footscray Cricket Club and Recreative Society morphed into the solitary entity called the Footscray Cricket Club during the mid to late 1860s, since any mention of the cricket club post 1864, drops the moniker 'Recreative Society'.<sup>9</sup> If this was so, it would indicate that cricket was the only surviving sport mentioned in the initial 'charter' of the 'Recreative Society' that achieved, through ongoing support and participation, an unbroken history from the suburb's inauguration as a district.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, a claim that the Footscray Cricket Club continued under the same format and name, is speculative at best. For this reason, there are two opening sub-sections in this chapter with details of the break in entities deemed unclear due to the void of local Williamstown newspapers between 1861-March 1867, and the whole of 1868.

The last sub-section will evaluate the cricket landscape in the district. This will also feature scrutiny of the Prince Imperial Cricket Club. Popular theory has it that the Footscray Football Club was derived from the Prince Imperial Football Club. What is less known is the role played by cricket and, in particular, the Prince Imperial club, in setting a precedent for this to occur. An interesting sub-plot was the role the Excelsior Cricket Club played in strengthening the Footscray Cricket Club in the early 1880s, which was in direct contrast to the example set by their corresponding football club. Conclusions will then be made at the end of the chapter.

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<sup>9</sup> The only evidence of the Footscray Cricket Club and Recreative Society maintaining its name for at least some part of the 1860s, found on Trove, comes from a rather innocuous donation under its original name to the Melbourne Hospital which appeared in the *Argus*, 16 February 1864, p. 45.

<sup>10</sup> See, *Argus*, 3 October 1860, p. 5.

## 4.2 Established 1860: Footscray Cricket Club and Recreative Society

A vote of thanks to the chairman terminated the proceedings, which augur well for the new club, and for the young district in which it is established.

*Argus*<sup>11</sup>

A newspaper article in 1886 by long-time Footscray resident Fred Humphrey provides an insight into the early cricketing scene in Footscray.<sup>12</sup> Relating how cricket came to start in Footscray, Humphrey provides an overview of the first games played in the suburb in the year 1860. Hailing from a cricketing county in England, Humphrey had met with several influential citizens in Footscray, including hoteliers and the local Church of England minister Mr Hunt, with the purpose of forming a local cricket club. Once the Footscray club was formed, practice was ‘indulged in morning and night’, until they became adept enough to challenge for a game. Humphrey who was employed in a tailoring firm in the city, arranged to play his fellow-workmen, who had themselves formed their own club of tailors.<sup>13</sup> The *Argus*, a metropolitan newspaper, provided a brief report of the inaugural meeting of the two teams:

Eleven gentleman from the city played the Footscray Cricket Club a friendly match, the latter winning by only four runs. The play on both sides was very good.<sup>14</sup>

Footscray’s first representative match was played at home on a remote ‘piece of ground’ with just seven or eight houses in the vicinity. Humphrey alludes to the social aspect of the occasion:

We won our maiden match and had a most enjoyable day. Mrs. Young in her usual kind and considerate way, had provided some nice corned round, and a billycan – not the ‘black bag’ – brought beer from the Railway Hotel, to where we indulged in our *el fresco* meal on the grass.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Fred Humphrey, ‘Early Cricket’, *Independent*, 1 May 1886, p. 3.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> *Argus*, 7 April 1860, p. 4.

<sup>15</sup> Fred Humphrey, ‘Early Cricket’, *Independent*, 1 May 1886, p. 3.

This quotation is suggestive of the informal nature of the contest, the fact that it was considered a genteel social encounter befitting middle-class expectations, as distinct from a competitive sporting contest where the reputation of the town was at stake, indicating an important interaction of communities with the same leisurely attitude to ‘manly’ British pursuits. Early cricket in Footscray seems to have been conducted in this ‘gentlemanly’ fashion which replicated British attitudes and custom of the time. The visitors were so impressed with the way they were treated that a challenge was issued for a return match at Emerald Hill. The Footscray club again won the return match and afterwards were treated to ‘a dinner few workingmen see’ at the Freemason’s Tavern, near Young and Jackson’s pub in the city, before scrambling for the last train near midnight.<sup>16</sup> With the addition of ‘four smart powerful young men’ in Connell, two Lowrys and McQuay, Footscray Cricket Club’s next task was to move to a more suitable piece of land for cricketing purposes, at the foot of Napier Street and next to the river. Further challenges that year were made to Williamstown (twice), Hawthorn (the trip being made by cab), and a team from Emerald Hill. Humphrey stated that other matches followed, although he could not remember the results except for the fact they played for amusement only and did not need the encouragement of ‘trophies and medals.’<sup>17</sup>

Another important news item appeared in the *Argus* newspaper on 15 June 1860, this time praising ‘the people of Footscray, in default of ordinary sources of public amusement’ for, ‘endeavouring to supply themselves with the means of recreation, and also instruction.’<sup>18</sup> Just one year after Footscray was declared a municipality, there was movement within the community, propelled by council representatives, to inaugurate both a sporting club and a rifle company. This push to formalise these clubs led to the successful inauguration of the ‘Footscray Cricket Club and Recreative Society’ and a separate volunteer rifle company within a few weeks of each other in late spring, 1860.<sup>19</sup> By October 1860, the *Argus* was reporting that:

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid. For a report of this game, see also, *Argus*, 26 May 1860, p. 4.

<sup>17</sup> Fred Humphrey, ‘Early Cricket’, *Independent*, 1 May 1886, p. 3.

<sup>18</sup> *Argus*, 15 June 1860, p. 4. A local Mechanic’s Institute had also been established in 1860. See *Age*, 7 April 1860, p. 5.

<sup>19</sup> For the formation of the Footscray Cricket Club and Recreative Society, see *Argus*, 3 October 1860, p. 5, and *Argus*, 10 October 1860, p. 4. For the formation of the Rifle Company, see *Argus*, 10 October 1860, p. 4, and *Argus*, 20 October 1860, p. 4.

An adjourned public meeting was held, at the Rising Sun Hotel, Footscray, on Monday evening [1 October 1860], for the purpose of furthering the formation of a Footscray Cricket Club and Recreative Society.<sup>20</sup>

It was stated that the ‘objects of the society’ were ‘to embrace all out-door amusements, such as cricket, quoits, football, and a ladies’ archery club.’<sup>21</sup> Councillor Cleverdon moved a motion to form such a club which was unanimously endorsed by those present. Cleverdon believed that the formation of a sporting society was particularly beneficial to the young district ‘in a social sense, as it would bring together those who, owing to the municipality being so scattered, were comparative strangers to each other.’<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, it was decided to adjourn at Connelly’s Hotel a few days later to enrol prospective members before conducting a general meeting of the club at the Railway Hotel for the purpose of framing rules and the election of office-bearers.<sup>23</sup>

The first general meeting of the club, held on Monday, 8 October 1860, saw the election of a president, secretary and treasurer, along with an eight-man committee whose responsibility it was to frame a set of rules.<sup>24</sup> It is not clear if the Footscray Cricket Club that existed in the first half of 1860, coalesced or was the forerunner that spawned the new entity known as the Footscray Cricket Club and Recreative Society. There are indications that this may have been so. For example, three of the five initiators in starting the Footscray Cricket Club were heavily involved in the formation of the Recreative Society cricket club. These prominent citizens were Cr Cleverdon, whose motion it was to form the club; Fred Humphrey who chaired the all-important general meeting and took up a position on the club’s committee; and Mr Tyrell, player and committeeman. This line of thought is strengthened by the inclusion of a number of known players including Tyrell and Connelly appearing in reports of matches.<sup>25</sup> It is also possible that Humphrey’s

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<sup>20</sup> *Argus*, 3 October 1860, p. 5. Interestingly, the Rising Sun Hotel was located at Upper Footscray, away from the centre of town. It is likely the promoters of this new organisation wished to reach a wider audience of residents of the sprawling district in a bid to ensure a strong membership base.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> See *Argus*, 10 October 1860, p. 4. Despite the mention of a possible archery club being formed for the ladies as an adjunct to the Footscray Cricket Club and Recreation Society, there is no evidence of this happening, nor is there any female representation among club officials. This, however, does not discount the fact that the archery club may have come to fruition.

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, the game against Hotham, *Argus*, 28 December 1860, p. 4. Connelly, is likely Connell mentioned earlier in this chapter.

reminisces of ‘Early Cricket’ for the *Independent* in 1886 confused the two entities as the Footscray Cricket Club and Recreative Society played both Williamstown and Hawthorn towards the end of 1860.<sup>26</sup> The home ground, near the powder magazine in the lower part of town, was described as the ‘Footscray cricket ground’, but it is uncertain although likely, that this was the same patch of land the Footscray Cricket Club had played on earlier in the year.<sup>27</sup>

Confirmation though that the new club was regarded as a separate body to the previously known Footscray Cricket Club was published in the *Argus* on Friday, 9 November 1860:

A scratch match between two elevens of the Footscray Cricket Club and Recreative Society will be played to-day. The sides will be chosen from the members on the ground. This being the opening match of this club, *which has only sprung into existence during the last month*, there will, no doubt, be a good muster.<sup>28</sup>

Whether the Footscray Cricket Club and Recreative Society achieved its aims in fielding various teams for other sports such as quoits, football and archery is highly speculative. The fact the ‘Recreative Society’ moniker was not dropped until later in the 1860s could indicate that various other sports or activities were engaged in. How successful or otherwise the club was, is hard to gauge given the paucity of relevant newsprint available during the formative years. Without a local paper to record the day to day happenings and the missing archives of the Williamstown papers during the bulk of the 1860s, the task of presenting some firm arguments as to the exact origins of cricket in Footscray, one way or the other, is problematic.

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<sup>26</sup> The contrary view could also be taken. Having made a connection with both clubs, the matches may have cemented their relationship.

<sup>27</sup> For descriptions, see *Argus*, 17 November 1860, p. 5 and *Argus*, 28 December 1860, p. 4.

<sup>28</sup> *Argus*, 9 November 1860, p. 4. Emphasis added.

### 4.3 Footscray Cricket Club

It was love, yes, and honor [*sic*] too, ‘work hard and play fair’ was our motto.

Fred Humphrey<sup>29</sup>

By the mid-1870s, the Footscray Cricket Club, whether it was a revised entity or not, had achieved the most prominent mantle in Footscray’s sporting fraternity. Cricket was a long established game in socially accepted British sporting culture and for a majority of the early years of colonisation, Australian Rules football and its clubs were sub-servient to its cricketing peer, particularly in terms of seniority, press coverage, use of grounds and respectability within the community.<sup>30</sup> After all, football was a game devised to keep cricketer’s fit during the winter months.<sup>31</sup> This sentiment was clearly evident in Footscray. As noted, the local rowing club was formed in 1873 and would not have an impact on the sporting world until the early 1880s, while the football club which bore the suburb’s name first appeared in 1876. This left the way clear for the cricket club to carry the fortunes of community sporting sentiment throughout the town’s first decade and a half, only interrupted at times by the activities at nearby Flemington racecourse and the locally held Annual Melbourne Regatta.

No doubt, the great problem once forming a sporting club in Footscray, particularly for a ball sport, was the requirement to find an area or a reserve to carry out that sports activities. That was the case with the Footscray club. During 1874, the cricket club approached council on numerous occasions seeking use of a piece of land for cricketing purposes.<sup>32</sup> Exasperated by not having much success, Footscray’s secretary suggested that ‘Council surrender to the club their right to about four and a half acres of the recreation reserve at the corner of Cross and Gordon streets’, in Upper Footscray, or what became known as the Western Reserve, the club’s eventual home.<sup>33</sup> Just two weeks

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<sup>29</sup> Fred Humphrey, ‘Early Cricket’, *Independent*, 1 May 1886, p. 3.

<sup>30</sup> What is now known as Australian Rules was originally coined Melbourne Rules and then Victorian Rules, and had its genesis in 1850s Melbourne.

<sup>31</sup> As per Tom Wills’ letter to *Bell’s Life* suggesting that a football or rifle club should be formed. See Tom Wills letter to editor, titled ‘Winter Practice’ in *Bell’s Life in Victoria and Sporting Chronicle*, 10 July 1858, p. 3.

<sup>32</sup> Footscray Council meetings were recorded in the Williamstown papers. For reports dealing with correspondence from the Footscray Cricket Club in 1874, see, under the heading ‘Footscray Borough Council’, *Williamstown Chronicle*, 23 May 1874, p. 6, 26 September 1874, p. 3, 10 October 1874, p. 3 and 24 October 1874, p. 3.

<sup>33</sup> *Williamstown Chronicle*, 10 October 1874, p. 3.

later, the request had been denied with the Footscray club asking council to again assist them in acquiring another piece of ground as a cricket field.<sup>34</sup> Early in 1875, there were similar requests from newly formed cricket clubs, Upper Footscray and South Footscray and later in the year, from the Yarraville Cricket Club.<sup>35</sup> Footscray Cricket Club were eventually granted a piece of land ‘situate on the south side of the creek, near the late Gardens Reserve’ between Whitehall and Cowper Streets at South Footscray.<sup>36</sup>

The mid-1870s saw Footscray Cricket Club seek to enter more formalised competitions. Along with Brunswick, Footscray accepted an offer to join the Junior Challenge Cricket Cup for the 1875-76 season. Two seasons later, a meeting of the delegates of four local clubs met to arrange the ‘inauguration of a challenge cup.’<sup>37</sup> At the end of 1879, the Gardens Committee of local council submitted a report, conceived and prepared by the gardener, Markby, to set aside a portion of the Western Reserve as a cricket ground for recreational purposes. The plan recommended that half the reserve between the pound (corner of German [now Barkly] and Gordon Streets) and Cross Street, abutting Gordon Street be used for cricket and recreational purposes and the other half to be laid out as a botanical garden with pine trees surrounding the border.<sup>38</sup> The area was already a garden reserve of sorts but the decision to adopt the motion and allow part of the reserve to be used as a recreational space would have far greater implications for the future of ball sports in Footscray. As seen above, council had been wary of approving sporting use of the gardens due to the threat posed in damaging the trees and shrubs. Its home ground by now had moved from the lower part of town to the Northern or Market Reserve, an area adjoining the Presbyterian or Scot’s church in Barkly Street and bordered by the main through-fare in the north ward, Geelong Road. This ground was also used by the Footscray Football Club at this time. The Club continued to play its normal fixture interspersed by Junior Challenge Cup matches, a knockout suburban competition.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> *Williamstown Chronicle*, 24 October 1874, p. 3.

<sup>35</sup> See, *Williamstown Chronicle*, 13 February 1875, p.3, *Williamstown Chronicle*, 13 March 1875, p. 3, and *Williamstown Chronicle*, 25 September 1875, p. 3.

<sup>36</sup> *Williamstown Chronicle*, 27 March 1875, p. 3.

<sup>37</sup> *Williamstown Chronicle*, 3 November 1877, p. 2. The four clubs were Footscray, Yarraville, Apollo and Maribyrnong.

<sup>38</sup> *Williamstown Chronicle*, 1 November 1879, p. 4.

<sup>39</sup> By 1882/83, the Challenge Cup was known as the ‘Boyle and Scott’s Junior Challenge Cup’, sponsored by the sports store of the same name in Melbourne.

By the start of the 1882/83 cricket season, the Footscray Cricket Club was flourishing. It had been revitalised under new management and the shake-up produced immediate results, both on and off-field. Interestingly, at the following year's Annual Meeting the secretary's report described the changes as 'the re-organisation of the club at the last Annual Meeting'.<sup>40</sup> The secretary further stated that the changes in management had the 'effect of pulling it into a position in the cricket field that it would never have reached had it maintained its old and un-energetic style.'<sup>41</sup> These comments suggest that the club could have once again ceased and re-started as a new entity. So, did this occur and did a similar event also occur with the Footscray Football Club in 1883? In the mind of Charlie Lovett, this prospect seemed to be the case with the cricket club. In his memoirs, published in the *Mail* and reproduced in *Charlie Lovett's Footscray*, Lovett stated that:

The Footscray Cricket Club was formed in 1882. Previous to this there were several clubs calling themselves the Footscray Cricket Club. None had a ground and existed for a year or two and then faded out. In 1882, the club, as at present constituted, was formed and took over the Western Reserve, where it has played ever since. I have a book of rules of the Footscray Cricket Club of that year, and the opening clause is "The name and management of the club shall be the Footscray Cricket Club."<sup>42</sup> I think this definitely establishes the date of the formation of the club.<sup>43</sup>

Lovett's recollection further complicates the issue. Did they consider a 'change of management' as the beginnings of a 'new' club? Or was the colonial view, in Footscray at least, one that recognised the start or 'formation' of a club as coinciding with a properly

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<sup>40</sup> See, Footscray Cricket Club, *Independent*, 15 September 1883, p. 3.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. The 1882-83 Annual Meeting held in September 1882 did not attract any such comment about a 're-organisation of the club' in the two recorded articles reported in newspapers, rather only office-bearers and no further details were given. See, *Sportsman*, 13 September 1882, p. 4 and *North Melbourne Advertiser*, 15 September 1882, p. 2.

<sup>42</sup> The actual document under the title 'The Footscray Club - Rules' and heading 'Name and Management' states 'That the name of the club shall be the FOOTSCRAY CRICKET CLUB' highlighted in capitals. The Footscray Historical Society holds a copy of this document in their cricket files. The document is not dated but has the year '1882' hand-written on it. However, the printer is W.M. Clark 'Independent' Office. As the *Independent* newspaper did not come into existence until March, 1883, the date this document was published could evidently be 1883.

<sup>43</sup> Lovett was writing in 1935-36. See, John Lack (ed.), *Charlie Lovett's Footscray*, Footscray: The City of Footscray Historical Society, 1993, p. 67. Lovett also states that his brother, Harold Eldred (H.E.) Lovett 'was the first secretary'.

constituted club document outlining a standardised set of rules? Other origin conundrums have been published as fact. The *Independent* recorded the annual meeting in August 1890 as the club's tenth suggesting a continuous history from 1880 or 1881, not 1882 as stated by Lovett.<sup>44</sup> Unfortunately, the answer remains a mystery and crucial newspaper coverage is missing for the two prior years, 1880-81. It is this key information that could hold all the answers and is vital in determining the club's exact origins.

Whatever the case was, season 1882-83 saw an influx of quality players including new captain, Sam English, a former South Melbourne and intercolonial representative, which strengthened the team and helped produce a record season.<sup>45</sup> The cricket club had grand visions. At the start of the season, Footscray Cricket Club secretary Harry Scott, son of Reverend H.F. Scott, wrote to council requesting use of the Western Gardens Reserve as a 'playground' for the season. Scott indicated to council that the club had received the 'support of many of the leading citizens' and it was a combined proposal that the club would spend time, energy and expense in improving the Western Reserve as a playing ground. He further proposed that the club would lay a turf wicket and erect a pavilion but needed an assurance from council that, if they spent monies improving the ground, they would not be 'turned out ... at a moment's notice'.<sup>46</sup> Despite the land being owned by the Government, the offer was too good to refuse and council granted permission for the cricket club to use the Western Gardens Reserve as its home ground and this arrangement would remain so for the best part of over a century.<sup>47</sup>

The club's promised transformation of the cricket ground was noted in a letter to the *Independent* in April 1883. The writer, a football player from the Footscray team, congratulated the cricket club on turning 'an almost barren waste into a beautiful piece of

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<sup>44</sup> *Independent*, 30 August 1890, p. 3. Even the current Footscray Cricket Club origins are somewhat cloudy. Whilst there is documented evidence the club was 'newly' formed on 5 September 1894, as perhaps a new entity and separate to the previous organisation, prominent Footscray City publications list 1888 as the formation year, while a 1984 anniversary booklet probably incorrectly makes a typographical error in declaring 1884 as the birth of the club. Further complicating matters, the booklet states the club is 'at present [1994] celebrating its centenary'. See, Hugh Michell (ed.), *Footscray's First Fifty Years*, Footscray: *The Advertiser*, 1909 and *City of Footscray: 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebrations*, Syme Newspapers, 1984.

<sup>45</sup> Other recruits were locals in Fred English, A. Nunweek, J. Dean (who had been playing with leading metropolitan clubs) and F. Baird. The Footscray Cricket Club also fielded a second eleven.

<sup>46</sup> 'Footscray Borough Council', *Williamstown Chronicle*, 14 October 1882, p. 2. The council had refused the request of the Footscray Football Club in 1883 to use the Gardens Reserve when their ground next to the Presbyterian Church became muddled. See, 'The Council and the Football Club', *Independent*, 28 April 1883, p. 3.

<sup>47</sup> It was not until 1997 that the Footscray Cricket Club and its various incarnations were forced to find another home ground.

turf.<sup>48</sup> After a concert was held to help raise funds for the improvements, the cricket club wrote to council requesting that they be reimbursed for their alterations to the Western Reserve. It seems that the cricket club had got wind that council were receiving a kickback of funds from Government that matched any monies expended on improving the Gardens.<sup>49</sup> Extensive improvements to the ground were made during the football season of 1883. According to the *Independent*, ‘The club had their ground ploughed, harrowed, and sown with English grass,’ providing four acres of lush turf.<sup>50</sup> More fundraising activities were planned with the aim of building a pavilion and making the ground one of the best in Melbourne. The club had visions of raising its profile in suburban cricket and sought to play and attract some of the leading metropolitan clubs, such as Carlton, Kew and Williamstown, to their new turf ground.

The cricket ground on the Western Reserve was a far cry from the rough piece of land originally acquired by Mr B. French, who had received ‘permission’ from the Minister of Land years before, for a site in the low lying area in the lower part of the district, near the gasworks.<sup>51</sup> Later secretaries, T.H. Young and J.S. Keays had also been responsible in ‘procuring a piece of land from Government, which was ultimately changed for land’ at the Western Reserve.<sup>52</sup> The prospect of adding a pavilion to the Western Reserve was of paramount importance to the club’s profile as the need to provide ‘a decent reception’ and change rooms to visiting teams, rather than the unseemly sight of ‘athletes stripping on the open grass’, reciprocated goodwill on its part and enhanced the club’s reputation.<sup>53</sup> Ian Turner noted that, ‘a key moment in the history of any community was the building of a grandstand’ which ultimately ‘became the focus of vociferous barracking for the home team.’<sup>54</sup>

The proceeds of a successful concert given by the club over two nights in October 1883 provided the impetus for an advertisement in December seeking tenders for the

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<sup>48</sup> *Independent*, 28 April 1883, p. 3.

<sup>49</sup> *Independent*, 4 August 1883, p. 2. See also, ‘Borough Council’ on same page.

<sup>50</sup> *Independent*, 8 September 1883, p. 2.

<sup>51</sup> *Independent*, 15 September 1883, p. 3.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> Ian Turner, ‘Understanding Colonial Australia through Football’, *Victorian Historical Journal*, Vol. 74, no. 1, April 2003, pp. 92-93.

erection of a pavilion on the Footscray Cricket Ground.<sup>55</sup> Once erected, the new (and almost completed) pavilion was first used on 1 March 1884 and officially opened a few weeks later with a celebration community ‘Muff’ cricket match.<sup>56</sup> A Grand Bazaar and Fancy Fair was organised by the ladies of the club in July 1884 with an aim to raise enough funds to wipe off the accrued pavilion debt and further beautify the Reserve by adding attractions such as a bowling green (for elder gentlemen) and lawn tennis ground (for the ladies).<sup>57</sup>

The club had made great strides by the time the annual meeting was held at the Royal Hall before the start of the 1883-84 season. At this meeting another significant occurrence took place. The *Independent* reported that:

It was pleasing to notice several, who, last year were members of the Excelsior Cricket Club, but, who this year had agreed to sink all petty feelings, and join together for the purpose of making one good club in the borough.<sup>58</sup>

This also has parallels with the football landscape in Footscray at the time and a sub-section will be devoted to the relationship between the two football clubs in the following chapter. What is extraordinary about this movement of Excelsior players to ‘make one good club’ is that, this is possibly the event that caused a set of rules to be written in the first place, and that this club seemingly previously acted in opposition to the Footscray Cricket Club, yet there is no first hand evidence of the club existing at this time and no recorded newspaper coverage of its activities.<sup>59</sup> Could it be that the rules of the club, quoted by Charlie Lovett above, actually pertain to the cricket season 1883-84? After all, one of the rules states, ‘That the name of this Club [Footscray] shall not be

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<sup>55</sup> See Advertisement, *Independent*, 1 December 1883, p. 2.

<sup>56</sup> The pavilion was officially opened on Monday 17 March 1884. Ironically, the first official game set to be played after the completion of the pavilion was replaced by a scratch match when the opposition, Eastern Hill, failed to show. Muff cricket games were common in this era and generally featured mature civic aldermen or local men of some standing or repute who were devoid of cricketing abilities. They were generally played for celebratory or fund raising reasons and sometimes played in varying themed costumes for the amusement and entertainment of the spectators. For more on ‘muff’ games see, Brunette Lenkic and Rob Hess, *Play On!: The Hidden History of Women’s Australian Rules Football*, Richmond: Echo Publishing, 2016, specifically pp. 2-3.

<sup>57</sup> *Independent*, 28 June 1884, p. 2.

<sup>58</sup> *Independent*, 15 September 1883, p. 3.

<sup>59</sup> In surviving newspapers or via other research, this author has not come across the existence of a Footscray Excelsior Cricket Club at this time.

altered.’<sup>60</sup> This rule may have been instituted as a means of stopping any threat that the influx of Excelsior players posed in voting for a name change in the future. And, the date fits with the printer being established in business at the *Independent* office in 1883.

A large amount of the club’s activities received the necessary local press coverage, due in part, to the fact secretaries, T.H. Young and Harry Scott, were employees and contributors of the new *Independent* newspaper. Accusations of a clique, though their association to W.M. Clark’s ‘political’ paper, was levelled at these administrators by another section of the club, notably those aligned with the opposition paper, the *Advertiser* at the annual meeting before the 1884-85 season.<sup>61</sup> Ill-feeling was reported as rife by the newspaper. However, the Footscray Cricket Club lost both Scott and Young within a few months. Scott accepted a posting as general manager of the *Euroa Advertiser*, while work commitments restricted Young’s ability to continue in the role. Former secretary and committeeman, Harold Lovett’s death from footballing injuries during the season added to the club’s loss of many ardent workers in such a short space of time.

A replacement secretary though, was found in Sam English, Footscray’s veteran star batsman and captain. It was English’s reputation, guidance and ability as a cricketer that had helped the club improve its standing in the cricket world. His influence had been profound in such a short time. He had always lobbied for a turf wicket rather than the hard wicket competition Footscray had played in previously, and was likely behind the club adopting the red and white colours, the same colours as his old team, South Melbourne. However, by June 1885, English had received an offer to take up a physical education role as a gymnastics instructor at one of Melbourne’s inner city gymnasiums. At a club testimonial, he was lauded for the position he had helped the club attain. According to the *Independent*, the club’s success ‘both financially and from a cricket stand-point was mainly attributable to the energy and zeal displayed by Mr English.’<sup>62</sup> The loss of such key contributors in English, Scott, Young and Lovett would be strongly felt by the club in the years to follow.

The Footscray Cricket Club’s industrious moves to establish itself on stronger footing by gaining the Western Reserve as a playing ground and the improvements and

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<sup>60</sup> Rule 13. Alteration or Dissolution. The Footscray Club – Rules. W.M. Clark, Printer, Independent Office. Copy sighted and held by the Footscray Historical Society (accessed, 10 April 2018).

<sup>61</sup> Footscray Cricket Club Patron, P.M. Salmon, was proprietor of the Footscray *Advertiser* at this time.

<sup>62</sup> *Independent*, 20 June 1885, p. 3.

beautifications it had made to the spectating facilities at the Gardens venue, including the building of a pavilion, paved the way for the Footscray Football Club's bid to seek admission to the VFA, the senior footballing body in Victoria. In doing so, the Footscray Football Club sought a merger with the Footscray Cricket Club to form a senior club to help facilitate its acceptance into the VFA competition. At a meeting at the Belgravia Hotel, the committees of both clubs agreed to an amalgamation whereby terms for the sharing of gate-money was a crucial factor in clinching the deal.<sup>63</sup> Thus, the year 1886 proved a germane one in the fortunes of sport in Footscray. Footscray lost the right to host the Annual Melbourne Regatta but, the merger between the cricket and football clubs guaranteed Footscray's continued representation in a major metropolitan sporting competition, thereby, keeping the suburb's name to the fore in one way or another. In the next sub-section, the cricketing landscape during this period will be surveyed in order to determine any impact other clubs may have had on the origins of the main cricket and football clubs bearing the suburb's name.

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<sup>63</sup> See, *Independent*, 13 March 1886, p. 3, and John Lack, Chris McConville, Michael Small and Damien Wright, *A History of the Footscray Football Club: Unleashed*, Footscray: Aus-Sport Enterprises, 1996, p. 16.

#### 4.4 Footscray's Cricketing Landscape

In cricket we have an ideal summer game, pure in its associations, full of sportsman like instincts, with a tendency to promote healthy and gentlemanly manners in its players and supporters.

*Australian Football*<sup>64</sup>

Without the Williamstown papers as a resource for the bulk of the 1860s, it is hard to decipher the extent of cricketing clubs in Footscray during the period covered by this thesis. What is clear though, is that there is a spate of cricket clubs formed in the Footscray district and surrounding areas from the mid-1870s until the end of the decade. Ignoring the established Footscray Cricket Club, dealt with in the previous sub-section, newspaper coverage expanded to include reports and team lists from other clubs in the Footscray district such as South Footscray, Upper Footscray, Yarraville, Apollo, St John's, Exchange, Footscray Alberts, Barkly and Star of Footscray. The teams were so named for a variety of reasons. Besides the obvious geographical naming of teams, clubs were also formed through church, school, workplace, street, pub and group affiliations. Footscray teams also played against neighbouring sides established in Williamstown, Braybrook, Maribyrnong, Melton and Kensington. With so many clubs in the district, a move was made to inaugurate a locally run Junior Challenge Cup for the 1877-78 season. Teams involved in the challenge competition were Footscray, Yarraville, Apollo and Maribyrnong.<sup>65</sup>

The late 1870s and early 1880s saw the emergence of a number of separate cricket clubs that would have an influence and possible critical link to the fortunes of the Footscray Cricket Club. As noted, the St John's Cricket Club, founded by the Rev. H.F. Scott of the Church of England, appears to have existed for seasons 1877-78 and 1878-79. The St John's club fielded two cricket elevens drawn from their brethren, including several leading citizens of future years who would be prominent in Footscray football

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<sup>64</sup> This quotation, although taken from the 1920s, expresses the view and attraction the game held to colonial Australians during the period of this study. Victorian Football League, *Australian Football: Origin and History of the Laws of the Game, Some Special Features of the Game*, Melbourne: Victorian Football League, 192-(?), p. 4.

<sup>65</sup> *Williamstown Chronicle*, 3 November 1877, p. 2. Despite the inauguration of this junior challenge competition, the article notes that the Apollo club are 'the present holder' of the Cup.

circles. Curiously, there is no mention of a St John's cricket team in available newspaper sources for the 1879-80 season, however, a team representing the Prince Imperial Cricket Club is listed in the *Williamstown Chronicle* in March 1880.<sup>66</sup> There is little doubt that the club was named after the Prince Imperial, heir to the French throne, and subject of great sympathy in the British world after he was killed in battle whilst fighting for the British army, in 1879. Such was the respect he was held in, a spate of sporting clubs in metropolitan Melbourne added the moniker, 'Imperial', to their name.

Included in the Prince Imperial team (from available resources) are, at least, eleven names previously associated with the St John's Cricket Club.<sup>67</sup> This is highly suggestive of a possible link between the two and indicates that St John's may have changed its name to Prince Imperial for the 1879-80 season or, that a new club was started afresh under the new name using the bulk of the St John's playing stocks.<sup>68</sup> Perhaps coincidentally, the St John's team played a West Melbourne team, Prince Imperial, in March 1878 and remembering this fact, wished to honour and associate with the Prince Imperial's name, like the West Melbourne team, as recognition of their strong Imperial ties. The Prince Imperial club requested use of the vacant land behind the Presbyterian Church, bordering Barkly Street and Geelong Road, now a market reserve and common recreational field used by footballing and cricketing interests in Footscray.<sup>69</sup>

In the previous sub-section on the Footscray Cricket Club, an intriguing aspect to the sporting milieu of Footscray was the presence of a team called the Excelsior. Sporting both a football and cricket club of the same name, a number of their cricket players transferred their allegiance to the Footscray Club for the 1883-84 season. As noted earlier, this act received praise in the *Independent*. It is interesting to note here the mention that there had been 'petty feelings' between the two clubs. While it is impossible to know the extent of this feeling, or why it was generated, the action taken by some members of the Excelsior club would further strengthen Footscray Cricket Club's playing depth and avoid

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<sup>66</sup> See *Williamstown Chronicle*, 6 March 1880, p. 3.

<sup>67</sup> According to a spreadsheet detailing the movements of players kept by this author based on team lists appearing in relevant newspapers.

<sup>68</sup> News of the Prince Imperial's death in South Africa at the hands of Zulu warriors reached Australian shores some three to four months prior to the 1879-80 cricket season.

<sup>69</sup> See *Williamstown Chronicle*, 2 October 1880, p. 2, for a report of the Footscray Borough Council meeting of September 29.

any unnecessary rivalry for the best players in the district. The Footscray Cricket Club was able to field a first and second eleven, along with a third side – those with lesser ability making up the ‘club eleven’. With a rising population, the Footscray district at this time still had at least six junior clubs competing for players.<sup>70</sup> The Footscray Cricket Club had positioned itself as the premier team of the district, appropriately carrying the name of the suburb.

#### 4.5 Conclusion

As W.F. Mandle has pointed out, cricket was important in establishing a national identity in the antipodes. By extension, the role cricket played in establishing a local identity at suburban level was paramount, particularly in a socially isolated community such as Footscray. Cricket’s popularity and class inclusiveness added to the appeal of the game to our early pioneers. It also had the backing of the powerful middle-class who were only too keen to diffuse its values, such as gentlemanly play and sportsman-like behaviours, to the working-class. The game encouraged and increased discourse between classes and because the game was seen as an extension of the British belief in ‘muscular Christianity’, it had wide religious and cultural support.

The early cricketing scene in Footscray encouraged social play befitting middle-class attitudes of the time where those participating were more interested in sportsmanship and how the game was played, rather than the end result. As the game opened up to the lesser classes during the latter period of this thesis, cricket became a social institution that community members took pride in being involved. The fortunes of cricket clubs depended on the input of many and not just from any one class of person. As we have seen, it was the elite of the district, the civic fathers whose leadership inspired and instituted the formation of many local sporting clubs. But, it was the inclusion of all classes who were included in this activity. Participation and the shared responsibility of running such an institution provided the impetus for success and united the community, sparking a fierce local pride once inter-suburban contests became the norm. Newspapers

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<sup>70</sup> Those clubs were, Footscray, Footscray Alberts, Bay View, Dawn of Freedom, Mona Castle and Myrtlebank. It is unknown if Excelsior disbanded or fielded a cricket team for the 1883-84 season, due to its players moving across to Footscray Cricket Club. Neighbouring Yarraville supported at least two cricket clubs, Yarraville and Yarraville United.

reflected this community involvement and civic pride, with the local press keen to align itself with club affairs, annual meetings and the report of club matches.

The cricket club, one of the earliest social organisations in any district, was a chance for the community to come together for a common purpose. Cricket clubs formed through the support of many of the town's leading citizens where their patronage and business acumen was vital. Clubs likewise, required the backing of the 'fairer sex' (women). Their encouragement and fundraising efforts went a long way to establishing a successful and sustainable sporting club, helping provide facilities for a club to grow. The Footscray Cricket Club's industrious moves to establish itself as a stronger and more viable entity in the early 1880s, coupled with the Clarke Cup success of the Footscray Rowing Club, had a critical impact on the fortunes of local sport in Footscray, placing the success of a representative local team on a pedestal, thereby achieving the external recognition and acknowledgement the suburb craved. This, no doubt was a mitigating factor in the football club merging with the cricket club to seek senior representation in the VFA in 1886.

In determining the origins of football clubs formed in the colonial era, it is important to note that football clubs were, in general, established and developed after their cricket club forebears, not the other way around. In other words, a football club played sub-servient to its cricketing equivalent. It was often that a football club came into existence by taking the name or being representative of an existing cricket club. And, as Mancini and Hibbins noted, it was through the agency of the Melbourne Cricket Club that Australian Rules football as we know it, received its start.<sup>71</sup>

It was the cricket clubs that paved the way for football to expand its horizons. Cricket clubs had first established recreation space or fields to play a game and often improved their lot by adding pavilions, improving the turf or beautifying the arena for the comfort of spectators. Available playing space, player availability and financial considerations were likely explanations for the rapid turnover of many of Footscray's early clubs. This was highlighted by the number of clubs that came and went, particularly

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<sup>71</sup> Mancini, Anne and Hibbins, G. M. (eds), *Running with the Ball: Football's Foster Father*, Melbourne: Lynedoch Publications, 1987, p. 20. The authors' state that the Melbourne Cricket Club (MCC) supported its secretary's (Tom Wills) suggestion to *Bells Life in Victoria* (10 July 1858) that a football club could be started to keep the cricketers fit during winter by providing 'the early players, an organizing base, and the status' for it to succeed.

in the latter part of this thesis period, 1876-86. It is also interesting to note that once leisure time became more available to the common man, and the cricket scene developed with Footscray's population now able to sustain a number of clubs, alignment to structured competitions became the vogue, often leading to the creation of self-interest, rivalries and even jealousies among clubs. This was surely not confined to Footscray alone.

Again, the gap in the holdings of the early newspapers limits understanding of the founding origins of local cricket clubs, and the historian has a hard time deciphering the exact turn of events without the necessary resources at hand. This issue has been critical in determining the origins of the Footscray Cricket Club. The appearance and non-appearance of a number of local clubs and their short life-spans only adds to the confusion. An important discovery though, in this research, has been the uncovering of cricket clubs representing the St John's, Prince Imperial and Excelsior cricket clubs with the distinct possibility that the St John's and Prince Imperial clubs were heavily connected. The striking parallels that exist between these particular cricket clubs and their footballing equivalents in connection with the Footscray Football Club, requires further investigation. This indeed, provides some fodder for the considerations of the origins of the Footscray Football Club, which will be the main focus of attention in the next chapter.

## Chapter 5

### ‘King Football’: Football in Footscray

Football is not merely a reflection of society, but an active force in its development.

Robert Pascoe<sup>1</sup>

#### 5.1 Introduction

A club calling itself the ‘Footscray’ football club first surfaced (at least in newspaper reports) in 1876. However, belief that the club was born in 1883 was regurgitated down through the annals of club history.<sup>2</sup> This was somewhat challenged with the publication of the club’s history in *A History of the Footscray Football Club: Unleashed* in 1996.<sup>3</sup> Whilst painting the picture of the events leading up to 1883, the book did not go so far as to nominate a date of formation or year of origin but provided evidence to the contrary of what was previously held as fact. The research outlined in *Unleashed* indicated that the birth date of 1883 was inconclusive and more likely, inaccurate. Indeed, there appeared to be a history before 1883. The research itself also poses a defining question about the foundation years of the Footscray Football Club. That is, was there a continuous history between the Footscray Club of 1876-79 and the Prince Imperial Football Club 1880-81, and therefore a connective history to the current day Footscray Football Club (or Western Bulldogs as the club is now known)?<sup>4</sup> This chapter therefore digs deeper into available resources and explores in more depth the origins of the Footscray Football Club by casting a wider lens across the football landscape in Footscray than has been achieved before.

The chapter will start with a look at the early years of football in Footscray, its landscape and clubs, helping to provide a backdrop for the rest of the chapter. The following two sub-sections will deal with, the St John’s Football Club and Prince Imperial

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Pascoe, ‘Understanding Colonial Australia through Football’, *Victorian Historical Journal*, vol. 74, no. 1, 2003, p. 94.

<sup>2</sup> The club even celebrated its ‘centenary’ year in 1983.

<sup>3</sup> John Lack, Chris McConville, Michael Small and Damien Wright, *A History of the Footscray Football Club: Unleashed*, Footscray: Aus-Sport Enterprises, 1996.

<sup>4</sup> Footscray Football Club changed its playing name to Western Bulldogs from season 1997.

Football Club, as both have strong links to the Footscray Football Club. This will, in turn, lead to a critical junction in exploration of the link between the Prince Imperial club and Footscray Football Club, or specifically the years 1882 and 1883, which raises several questions for discussion. The origin myth of 1883 will also be discussed in one subsection where a number of fundamental questions and truisms will be investigated and assessed. The chapter will be rounded out by exploring the Excelsior Football Club, a major rival to the Footscray Club. Above all, the research focus is on any indication, key moment or connection that could point to the foundations of the club, before conclusions are then made.

## 5.2 Football Origins in Footscray, 1876-79

Unravelling the origins of the Footscray Football Club is no easy task.

John Devaney<sup>5</sup>

*Unleashed* states the first reference to a Footscray football club was recorded by the *Williamstown Chronicle* in July 1876.<sup>6</sup> Footscray's opponent in this match was the Williamstown Thirds. Williamstown Football Club, with over 100 members and fielding three teams, were a strong 'junior club' in 1876, taking out the metropolitan Junior Challenge Cup.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, if judging Footscray's standing in the football world at this time, then its opponent, Williamstown Thirds, was indicative of the minor status it held. Robin Grow notes that early in the game's development an 'informal hierarchy of "senior" and "junior" clubs had evolved in Melbourne'.<sup>8</sup> 'Their place in the hierarchy was determined by playing strength, club organisation, and whether they had a home ground.

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<sup>5</sup> John Devaney, *The Full Points Encyclopedia of Australian Football*, vol. 1, London: Full Points Footy Publications, 2008, p. 609.

<sup>6</sup> The match between 'the Footscray' and Williamstown Thirds was played on 15 July 1876. Footscray won the match, two goals to one. See, *Williamstown Chronicle*, 15 July 1876, p. 3. See, also Lack, McConville, Small and Wright, *Unleashed*, p. 6.

<sup>7</sup> *Williamstown Chronicle*, 15 July 1876, p. 2. There was no clear definition of what a 'junior' club was at this time. However, the best explanation is probably provided by football historian, Mark Pennings in his series on the origins of *Australian Rules Football*. He noted that 'junior' teams were those that received a handicap concession of extra players when playing against teams regarded as 'seniors'. Or conversely, a 'senior' team was one that did not require a handicap concession when playing any other opposition.

<sup>8</sup> See Robin Grow, 'From Gumtrees to Goalposts, 1858-1876', in Rob Hess and Bob Stewart (eds), *More Than a Game. An Unauthorised History of Australian Rules Football*, Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1998, p. 28.

A club's status could change quickly.<sup>9</sup> Footscray's situation would be consistent with a newly founded club representative of the district. It is highly likely too, that Footscray would have played Williamstown teams prior to this year had it fielded a team. The fact that there is no current evidence or a simple report or entry in any newspapers on Trove, particularly the Williamstown papers, prior to this date, makes it likely that 1876 was the first year that Footscray fielded a representative football team.<sup>10</sup>

However, the authors of *Unleashed* state that it was likely the Victorian code of football was played in Footscray 'formally and informally, well before this [1876]', with games likely emerging 'from street, factory, and neighbourhood scratch matches, organised on the basis of challenges'.<sup>11</sup> This claim makes sense given the increasing popularity of the game, nevertheless there is no evidence that any of these teams led to a formal game against a recognised team before 1876. Regardless of the way Footscray's likely original team came together, its recorded opponents in 1876 were mainly sourced from the Williamstown area: Williamstown Thirds, Williamstown Union and Star of Williamstown. The *Footballer* – an impressive annual publication put together by Carlton secretary Thomas Power from 1875 featuring information on football clubs, match results, player profiles and the game's history in Victoria - records a match against Richmond Standard, a junior club, in September of 1876, indicating the club was of sound enough structure to at least seek one game further afield than the surrounding Footscray area.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid. Eventually though, a system was devised to distinguish between the different levels of junior clubs whereby these clubs were split into first-rate, second-rate and so on competitions. As senior clubs would concede more players if playing an opposition junior club, so could a higher rated junior club concede extra men to a lesser rated team. The *Footballer* rated a team's status as either 'senior', 'junior' or 'minor'. It is highly likely, Footscray fell into the latter category at the time of its formation.

<sup>10</sup> It is possible that access to council correspondence for this period could provide the key to the exact origins of a representative Footscray football team.

<sup>11</sup> Lack, McConville, Small and Wright, *Unleashed*, pp. 5-6. As we saw in the previous chapter, the Footscray Cricket Club and Recreative Society endeavoured to incorporate 'football' as one of its included sports on inauguration in 1860. It is unknown whether the football referred to, was a form of what became Association football (soccer) or was an early example of Melbourne Rules. If it was the latter, then Footscray could lay claim to being at the very forefront of the establishment of the game in outer suburban Melbourne. Association football was not codified until 1863 in England. For more on the history of soccer in Australia see, Roy Hay and Bill Murray, *A History of Football in Australia: A Game of Two Halves*, Sydney: Hardie Grant Books, 2014.

<sup>12</sup> T. P. Power, *Footballer*, Melbourne: Henriques and Co., 1876, p. 87. This is the first mention of a Footscray team in this publication. The 1877 edition lists Footscray as a club playing under the 'Victorian Rules of Football' but states that no information was received from the club to reproduce in the annual. Whilst the *Footballer* relied on the secretaries of individual clubs to forward information about their

By Footscray's second season – in 1877 – the football scene in Victorian had become more structured and formalised, with the establishment of the VFA for senior clubs as the governing body for the sport. The *Williamstown Advertiser* published a formalised fixture featuring the Footscray clubs' engagements for the season.<sup>13</sup> Despite the arrangements in place, clubs were known to not turn up, or make other arrangements with the clubs they were scheduled to play, seeking alternatives at the last minute.<sup>14</sup> At a Footscray Borough Council meeting in July 1877, a letter was read from Footscray secretary, John Carter, requesting use of a ground to play and practice on:

Gentlemen

The Footscray Football Club being Thoroughly Started now and being in want of a Ground Very Much I have been requested to Write and Ask Your Concent to allow us to play our Matches and practise also in the Recreation Reserve (Upper Footscray). Hoping you will be pleased to Grant the Same which is in every way Convenient for Football purposes.<sup>15</sup>

The request was no doubt due to the danger posed by the 'potholes' that had appeared in the club's home ground at the Northern (Market) Reserve in Barkly Street.<sup>16</sup> The application for the Recreation Reserve at Upper Footscray (later the Western Reserve) for the remainder of the season was granted provided there was 'no damage to trees'.<sup>17</sup> Footscray's correspondent to the *Williamstown Chronicle*, noted in a September article that while the 'reserve makes a splendid football ground', the boundary flags marking the ground 'should be placed farther away from the trees, or the ball will assuredly damage them'.<sup>18</sup>

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respective club and results and so on, it is noted, that Footscray did not submit any correspondence for the 1876-79 editions.

<sup>13</sup> *Williamstown Advertiser*, 2 June 1877, p. 3.

<sup>14</sup> This season saw at least two matches altered from Footscray's set fixture, at the last moment, while several games were abandoned due to such reasons as the state of the weather, a dispute or unfavourable umpiring.

<sup>15</sup> Footscray Borough Council Meeting, Inward Correspondence, 25 July 1877 (original spelling, punctuation and upper case as used in the original document). A copy of this letter was uncovered by the author when conducting research for *Unleashed* in the early 1990s.

<sup>16</sup> See report of Footscray Borough Council, Wednesday, 25 July 1877 in *Williamstown Chronicle*, 28 July 1877, p. 3.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Williamstown Chronicle*, 15 September 1877, p. 3.

In 1878 the *Williamstown Chronicle* declared that ‘the Footscray club is again in motion’, and that secretary Carter had approached Footscray Council for use of the Recreation Reserve in 1878 under the ‘conditions observed last year.’<sup>19</sup> On the surface, this season was critical in the development of football in Footscray. Suddenly, three other clubs appeared in newspaper reports – Rose of Footscray, Star of Footscray and St John’s – but all were considered inferior to Footscray and did not play the more senior club during the season.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, the establishment of new clubs created a rivalry for players with the local newspaper encouraging young Footscray men to take up the game and strengthen the side:

If the young men, the bone and sinew of our industrial borough, would only come forward and take an active interest in the game, Footscray should send a powerful team into the field.<sup>21</sup>

The year featured a walkover, a disputed game and a cancellation caused by players unable to obtain time off work on a public holiday, while Footscray also refused to play one match due to inclement weather and the bad state of the ground – proof of the teething problems facing the unregulated game of junior football in metropolitan Melbourne.

In 1879, Henry Mitchell replaced John Carter as Footscray’s secretary. Mitchell was also pro-active in seeking a ground for the season, writing to council in May.<sup>22</sup> The team played a different set of clubs than from the previous year. Included among the reported matches were opponents from St Kilda Park, West Melbourne Alberts, Sandridge Juniors, North Williamstown, Simpson’s Road and the newly formed Yarraville Sugar Works (or Sugar Refinery).<sup>23</sup> The Yarraville Sugar Works was a major local employer and its workplace team was possibly the first football side formed in

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<sup>19</sup> *Williamstown Chronicle*, 18 May 1878, p. 3. The request was granted. It was reported in the *Williamstown Advertiser*, 18 May 1878, that a scratch (practice) match though, was to be played on ‘the old ground in Barkly Street’ (Northern Reserve).

<sup>20</sup> By ‘inferior’, the reference is to the status attained by each club. Footscray were playing a higher grade of junior football against stronger opponents than other local clubs.

<sup>21</sup> *Williamstown Chronicle*, 18 May 1878, p. 3.

<sup>22</sup> This request was granted by council. See, *Williamstown Chronicle*, 17 May 1879, p. 3. Also see, Footscray Council Minute Books, Public Records Office, VPRS 5338/P0000/7, 1879-81, p. 52.

<sup>23</sup> Footscray failed to turn up for both North Williamstown games.

Yarraville and one of, or if not, the earliest workplace team based in the greater Footscray district.<sup>24</sup>

With serious gaps in local newspaper coverage and council records at this point, the end of the 1870s poses many conundrums about what happened to the Footscray Football Club that existed from 1876 to 1879. Did the Footscray Football Club change its name to the Prince Imperial Football Club for the 1880 season, thereby forming a continuous link in history as one club? Or did it merge with the St Johns Football Club, acting as a form of genesis of a new football union, the Prince Imperial Football Club? Was the Prince Imperial regarded as a new or separate club? Does the modern interpretation differ from the colonial interpretation as far as the starting origin or beginnings of a club differ? These questions and more will be explored in the following sub-sections.

### 5.3 The St John's Football Club Connection

Several key families associated with St John's Church of England, Cowper Street, remained connected with the club.

Lack, McConville, Small and Wright<sup>25</sup>

The short life of the St John's Football Club at the end of the 1870s decade poses an intriguing question in the consideration of the origins of the Footscray Football Club. With so many of the players of the St John's 1878 team featuring in the Prince Imperial side of 1880, it begs the question – was there a merger of sorts between the Footscray Club and St John's for the 1880 season, possibly incorporating a change of name to the Prince Imperial Football Club?<sup>26</sup> Or even more extreme, did the original Footscray Football Club of the 1870s disband, with the Prince Imperial Football Club of 1880

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<sup>24</sup> For more on workplace football teams in the nineteenth-century see, Peter Burke, 'A Social History of Workplace Australian Football, 1860-1939', Doctoral Thesis, RMIT University, 2008, and Peter Burke, 'The Emergence of Australian Football in Nineteenth-Century Workplaces', *Sporting Traditions*, vol. 25, no. 1, 2008, pp. 17-39. For a history of the Yarraville Sugar Refinery see, Carmel Taig, *The Giant by the River: A History of the Yarraville Sugar Works*, Seddon: self-published, 2014.

<sup>25</sup> Lack, McConville, Small and Wright, *Unleashed*, p. 10.

<sup>26</sup> According to the author's notes, at least sixteen members of the St John's team of 1878 were playing with Prince Imperial F.C. in 1880. These players were Comben, C. and H. Coppelstone, Cuming, French, J. Harrison, W. Kelly, Langwill, Larritt, C. Lovett, McLean, O'Connor, Roberts, H.J. Scott, G. Spence, Williams and H. Williams.

originating from the ashes of the St John's Football Club? After all, why did so many of the St John's players gravitate towards Prince Imperial?

A similar precedent occurred in Footscray's cricketing milieu with many of the playing members of the St John's Cricket Club gravitating or transferring their allegiance to the new Prince Imperial Cricket Club. Playing personnel of the St John's Football Club have the strongest connection to the Prince Imperial Football Club of 1880, therefore it is reasonable to assume the possibility that the Prince Imperial club was formed out of the St John's club or from a merger between St John's and the Footscray Football Club teams of 1879. It is a fact that virtually all the St. John's team of 1878 were Prince Imperial players in 1880.

A glance through the honour board of administrators of the Prince Imperial (1880-81) and Footscray (1882 onwards) clubs further highlights the connection between the St John's Church and the local football club.<sup>27</sup> The president of the Prince Imperial Football Club in 1880 was William Meeke Fehon, a treasurer of the St John's Church of England at Footscray. Fehon, who had a high position with the Victorian Railways, held the presidency for three years (1880-82), only relinquishing the reins when business interests took him to England in 1883. In fact, all three critical administrative positions in the club were held by adherents of the St John's church and remained unchanged for the period 1880-82. The secretary's role was carried out by Harry Scott, son of St John's incumbent reverend, Henry Forde Scott, while Harold Lovett was the treasurer.<sup>28</sup> Lovett's replacement as treasurer in 1883 was J. Williams, another with strong links to the church and its secretary at one point. Fehon's replacement in 1883 was Dr J.C. Morton, a leading citizen, doctor and prominent guardian of the church and, as we have seen, was heavily connected to the Footscray Rowing Club. Morton held the presidency of the three main sporting clubs (rowing, cricket and football) in Footscray in 1883. Morton's successor was proprietor of the Belgravia Hotel, E.J. Emery, a strong advocate for local sports.<sup>29</sup>

Prior to Footscray's elevation to senior status in 1886, Sam English and Billy Hunter had short term roles as secretary, and both had a strong connection to the St John's church. Virtually every office-bearer in this period had links to the St John's Church of

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<sup>27</sup> This factor was also touched on in an earlier chapter of this thesis.

<sup>28</sup> Harold Lovett also replaced Scott as secretary in 1883, with Scott returning to the secretaryship for one more season in 1884.

<sup>29</sup> A search of Footscray Historical Society Records does not reveal Emery's religious persuasion.

England. *Unleashed* also acknowledges that the committee at one point ‘comprised the two Lovett’s [Charlie and Harold], English, Scott, Warren, Lucas and Wood’, all connected to the Anglican Church.<sup>30</sup> In fact, church followers dominated all layers of the club, particularly in the formative years. Unfortunately, *Unleashed* did not further explore this connection with the church, other than to briefly acknowledge its existence. The club’s on-field leaders were again dominated by names that reinforce the St John’s church connection, such as Fred English (1880), Charlie Lovett (1881-83), H. Reid, J. Harrison (both 1884) and W. Warren (1885).

St John’s Football Club lasted for only one or two seasons, starting in 1878 and ending in that year or in 1879.<sup>31</sup> The original goal of the reverend Scott in establishing both a cricket and football team was for the purposes of providing physical and ‘manly’ recreational activity to his younger Sunday school male pupils, in keeping with the ideals of ‘muscular Christianity’. It is highly likely that as most of the players of the church team reached adulthood by the turn of the decade, the gravitational move of such a body of players to the Prince Imperial Football Club spelt the death-knell of the club known as St John’s, in much the same circumstances as befell its cricketing equivalent. In a postscript to this event, a St John’s football club was revived a decade later in 1891, playing in a local church competition, a trend that had become increasingly in vogue by the 1890s.

An interesting article appeared in the *Footscray Advertiser* in 1906 declaring the St. John’s side of the late 1870s as clearly having prominent status locally:

Some great games have been played between clubs representing Williamstown and Footscray. Before either place aspired to a senior team there used to be some exciting contests between the crack clubs of the two places, the Battery United (Williamstown) and St. John’s (Footscray) ... Charlie Lovett was the Footscray skipper, and a more sterling player, or popular captain never donned the toggery in this place. Those were glorious games. Men played for the love of the game and worked heart and soul for their club ... Shades of Weatherhead, ‘Cockles’ Matthews, Ward, Lovett, English, Williams, Scott, Bennett, Woods,

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<sup>30</sup> Lack, McConville, Small and Wright, *Unleashed*, p. 10.

<sup>31</sup> There are no primary sources indicating the club continued past this point and there is only one small reference to St John’s in 1879. This was in a fixture of 1879 to play North Williamstown on 24 May at Footscray. See, *Williamstown Chronicle*, 24 May 1879, p. 4. However, there is no match report of this game.

Monteith, Beeching, Laming, the brothers Litchfield, James, Roberts, Larrit, Mackrell, Kelly etc.<sup>32</sup>

On Footscray's ascension to a senior club and elevation to the VFA in 1886, Councillor David Mitchell, became the new president, a position he held for the first eight years. Mitchell was connected to the Presbyterian or 'Scotch' Church in Barkly Street, which had been adjacent to the club's then home ground. The move further up the road to the Western Reserve, Upper Footscray, in 1886 meant the club was now based further away from the location of the St John's church in Lower Footscray. Charlie Lovett, in his early reminisces of Footscray, published in the *Footscray Mail* in 1935-36 indicated that before moving to the Western Reserve, football was played on 'a vacant block, bounded by Hyde, Napier and Bunbury streets.'<sup>33</sup> This original block of land was at the very doorstep of the St John's Anglican Church of England on the north-west corner of Cowper and Bunbury streets in lower Footscray. With the movement of the club's home ground to the Western Reserve, the influence of the St John's Church may have been diluted somewhat as the team became more reflective and representative of the town as a whole, particularly from 1886, when it entered the VFA after re-forming as a senior club. What is clear is that Protestant involvement and British ideology, strongly espoused by the Reverend Scott and the St John's Church, played a key and intrinsic role in establishing the first football clubs of Footscray.

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<sup>32</sup> *Advertiser*, 4 June 1892, p. 3. The Battery United Football Club is believed to have been established in 1878, the same year as St John's and merged with the Williamstown Football Club under the Williamstown name in 1882.

<sup>33</sup> *Mail*, 16 November 1935, p. 7. However likely, there is no early proof of this and early maps of Footscray indicate this block was dotted with houses.

#### 5.4 Prince Imperial Football Club, 1880-81

With 1880 came a change of name for the club. On 17 April 1880, the *Williamstown Advertiser* announced that Footscray's 'Prince Imperial Football Club' was commencing practice for the season.

Lack, McConville, Small and Wright<sup>34</sup>

This comment above, from *Unleashed*, gives the strongest indication yet that the Prince Imperial Football Club was a continuation of the club known as Footscray, 1876-79, at least in the eyes of its authors. But was this what happened? On face value, it appears so. The name of 'Footscray' disappears from the footballing vocabulary for the two seasons the Prince Imperial appears. As noted, the bulk of the Prince Imperial team was made up of St John's players. The confusing aspect of trying to form a link between the Footscray side of 1879 and the Prince Imperial of 1880 is that at least 18 players representing Footscray in 1879 did not play for the Prince in the following season.<sup>35</sup> However, nine players did.

In his recorded reminiscences, Charlie Lovett provides an answer as to why the name Prince Imperial was chosen and his memoirs provides the strongest link to the past. According to Lovett, the club was:

named after the Prince Imperial of France, who was serving with the British Army in Africa in the Zulu War and during a scouting expedition was killed by the Zulus. His death caused a great shock to the British nation as he was a very popular officer in the British Army and as brave as he was popular. Out of respect to him we named the first football club the Prince Imperial.<sup>36</sup>

Lovett though, makes no reference to a change of name. Nor does he make a link to previous entities such as the team calling itself Footscray prior to 1880, a team that records indicate he probably played for in 1877 and 1879, although he does refer to Prince Imperial as 'the first football club'. Born on 8 January 1863, Charles Eldred Lovett was just seventeen years of age when he donned the Prince Imperial guernsey for season 1880,

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<sup>34</sup> Lack, McConville, Small and Wright, *Unleashed*, p. 10.

<sup>35</sup> Information from the author's spreadsheet on the movement of players. Due to the lack of resources for this year, it is not known where these players ended up playing.

<sup>36</sup> *Mail*, 9 November 1935, p. 7. Also reproduced in John Lack (ed.), *Charlie Lovett's Footscray*, Footscray: The City of Footscray Historical Society, 1993, p. 65.

having also played for St John's in 1878, when fifteen years of age. Lovett's family home at this time was in Cowper Street, between Napier and Bunbury Streets, a short two minute walk to the St John's Church of England.<sup>37</sup>

It was not until the Prince Imperial's first year, 1880, that a metropolitan governing body was formed – the Victorian Junior Football Association (VJFA) - to administer and manage junior clubs in Melbourne. The senior clubs already had their governing body created by the formation of the VFA in 1877 to oversee senior competition. Up until 1880, most junior clubs played in the lower ranks, under the auspices of the VFA, but control of fixtures and disputes was still a sticking point. The attempt to formulate a junior association proved unsuccessful at first, with the VJFA only lasting a year or two before its ongoing establishment in 1883 under a new regime.

The 'Prince', the most senior team in Footscray in 1880, had their status and reputation queried, with the challenge from another local side, Star of Yarraville, generating great interest. The *Williamstown Advertiser* billed the match as one 'for the supremacy of Footscray and Yarraville'.<sup>38</sup> The 'Star' had defeated Prince Imperial earlier in the season but it was the 'Prince' who emerged victors in the return match by 4 goals to 1.<sup>39</sup> These formative years were not without their hardships as clubs struggled for survival, particularly through availability of players. An example of this occurred in 1881. A special general meeting of the 'Footscray Football Club' was called at Lovett's Royal Hotel to deal with the situation. Interestingly, the *Williamstown Advertiser* referred to what is seemingly the Prince Imperial club as the 'Footscray Football Club' and in the same column lists the team to play Powlett that weekend as 'Footscray'.<sup>40</sup> The *Williamstown Advertiser* reported:

About thirty-five were present and Mr C. Lovett was voted to the chair. The meeting was called to decide whether the club was to continue or not as upon the last three Saturday's, out of fifty odd members, only 10 or 11 having put in an

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<sup>37</sup> Lack, *Charlie Lovett's Footscray*, p. 1.

<sup>38</sup> *Williamstown Advertiser*, 4 September 1880, p. 3.

<sup>39</sup> In this match, W. Emmerson excelled himself by kicking three of Prince Imperial's goals. One though was disputed by the 'Star'. 'Emmerson obtaining a mark, placed the ball on his cap, sent it fair between the posts, but the Star objected, as they said there was a rule prohibiting the ball being placed on a hat or cap'. See *Williamstown Advertiser*, 4 September 1880, p. 3.

<sup>40</sup> The bulk of these players, bar at least two from the Union club (McAlister and McMaster), represented Prince Imperial during the season.

appearance. However, it was the unanimous wish of the members present that the club should live, and with the addition of one or two members, and the return of some old ones, the club promises to be far more successful in the future than it has been in the past.<sup>41</sup>

Two weeks later, the club was faced with the same issue when only fourteen players fronted for the away game against East Melbourne club, Powlett. On this occasion, substitutes filled the void. Despite these teething problems, the team performed relatively well during the two seasons it was known as the Prince Imperial with wins easily outweighing losses. The most telling pointer to the Footscray Football Club origins came with the 1882 annual meeting of the club, covered in the next subsection.

### **5.5 The Forgotten Year in Footscray Football Club's History, 1882**

The annual meeting of the Footscray Football Club, (late the Prince Imperial), was held on Monday ... in the Mechanics Institute.

*Williamstown Advertiser*<sup>42</sup>

As the heading suggests and the epigraph confirms, the year 1882 has been overlooked in the history of the Footscray Football Club and its importance in the origin debate has been neglected. As clearly reported in the *Williamstown Advertiser*, the Prince Imperial Football Club decided to change their name to that of 'Footscray Football Club' at the annual meeting held in April 1882, thereby proving beyond doubt that the club took the name of Footscray from the 1882 season and had a continuous history with the Prince Imperial of 1880-81. This fact gets lost a lot when discussion revolves around Footscray's supposed change of name with various sources suggesting the name change (or birth) occurred in 1883. In Charlie Lovett's memoirs published in the *Mail*, he provides clarity on why the name change took place, despite an obvious lapse in memory over the length of time the club had been called Prince Imperial:

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<sup>41</sup> *Williamstown Advertiser*, 10 June 1881, p. 4.

<sup>42</sup> *Williamstown Advertiser*, 8 April 1882, p. 3.

It [the club] continued under that name for five or six years until it was thought that as Footscray was growing in importance we should have a club named after the district. A meeting was held in the Mechanics' Institute and it was decided to start the ensuing season with a club named after our town ... the new name made no difference except that everyone knew where we came from, whereas before very few knew we were a Footscray side.<sup>43</sup>

Lovett was clearly talking about the 1882 annual meeting. Ironically, the *Geelong Advertiser* reported on a match in May between North Geelong and 'Prince Imperial'.<sup>44</sup> Perhaps old habits die hard. North Geelong first visited Footscray in 1881 and reciprocal arrangements were made between the two clubs in the following couple of seasons. The contests were the highlight of the football calendar locally, given North Geelong's status as a *bona-fide* 'up-country club' who occupied such a good 'position in the football field'.<sup>45</sup>

Footscray's fixture for 1882 included 20 matches, with only two vacant Saturdays during the season. As the more highly rated 'junior' club in several of these fixtures, Footscray were forced to concede a handicap of extra players to some of their opponents. With a lack of local newspaper coverage and no council correspondence available, not a great deal can be gleaned from the season. However, the annual meeting of 1883 confirms the link between the 1882 and 1883 Footscray Football Clubs. The secretary's report of 1883 indicated the club was in 'a very satisfactory position' although it 'met with many extra expenses last year [1882].' Mr J. Cameron was presented with a silver medal for his 'fine all-round play during last year' while players, Bullock and Harvey, were commended for travelling long distances to uphold the 'honors of the club.'<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> *Mail*, 9 November 1935, p. 7. Lovett has the length of years wrong here. The club was known as Prince Imperial for two years, 1880-81.

<sup>44</sup> *Geelong Advertiser*, 26 May 1882, p. 4. It is possible the fixture had been arranged at the start of the season, before the name change took place.

<sup>45</sup> *Williamstown Advertiser*, 30 July 1881, p. 3.

<sup>46</sup> *Williamstown Chronicle*, 24 March 1883, p. 2. Original spelling retained.

## 5.6 Footscray Football Club: Exploring the Origin Myth of 1883

Origin mythology is not uncommon in sporting history.

Gregory de Moore<sup>47</sup>

In discussing the birth of the Footscray Football Club, football enthusiast turned historian John Devaney, notes that the ‘near universal nomination of 1883 as the inaugural year of the club’ was a result of the historic acceptance that the Prince Imperial name was dropped in favour of the Footscray name before the start of the 1883 season.<sup>48</sup> As demonstrated in the previous sub-section, Prince Imperial Football Club converted (or perhaps reverted) to the Footscray name for the start of the 1882 season, not 1883 as commonly purported. It is this sole misnomer of fact that has been perpetuated down through history and overlooked by historians since. Devaney observes that ‘an objective examination of the facts appears to make it clear that such a demarcation is both convenient and contrived’, emphasizing the doubt over the 1883 myth.<sup>49</sup> He concedes and summarizes that, ‘identifying a discrete and unambiguous starting point is notoriously difficult’, particularly with football clubs whose origins are in the nineteenth century.<sup>50</sup> In Robin Grow’s excellent work on the origins of the game in *More Than a Game*, he notes the problems determining exact origins for many clubs is ‘sketchy’ at best, with ‘dates of formation’ and other club-related details ‘not regarded as important’ at the time.<sup>51</sup>

Likewise, the authors of *Unleashed* glossed over this fact with little or no explanation as to why 1883 was considered the birth year of the Footscray Football Club. They simply state that, ‘In 1882, a decision was taken to drop the name Prince Imperials, and 1883 came to be regarded as the first year of the Footscray Football Club.’<sup>52</sup> Perhaps they could not explain it because it made no sense according to their research. They did though, try to confirm that the year 1883 was significant in the club’s history, admitting that 1883 ‘was not Footscray’s first season’ and ‘as we have seen, a Footscray team –

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<sup>47</sup> de Moore, ‘Tom Wills, Marngrook and the Evolution of Australian Rules Football’, p. 5.

<sup>48</sup> Devaney, *The Full Points Encyclopedia of Australian Football*, p. 609.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> Grow, ‘From Gumtrees to Goalposts, 1858-1876’, p. 16.

<sup>52</sup> Lack, McConville, Small and Wright, *Unleashed*, p. 11.

“The Footscray” – played as early as 1876.’<sup>53</sup> However, the *Independent* of 1883 is categorical in stating that ‘the Footscray Football Club have now come to the beginning of their *fourth* season’.<sup>54</sup> As noted previously, this is proof of the connection back to, at least, the Prince Imperial club of 1880. It is also known that the Prince Imperial name was changed to Footscray at the beginning of the 1882 season. So an exploration of the reasons for the 1883 origin confusion in the narrative of club history over the last century or more is warranted.

In the most part, the standard narrative from generalised historical references to Footscray Football Club history suggests that the club evolved out of the ‘formation’ of the Prince Imperial club. There is also another version of the general narrative that plays out in numerous historical resources, stating that the Footscray Club was formed or founded in 1883, thereby dismissing any link with Prince Imperial Football Club. There are some, though, that provide the link to Prince Imperial but still insist Footscray formed as a football club in 1883. This narrative is portrayed in a number of different sources as follows:

A band of local enthusiasts formed the club in 1883. It was named after the Prince Imperial, who had just died, but was soon altered to the Footscray Football Club.<sup>55</sup>

It is this myth – that the club formed in 1883 – that has been regurgitated down through history in a myriad of official or unofficial publications and endless newspaper articles. In keeping with the 1883 myth, Gillian Hibbins – in her study of the origins of Australian Rules football – emphasises that the dissemination and constant repetition of wrong information by various official and unofficial avenues has led to an acceptance of ‘uncriticised traditions’ being revered as factual.<sup>56</sup> So convincing is the theme of 1883 formation that the Footscray Football Club itself, even celebrated its ‘own’ centenary in 1983!<sup>57</sup> The football club further perpetuated its own myth by releasing a book to mark

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<sup>53</sup> Lack, McConville, Small and Wright, *Unleashed*, pp. 11-12.

<sup>54</sup> *Independent*, 5 May 1883, p. 3. Emphasis added.

<sup>55</sup> See for example, the pre-season edition of the *Footy Fan*, 1963, p. 16.

<sup>56</sup> Gillian Hibbins, ‘Myth and History in Australian Rules Football’, *Sporting Traditions*, vol. 25, no. 2, 2008, p. 43.

<sup>57</sup> Footscray and Fitzroy even had a ‘centenary cup’ instituted in 1983 for competition between the two teams, for the purpose of celebrating the centenary of both clubs.

the occasion.<sup>58</sup> Some 50 years earlier, the *Independent's* rival newspaper in 1933, the *Advertiser*, jumped on an opportunity to celebrate the club's 'jubilee' 50 years history with the release of its own production, *Fifty Years of Football, 1883-1933: Incidents in the Fifty Years History of the Footscray Football Club*.<sup>59</sup> This booklet provided the most detailed account of the football clubs' history to that point in time, albeit replicating the myth of 1883. Yet, the *Advertiser's* *Fifty Years of Football* booklet probably borrowed from literature readily published on club history prior to its release in 1933.

Perhaps the only source (other than *Unleashed*) that correctly identifies the formation year of the Prince Imperial Football Club as 1880 (whether as a new entity from the club previously known as Footscray, – or not), is the commemorative supplement to the *Footscray Independent* in September 1923.<sup>60</sup> As an added attraction, the *Independent* even went so far as to produce a separate commemorative memento of photographs featuring 40 past players and officials from 40 years ago (1883), thereby capturing the club's forefathers and reinforcing the link to 1883.<sup>61</sup> Unfortunately, the supplement makes the *faux pas* of falling into the trap of stating, 'Early in 1883 the club changed its name to the Footscray Football Club ...'<sup>62</sup> Given the supplement was celebrating '40 years' of Footscray Football Club history, consistent with its title, this is not surprising.

So, where did this myth originate from? The first attempt at recording a history of the club was captured with the release in 1909 of *Footscray's First Fifty Years*, a jubilee publication celebrating the suburb of Footscray's first 50 years since its proclamation as a borough in 1859.<sup>63</sup> No mention was made of the year in which the club was formed, however it did reproduce a team photo, believed to be from 1883 titled, 'Footscray's first

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<sup>58</sup> Greg Hobbs, *The Bulldog Book: Sons of the 'Scray (1883-1983)*, Carlton: All Graphics Industries, 1983.

<sup>59</sup> *Fifty Years of Football, 1883-1933: Incidents in the Fifty Years History of the Footscray Football Club*, Footscray Advertiser, 1933. Also reproduced in, Greg Hobbs, *The Bulldog Book*.

<sup>60</sup> 'Footscray Football Club 1883 – 1923', Supplement to *Independent*, 29 September 1923. In a 1940 newspaper article, noted football journalist Reg Wilmott, writing under the pseudonym 'Old Boy', also nominated 1880 as the year Footscray came 'into the picture'. See, *Australasian*, 22 June 1940, p. 14.

<sup>61</sup> 'Footscray Football Club 1883 – 1923', Supplement to *Independent*, 29 September 1923. Each portrait of a player or official was accompanied with their name and for those that were involved during 1883, the year was assigned. For a reproduction of this memento, see Lack, McConville, Small and Wright, *Unleashed*, p. 13.

<sup>62</sup> 'Footscray Football Club 1883 – 1923', Supplement to *Independent*, 29 September 1923.

<sup>63</sup> Hugh Michell (ed.), *Footscray's First 50 years*, Footscray: *The Advertiser*, 1909

football team'.<sup>64</sup> The origin narrative had changed some 50 years later, with the publication of the centenary edition in 1959 and the declaration, 'Football officially came to Footscray 76 years ago – in 1883'.<sup>65</sup> The next attempt, after the *Independent* supplement in 1923, to piece together a history did not occur until Footscray's entry to the Victorian Football League (VFL) in 1925. The *Advertiser* expressed the view that:

In this hour of Footscray's elevation to the ranks of the Victorian Football League, it is meet that reference to those who 'well and truly' laid the foundations of the club should be revived.<sup>66</sup>

The *Advertiser* article borrowed from the 1909 narrative and did not nominate a formation year for the club. Perhaps the first mention alluding to 1883 as a formation year was made in the *Advertiser* on 16 January 1926. In honouring Billy Hunter's 43 years of club service, the paper declared he 'was a member of Footscray's first football team way back in 1883'.<sup>67</sup> Was it journalistic licence that claimed the image to be 'Footscray's first football team' or was this false 'fact' provided by someone conversant in club history? The reproduction and dating of the team photograph as 1883 seems to be the key factor that has driven a century of myth. It may well have been the first team photograph, but it was not the first team. Ensuing Footscray Football Club re-unions also replicated the continuing narrative of 1883 formation and trotted out former players of 'Footscray's first team' in proud celebration.<sup>68</sup>

There is also much circumstantial evidence pointing to the year 1883 as the formation year. This has further complicated matters adding to the confusion over the origin date. The year 1883 marked several 'firsts'. To begin with, it was the first year of the newly re-established VJFA. Footscray was one of the first clubs to apply for admission to the new first-rate junior competition. As previously mentioned, the VJFA had made several efforts to establish a governing body to control and manage the metropolitan junior clubs in 1880 and 1882 but both attempts were short-lived.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> *Footscray's First 100 years: The Story of a Great Australian City*, Footscray: Footscray Advertiser/Footscray City Council, 1959.

<sup>66</sup> *Advertiser*, 24 January 1925, pp. 2-3. It is unsure what 'meet' means in this context.

<sup>67</sup> *Advertiser*, 16 January 1926, p. 8.

<sup>68</sup> For an example, see 'Old Footballers' Re-Union', *Advertiser*, 28 September 1929, p.1.

<sup>69</sup> The first Junior Association in Melbourne formed in 1880 with Mr Fowler of Battery United Football Club (a Williamstown team) as secretary and consisted of about 20 junior clubs. See, *Argus*, 22 April 1880,

The 1883 version of the VJFA was a properly constituted body and no doubt resulted in the first membership ticket of the Footscray Club being printed.<sup>70</sup> The first photograph of the Footscray Football Club team, as previously mentioned above, was also taken in the same year and it was this visual ‘evidence’, along with the membership ticket, that has added weight to the belief 1883 was the formation year of the club. A ‘handsome silver cup’ was also offered to the ‘Best all-round man in the club’.<sup>71</sup> This was won by captain, Charlie Lovett. All three items, the team photograph, membership ticket and the silver cup survived the ravages of time and have been used as stark reminders to reinforce the 1883 origin theme.<sup>72</sup> Charlie Lovett, who appeared in the team photograph as captain in 1883 and was responsible for helping Footscray gain admission to the VFA in 1886, had retained both the membership ticket and silver cup as family heirloom. It seems his reticence when interviewed to correct history or perhaps a failing memory allowed for the narrative of the image of Footscray’s first team (in 1883) to gain momentum as time moved on, perpetuating a myth that would be held as a truism for the best part of the twentieth century.

In 1883, it is also thought that the club adopted a red cap to its uniform – as a mark of respect for the Footscray Rowing Club who had won the prestigious Clarke Challenge Cup.<sup>73</sup> The print media also made its first continual appearance in Footscray from March 1883, with the locally published *Independent* newspaper providing a strong parochial voice. Ironically and as previously mentioned, the *Independent* reported in May 1883 that the Footscray Football Club had come to the start of its ‘fourth season’.<sup>74</sup> Despite this report, all these other coincidental factors have combined to further fuel the myth that 1883 was the club’s founding year.

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p. 4; *Argus*, 28 April 1880, p. 4, and *Williamstown Chronicle*, 1 May 1880, p. 2. It is unclear if this continued in 1881. In late 1882, another Junior Association was created but this dissolved just as quickly as it came to fruition. See, *Herald*, 5 August 1882, p. 2.

<sup>70</sup> Footscray was one of the inaugural clubs represented in the new Association with Harold Lovett, younger brother of Charlie, as its delegate and representative on the Association’s Match Committee. See, *Age*, 27 April 1883, p. 3.

<sup>71</sup> *Independent*, 5 May 1883, p. 3.

<sup>72</sup> See pages 11, 12 and 14 in Lack, McConville, Small and Wright, *Unleashed*, for a photograph of each item.

<sup>73</sup> Lack, McConville, Small and Wright, *Unleashed*, p. 11. As previously discussed in chapter three, Footscray Rowing Club captured the Clarke Cup in perpetuity after victories in the 1880-81-82 Melbourne Regattas. It could also be argued that the adoption of red and white as the colours of the Footscray Cricket Club (chapter four) also contributed to the football club’s acceptance of red as part of its tricolour image.

<sup>74</sup> *Independent*, 5 May 1883, p. 3.

Later ‘evidence’ or claims, reporting 1883 as the foundation year, appeared regularly throughout the twentieth century. On 5 May 1934, the popular *Sporting Globe* newspaper produced an article, featuring old-timer and 1883 captain Charlie Lovett, in celebration of Footscray’s 51<sup>st</sup> anniversary to the day since it ‘fielded their first football team’.<sup>75</sup> The message was similar in an article two years earlier. The sporting paper provided some history of the club to that point, accompanied by the ‘first football team’ photograph, and opened with the line, ‘In 1883, Footscray decided to have a football club.’<sup>76</sup> It seems the 1920s and 1930s was the era various avenues of club history, presented and provided in the public domain, settled on the narrative of 1883 as being the Footscray Football Club’s first year. This signalled a shift in the preferred narrative used by the press prior to that era, where dates and years were not mentioned. The fact it took some 40 or so years for the narrative seed to grow confirms Ruddell’s observations in the introduction to the thesis, that origins stories can evolve ‘haphazardly’ and perhaps not accurately over time. Thus, the exploiting of the myth of 1883 as the factual basis for the ongoing narrative of the origins of the club appears to have germinated over a generation or two and was not present in early communications of club history.

For the 1946 VFL season, the local *Advertiser* also dedicated much newsprint to a celebration of the club’s history, titled ‘Footscray’s Football Cavalcade’, across two editions in April and covering 63 years (1883-1946) of the ‘major deeds and events’. The *Advertiser* produced the feature article to celebrate Footscray’s participation in the VFL’s Victory Season ‘after six years of war’. Especially topical, this local journal again reinforced the club’s foundation year as 1883 – ‘when the club was first formed’.<sup>77</sup>

A first-hand eyewitness account in 1965 provided further fodder for the 1883 foundation year story. The Footscray *Advertiser* interviewed 102 year old Footscray resident, Jack Hutton, who the paper declared, ‘was at the meeting in the Mechanic’s Institute which led to the formation of Footscray Football Club’.<sup>78</sup> According to the paper, Hutton:

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<sup>75</sup> *Sporting Globe*, 5 May 1934, p. 7.

<sup>76</sup> *Sporting Globe*, 30 April 1932, p. 6.

<sup>77</sup> *Advertiser*, 20 April 1946, and *Advertiser*, 27 April 1946.

<sup>78</sup> *Advertiser*, 21 July 1965, p. 2.

is the last survivor of the hardy band of 23 pioneers who met at the old Mechanics' Institute in Nicholson St. in 1883 to form what was later to be called the Footscray Football Club.<sup>79</sup>

By the 1970s, the VFL's own records and correspondence, including prominent metropolitan newspapers and football journals, such as *Inside Football* were all declaring that the club was formed in 1883.<sup>80</sup> Even, the Australian Football League's (AFL) official organ, the *Football Record*, has for the past decade or so nominated Thursday, 26 April 1883 as the foundation date of the Footscray Football Club in its club information statistical page. It is assumed this date was borrowed from the research of Norm Sowden, whose works on the history of the game and several clubs is kept in original manuscript form held by the AFL. Sowden nominates the formation took place in the manse of the Presbyterian Church but his research does not contain his sources to cross reference against. This just adds a little bit of intrigue to the origin debate but without any primary source evidence, this information has to be discounted at this stage. This is particularly so, given the parochial *Independent*, established one month earlier, did not report on any such meeting and, rather tellingly, reported the club as undertaking its 'fourth' season. As explored in the next sub-section, another significant event occurred in 1883, with the advent of the Excelsior Football Club as a rival team.

## 5.7 A New Rival: The Excelsior Push

If football is to prosper in the borough, then the clubs [Footscray and Footscray Excelsior] must amalgamate, or else it will result in the squelching of one or the other. Both cannot prosper.

*Independent*<sup>81</sup>

The year 1883 marked the arrival of a new football club bearing the name Footscray – the Footscray Excelsior Football Club. And for a brief period, this new club was a fierce rival to the Footscray Football Club for local bragging rights on the football

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid. It is likely Hutton's memory had become confused with the previous incorrect published narrative. Footscray Football Club held their annual general meeting in the local Mechanic's Institute all the years between 1882 and 1885.

<sup>80</sup> For examples, see *Sporting Globe*, 3 June 1972, p. 10, and *Inside Football*, 20 May 1976, p. 15.

<sup>81</sup> *Independent*, 29 March 1884, p. 5.

field. As *Unleashed* noted, ‘the new club claimed to be, simply, the best.’<sup>82</sup> The use of the term ‘Excelsior’ as a name for the team is open to conjecture, for the term was connected at this time to many things including Freemasonry Lodges, hotels and even music, but became somewhat of a by-word for ‘higher’ or ‘superior’ during this era.<sup>83</sup> The *Williamstown Chronicle* referenced the word ‘Excelsior’ as a motto meaning to ‘ascend the ladder of life’.<sup>84</sup> One of the most interesting uses of the term was given to a movement in suburban Melbourne which was founded around 1881.<sup>85</sup>

The movement, later popularised by the initiation of ‘Try-Excelsior’ classes throughout Melbourne’s inner suburbs, shared common goals and objectives, specifically targeting teenage boys (to early adulthood), aimed at moral and intellectual improvement through such activities as entertainment and athletic pursuits but eventually came to focus on the ‘protection’ of children.<sup>86</sup> Youths were encouraged to conduct their own meetings in an adult way thereby instilling independence, discipline and order into their lives. In an era of spiralling larrikinism, the Excelsior classes were designed to rescue boys from the evils of misbehaviour by teaching them to be more morally and socially acceptable to society with membership demanding strict attention to behaviour, manners and language.<sup>87</sup> Sport and gymnasium activities also became an extension of the Excelsior ideology. In Footscray, this movement was received favourably with a local solicitor, F. J. Sincock, starting the first classes in Footscray in mid-1885. It is possible the Footscray Excelsior Football Club derived their name and player resources from this movement –

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<sup>82</sup> Lack, McConville, Small and Wright, *Unleashed*, p. 11.

<sup>83</sup> A more prominent Excelsior football team playing out of Royal Park to the north of the city also existed around this time, its playing members forming a workplace team from the ‘big West Melbourne printing factory of Sands & McDougall.’ See Blainey, *A Game of Our Own*, 2010 edition, p. 109.

<sup>84</sup> *Williamstown Chronicle*, 28 April 1883, p. 3.

<sup>85</sup> This Excelsior movement as it was christened, was founded by William Groom in North Fitzroy (circa 1881) and was based on a similar movement originating in London. Another movement with parallel guiding principles as its basis was instituted in Toorak a few years later by Mr W.M. Forster ‘under the title of the Try Class.’ Both men decided to combine their philanthropic efforts and adopted the title of ‘Try-Excelsior’ classes as a means of spreading their ideology. The movement gained further impetus with the establishment of classes in Melbourne, Richmond, Port Melbourne, South Melbourne, Toorak and Footscray by mid-1885. For more on the inaugural history of the Try-Excelsior movement see contemporary newspaper reports, *Age*, 20 June 1884, p. 6, and 8 November 1884, p. 13; *Advertiser*, 20 February 1885, p. 2, and 12 September 1885, p. 2; *Independent*, 27 June 1885, p. 2.

<sup>86</sup> Perhaps the movement’s enduring impact came with issues concerning child protection and neglected children. For more on this see, David Maunders, ‘Legislating for Dependence: The Development of Juvenile Trading Legislation in Victoria 1887-1927’, *Journal of Australian Studies*, vol. 12, issue 22, 1988, pp. 94-104.

<sup>87</sup> See, James Murray, *Larrikins: 19<sup>th</sup> Century Outrage*, Melbourne: Lansdowne Press, 1973; and Melissa Bellanta, *Larrikins: A History*, St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2012.

albeit the club was named before Excelsior classes were formulated in Footscray. However, the movement had already gained traction and credibility in inner Melbourne by the time Footscray Excelsior Football Club was founded.

Tracing the Excelsior Football Club's origins, though, is also clouded by the lack of newspaper coverage and council correspondence. As noted previously, an Excelsior Cricket Club sprang to life in the summer season of 1882-83. It might be no coincidence then that the first newspaper reports of the Excelsior Football Club appear in 1883, the following football season. In May of that year, the *Independent* reported that the Footscray Excelsior club 'open their third season today' suggesting 1881 as the foundation year.<sup>88</sup> It is therefore highly likely that the Excelsior Football Club emerged from the Footscray Juniors Football Club of 1881-82, hence the reference to 'third season'.<sup>89</sup> Excelsior's ground was situated in Nicholson Street, Footscray, not far the Footscray's playing field behind Scot's Presbyterian Church, bordering Barkly Street and Geelong Road.

The first recorded entry mentioning the Excelsior Football Club came in an advertisement, placed by club secretary F. Upton one month earlier, in response to a call for the club to amalgamate with the Footscray Football Club.<sup>90</sup> This would not be the first time the club were called to amalgamate with Footscray. Upton posted a special notice in the *Independent* under the heading 'Excelsior Football Club' declaring Excelsior's bid to go it alone:

The above named Club having decided not to amalgamate with the Footscray Football Club are Open to RECEIVE SUBSCRIPTIONS.<sup>91</sup>

The secretary's plea was successful as Excelsior's playing stocks were boosted to such an extent that they were able to field a second 20 in 1883, despite its status as a 'third-rate' junior club. Footscray Football Club held 'first-rate' junior status under the

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<sup>88</sup> *Independent*, 28 April 1883, p. 3.

<sup>89</sup> Footscray Juniors Football Club formed for the 1881 and 1882 seasons before a likely merger, takeover or change of name to Footscray Excelsior Football Club from season 1883. As further evidence, the database tracking player movement, kept by this author, indicates virtually all Footscray Junior players in 1882 were aligned to the Excelsior club in 1883. There is also a strong connection linking the Footscray Union Football Club, formed in 1881 and lasting only that season, with the Footscray Juniors Club.

<sup>90</sup> Upton had been secretary of Footscray Juniors in 1882.

<sup>91</sup> *Independent*, 21 April 1883, p. 2. Words in upper case maintained. Excelsior's fixture for the 1883 season and team for its first game were published two weeks later. See, *Independent*, 5 May 1883, p. 3.

new umbrella of the VJFA but did not field a ‘seconds’ team until 1884. Excelsior’s refusal to merge however, caused consternation and ill-feeling between the two clubs.<sup>92</sup> Excelsior’s independence would become a sticking point in relations between the two clubs in the ensuing years. In June 1883, the two teams met for the first time. The *Independent* noted:

It was the first time that the two clubs in Footscray have sent teams into the field to oppose each other. On this occasion the younger club was allowed three extra men, but their powers, were not sufficient to enable them to hold their own against their formidable antagonists, Footscray.<sup>93</sup>

Footscray won the match, 2-(23) to 0-(3), with the *Independent* reporting the match drew great interest among the junior fraternity.<sup>94</sup>

The local paper bemoaned the effect Excelsior’s presence had on the district’s main junior club, the Footscray Football Club, and its ability to attract the local footballing talent. Lamenting Footscray’s ability to field strong teams away from home and suffer losses as a result of players transferring allegiances to Excelsior, the correspondent for the *Independent* pleaded for common sense to prevail:

Several players who commenced the season with the Footscray, have left them, and in several instances have played with a junior club (The Excelsior.) The players who do this, ought to consider two things, firstly – whether they would not be doing better to the borough they live in by joining together and making the name of Footscray Football Club one to be eulogised in the same way as the Footscray Rowing Club is, and secondly – whether by leaving Footscray to play with third rate juniors they are benefiting themselves.<sup>95</sup>

The *Independent* clearly saw this as an issue affecting town pride and reputation. Perhaps hoping to prise the rising generation of footballers from Excelsior’s grasp for the noble cause of assembling the town’s finest combination as a representation of the district,

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<sup>92</sup> As seen in the previous chapter on cricket, this ill-feeling may have been a result of differences between the cricketing counterparts of each club.

<sup>93</sup> *Independent*, 16 June 1883, p. 3.

<sup>94</sup> Points were recorded but were not an official part of the score during this era.

<sup>95</sup> *Independent*, 21 July 1883, p. 1.

the Footscray Club remained, for the most part, at loggerheads with its local brethren – much to the chagrin of the local press.

*Unleashed* noted that a bitter ‘struggle for supremacy’ had developed between the two clubs ‘and a debate over the wisdom of having several local clubs competing against one another for players and support came eventually to centre on this rivalry’.<sup>96</sup> It would not be long before the local paper was calling for the clubs to once again, merge. Before then however, relations were further soured after a match in September 1883 – the last of the season – failed to go ahead as scheduled. The non-match generated much excitement locally. With Excelsior including players from Yarraville, Melbourne Imperial and Sandridge, Footscray captain, Charlie Lovett, objected to these substitutes and refused to take the field, which resulted in the game ending in a farce before it started. The *Independent* sided with the Footscray Club, declaring Excelsior’s actions in seeking substitutes to top up their team as showing, ‘perverse and unfootball-like conduct’ which were contrary to ‘Football Association’ rules.<sup>97</sup> The local paper’s strong stance probably had something to do with its connection to Harry Scott, former Footscray secretary and newspaper correspondent.

Perhaps the real reason for the ‘fiasco’ though, was the betting that was openly engaged in by supporters of both teams on the result of the game. The *Independent* acknowledged that odds of 2 and 3 to 1 were being offered to Excelsior players and supporters by their Footscray counterparts, based on the result of the game played earlier that season.<sup>98</sup> In a letter to the editor defending his club, Excelsior secretary, F. Upton, declared that ‘Footscray would not play, owing principally to some of them having money on the match.’<sup>99</sup> He stated Excelsior were forced to seek substitutes due to a shortage of team members on the day. In closing, his club offered to play Footscray if both teams fielded members or residents of Footscray only.

A week before the annual meetings of both clubs prior to commencement of the 1884 season, the *Independent* suggested that unity through amalgamation would put an end to the existing ‘spirit of rivalry’ and that Excelsior should ‘roll up *en masse*’ at

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<sup>96</sup> Lack, McConville, Small and Wright, *Unleashed*, p. 14.

<sup>97</sup> *Independent*, 29 September 1883, p. 3. Excelsior offered to play with 20 players rather than the 23 players they were entitled to field due to their rating as a junior club compared to Footscray.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>99</sup> *Independent*, 6 October 1883, p. 1.

Footscray's meeting to form one good club that is a credit to the borough.<sup>100</sup> 'If football is to prosper in the borough,' it continued, 'then the clubs must amalgamate, or else it will result in the squelching of one or the other. Both cannot prosper.'<sup>101</sup> The time had come, according to the *Independent*, to:

let bad feeling, altogether be eliminated ... But above all let the name of the club be the Footscray, as whether bad or good, a club bearing the name of the borough is sure to be more noticed.<sup>102</sup>

Reporting on both annual meetings a week later, the *Independent* expressed disappointment with Excelsior's decision not to merge with Footscray and once again, go it alone:

Evidently the members of the Excelsior Football Club do not believe in the motto 'Unity is strength' ... It is hard to say, what were the reasons which induced the members of the X to take this step, but we venture to predict that in time, they will find out their folly.<sup>103</sup>

The Excelsior Football Club's decision was in direct contrast to their cricketing counterparts who, as stated in the previous chapter, had willingly transferred their allegiance to the Footscray Cricket Club, making a stronger representative team. As a final word of warning, the *Independent* predicted that Excelsior's stance would cost them in the future as ongoing 'success will rest with the club that bears the name of the borough'.<sup>104</sup> In the report of the Excelsior meeting in the same column, the paper noted that the proposed amalgamation was discussed at length, and in a favourable light by representatives of the Footscray club, but whose arguments were strongly rejected by members of the Excelsior.

The *Advertiser* was more succinct on the reason for rejecting the merger proposal. It reported that after the 'question of amalgamation with the Footscray club' was put before them, the 'X' voted unanimously to continue as a separate club because it had made 'vast strides last season towards being the premier club in the borough.'<sup>105</sup> It appears

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<sup>100</sup> *Independent*, 29 March 1884, p. 5.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>103</sup> *Independent*, 5 April 1884, p. 3.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>105</sup> *Advertiser*, 11 April 1884, p. 3.

the Excelsior had grandiose plans of taking over the mantle of the senior club of the district having ‘reached some prominence in the football arena.’<sup>106</sup> With strong local backing from influential figures such as president, Cr James Cuming,<sup>107</sup> vice-presidents in Fehon, Burrows and Binney, along with club patron Dr Beaney, Excelsior was well-placed to make this decision count. However, the defection of four players to Footscray in J. Harrison, Lucas, Pearce and Charles indicates that the decision not to merge, was not entirely unanimous. Harrison, in particular, was a major coup. He was arguably the district’s best player and was duly appointed Footscray captain early in the 1884 season when H. Reid was stood down.

Footscray’s published fixture for season 1884 showed three matches were to be played against Excelsior with the first contest on 17 May.<sup>108</sup> Yet the Excelsior cancelled this match for reasons not divulged, with members requested to contact the secretary if they wished to play at Lancefield a week later, on the Queen’s Birthday.<sup>109</sup> As the *Independent* had prophesised, the Excelsior was finding it hard to field a side. Footscray agreed to play Abbotsford, a likely opponent of Excelsior’s second’s team, in a ‘friendly’ on the Saturday it was scheduled to meet Excelsior. Perhaps feeling a sense of responsibility for not meeting their engagement, Excelsior secretary, F. Upton, umpired the game.

Excelsior’s probable cancellation of all matches during 1884 spelt the death knell of its short-lived rivalry with Footscray and its likely disbandment as a club. At the same time, four newer clubs emerged as stronger challengers in Footscray during the 1884 season. They were Footscray Alberts, Belgravia United and later versions of previously established clubs, Rose of Footscray and Star of Footscray. Their effect on the availability of playing personnel impacted on Excelsior’s ability to field a team. With local clubs merging and disbanding regularly, sometimes after only a season, the landscape and fortunes of clubs was ever changing.

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<sup>106</sup> *Advertiser*, 28 March 1884, p. 2.

<sup>107</sup> Cuming was later president of Footscray Football Club from 1896 until his death in 1911, overseeing the club’s first four premierships.

<sup>108</sup> *Independent*, 12 April 1884, p. 4.

<sup>109</sup> *Independent*, 17 May 1884, p. 3. The *Independent* reported on the 14 June 1884 that a ‘mixed’ team of players from Excelsior and Footscray clubs would ‘proceed to Lancefield on July 1<sup>st</sup>.’

In a postscript to the above events, the Excelsior name was once again revived when the Belgravia United Football Club changed its name to Footscray Excelsior at its 1887 Annual Meeting.<sup>110</sup> Instigator of the Excelsior movement in Footscray, F.J. Sincock, was a vice-president of the club at this time. The new entity magnanimously adopted the red, white and blue colours of the Footscray Club. In 1888, a movement was proposed at Excelsior's annual meeting to merge with the senior club (Footscray) to form a second 20.<sup>111</sup> By the end of the decade, as the *Independent* had predicted, the Excelsior Football Club had faded into obscurity.

## 5.8 Conclusion

History, and sport in particular, is littered with instances of falsehoods and myths perpetuated down through time and accepted as truth. The sporting subject of this chapter – the game of Australian Rules football – is home to many such myths and ‘artificial constructs’ as Hibbins calls them.<sup>112</sup> As this chapter has outlined, the narrative of the origins of the Footscray Football Club have been steeped in the story of its purported beginnings in 1883 for the best part of a century. However, accounts of the birth year of 1883 has been clearly shown to be an inadequate construct and a convenient falsehood that has not stood up to the weight of evidence proving otherwise.

The club history book, *Unleashed*, published in 1996, was the first publication to cast doubt on the 1883 date of formation but it did not go far enough in examining the vexed question of formation. Perhaps the issue was not considered as important by a commercial operation trying to capture 120 years of history with printing deadlines. Central to the regurgitation of the 1883 foundation year of the Footscray Football Club – after careful deconstruction in this chapter – has been the ongoing discourse concerning the 1883 team photograph, labelled ‘Footscray’s first football team’. As shown, there was an almost universal acceptance that because the ‘first football team’ photo was taken in 1883, then this must have been Footscray’s first season, and therefore, the foundation year or quite simply, the club’s year of birth. This is not the case. Rather it was a distinct

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<sup>110</sup> *Advertiser*, 16 April 1887, p. 4. Confusing matters, the 1888 annual meeting of the Footscray Excelsior Football Club was reported as its fifth AGM. See, *Advertiser*, 24 March 1888, p. 3.

<sup>111</sup> This was ‘negated by four to one’. *Advertiser*, 24 March 1888, p. 3.

<sup>112</sup> Hibbins, ‘Myth and History in Australian Rules Football’, p. 50.

case of ‘lost in translation’. This confusion or misinterpretation of facts has led to over a century of misleading information and influenced the perception of the club’s foundations to the present day. The 1920s and 30s was the era that accepted the narrative of the club, as having started in 1883, forever changing the historical dialogue from that point on.

This chapter has shown that there was a team known as Footscray as far back as 1876, and has clearly demonstrated that the renaming of the club from the Prince Imperial Football Club to Footscray Football Club occurred in 1882, not 1883 as commonly purported. It is beyond question that the Footscray Club was born out of the ashes of the Prince Imperial club of 1880-81. What remains unclear is any direct link between the Footscray team of 1876-79 and the Prince Imperial side of 1880-81. So, was there a continuous history between the Footscray Football Club of 1876-79 and the Prince Imperial Football Club 1880-81, and therefore a connective history to the current day Western Bulldogs? This can be seen as both speculative and likely. One reason for speculation is the fact that only six or seven players from the Footscray team of 1879 appear for Prince Imperial in 1880 and likely, because the Footscray name disappears for the two seasons that the team known as the Prince Imperial’s take the field. It is highly likely this was the same club but the crucial two-year period of 1879-1880 is devoid of local newspaper coverage while the key inwards and outwards council correspondence is regrettably missing and a constant frustration to research, its whereabouts unknown.<sup>113</sup>

There were also a number of aspects of circumstantial evidence that became a convenient tangled web of misinterpretation helping perpetuate the origin myth. Prominent among these, and in addition to the ‘first team photo’, was the memory of football club pioneer, Charlie Lovett, and his family keepsakes which included the 1883 membership ticket and trophy for ‘best all-round player’ for that season. Other outside influences included the establishment of Footscray’s first locally circulated newspaper that was coincidentally established from March 1883, along with Footscray’s admittance to the re-formed VJFA, which oversaw junior football in Victoria in the same year. Besides the myth over the origin year and the re-naming of the club, this chapter has

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<sup>113</sup> Maribyrnong Council deny they have any such records and in email correspondence with this author, indicated council records from this period of study were forwarded to the Public Record Office. The Public Record Office house the Minute Books, some illegible, but do not have the important ‘inwards’ and ‘outwards’ council correspondence so vital to this study and previously viewed by fellow researchers at Council Offices some three years earlier than the commencement of this thesis.

tackled other aspects likely to have affected the establishment and ongoing narrative of the Footscray Football Club.

As part of this research, light has also been shed on the local football scene during this era. The St John's Church of England and its Protestant brethren had a strong influence and link to sport, and in particular football, within the district. It is quite possible that the St John's Football Club had an influential connection with the Footscray Football Club, or what was the Prince Imperial club from 1880. The Footscray Rowing Club, revered locally and nationally for winning the Clarke Cup, appears to have also had a surprisingly strong link with the transference of a number of personnel adopting and participating in both sports to the benefit of each club. When faced with a fierce new footballing rival in 1883 – Excelsior Football Club – the local papers encouraged the merging of both entities into one strong representative sporting body carrying the borough's name to further secure Footscray's reputation in the sporting world, thereby helping it sustain the district's reverence in sporting terms, previously achieved by the Footscray Rowing Club.

It is to be hoped that the council correspondence will resurface at some later stage and shed some light on the connection or otherwise of the 1879 Footscray team and the Prince Imperial team of 1880. There was a strong connection between the St John's football team of 1878 and the Prince Imperial side of 1880. Because of this link, there is some doubt as to whether the current day Western Bulldogs Football Club has a continuous history that stops with the Prince Imperials of 1880, or whether that history goes further back to the Footscray Club that existed from 1876 or even includes a formal connection with the St John's team. The clue to the answer lies in council correspondence as it is unlikely any local paper has survived the ravages of time to support evidence either way.

## Chapter 6

### Thesis Conclusion

Often despised, derided and deprived, Footscray carried a litany of reputations cast by its past history, environs, isolation and working-class demographic that it found difficult to shake. The town's unique growth in the face of much adversity contributed to a strong sense of community and generated an unbreakable civic pride. Much of this had to do with the town's isolation during this period of study and beyond. In chapter two, I sought to understand the mitigating social and cultural aspects that may impinge on Footscray's society in a bid to learn how this impacted on the local sporting culture. This taught us much about social life in Footscray and provided a backdrop in understanding how sporting clubs came to exist and develop.

Footscray faced many challenges in its early history. There were innumerable factors that combined to stifle progress. Ostracised from the rest of Melbourne due to its isolation and often neglected in parliamentary terms, Footscray initially struggled to establish the means for a functional town. Due to a lack of funds and the self-interest of councillors, Footscray carried the burden of debt and constant ridicule by outsiders over its inability to manage its own municipal affairs. Covering a large area and with a scattered community, Footscray was devoid of basic infrastructure and lacked adequate transport links during most of this study period, the most compelling problem being a direct route to Melbourne. The tolls and maintenance of the maligned, and at times impassable Swamp Road, were seen as major impediments to settlement during this time. Primitive living conditions through unmade roads, footpaths and drainage also made life difficult for the early pioneers while the mud and slush in winter and dust in summer wreaked havoc for the local inhabitants.

During this period of study, Footscray shifted its focus from that of a quarrying district to a manufacturing and industrial hub which offered opportunity, employment and cheap land to new residents. Footscray became a sanctuary for the noxious trades industry. It earned the unwanted reputation for stinks and smells, as vile as could be imagined – its name smeared by the very industry that put food on the table of a considerable portion of its working-class citizens. Footscray was an insular suburb where the community lived, worked, played and socialized together. This though, led to a strong sense of place, attachment and loyalty, giving rise to a distinctive and unwavering

parochial civic pride. Other academics have described this local pride as ‘defiant’ and even, ‘perverse’.<sup>1</sup>

The year 1886, chosen as the end point of this thesis, represents a significant turning point in Footscray’s sporting fortunes. To this point, the Footscray Rowing Club had been of critical importance in the way it represented the Footscray community in the sporting arena. It had achieved glory and fame for its deeds but there was to be a changing of the guard. With the Saltwater River and environs labelled as ‘unpalatable’ to ‘public patronage’, the Rowing Association of Victoria decided in late 1886 – on a vote of 7 to 5 – to move the Annual Melbourne Regatta from the often maligned Footscray course to the peaceful serenity of Albert Park Lake.<sup>2</sup> This marked the end of Footscray’s stranglehold as host of Victoria’s premier rowing event on the calendar and consigned to history the memory of Footscray Rowing Club’s reign as the number one rowing club in the land. The ramifications of such a decision and the tensions caused by the amateur-manual labourer debate during this era had raised the ire of the community and, as we have seen, the parochial local press. Footscray’s success on local waters, particularly in winning the Clarke Cup, had come to symbolise a community’s pride in the achievements attained by its working-class local sportsmen against the odds. The loss of rowing’s greatest drawcard event, along with the ridicule and attempts by rowing’s hierarchy to ban the manual labour rower from certain events, was seen as an affront to working-class Footscray, a stain on their reputation and a low blow to town pride. It was here, in the acclaimed ‘manly’ sport of rowing, that Footscray experienced, at first hand, its first real social alienation and discrimination, in a sporting sense.

A major change in direction occurred in the same year at another kindred sporting club in the district. Early in 1886, a motion was moved at the Footscray Football Club annual meeting to seek amalgamation with the Footscray Cricket Club to form a senior football club and apply for admittance to the VFA – the premier football competition in the colony. With the agreement of the cricket club, Footscray was one of five new clubs whose application to an expanding VFA was successful.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the Football Club would

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<sup>1</sup> Lack, John, *A History of Footscray*, North Melbourne: Hargreen Publishing Company, 1991, p. 100; Margaret Indian, ‘Leisure in City and Suburb: Melbourne 1880-1900’, Doctoral thesis, Australian National University, 1980, p. 129, 169.

<sup>2</sup> *Advertiser*, 3 December 1886, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> A second team from Williamstown, South Williamstown, was also admitted to the VFA in 1886. South Williamstown lasted just two seasons before merging with Williamstown.

replace the Rowing Club as the highest profile sporting club in the district, maintaining a presence in the pre-eminent metropolitan competition and providing the community a continuity of sporting importance, at least, in the public eye.

Likewise, Footscray Cricket Club went through a similar transition in seeking to maintain a strong position and presence within the community. The cricket club had several ‘makeovers’ and a ‘re-organisation’ in 1882-83 before merging with the Footscray Union Cricket Club at the beginning of season 1886-87 to form a stronger representative team. Its ascension to top flight competition would take a lot longer though. And, as we saw in rowing, the Footscray Rowing Club absorbed Myrtle Bank Rowing Club, amalgamated with Crown Rowing Club in the late 1870s and sought to merge with the Harbor Trust Rowing Club in the mid-1880s, all in a bid to maintain a stronger position as the representative club of the district. This issue of local clubs forming, merging, re-organising and re-starting was a common theme throughout the 1870s and ‘80s when there was a proliferation of clubs forming in and around Footscray in various sports. Fluctuating financial and player resources often dictated the viability of clubs. The mid-late 1870s and ‘80s was a time when leisure time and social pursuits became more widely accessible, regulated and structured with organised sporting competitions, in particular, becoming the vogue.

This reinvention and merging of clubs, particularly bearing the name of the suburb, was common practice in most municipalities at this time. The link between, and importance of local sporting clubs fielding the strongest possible representative team - carrying the suburb’s name – was a common theme pushed by the Footscray middle-class press and vital to establishing a sense of identity. ‘Let the name of the club be Footscray’ was the usual catch-cry. Furthermore, Footscray sought to gain respectability through sporting conquests, befitting a suburb of importance, and looked to reverse the perceptions labelled upon it. The examples above highlight that there was honour and prestige at stake, and pressures to perform. After all, the suburb’s reputation was on the line. Thus, rivalries and jealousies developed because of it, making sporting success all the more palatable for a suburb often labelled as socially inferior. I support Maggie Indian’s contention, in her examination of leisure in Footscray and Hawthorn, that Footscray was a close-knit and integrated society, where reliance on work and leisure

pursuits was paramount to a thriving sense of community. Thus, one that ‘fostered a rigorous and combative sense of community identity.’<sup>4</sup>

After claiming rowing’s ‘holy grail’, Footscray openly sought higher representative competition in other fields of sporting endeavour. As Brian Stoddart emphasises, the fortunes of representative sports team’s provided a strong ‘yardstick by which general social progress’ of a community could be measured and Footscray wished to keep itself in the forefront and attain respect from the outside world.<sup>5</sup> As shown in chapter three, the Footscray Rowing Club was born out of a need to be involved and to showcase to the outside world what the community represented. Footscray wanted to compete, to be respected and held in the same regard as other suburbs or clubs. It appealed to the community’s sense of worth to have a competitive rowing club, bearing the name of the municipality and carrying the honour and hopes of the borough. Through sporting success, Footscray could therefore climb the metropolitan ladder of importance and change the narrative of public opinion.

Thus, sporting clubs provided the community a platform to express their own unique personality, one that was truly representative of their circumstances. The community came to live vicariously through the deeds of their local sporting club, this was clearly evident in the fortunes of the Rowing Club. The Footscray Rowing Club was the toast of the rowing world after reaching the pinnacle of success in 1882, winning the Clarke Cup in perpetuity. Consequently, the Rowing Club became an iconic institution and the most culturally significant sporting entity in Footscray at its peak. A moment’s glory in the sporting arena by Footscray’s representative teams strengthened community spirit and defied perceived notions of class injustice and social inadequacy. It was these small wins and shared experiences that bought a community together, raising self-esteem in the process.

The sporting club became a form of class solidarity. As Cashman points out, ‘the sporting club is the primary unit of loyalty.’<sup>6</sup> Sporting clubs provided one avenue to respectability for a suburb, and particularly so, in such a maligned suburb as Footscray.

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<sup>4</sup> Indian, ‘Leisure in City and Suburb’, p. 166.

<sup>5</sup> Stoddart, Brian, *Saturday Afternoon Fever: Sport in Australian Culture*, North Ryde: Angus & Robertson, 1986, p. 42.

<sup>6</sup> Richard Cashman, ‘The Rise and Fall of the Australian Cricket Club 1826-1868’, *Sporting Traditions*, vol. 5, no. 1, 1988, pp. 112-130.

Thus, sporting clubs gave identity to a community. Footscray's working-class community also found social expression through representative sporting contests, giving them a voice to vent their frustrations and support their own local sportsmen. It was the local barracker's rite of passage. Success, such as the Footscray Rowing Club achieved, bought not only joy to locals, but envy and acknowledgement from the outside world. On a deeper level, the role of sporting clubs provided an outlet for the community's anxieties, hopes and feelings.<sup>7</sup> Glory on the sporting stage brought a moment's respite from the negative connotations labelled on it by the outside world.

In Footscray, the community could hide behind sporting triumphs to mask external denigration and class divisions. Working-class gloom could be erased by the instant gratification of victory in the sporting arena, at least for a little while. Therefore, the presence of prominent sporting clubs in Footscray attached greater significance to the suburbs status and provided symbols of pride, or hope, for an otherwise outcast society. The understated role that clubs played in forging a representative sense of community was paramount to the success of any local sporting institution and the importance of the suburb. This was even more so in Footscray, where outside perceptions led to an unwanted reputation. In communities, such as Footscray, where an inferiority complex exists, a reliance on sporting success became paramount as a unifying thread among the locality, generating a thirst, and in some cases, an obsession or extreme passion for sport as the elixir of salvation.<sup>8</sup> The press and civic fathers alike, understood the value that strong and successful representative sporting teams could provide in portraying a beneficial image for the district. It is thus, important to note here, that the sporting arena could deliver a far more positive outcome for the community in terms of respect, than could be achieved through other avenues, be they social, economic or political.

While the chapters on Footscray's social life and rowing were important in providing a clearer picture as to how Footscray earned its reputation through common issues such as class, economy and geography, cricket and football were inextricably linked in other ways and eventually came to inherit these same reputations and burdens.

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<sup>7</sup> For more on the passions evoked in the context of Australian Rules football see, Matthew Klugman, *Passion Play: Love, Hope and Heartbreak at the Footy*, Melbourne: Hunter, 2009.

<sup>8</sup> W.F. Mandle, 'Games People Played: Cricket and Football in England and Victoria in the Late Nineteenth Century', *Historical Studies*, vol. 15, no. 60, April 1973, pp. 511-535. Mandle raised this as an because some British Australians feared they they were an inferior British race. These fears were somewhat allayed in the 1870s when men from Australia defeated men from England in cricket and rowing.

Being universally regarded as Australia's favourite sporting game, cricket (see chapter four) was the first sport given precedence within the local community and its importance was acknowledged at council quorums. As we have seen, it was council who first lobbied for the inauguration of a cricket and sporting club, as far back as 1860, as a means of generating community interaction through social institutions such as a cricket club. Upper class patronage, particularly by the civic fathers and leading citizens, attracted community sentiment and support, lending itself to a shared responsibility and quasi ownership of sorts between the different layers of local society. Cricket clubs actively sought the social elite of the district as presidents, vice-presidents and patrons or to carry out the duties of a club official which in turn, gave the club clout and structure within the local community. Cricket, therefore played a prominent role in establishing an early sporting precedent in community life and drew locals together for one common purpose.

In a number of ways, cricket paved the way for promotion and diffusion of football. Cricket's status as an intercolonial and then international sport during the period of this study cemented its standing within the Australian sporting psyche. The cricket club played an integral role in the social link between the classes, neighbouring suburbs and the community in general. Confining our focus to Footscray, the local cricket club had sourced and made application through council for playing fields thereby providing a ready place and resource for games to be staged. By utilising and maintaining these grounds for their activities, and with the advent of a pavilion, there was a mutual benefit to football clubs and the local community.<sup>9</sup> In short, cricket clubs provided the blueprint to success for other sporting clubs, particularly football, to follow.

The inclusion and support received by the 'fairer sex', although barely commented upon by the male-dominated press, was instrumental in placing cricket as an honourable sporting pursuit and for setting the tone of female involvement in local sport at this time.<sup>10</sup> In fact, it was the ladies who most invested in their time and effort to make sure a fund-raising activity was a success in creating the means for a club to survive and prosper. The

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<sup>9</sup> It was not until the cricket club had secured the Western Reserve in Upper Footscray, improved the ground and built a grandstand, providing the football club with the amenities and opportunity to seek admission to the Victorian Football Association in 1886.

<sup>10</sup> For more on the role of women in colonial sport, using football as an example, see Rob Hess, 'Women and Australian Rules Football in Colonial Melbourne', *International Journal of the History of Sport*, vol. 13, no. 3, December 1996, pp. 356-372.

fact the game was seen as a ‘manly’ pursuit and an outcome of ‘muscular Christianity’ made it a worthy recreational activity for the manhood of any developing town to participate in, particularly one as British, protestant and working-class as Footscray. Many women were only too happy to encourage this ideal and freely gave of their time and energies. The Church, particularly Reverend Henry Forde’s St. John’s Anglican Church of England, championed the English doctrine’s surrounding ‘muscular Christianity’ and provided further impetus to the sporting movement locally.

One of the major aims of this thesis was to uncover more on the complex origins of the Footscray Football Club which was the subject of my fifth chapter. As noted, most literature for the twentieth century nominated 1883 as Footscray Football Club’s year of birth. From my deconstruction in chapter five, it appears that ‘journalistic licence’ may be to blame for this ongoing narrative, a convenient illusion based around the summarized view that the 1883 team photo was the club’s ‘first football team’. Other coincidental factors relating to the year 1883 also reinforced this assumption. These ancillary half-truths, false assumptions, inaccuracies and ‘artificial constructs’ have been accepted and adopted as part of club folklore, helping perpetuate the narrative or myth ever since. In exploring the origins of cricket and football in chapters four and five, there appeared some striking parallels that provided an interesting comparison. As outlined in chapter four, there is also much confusion about the Footscray Cricket Club’s origins and history coincidentally involving the same set of clubs intrinsic to unravelling the Footscray Football Club origins.

There are some critical points at play here to consider on the football side. As we have seen with the Footscray Football Club, the fortunes of various clubs such as St. John’s, Prince Imperial, Excelsior and Footscray in some ways seem intertwined. All four clubs were formed as a cricket entity before their footballing counterparts. This has the effect of setting a precedent. The football club may well have followed the actions taken by their cricketing namesakes. As I have stated, the football clubs played a sub-servient role to the cricket club with the cricketing equivalent regarded as the senior body and generally taking matters in hand when it came to direction or control of that representative

organisation. In both these sports, the St. John's teams lasted two seasons before disappearing in 1879, the year news broke of the death of the 'heroic' Prince Imperial.<sup>11</sup>

The Prince Imperial team, on the other hand, appeared in both sports, the season after St. John's disappeared and also lasted two years, clearly being named in honour of the Prince.<sup>12</sup> As I have shown on the football side, there is a very strong link between the playing and administrative personnel of the St. John's teams and by extension, the adherents of the St. John's Church of England, with their Prince Imperial equivalents and later, the Footscray Football Club through the 1880s. The Excelsior football club though, provided an interesting case study, as it almost defied the pattern of behaviour described above, to one that indicated that tension, conflict and rivalry was now part of the local sporting environment. Its cricketing members were lauded for joining with the Footscray Cricket Club at the start of the 1883-84 season, however, an intense rivalry prevented the merger of its footballing counterpart with the Footscray Football Club, despite constant pleas from the local press to form one strong union bearing the name of the suburb.

There is no disputing the fact that the current day Footscray Club (Western Bulldogs) evolved out of the Prince Imperial club, which had changed its name to Footscray in 1882, and not 1883, as commonly asserted in historic literature. Whether the Prince Imperial club was connected to the Footscray Football Club of 1876-79 is still open to speculation. There is evidence to suggest a connection, as the very two years the club with the Footscray name disappears, the Prince Imperial team takes its place as the number one team in the district. However, serious consideration must also be given to the role the St. John's club played in these events at this time. As previously suggested, there might have been a union or merger of some sort involving Footscray and St. John's in either 1879, or 1880 incorporating the Prince Imperial name. Or it might be, that the Footscray Football Club was a re-organised club, or even new entity from 1880 as hinted to by the local *Independent*?<sup>13</sup> Or, did the Footscray Club of 1876-79 simply change its name to Prince Imperial in 1880? Conundrums like these abound in determining the early history and origins of Footscray's sporting landscape. As reiterated throughout this thesis,

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<sup>11</sup> News of the Prince Imperial's death reached Australian shores about July, 1879. St. John's Cricket Club played seasons 1877-78 and 1878-79. The football team played season 1878 and possibly season 1879.

<sup>12</sup> Prince Imperial Cricket Club played seasons 1879-80 and 1880-81. The football team played seasons 1880 and 1881.

<sup>13</sup> *Independent*, 5 May 1883, p. 3.

the lack of local newspapers and the unknown whereabouts of council correspondence, especially for the crucial years 1879-1881, has been counterproductive in my pursuit of answers and quest to unlock some hidden mysteries of the past.

This study though, has incorporated a unique approach by examining and placing into context the three culturally significant sports of the era – rowing, cricket and football – against a backdrop that explored the various aspects and issues of social life in one suburb of Melbourne, Footscray, during the period 1859-86. This construction of sporting and town life has provided the necessary vehicle to understand the foundations and development of key sporting bodies at a critical time in Australian history. The research method of triangulation has allowed for a more rounded interpretation of just how sporting clubs came to life in the colonial period in this unique suburb and will provide a point of comparison for similar studies.

While this thesis has considered many broad aspects concerning the origins of community sporting clubs, there is further scope for more study in fields touched on in this dissertation. In a more general sense, there is limited offerings on the role women played in the proliferation of sport during this period of study. My research indicated there was a strong and underlying suggestion that women played a far greater role in the activities of sporting clubs than has been previously acknowledged. Further study in this area could provide important context to the way we view and understand history at this time and the role women played in facilitating sport in Australian society in its foundation years. This thesis has expanded on our knowledge of Footscray's football landscape, but furthermore, has chartered new territory by helping fulfil a gap in local rowing and cricket knowledge, detailing the previously untapped history of both sports clubs (prior to their new entity being formed in 1894), but still opens the possibility for further study in a number of key areas studied herewith. Namely, the role Melbourne's Annual Regatta played in setting Victorian rowing's culture; the issues of class distinction in sports in general; the critical role cricket played in forging the indigenous game of Australian Rules Football; and the function local sporting teams and their performances played in building pride, self-esteem and a sense of place or belonging, of a community.

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A number of the following resources were consulted in the research and writing of this thesis. The National Library's Trove database of newspapers formed the basis of this work. A spreadsheet of over 2600 entries relating to my thesis was captured in date and subject form using 'Footscray', or variations thereof, as the key word in my search. Adding to this was a spreadsheet documenting the movement of players between cricket and football clubs in the Footscray area, 1876-1886. Local newspapers regularly consulted through Trove were the *Williamstown Chronicle* and *Independent* (Footscray). Other major metropolitan daily or weekly newspapers consulted during the thesis period (1859-1886) were: *Age*, *Argus*, *Australasian*, *Bells Life in Victoria*, *Leader*, *Weekly Times* and the *Sportsman*, while various suburban and regional newspapers were also used.

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