England in Australia 1876-77 Two Tests. *Series Drawn 1 - 1.*

Balls per over: 4 Playing Hours: Approx. 220 minute days (timeless) Captains: DW Gregory (Aus), J Lillywhite (Eng)

Although the term "Test match" was used as early as 1862, it should not be assumed that the concept, as we now know it, emerged fully developed when James Lillywhite's touring team came to Melbourne to play a combined NSW and Victoria XI on 15th March 1877. Like nearly all England touring teams of the 19th Century, this team, while it contained perhaps four worthy England cricketers, was in no way representative of the full strength of English cricket. It consisted mostly of professional, i.e. working class, cricketers; one of them, James Southerton, was 49 years old. Nor was the "Australian" XI fully representative: the fact that some senior players such as Spofforth declined to take part, for rather trivial reasons, is a sign of the ambiguous status of the first match. While not rating a mention in *Wisden*, the two matches were generally seen as important at the time, and they were definitely the first matches involving teams from England and Australia to be played on even terms; it was not until the 1890s that their Test status was conferred (and then rather arbitrarily) by an Australian journalist Clarence Moody.

The Tests of 1877 were arranged at short notice, very late in the season, after some promising efforts by local teams earlier on. The performance of Lillywhite's team in the first match was rather hampered by the fact that they had completed a difficult crossing from New Zealand only the day before, and they had lost their wicketkeeper Pooley, held in jail in New Zealand following a betting scandal! When the accurate round-arm bowler Albert Shaw bowled the first ball to the England-born Charles Bannerman at 1:05 pm (the hours of play varied from day to day), no one could have imagined what they were starting, or that Bannerman's innings would set major cricket records which were still standing some 125 years later.

The reports say that Bannerman's batting – his 165 retired hurt was 9.17 times more than the next best, still a Test record for a complete innings – was every bit as superior to his team mates as the scoreline would suggest. His scoring of 67.3% of the side's runs also remains unsurpassed 125 years later, (although if extras are left out of the equation, Asanka Gurusinha of Sri Lanka did marginally better against India in 1990, 70.3% to Bannerman's 69.6%), and Bannerman's record score for an Australian on debut has survived assaults from no fewer than four batsmen who have come within 10 runs of this mark. This was a gigantic score by the standards of the 1870s, and Australia's 245 looked sufficient to produce a victory, and so it proved.

The England XI provided stout if slow resistance from then on, Jupp requiring over three hours, and probably more than 200 balls, for his 63. Shaw's unbroken second-innings spell, 34 overs 5 for 38, kept them in the match, but Kendall (7 for 55 on his first-class debut) performed a similar feat for Australia to halt England 45 runs short.

In the return match, Shaw was even more parsimonious as the Australians scored at barely 1 run per (4-ball) over. England, having recovered their land legs, batted with more enterprise, but they must have been shocked when Bannerman slogged 30 runs in 15 minutes in the second innings, including Australia's first six (then counting only five) in Test cricket. Set 122, England were in trouble at 3/9, but George Ulyett, who would eventually make five tours of Australia in days when it was quite an arduous trip, steadied the ship with 63 in 90 minutes, and British honour was preserved.