

Horan, Thomas ('Tom'; 'Tommy') Patrick

by Turlough O'Riordan

Horan, Thomas ('Tom'; 'Tommy') Patrick (1855–1916), cricketer and journalist, was born 8 March 1855 near Middleton, Co. Cork, the son of James Horan (d. 1895), a building contractor, and his wife Ellen (d. 1876). The family emigrated to Australia soon after Thomas's birth, settling at 186 Fitzroy Street, Melbourne, Victoria. Alongside his brother James, Horan attended Bell Street School, Fitzroy, Melbourne. He met John ('Jack') Blackham (1854–1932) there and together they made their debuts for the Carlton Cricket Club (CC) in 1870, and East Melbourne CC and Victoria in 1874 before going on to play for Australia together.

Horan thrived in 'intercolonial' cricket, the fulcrum of the Australian cricket season. Widely regarded as the leading batsman in Victoria by the late 1870s, Horan hit 26 and then 69 (the top score) in Victoria's 2 wicket victory over Lord Harris's England XI in February 1879; his highest ever innings of 250 not out for East Melbourne came in December 1880 against Tasmania. Horan led the 1881 table of first-class batsmen in Australia, joining the first rank of Australian batsmen in the early years of the decade.

He played for Australia (only five of the team were native born) at the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG), from 15 to 19 March 1877, in what was retrospectively regarded as the first ever eleven-a-side international 'test' match. He hit 12 runs in the first innings, and top-scored with 20 runs in the second innings, as Australia unexpectedly beat England by 45 runs. Horan joined the 1878 tour of an Australian XI to Britain, the USA, Canada and New Zealand (they also toured Australia at the start and end of their travels), which lasted sixteen months and was self-financed by the 12 players.

Horan featured in the Australians' famous victory against a Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC) selection, at Lord's Cricket Ground, London, on 27 May 1878. Captained by W. G. Grace and regarded by *Wisden* as one of the strongest ever fielded by that august club, the MCC were 4–1 favourites over the Australians, the latter playing only their second game in England. Horan, prefacing the fixture in a newspaper column: 'Lord's is to cricket what Rome is to the world' (Tyson, 83), caught the MCC's last man to close England's first innings on the way to Australia's commanding victory over the MCC, by 9 wickets, in a single afternoon. Grace, the Goliath of English cricket, was dismissed in two balls for two runs in each innings, as Australia's bowlers dominated. This resounding victory, by the first ever settler-colonial team to tour England, raised the reputation of Australian cricket, from also-rans, to equals in first-class cricket. They had obliterated England's self-assumed superiority.

Lauded by English supporters and the local press, their unprecedented victory secured the financial success of their tour. Horan's best performance with the bat came at the Orleans Club, Twickenham, London, 8–9 July. After a restful night's sleep in the luxurious clubhouse (he was plagued by ongoing sleep deprivation due to incessant overnight train journeys between fixtures), Horan hit 64 runs in Australia's victory over 'Mr C. I. Thornton's XI'.

Horan supplied copy to the English press as 'One of the team', as well as to *The Age* (Melbourne) as 'One of them'; his dispatches to the latter took eight weeks to arrive by sea. The foundation for his subsequent career as a journalist, Horan's insomnia inadvertently allowed him time during the hectic travel schedule to compose his frequent reports. Commenting on how the English were unfamiliar with Australia, Horan noted, 'The prevailing opinion seems to be that Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide and Brisbane are only a few miles apart and that the inhabitants of one of those cities should know the inhabitants of the other three personally' (Tyson, 89). The tour, which Horan's coverage of did much to promote, was a huge success, propelling interest in the idea of national teams in both countries.

The coup-de-grâce of the remainder of the tour was Australia's victory (5–6 September) over Gloucestershire, captained by Grace, in front of 4,000 spectators at their home ground at Clifton, Bristol. It was Gloucestershire's first ever loss there. Horan briefly returned to Cork in mid-September to visit relatives, before rejoining the tour as they sailed from Queenstown (Cobh). Met upon their return by a crowd of 30,000 in Sydney harbour, the tourists were also heralded at the East Melbourne CC ground by a crowd of 50,000.

Horan contributed to Australia's 2–0 victory in the four-game series (1881–2) against Alfred Shaw's English XI, the first and last games being drawn. Batting at the MCG in the final test match of the series (31 December 1881–4 January 1882), Horan scored 124 in the first innings, before being run out – his sole test century. Horan was easily dismissed during the famous Australian victory over England at the Kennington Oval, London, 28–29 August 1882, from which the Anglo-Australian 'Ashes' competition originated.

This was the only test match on a 38-match tour to England, on which Horan batted two centuries, marking his prowess with the bat on the often more challenging crease's he encountered there. The first, against a United XI at Chichester, saw Horan top score with 112, as Australia were victorious with a score of 501. Then, against Gloucestershire at Clifton, Horan contributed 141 to the Australian total of 450. Horan accumulated a run total of 1175 runs, for an average of 25, behind only his captain W. L. Murdoch. Having toured England twice, Horan declined an invitation to join the 1884 tour for family reasons.

Horan was appointed Australian captain for the second test of the first-ever five test series, at the MCG from 1–5 January 1885. A dispute over the demand of some

Australian players for half the gate receipts, widely considered excessive, saw the Australian selection almost entirely refreshed after the first test. Horan captained nine newcomers (five of whom were earning their sole cap), and batted 63 in the first innings, in a 10-wicket collapse to England. Losing the captaincy, Horan bowled six English wickets, for 40 runs, in the first innings of their third test, as Australia won by six runs. Horan featured marginally in the fourth test, which Australia won by eight wickets. Regaining the captaincy for the deciding fifth test (the fourth change in the captaincy in the series, and Horan's last ever test) in Melbourne, Australia lost by an innings and 98 runs, losing the series 3–2.

Squarely built, with a notably large head on powerful shoulders, Horan wore distinctive black leg pads, adding to his conspicuousness. His defensive right-handed batting, usually deployed in the middle order, was founded on his excellent leg play (deflecting balls aimed at his feet) and was the basis of his grinding out innings. A capable right-handed, round-arm medium-pace bowler, he bowled 11 wickets in his 15 tests, for a loss of 143 runs. Horan's 29 test innings with the bat, all against England, produced 471 runs, for an average of 18. Horan made 4027 runs in first-class cricket, the highest being 141 not out against Gloucestershire in 1882. He batted his last century, 117 not out for Victoria, against England, in 1886; although shortlisted for the Australian tour to England that year, his declining form led to his exclusion.

Horan continued to play intercolonial cricket until his retirement in 1892, playing on for East Melbourne CC until 1893. Appearing in forty-two matches for Victoria, Horan was their first player to make three centuries in matches, and also to claim over 1000 runs against New South Wales. Horan completed eight first-class centuries in total, four of those when at his zenith in 1882. His 126 in Victoria's victory over New South Wales in December 1883 was regarded as his most commanding.

Joining the Victorian Audit Office as a clerk in 1873, rising to a senior clerkship there, Horan ensured his annual leave always coincided with intercolonial and international cricket matches, even after he retired from playing. With a stocky build, capped by a luxuriant moustache crowning hearty mutton chops, Horan – a vegetarian and non-smoker – was a well-known figure in cricketing. Nicknamed 'Dutchy', his stature in the Melbourne cricketing community, was based on his commitment to club and state. His regular attendance at practice and his coaching of younger players left an indelible mark on Victoria's cricketing consciousness, the depth and longevity of which was amplified by his widely regarded journalism.

He began his 'Cricket chatter' column for the Melbourne-based *Australasian*, a weekly sister paper of the *Age*, in September 1879, under the pseudonym 'Felix'. His musings appeared regularly during the Australian cricket season, and overseas tours (apart from when in England in 1882) until his death in 1916. Commencing his 'Round the ground' column in January 1893, Horan profiled leading cricketers, and shared his musings on the game – as played and organised. His famous 1902

description, in 'Round the ground', of the closing overs of the famous August 1882 Australian Ashes victory, became an important and much recounted source for historians. Horan recalled '... that was the match in which for the final half-hour you could have heard a pin drop ... when one [English] man's lips were ashen grey and his throat so parched that he could hardly speak as he strode by me to the crease ... and when in the wild tumult at the fall of the last wicket, the crowd in one tremendous roar cried "bravo Australia"' (*Australasian*, 11 Jan. 1902).

Regarded as a leading authority on Australian cricket, 'Felix' was widely quoted in the British and antipodean press. His own playing experience, modestly drawn upon, imbued his highly regarded judgments of players, matches and tours. In 'Round the ground' Horan waxed lyrical about the game of cricket in the broadest sense: the settings, sounds and smells of its grounds, delighting in how the vivid texture of the game emerged anew each spring. Rarely in the press box, Horan observed matches as the avid spectator he was, shaded under a grand elm tree opposite the pavilion, his favoured perch at his beloved MCG, 'whose leafage, spreading every year, gives ampler shade to the lovers of the game ...' (*Australasian*, 13 Jan. 1894).

He married Kate Pennefather, the daughter of a police sergeant, in 1879 and they had four sons and four daughters together. Two of their four sons, James and Thomas, played cricket for Victoria. After enduring severe illness for a few weeks Horan died of dropsy, aged sixty-two, at his home 'Hillview', Malvern, Melbourne, 16 April 1916. Horan's funeral took place at the Melbourne General Cemetery, 17 April, he was buried alongside his parents. His sister Mary Horan (d.1919) was later interred alongside them.

A central figure in the evolution of cricket in Australia, as sporting identity and prowess reinforced nascent national sentiment at the close of the nineteenth-century, the first Irish-born catholic to represent or captain Australia in any sport, Horan featured in and memorialised the key matches of what would become their national sport, as the colonies advanced towards federation in 1901. Regarded as the third player to be capped by Australia, a life size bust of Horan is included in 'Captain's walk', Cootamundra, New South Wales, Australia.

The Referee (Sydney), 19, 26 Apr. 1916; *The Field*, 22 Apr. 1916; *Weekly Times* (Melbourne), 22 Apr. 1916; *Australasian* (Melbourne), 12 Jan. 1918; *Smith's Weekly*, 26 July 1919; *Herald* (Sydney), 8 Oct. 1921; Jack Pollard, *The formative years of Australian cricket 1803–93* (1988), *passim*; Brian Mathew Crowley and Pat Mullins (eds), *Cradle days of Australian cricket: an anthology of the writings of 'Felix' (T. P. Horan)* (1989), *passim*; Chris Harte, *A history of Australian cricket* (1993), *passim*; Frank Tyson (ed.), *Horan's diary: the Australian touring team 1877–1979* (2001), *passim*; Gideon Haigh, *Silent revolutions: writings on cricket history* (2006), 231–

33; John Lazenby, *The strangers who came home: the first Australian cricket tour of England* (2016), *passim*; 'Thomas Horan', www.blueseum.org/Thomas+Horan (accessed 12 Dec. 2019); www.espnricinfo.com, *passim* esp.: 'England in Australia, 1884–85', www.espnricinfo.com/wisdenalmanack/content/story/153446.html (accessed 12 Dec. 2019); 'Tom Horan: first Irish test cricketer, pioneer cricket writer, owner of an imposing moustache', (accessed 12 Dec. 2019); findagrave.com

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