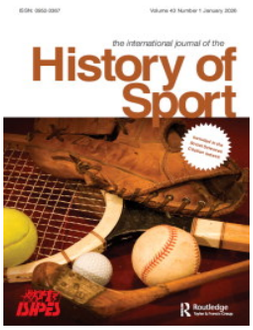

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How Tom Wills Shaped the Origins and Early Evolution of Australian Rules Football

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ABSTRACT

Thomas Wentworth Wills is the most important figure in the origin and early evolution of Australian Rules football. His life was shaped by intersecting forces: the sporting journey of the gifted athlete, the relationship between father and son, the tensions between colonial and Aboriginal societies, the everchanging place of colonial society within Empire, the impact of impaired mental health, and the damaging influence of alcohol in sport. His story extends well beyond the sporting boundary. The full extent of his role in the formation and early development of the Australian game reveals the more contentious disputes that his recent prominence has ignited, a prominence that has seen his life story resonate as a staple of Australian culture and history.

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Thomas Wentworth Wills (more familiarly known as Tom Wills) occupies a distinguished perch in Australian history. Wills is regarded as Australia's first celebrated cricketer, and the man who – more than anyone else – instigated the national game of Australian Rules football. Although the name Tom Wills has been associated with Australian football since its inception, it has only been in recent years that renewed research, plentiful documentary findings, and the impact of his life on Australian culture has really come to the fore. The early work of Anne Mancini and Gillian Hibbins, and then Geoffrey Blainey, helped lay the foundations for the more recent interest in Wills. Building on this early work, accessing archives from numerous sources, most notably those from the Wills family and Rugby School, this paper details for the first time in an academic publication the full extent of his contributions to the start of Australian Rules football and its early evolution, and distills the factors that shaped his thinking: from his early schoolboy experiences at Rugby School to the influence of his ambitious father. Wills's importance extends beyond the beginnings of the game to the often-neglected later contributions during the second half of his life. To set the stage and to place his footballing life in context, a brief biography of Wills is particularly important for an international audience that may be unfamiliar with Wills. The scope of his extraordinary life has risen to be part of the national discourse, and places early football and cricket in a narrative well beyond the sporting field.[1]

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A Colonial Life

Tom Wills was born on August 19, 1835, at Burra Burra sheep station, in southern New South Wales, Australia, the first-born son to Horatio and Elizabeth Wills. His parents, both descended from convicts, were driven to succeed in a young colony, an aspiring mindset they instilled into Tom. The family overlanded to the Port Phillip District, now Victoria, when Tom was a boy of four, settling near Mount William on the eastern border of the Grampians Mountain range. The colonial incursion on Aboriginal lands immediately descended into brutal and bloody frontier conflict, yet later family correspondence suggests mutual affection between Tom and the local Aboriginal people, the Djabwurrung.[2]

In 1850, at the age of 14, Tom was despatched to Rugby School, England, driven by his father's desire for his son to become a gentleman of note in the colony. His time at Rugby School set the template for the rest of Tom's life. He captained the school's cricket team ascending to be one of the finest young cricketers in the land and learned the skills of the nascent game of Rugby School football, becoming a star in his own right on 'The Close'. Tom's middle name – Wentworth – honoured William Charles Wentworth, lawyer, statesman and family friend, mirroring his father's aspiration for his son. Tom was expected to study at Cambridge University, but although he played for Cambridge in the annual Oxford-Cambridge cricket match, he did not formally enrol.[3]

By the end of 1856 he was back in Melbourne, and soon celebrated as the finest cricketer in the colony, captaining Victoria in intercolonial matches against New South Wales (NSW).[4] In 1858, only 22 years old, he wrote with youthful authority a declarative public letter urging the colony to form 'a foot-ball club'.[5] Tom played football in Victoria for the next three years until he travelled with his father in 1861 to settle a new property in central Queensland. Soon after arriving, his father and 18 other settlers were slaughtered by local Gayiri Aboriginal people; in response nearby settlers formed a posse of revenge, killing an untold number of Aboriginal people. Tom Wills was not a part of this posse of settlers, remaining on the sheep property, but the impact of this episode profoundly affected him, developing what would now be considered a picture akin to post-traumatic stress disorder. There is evidence that this accelerated his already strong disposition to drinking alcohol. By early 1864 he was back in Melbourne where he continued as the most sought-after cricketer in the land and continued to play and develop the early game of Australian Rules football.[6]

Of all the influences that shaped his life, that of his father was the most profound. Horatio Wills inspired in his son a sense of nationalism in a colony yet to become a nation, but his link with Rugby School would also forever tie Tom Wills to England even as he sought the approval of his colonial, and now dead, father. In 1866, despite the death of his father five years earlier, Tom, against the tide and culture of the time, captained and coached a western Victorian Aboriginal cricket team notably speaking to his players in the Aboriginal language he had learned as a boy. He played with this team on the Melbourne Cricket Ground on Boxing Day 1866. Plans to take this team to England with Wills as captain were scuppered when the entrepreneur funding the enterprise was found to be corrupt. One year later, Charles Lawrence, the English cricketer, resurrected the team with Wills deliberately sidelined, and the team

famously travelled to the United Kingdom in 1868, the first international tour made by an Australian cricket team.[7]

Wills continued to play cricket and football, and in the last year of his life lived on the outskirts of Melbourne. Always a heavy drinker, by the late 1870s he was a confirmed alcoholic, and in 1880 he entered a state of severe alcohol withdrawal with terrifying delusions, and took his life on May 2.[8]

Wills at Rugby School

'The chief game here is football, and will be so all the rest of the winter …'[9]

Tom Wills, 14 years old, left Melbourne for England in February 1850 aboard the *Lochnagar*, a barque of 300 tons; he was 21 when he returned to Melbourne in December 1856. In between, Rugby School, 83 miles northwest of London, was his theatre.[10] Wills entered the house of Master Charles Evans, one of nine houses at Rugby, the only Australian in this house.[11] Games were fundamental to the pendulum of daily Rugby life; each house was represented in cricket, football and athletics. The world of Tom Wills was a circumscribed one, confined by the perimeter of the Close, and he was a rising star in all three sports.[12]

At Rugby, 'Football and cricket reigned supreme, with running an honourable third'.[13] He immediately made his mark in cricket and by 1855 Wills captained the cricket team, the most prestigious sporting position at the school.[14] But in the collective Rugby mind, *the* most exciting game was football. Wills arrived at Rugby School at a propitious time. The house football competition until then had been sporadic and poorly organized, but by the early 1850s it was a tightly organized competition. The football teams were not XVs as they are today but House XXs.[15] An early photograph shows the boys congregating in preparation for a contest; the game of football was a coming of age for the Rugby boy (see Figure 1).[16]

The Evans House Archives give a detailed breakdown of the honours held by each boy. Wills earned his 'school cap'. That is, he had earned the right to play in the principal games of football at the school, a matter of great pride to Rugby boys.[17] Wills played as a forward player and a back player for his house. As a forward he was part of a sprawling mass of boys that swarmed across the field, grinding the ball forwards. But it was as a back player that his deeds rose to grab attention. Wills has the letter 'B' scribbled after his name in these house archives, to designate his role as a back player. These were the elusive boys with speed, the 'dodgers' of the game, who sparkled and danced through apertures in the defence.[18] After house games were played the schoolboys, in an informal manner, reviewed the rules and over time evolved a code to their satisfaction.[19]

Tom Wills was also a champion kick of the football at Rugby. Dropkick competitions were part of the school athletics programme.[20] This was recapitulated when Wills returned to Victoria where he was the longest dropkick of a football in the colony.[21] Remnants of the Evans House Football book offer reinforcing clues to Wills's status in kicking the football for goal.[22]

There was no Rugby School football captain in the 1850s. The football at Rugby during the 1850s was an incestuous affair, a game played amongst the boys of the

Figure 1. Boys preparing for Rugby School football on 'The Close' c. 1851. Image courtesy of Temple Reading Room, Rugby School.

school. Contests between schools, the so called 'foreign' matches, did not take place until over a decade after Wills had left Rugby: the football that shaped Tom Wills was pure Rugbeian.[23] There were three great contests of Rugby School football: the sixth form against the rest of the school; the School House [the most highly-regarded of all the houses] against the rest of the school; the school versus Old Rugbeians. As a champion footballer, Wills would have played in all three contests.[24]

Unlike cricket, football did not have a national focus or a clearly charted history. Football in the national English papers was reserved for only a handful of Public Schools, jostling for print space with other minor amusements.[25] Within this obscurity, prominence was not typically reserved for individual players. In games that sometimes involved over one hundred boys and played over several days, an individual needed panache to steal notice.

Reading these reports, the capacity of Tom Wills to charm spectators and reporters is immediately apparent: '"Football at Rugby". A novel match was played on Monday, the 20th ult, between the Debaters and the School … On the School side the play of Wills was excellent, he quite dodged the other side by his *slimy* tricks, which drew applause from the many spectators.'[26] In that same year, 1854, *Bell's Life in London* recorded:

> some fifty old Rugboeans might be seen on their old ground, in football costume, to play the annual match, with about ninety opponents, picked from the ranks of the School … Wills, to the admiration of the spectators, and to the great assistance to his side, displayed an eel-like agility which baffled all the efforts of his opponents to retain him in their grasp.[27]

There is no evidence to date of Tom Wills having ever played football outside of Rugby School. He did continue to play sport on the fields of Rugby for another year after he left school in the middle of 1855 and was a constant companion of the school until the middle of 1856. On August 19, 1855, Wills turned 20, too old for

school and untouchable as the school's most esteemed sportsman. He remained in England for just over a year after he left school, playing cricket as a gentleman amateur; in October 1856 he boarded the *Oneida* at Southampton and arrived home in Melbourne two months later, on 23 December.[28]

Wills took a great deal from his six years in England. At school, his life was dictated by the changing of the seasons; with the certainty of a finely-engineered clock, as the days cooled, the switch was made from cricket to football. This sporting rhythm was something he would introduce to Melbourne in the late 1850s. Rugby School shaped his identity, his self-perception, and made clear to him that sport was his abiding and consuming passion. At school and beyond, he was elevated, admired, and even adored as a sportsman, and at a young age he was accustomed to eyes being drawn to him. He carried back with him to Australia a trove of knowledge of the nascent game of Rugby school football: its rules and how these rules were refined by the boys through a series of makeshift committees. As a star of the game he understood its skills, the influential role of a captain, the importance of an oval-shaped ball, and the experience of playing cricket and football on the same stretch of ground. Rugby School imprinted itself on every aspect of Wills's adolescent life at time when he was most open to hear its message.

A New Game of Football: Melbourne (1857–1860)

When Tom Wills arrived in the colony of Victoria at the end of 1856, he was met by a pedestrian and somewhat unimaginative sporting landscape. There were sporadic newspaper references to 'football' but nothing that was organized, regular, or consistent. Indeed, what was referred to as 'football' were typically one-off carnival events.[29] Almost 20 years after he arrived back in Melbourne, Wills with typical swagger recalled the beginnings of the Australian game of football: 'This manly game was first introduced into the Colony by the writer, (T.W. Wills) A.D. 1857, but it was not taken to kindly until the following year, when a Committee was appointed (viz., Messrs. Hammersley, Smith, Thompson, and Wills) to draw up a code of Rules'.[30]

Although Wills mentions 1857 as the year in which he 'introduced' football, no confirmatory archival evidence from that year has yet come to light.[31] Tom Wills plunged into the world of Melbourne sport and rapidly rose as a significant sporting identity in the colony: he cut a dashing and stylish figure (see Figure 2). In September 1857 he assumed the prestigious role of the honorary secretary of the Melbourne Cricket Club, and soon captained the Victorian cricket team; his name was rarely out of the newspapers, writing a stream of letters brimming with ideas and opinions on sport, particularly that of cricket, his first sporting love. It is easy to see that he was not a natural-born administrator. He was a messy and at times undisciplined administrator; sharp margins and assiduous attendance at committee meetings were never his forte. No, his strengths lay on the field of play. It was little surprise that he lasted a mere 12 months as honorary secretary of the Melbourne Cricket Club. But his rising influence was immense; beyond his sporting connections he rubbed shoulders with key political and business figures who wished to bask in the glow of celebrity of the colony's finest sportsman.

In 1858 Tom Wills wrote what is generally regarded as the most important letter in the history of Australian football, a letter that Leonie Sandercock and Ian Turner

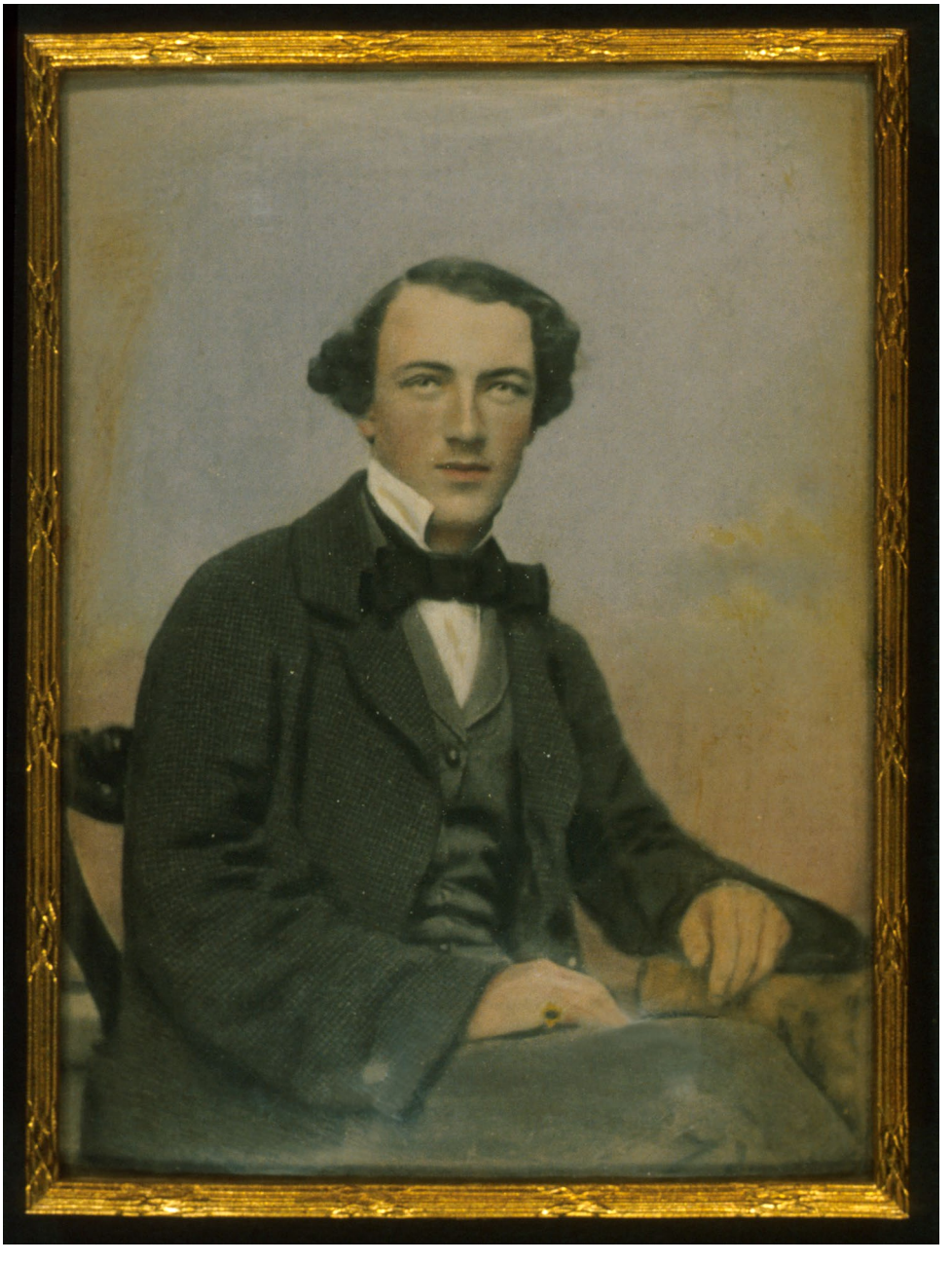

Figure 2. Tom Wills c 1857. Image courtesy of Terry Wills Cooke.

triumphantly called 'the founding document, the Declaration of Independence, of a new national game'.[32] Published on July 10, 1858, in the newly established *Bell's Life in Victoria*, Wills called for the formation of a 'foot-ball club' and a committee 'to draw up a code of laws'. The ringing tones of this letter set out most of the key items needed to conduct an organized competition. The grounding for this came straight from his time at Rugby School. The letter also owed a debt to his father, Horatio Wills, who by now was a member of the Victorian Parliament, and a man with

considerable publishing experience, accustomed to writing public letters to champion a cause.[33] This galvanizing letter sparked steps towards the most well-known of the early games of football.

The first football game portrayed in any detail (though not the first game played) was that between Melbourne Grammar School and Scotch College, played over three widely separated days in 1858: August 7 and 21 and September 4.[34] There were 40 players on each side; Wills was one of two umpires who took control of this match. It is not clear whether Wills and his fellow umpire (Dr McAdam, a Scotch College teacher) were also players. The game was conducted on a stretch of land just outside and to the north of the current Melbourne Cricket Ground. Trevor Ruddell's in-depth analysis of this game examines various interpretations of how the game may have been played, and examines its ongoing impact on how historians have cast the beginnings of Australian Rules football.[35] Although Wills brought back from Rugby the notion of playing football on existing cricket grounds, this was not without controversy, and it was another 20 years before the sharing of the same ground for football and cricket met with general acceptance in Melbourne.[36]

At the end of the third day of toil, neither school had scored the required two goals for a win – each team scored one goal across the month – and the game was declared a draw. As an umpire (and perhaps as an umpire-player) Wills was able to shape the rules and style of play, and occasionally, in the absence of accepted rules, the game took on the appearance of a farce:

> The ball, for instance, was frequently in the north-west corner of the park, and was at one time actually taken by a Grammar School player behind his own goal, and right round the other side of the cricket-ground fence. This seemed, however, carrying the thing too far, and on being appealed to, Mr. Thomas Wills, who acted as umpire, decided that the ball was out of bounds, and it was accordingly brought back.[37]

Years afterwards, a Scotch College boy recalled: 'It was in 1858 that the first real football was seen on the Grammar school ground when T.W. Wills brought a huge sewn many seamed round ball to show his brothers how to play the new English game, and it at once became popular'.[38]

On September 30, 1858, *Melbourne Punch* published a full page of verse describing a game of football between Melbourne and South Yarra. Tom Wills, reified as the captain of the Melbourne team, was the only player mentioned by name amongst a swarm of over 50 players. The crowd favourite, Wills, grabs hold of the reader's imagination and, as he had done at Rugby School, is the triumphant hero of the day. This important and detailed description of football in the critical year of 1858 places the emerging game within the heart of Melbourne society and identifies Tom Wills as its most public figure. Notably, the ball was spherical not oval, and the battle reminiscent of Rugby School football with players' shins kicked and bloodied. Finally, the ball spills free at the edge of a mass of scuffling players to be kicked towards goal, and Tom Wills charges ahead for a Melbourne victory:

> When Wills, the Melbourne chief,
>
> With picked-out men of lively shin,
>
> Banded to make a rush and win, …[39]

Tom Wills becomes the first captain of the Melbourne Football Club, the oldest of the current clubs in the Australian Football League (AFL).[40] As an umpire or as a captain during 1858, Wills was in a key position to shape the early rules. When a dispute over rules arose, umpires or captains (in the absence of umpires) were tasked with resolving the conflict. The Melbourne newspapers recorded that these early games included significant elements of Rugby School football.[41]

In May 1859, after a game on the Richmond Paddock, the *Argus* newspaper recorded 'The committee will meet on Tuesday afternoon, to draw up a code of rules … exceptions were taken last year to some of the Rugby regulations'.[42] Hence, a handwritten code of rules – the oldest extant written rules of Australian football – were penned on May 17, 1859, to modify what some viewed as the objectionable Rugby style of play. There were 10 rules and 'T.W. Wills Esq' headed the list of rule writers.[43]

Two factors underpinned the construction of the Melbourne rules. The first was to have a minimum number of rules, and for these rules to be simple enough to allow new players to understand them even if coming from disparate sporting backgrounds.[44] As noted by one observer in the *Australasian*:

> No matter who was the actual father of football in this colony, who got the first Rugby ball, and kicked it … I remember the present rules being drawn up in a little back room of the Parade Hotel. I have watched their working ever since, and I must say that if ever a set of good working rules were drawn up, they are the rules of football as at present recognised in this colony. They are simple, and concise, easily remembered, free from all those what I would term peculiarities which render the rules of the various schools in England so difficult to remember. A Rugbyian, an Etonian, a Winchester boy, an Harrovian, could step into the football ground here and play at once.[45]

The second overriding issue for the rule writers was to temper the level of physical violence; a matter that was also debated in English School games.[46] Debate on the advisability of hacking another player's shins was in the air at Rugby School in the years before Wills arrived at the school and continued well beyond his leaving the school. Presumably these discussions were known to Wills as a schoolboy at Rugby.[47] The relevance of the hacking debate to Tom Wills is that the abolition of hacking and the protection of players' legs were key points in the creation of the game in Melbourne in the late 1850s. Rule VII of the 1859 Melbourne Rules banned hacking, and this was extended in the 1860 rules to ban tripping and holding, reflecting the desire to control the level of violence, the most contentious aspect of Rugby School football.

The different English Public School football games were the starting point for the Melbourne rules for football. The authors of the rules said as much.[48] Almost all of the Melbourne rules of 1859 can be seen to have been adopted from English school games with Rugby providing the most important contribution.[49] The absence of an off-side rule was the most obvious difference in the Melbourne rules when compared with the principal English school games.[50]

Hibbins highlights the importance in the Melbourne rules of rule VI, VII and VIII.[51] Rule VI conferred an advantage to the player who caught the ball directly from another player's foot, which awarded a free kick to the player catching the ball.

In other words, catching a kicked ball on the full allowed the player catching the ball to stop and take a kick without being tackled by opposing players. Several of the English schools allowed catching of the ball but the advantages accorded the player who caught the ball varied from school to school. Rugby School allowed for catching of the ball which was vital in scoring goals both after touching down the ball to try for a goal and, also, for scoring a goal in general play.[52] The Rugby School adoption of the place kick and drop kick, allied to catching the ball, closely resembled the development of kicking and catching in early Australian football. The Rugby School rules of the 1840s also gave detailed consideration as to when one could lift the ball from the ground.[53] Rule VIII of the 1859 Melbourne Rules, which limited taking the ball from the ground only 'on the hop' was similar to Rugby's taking the ball on 'the bound'. The 1860 revised Melbourne rules attempted to reinforce this limitation on lifting the ball from the ground, and to quash running with the ball: both directives were impractical and failed. It was not long before there was full freedom to pick the ball from the ground and to run with the ball.[54]

There is no evidence to suggest that the existing fragmentary forms of football in the colony, prior to Wills's return to Melbourne in 1856, contributed to the game of Australian Rules football.[55] Tom Wills and William Hammersley, two of the co-writers of the 1859 rules, made it clear that their new Melbourne code of football was introduced into the colony at this time; not that they adopted and reshaped a game that was already in existence.[56]

The main co-writers of the 1859 Melbourne Football Club rules alongside Tom Wills, were William Hammersley, James Thompson and Thomas Smith.[57] In 1883 Hammersley in a series of reflective articles, wrote that Wills 'suggested the Rugby rules, but nobody understood them except himself'.[58] A different perspective on Tom Wills comes from his cousin H.C.A. Harrison, who himself would become a dominant football name in Melbourne. Harrison reflected: 'He [Wills] very sensibly advised us not to take up Rugby although that had been his own game because he considered it as then played unsuitable for grown men … but to work out a game of our own'.[59] This was not the only time Harrison highlighted that it was Wills more than anyone else who was the key man in the start of the game.[60]

All the principal rule writers – Wills, Thompson, Hammersley and Smith – used their various positions of influence in promoting the game and were bullish about their own importance in its inception. Wills seems to have taken on more roles than the others and was a player with transcendent skills and a captain with a keen eye for strategy. From the start Tom Wills was a player of note and his captaincy and tactical brilliance admired, viewing space and time differently to most players, and looking for creative opportunities to attack or defend. No other early player commanded respect in all these areas.

James Thompson underscored the importance accorded the English Public School games in shaping Australian football when, as editor of the *1859 Victorian Cricketer's Guide*, he published the Melbourne rules alongside the Rugby and Eton football rules.[61] Feisty and abrasive, James Thompson was vocal in his opposition to aspects of the Rugby School rules and highlighted his ideological conflict over this with Tom Wills. Thompson, the sportsman cum journalist, supported the early Melbourne rule that prohibited the lifting of the ball from the ground. Thompson also disliked the

retention of place kicking in the Melbourne game. Both lifting the ball and place kicking were prominent features of Rugby School football.[62] Thompson also wanted to abolish receiving a free kick unless the rules were breached. On the other hand, Tom Wills was an advocate of receiving a free kick after catching the ball, a rule more akin to several schoolboy games including that of Rugby School. On all these points the view of Tom Wills held sway. In the end, the decision to award a free kick to a player catching the ball after it was kicked, dramatically changed the nature of the Australian game, and when coupled with placing men down the length of the field, fostered rapid ball movement towards goal by a series of kicks.[63]

All the original rule framers of 1859, it seems, wished to produce a game that was less violent than that associated with the Rugby School football rules. As Thompson highlighted to Wills in 1871:

> I turn now to football, which I am sorry to see has degenerated into horse play riot. You may remember when you, Mr. Hammersley, Mr. T. Smith, and myself, framed the first code of rules for Victorian use. The Rugby, Eton, Harrow, and Winchester rules at that time (I think in 1859) came under our consideration, the outcome being that we all but unanimously agreed that regulations which suited schoolboys well enough would not be patiently tolerated by grown men.[64]

Even Wills, who it seems was more partial to aspects of the Rugby School rules than anyone else, recognized the need to compromise. In a private letter to his brother Horace, he wrote: 'Rugby was not a game for us, we wanted a winter pastime but men could be harmed if thrown on the ground so we thought differently'.[65]

In the Australian game, the combination of kicking and catching the ball, and the absence of an off-side rule allowed greater freedom of ball movement, allowing for the evolution of precise passing of the ball between players with an arc of 360 degrees. In other words, there was freedom to kick the ball in any direction to another player, regardless of whether that player was in front, to the side, or behind the kicker. This was a significant shift from the early style of tidal rugby movement in the Australian game. Wills, it seems, was the first to exploit this possibility of a different way to move the ball. The earliest Melbourne reference to the importance of how to creatively place men on the football field came on June 30, 1860, when Wills, captaining the Richmond team, hit upon the idea of placing his men down the length of the field – from backline to forward line – instructing his men to pass the ball from player to player, thus moving the ball swiftly down the length of the field to score a goal. An obvious tactic in the twenty-first century, it was not obvious in 1860. In a single stroke Wills advanced the concept of cooperative play.[66] James Coventry, in his analysis of tactics, regards this move as one of the most important in the history of the game.[67]

Wills, years later, wrote of this strategy of placing his men in a coordinated way to allow passing the ball from player to player and the pivotal role of the captain in overseeing it: 'in no case shall a player run further with the ball in hand than is necessary to obtain a kick, viz., five yards, this would put a stop to all dodging, and would make the game more scientific, as the captains would have to place their men so as to make them play more to each other'.[68] Even as an adolescent at Rugby School, Wills's sporting diary suggests a mind that felt most at home as a leader and tactician on the field. In his scribbled, ragged notes he wrote fearless critiques of his

fellow players, of match strategies, and all imbued with a deep competitiveness with the goal of winning. More than most of his Melbourne contemporaries Tom Wills understood the importance of the captain as a thinker and tactical leader, and not just as a player.

Wills was also the first and most forceful voice when it came to the shape of the ball. The issue of the ball's shape came to a head in 1860. In that year, the *Argus* reported on the novelty of the oval ball at a meeting held in the pavilion at the Melbourne Cricket Club. This meeting of the Melbourne Football Club included Tom Wills, William Hammersley, James Thompson and Thomas Smith. Hammersley chaired the meeting: 'After the meeting a scratch game was got up, in which about 40 gentlemen joined. The ball, which was of rather a novel shape – oval, was kicked about merrily until the waning light rendered it difficult to distinguish friends from foes.'[69] Two weeks later, the simmering issue of the oval ball was raised again. Melbourne played Richmond and the writer for the *Argus* [probably James Thompson] compared the game with those from his schooldays. Most notably he objected to the oval shape of the ball. An obstinate Wills, captain of the Richmond team, demanded that the oval ball be used:

> Another drawback to an otherwise almost perfect afternoon's enjoyment was the objectionable shape of the ball, which was oval, and is said to have gained the prize at the Great Exhibition, besides being of the kind now in use at Rugby School. This class of ball may fly further than a round one, but assuredly, in nine cases out of ten, does not fulfil the expectations of the propeller, more particularly if there be any wind. Considerable dissatisfaction was expressed when the game began at the Richmond captain's [Wills] maintaining his right to the choice of ball, and a great deal more after the play was over.[70]

The *Argus* continued its criticism later in the year: 'It was also noteworthy that the high wind operating upon the unpopular oval ball rendered kicking with precision a matter of exceeding difficulty'.[71] Although Wills clearly preferred the oval ball from his schoolboy days, it was not until 1877 that an oval ball was mandated in the rules.[72]

Tom Wills was the most colourful and imposing figure in Melbourne's new code of football from the time he returned from England until the end of 1860. In a small colony it was a time when an individual could single-handedly affect the flow of events. There was no grand design for the evolution of the game: no formal committees to oversee the development of the game; no larger infrastructure; no five-year plan. All the early descriptions are of makeshift games, with a handful of early clubs playing on stretches of rough fields. Typically, players met at a pre-designated venue, teams often chosen on the day, a tag of colour might be all that distinguished one team from another. It was also an egalitarian affair: there was no imposition of an amateur and professional structure. The game of Australian Rules was shaped by the players on the field, and in moments of reflection after the game when captains and key players sat to evaluate what worked and what did not. This iterative process (sometimes formal, sometimes informal) has a striking resemblance to the way the boys at Rugby described the evolution of their school game.

While the influence of Rugby School is clear, there were other factors that shaped Wills's thinking and allowed for his ideas to take root in this highly masculine world.

His family, although descended from convict blood, had established significant wealth, and Tom was a man of independent means, even if that means was a seemingly endless supply of money from his family. His status as the colony's most brilliant cricketer meant that his name and celebrity were on everyone's lips, and he was linked to the Melbourne Cricket Club, the premier cricket club in the colony. He had access to men of business and politics, partly through his father and partly through the inevitable contacts his sporting celebrity attracted. Also his personality was, to say the least, not held back by modesty. Nonetheless, it could be argued that there were at least two further key factors at play that distinguished him from his contemporaries.

His father's desire for his first-born son to be a man of colonial eminence was driven into Tom since infancy; this desire is recorded in his father's diary, and in his admonishing letters to Tom at Rugby School and continued when Tom returned to the colony. While Tom did not become what his father desired – an eminent lawyer with a statesman-like persona, it is hard to write off the importance of this intense and burdensome directive from his father. Tom Wills returned to Melbourne, saturated with the values of Rugby School and the polish of an England cricketing education, with a drivenness to succeed in his all-consuming affair with sport and forged ahead to recreate Melbourne's sporting landscape.

In addition to this paternal directive to achieve, there is another more speculative factor, which may have been at play in driving him during these first years back in Melbourne; this second factor has to do with his undoubted creativity on the field of play. At the time of Wills's greatest period of energy and sporting creativity, 1857–1860, his letter writing provides a window into a rather unusual mind; some of his letters were chaotic and his thoughts wildly disordered, making it almost impossible to follow his line of thinking. It has been suggested that he may have had a mental aberration, perhaps a mild form of bipolar disorder. Bipolar disorder has been linked with an increase in creativity. Trying to retrospectively make such a diagnosis is virtually impossible. Most likely his idiosyncratic style of writing was nothing more than a period of exuberance or even carelessness, but the proposition that he may have had an elevated mood (for periods of his life) as part of bipolar disorder is at least worth contemplation. More prosaically, the lack of obvious mental illness for much of his life, the absence of any mental health admission (until the end of his life when in alcohol withdrawal) both tell against this speculative line of thinking.[73]

Tom Wills, Marngrook, and the Evolution of Australian Football

Over the last 30 years, there have been claims that the origins of Australian Rules football can be traced back to Aboriginal football. Jim Poulter introduced the idea and there have been numerous analyses of the evidence ever since.[74] At the centre of these claims is Tom Wills. Wills lived (on and off) in western Victoria, near Mount William, during the 1840s from the age of four until he left for Rugby School 10 years later. Advocates of the connection between Aboriginal football and Australian Rules football postulate that Tom Wills observed and played a form of Aboriginal football as a child, and then incorporated what he learned into the early rules of Australian football. This contention has at times led to acrimonious and divisive brawls played

out in the media, and as one might anticipate, it is a discussion that rapidly moves beyond the field of sport.

It is well established that various Aboriginal ball games were played in different regions of Australia, including western Victoria, with a variety of names and different features. The term 'Marngrook' refers to a specific form of Aboriginal ball game, but has increasingly assumed a generic meaning in popular discussions to encompass the various Aboriginal football games. Several European observers wrote descriptions of these games including William Thomas whose description of Marngrook has become the most widely known.[75] James Dawson, a Scottish settler in Western Victoria, also witnessed these ball games. In Dawson's account he called the game of football, Min'gorm, as played by the Djab wurrung people in the western district of Victoria.[76] Although there have been claims that Tom Wills incorporated features of Aboriginal ball games into the early form of Australian Rules football, there is no archival evidence that supports this contention. Tom Wills did not leave any evidence, nor did any of the rule writers of the game refer to any Aboriginal connection. This proposed link has been analyzed in detail and, at best, it remains a speculation. Like all lines of historical enquiry, one should maintain an open mind to possible future discoveries.

Leaving and Returning to Melbourne (1861-63), Football Matures (1864–78)

The termination of 1860 marks the end of the most significant period of Tom Wills's contribution to early Australian football. At that point, almost as if by design, his father called him away from Melbourne in the service of the family. It was several years before his next phase of contribution to football. At the bidding of his father, Wills left Melbourne by steamer in January 1861, travelling with his father and a party of Victorian settlers to a new distant pastoral property, *Cullin-la-Ringo*, in central Queensland. It was there, on the October 17, 1861, that his father and 18 other members of this party were slaughtered by local Aboriginal people; Wills survived but was deeply affected by these events. In the days afterward, there was a reprisal raid conducted by neighbouring settlers that killed many Aboriginal people. A series of newspaper articles in 2021 claimed that Tom Wills might have been part of that reprisal raid.[77] When the archival evidence is examined, it is clear that Tom Wills was not part of the raid, and that the original article that sparked this discussion was erroneous. The documentary evidence reveals that Tom Wills was left behind on the family property tending sheep while 11 white settlers set off on their reprisal raid.[78] Wills temporarily returned to Victoria and NSW in early 1863 for cricket and made a desultory stab at playing football that year in Geelong, then went back to the property in Queensland, and finally came back to Victoria permanently by the start of 1864.

Tom Wills was a changed man when he returned to Melbourne: older and with a mind traumatized by the violent death of his father, he shuttled between Melbourne and Geelong, playing for both football clubs of that name during 1864 and 1865. The Melbourne Football Club still set the trends in this new code of football, and despite

his long absence in Queensland, this emblematic club immediately re-embraced Wills as one of its finest players. Sitting alongside him was his cousin H.C.A. Harrison, soon to the undisputed figurehead of the game for the next two decades. Both men, the stars of the biggest football club in the colony, were on display at the Melbourne Cricket Ground in a football kicking contest measuring the length of their drop-kicks: Wills coming first and Harrison second.[79]

In 1865 Wills joined William Hammersley, H.C.A. Harrison, and others at the Higgs Royal Hotel, Richmond, to review the laws of football.[80] Wills, insistent to be part of this review, seemingly retained an affection for elements of the Rugby School game and argued for the introduction of a cross bar eight feet above the ground between the two vertical goal posts.[81] To score a goal, a kicked ball would have to clear the horizontal cross bar, and not hit any part of the woodwork. This was the case in the Rugby School football rules. The motion was vigorously contested and the vote was tied, requiring the chair, Shoosmith, to break the deadlock. Shoosmith elected to retain the existing rule and so defeated Wills's support for the cross bar. Wills's reaction to the defeated proposition of a seemingly cherished Rugby School rule is not known. The meeting was a signpost of Wills's waning influence in Melbourne, and by year's end Tom Wills departed the metropolis of Melbourne; thereafter all his football was based in and around the provincial town of Geelong.

Tom Wills had played football in Geelong before his 1861 move to Queensland, and again in 1863; now it would be his home, playing with the Geelong club from the mid-1860s until 1874, captaining the team on and off until 1873. The Geelong Football Club, the second oldest of the current AFL clubs, formed in 1859 and the question arises whether Wills instigated the code in Geelong in the late 1850s, in the same way he had in Melbourne. While quite possible, even likely, a definitive answer is elusive and open to debate. His family lived in the Geelong region during this time, and Tom spent a great deal of his time in Geelong. Unfortunately, the Geelong Football Club archives are patchy for the earliest stretch of its history and do not resolve the issue; certainly, one of the earliest players in the Geelong region did recall Wills as the instigator of the game in Geelong, but there is a lack of archival information to confirm these recollections.[82]

Relatively recent research by Murray Bird, revealed somewhat unexpectedly how Wills's football influence in Geelong helped shape football in the colony of Queensland, nearly 2,000 kilometres away. The first known football club in Queensland took root in the capital, Brisbane, in 1866. At least one of Tom's brothers (who had travelled to *Cullin-la-Ringo* in Queensland) and two friends of Tom Wills from Geelong (both of whom also moved to Queensland), played with the Brisbane Football Club, taking their knowledge of the game in Geelong to Queensland.[83]

Wills's move to provincial Geelong, distant from the buzzing capital of Melbourne, meant that his words and opinions were no longer immediately transmitted across the sporting capital. He had played with the Melbourne club on the Richmond Paddock just outside the Melbourne Cricket Ground, but now Geelong was his new, if smaller, auditorium where he continued to brashly state his views on sport (see Figure 3). Hailed by the people of Geelong and drawn by the celebrity of his name, spectators swelled in numbers to watch him train and play for the Geelong Football Club. Previously, in Melbourne, Wills played in numerous positions; typically, as

captain he followed the ball around the ground. In Geelong he sometimes played in the ruck meaning he stayed close to the centre of the ground and occasionally drifted forward to kick a goal.

Even though Wills was past his physical prime, he made one further memorable contribution to the tactics of football. It was a bleak and windy day in July 1872 when Tom Wills captained his Geelong team in the gold mining town of Ballarat. Geelong kicked with the wind in the first half, but at the break no goals had been scored. In the second half, the beleaguered Geelong team were up against it, having to kick against an increasingly ferocious wind; expectations were with the Ballarat team. Wills defied the odds and did something previously unseen, or at least not described. With a military instinct to make the best of a seemingly hopeless situation, he mustered his men in defence leaving very few players in the forward region of the field. In other words, he 'flooded' the defensive area of the ground, and then he instructed his players to deliberately kick the ball out of bounds as a ploy to waste time. This unorthodox tactic drew immediate hostility from the partisan Ballarat crowd; Wills was jeered from the ground. But it was the kind of tactic a leader bent on not losing might pursue. The defensive tactic of 'flooding' remains an unpopular tactic to this day. Throughout the 1860s and 1870s, Wills was the most recognizable name at the Geelong Football Club: playing and captaining the club; umpiring as both central (field) and goal umpire; immersing himself in the affairs of the club by promoting the game through donations and trophies, sitting on match and fundraising committees, and assuming the role of vice-president from 1873 for five years.[84]

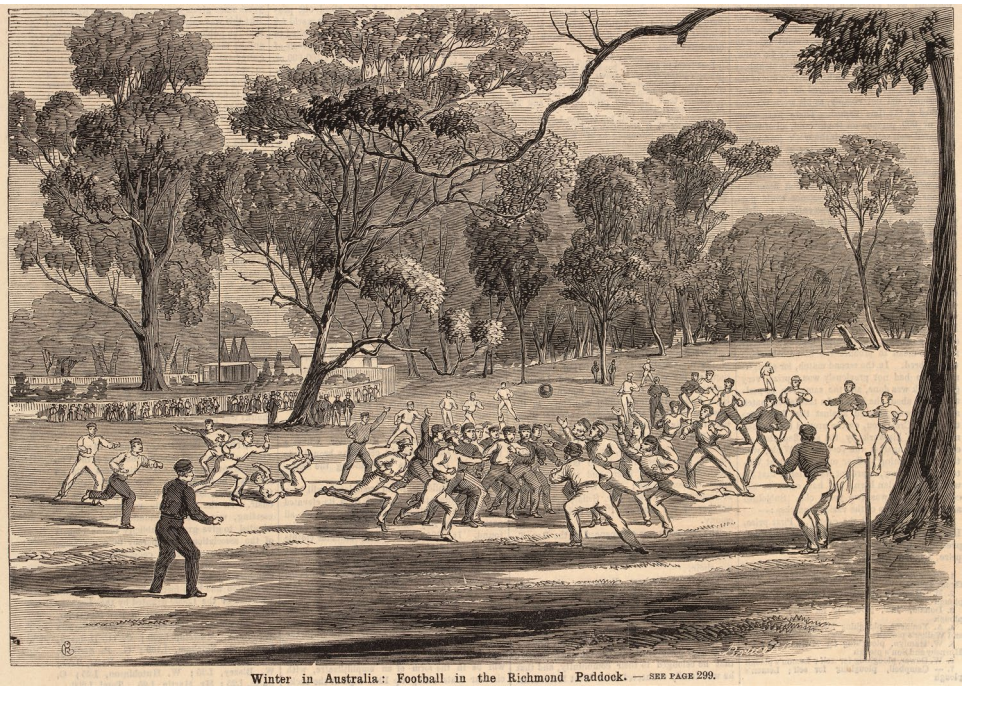

Figure 3. Australian Rules football played on the Richmond Paddock. In the background is the Melbourne Cricket Ground. Wood engraving, Robert Bruce, from the *Illustrated Melbourne Post*, July 27, 1866.

One final piece of evidence suggests Wills's lingering affection for some of the Rugby School rules. While umpiring a match in 1875, Wills awarded a free kick to a Geelong player in front of the goal posts, and, according to the practice of the time in Australian football, this player would normally have taken a shot for the goal. Instead, controversially, Tom Wills allows another player – the Geelong team's finest kicker – to take the shot for goal rather than the player who was awarded the free kick. This action by Wills harks back to his boyhood at Rugby School when, as the designated kicker for Evans House, he was expected to take the shot for goal. A local Geelong newspaper, despite the apparent anomaly, lauded Wills and reinforced the Rugby School link:

> A dispute arose on the ground with reference to Mr T.W. Wills, who was acting as central umpire, allowing the Geelong captain the privilege of selecting his man to kick … The case in dispute, was where Satchwell was held, and Mr Wills allowed Hall to kick the ball, thereby securing a goal. Most decidedly the central umpire was correct, on the grounds that as an injustice had been done to the Geelong team the captain had a perfect right, as a free kick was allowed, to give it to the best kicker in the team. The decision of Mr Wills should have been sufficient, as, being an old Rugby captain, he is perfectly well aware of the laws of football.[85]

By early 1878, a now 42-year-old Wills was back in Melbourne, living in the suburb of Emerald Hill (now called South Melbourne). The newly formed Victorian Football Association (VFA) gave a sophisticated administrative structure to the game of football. Wills joined the VFA as an umpire, and when criticized, still wrote to the press ripping into his critic and imposing his views of the rules of the game.[86]

Wills's final contribution to the Australian game came while he was living in Emerald Hill. Up until this point in the evolution of the game, football and cricket tended to be played on separate grounds. Cricket, by dint of history and culture, looked down upon football. Football was excluded from the fine turf of cricket ovals and condemned to play on rectangular fields on common parklands. The great concern from cricket administrators had always been that playing football in winter on a cricket field would ruin the turf for the summer game of cricket. As a result, only occasional games of football were played on cricket grounds. This was until the late 1870s, when the local South Melbourne cricket club, losing money, turned to Wills for advice. Tom Wills, leaning on his Rugby School experience of playing football and cricket on the same patch of ground, advised South Melbourne to turn their cricket ground over to football in winter as a money-making option, and confidently predicted it would improve the quality of the turf. The club did so, and turned around its fortunes; soon afterwards, other clubs did the same. Gradually there was a move from rectangular football grounds to playing on oval cricket grounds. This remains the case today.[87]

An Australian Story

Tom Wills took his life in 1880. For 100 years after his death, the name Tom Wills was largely absent from the national stage; over the last 25 years, he has barely been off that stage. It is worthwhile to ponder the reasons for this recent ascension.

The centenary anniversary of the Australian Football League in 1996 was a time for historical research and reflection. The year 2008 marked 150 years since Tom Wills's public letter calling for a football club and since the famous Melbourne Grammar – Scotch College football match. However, these anniversaries do not entirely explain the transformation. What it misses is an appreciation of the place of the Tom Wills story within a changing Australian culture. Two dimensions in particular are changing: that of this country's reappraisal of its connection with England, and the ever-expanding appreciation of the impact of colonization on First Nations people. Tom Wills stands right in the middle of all of this. Whatever the reasons, the resurrection of his life through historical research has touched deep chords within the Australian psyche.

The time Tom Wills spent at Rugby School was *the* most important influence in his instigation of Australian Rules football. It gave him a template from which to work when he arrived in Melbourne. He brought back from Rugby all the elements that would be required to forge a new sporting pathway. He was the first to publicly declare the desire for a 'foot-ball club', writing a letter in 1858 that helped inspire the playing of early games. As the colony's foremost cricketer, and as a standout member and honorary secretary of the celebrated Melbourne Cricket Club, he commanded attention. His name is remembered as the first captain of the first of the modern AFL clubs – the Melbourne Football Club. Wills played football from 1858 to 1874, a staggering 17 years, and he umpired across two decades: 1858–1878. His playing longevity, creativity on the field, leadership of men, and a seemingly unquenchable belief in his ability, set him apart from his contemporaries and stamp him as the game's most influential early figure.

Tom Wills left an exceptional legacy: apart from the football code he helped create, there was his astonishing role in captaining an Aboriginal cricket team in the aftermath of his father's murder in the biggest massacre of colonists in Australian history. To mark his life there are increasing tributes around Australia. A statue now stands outside the Melbourne Cricket Ground which casts Wills as an umpire overseeing two young boys competing for the ball in the 1858 Melbourne Grammar – Scotch College football game.[88]

No single individual 'invented' Australian Rules football. Rather a small group of like-minded individuals with similar schoolboy experiences came together at an auspicious moment in the colony's history. Of these, Tom Wills was the most talented, most imposing and long-lasting, leaving a legacy that redefined his home city of Melbourne. Nearly 200 years after his father expressed a desire for his first-born son to become a man of note and to shape the society in which he lived it can finally be claimed that the restless Tom Wills has settled into a position that might please his father.

Notes

1. For a full biography, see Greg de Moore, *Tom Wills: The Insubordinate Life of an Australian Sporting Legend* (Cammeraygal Country Crows Nest: Allen and Unwin, 2023); ABC Radio Podcast, Richard Fidler interviewing Greg de Moore, February 22, 2013, https://www.abc.net.au/listen/programs/conversations/greg-de-moore-on-the-life-of-to

m-wills-australias-first-sports-s/7756266 (accessed May 3, 2025); Greg de Moore, 'In From the Cold: Tom Wills – A Nineteenth-Century Sporting Hero' (PhD diss., School of Human Movement, Recreation and Performance, Victoria University, 2008); Anne Mancini and Gillian Hibbins, eds., *Running with the Ball: Football's Foster Father* (Melbourne: Lynedoch Press, 1987). For a fictionalized version of the life of Tom Wills, see Martin Flanagan, *The Call* (St Leonards: Allen and Unwin, 1998); for a family history, see Terry Wills Cooke, *The Currency Lad: A Biography of Horatio Spencer Howe Wills, 5 October 1811 to 17 October 1861, and the Story of His Immediate Family 1797 to 1918* (www.digbys, 2013). For an early reference on the recognition of Wills as the instigator of Australian football, see Henry Thomas, *Melbourne Handbook of Recreations and Calendar for 1873* (Melbourne: H. Thomas, 1873), 62.

2. Ian Clark, ed., *The Journals of George Augustus Robinson, Chief Protector, Port Phillip Aboriginal Protectorate, vols I-IV* (Melbourne: Heritage Matters, 1998); de Moore, *Tom Wills*, 3–19.
3. Les Perrin, *Cullin-la-Ringo: The Triumph and Tragedy of Tommy Wills* (Stafford: Les Perrin, 1998), 24–34; de Moore, *Tom Wills*, 20–51.
4. For specific aspects of Wills as a cricketer, see Greg de Moore, 'Tom Wills, Satan's Little Helper: A Case Study of Throwing in Nineteenth-Century Australian Cricket', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 25, no. 1 (2008): 82–99; Gregory de Moore, 'Tom Wills and the Adventure of the Lost Cricket Ball', *Baggy Green* 8, no. 1 (2005): 62–72; Gregory de Moore, 'The Sons of Lush: Tom Wills, Alcohol and the Colonial Cricketer', *Sport in History* 25, no. 3 (2005): 354–74.
5. *Bell's Life in Victoria*, July 10, 1858, 3.
6. Perrin, *Cullin-la-Ringo*, 69–112; de Moore, *Tom Wills*, 104–28.
7. John Mulvaney and Rex Harcourt, *Cricket Walkabout: The First Australian Cricketers to Tour England* (Ballarat East: Ten Bag Press, 2024).
8. Greg de Moore, 'The Suicide of Thomas Wentworth Wills', *Medical Journal of Australia* 171 (1999): 656–8.
9. Letter, E.H. Bradby to his mother, September 22, 1839, 'A New Boy's Letters from Rugby', Pamphlets IV, Temple Reading Room, Rugby School Archives and Special Collections, Rugby, England (hereafter TRR). Tom Wills attended Brickwood's Academy in Melbourne before he went to Rugby. Although he played cricket at Brickwood's there is no evidence of him playing any form of football.
10. *Argus* Passenger Index fiche 1846-1851, 151; *Argus*, February 28, 1850, 2; *Argus*, December 24, 1856, 4; VPRS 7666 Passengers to Victoria from British Ports, 1856, Fiche 117, 1–2, Public Record Office Victoria, Australia (hereafter PRO).
11. 1851 Census, TRR.
12. The Close refers to the playing field of the school.
13. John Barclay Hope Simpson, *Rugby Since Arnold: A History of Rugby School from 1842* (London: Macmillan, 1967), 246.
14. Honour Boards, 1855 XI, Cricket Pavilion, Rugby School.
15. William Rouse, *A History of Rugby School* (London: Duckworth and Co., 1898), 262–70.
16. 'Reminiscences', *The New Rugbeian* 3, no. 2 (November 1860), 79–83, TRR.
17. Jennifer Macrory, *Running with the Ball: The Birth of Rugby Football* (London: CollinsWillow, 1991), 82–3, 117.
18. Thomas Hughes, *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (London: Ward, Lock & Co., 1911), 97; Macrory, *Running with the Ball*, 96–101. In 1855 Wills was described as being a good back and forward player. Evans House records, TRR; *Bell's Life in London*, December 3, 1854, 6.
19. Macrory, *Running with the Ball,* 19, 57.
20. Rugby School Athletics Games Fixture, November 2, 1852, TRR. For the importance of the kicker, see, Macrory, *Running with the Ball,* 77.
21. *Geelong Advertiser*, September 19, 1864, 2.
22. 'Evans's House Football Book MDCCCLIV – LXI. Hutchinson's House Football Book MDCCCLXII', TRR.

23. Henry Bradby, *Handbooks to The Great Public Schools. Rugby* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1900), 192.
24. 'Meditations', *The New Rugbeian* 3, no. 8 (December 1861): 297–314, TRR.
25. For example, *Bell's Life London*, October 10, 1852, 6.
26. The word 'slimy' is in italics in the original. *Bell's Life in London*, December 3, 1854, 6. Earlier references to Wills can be found in *Bell's Life in London*, December 19, 1852, 6; *Field*, December 24, 1853, 610.
27. *Bell's Life in London*, November 12, 1854, 6.
28. Passenger List VPRS 7666, Passengers to Victoria from British Ports, 1856, Fiche 117 pages 1 and 2, PRO; *Argus*, December 24, 1856, 4.
29. For a comprehensive history of Australian Rules football, see Mathew Nicholson, Bob Stewart, Greg de Moore, and Rob Hess, *Australia's Game: The History of Australian Football* (Melbourne: Hardie Grant Books, 2021, reprinted 2024). On Victorian sporting history seen from the point of William Hammersley, see Gillian Hibbins, *Sport and Racing in Colonial Melbourne: The Cousins and Me: Colden Harrison, Tom Wills and William Hammersley* (Melbourne: Lynedoch Publications, 2007); Mark Pennings, *Origins of Australian Football: Victoria's Early History. Volume 1: Amateur Heroes and the Rise of Clubs, 1858 to 1876* (Ballan, Vic: Connor Court Publishing, 2012).
30. Thomas Wentworth Wills, ed., *The Australian Cricketers' Guide, For 1874-75* (Geelong: Henry Franks, Printer, 1875), 93.
31. Two newspaper references, decades afterwards, suggest early football may have started in 1857. See *The Leader*, May 7, 1898, 5; *The Sydney Mail*, August 25, 1883, 363.
32. Leonie Sandercock and Ian Turner, *Up Where, Cazaly? The Great Australian Game* (London: Granada, 1981), 19.
33. His father published the *Currency Lad*, in Sydney, an early colonial newspaper. In the months leading up to Tom penning his letter, Horatio spoke of the colony's preparedness for war. *Argus*, April 29, 1858, 5.
34. The Grammar-Scotch match was not the first school match of 1858. In June Melbourne Grammar played St Kilda Grammar, and in July played the St Kilda Club. Nicholson, Stewart, de Moore, and Hess, *Australia's Game*, 25. Three weeks after Wills's letter, a game of football was played, July 31, 1858, although no coherent set of rules governed play and the scant information that survives suggests an assortment of crude football types.
35. Trevor Ruddell, 'An Origin Myth Engraved in Stone?: Scotch College, Melbourne Grammar and Australian Rules', *Sporting Traditions* 33, no. 2 (2016): 57–78. Wills had links to both schools, one of his employers, Robert Willan, was on the Grammar School Council, and his 13-year-old brother, Cedric was a student at Scotch.
36. Nicholson, Stewart, de Moore, and Hess, *Australia's Game*, 123.
37. Ruddell, 'An Origin Myth Engraved in Stone?', 71, as originally cited in 'Notes and Comments', *Young Victoria: A Journal of the Scotch College*, no. 6 (July 1878): 75–76.
38. 'Old-Time Footballers', *Australasian*, September 9, 1922, 547.
39. *Melbourne Punch*, September 30, 1858, 80.
40. References that suggest a club was formed by the end of 1858 included the *Melbourne Herald* August 7, 1858, 5; *Argus*, May 9, 1859, 5; *The Leader*, May 7, 1898, 5. Against this is the view that the club only came into formal existence after the writing of the rules and the formation of a known committee in 1859.
41. *Argus*, May 16, 1859, 5; *Melbourne Herald* August 23, 1858, 5; Mancini and Hibbins, *Running with the Ball*, 22, 26–7.
42. *Argus*, May 16, 1859, 5.
43. The other key men were James Thompson, William Hammersley and Thomas Smith. Trevor Ruddell, 'The Evolution of the Rules From 1859 to 1866', *The Yorker* 39 (2009): 14–23; Trevor Ruddell, 'The Evolution of the Rules of Football from 1872 to 1877', *The Yorker* 41 (2010): 16–27; Nicholson, Stewart, de Moore, and Hess, *Australia's Game*, 31–9; handwritten 1859 rules, Melbourne Cricket Club Museum Collection, Melbourne, Australia (hereafter MCCMC).

44. Harrison's comments in Mancini and Hibbins, *Running with the Ball*, 118-9; Hammersley in *Sydney Mail*, August 25, 1883, 363–4; *Bell's Life in Victoria*, May 28, 1864, 2; *Bell's Life in Victoria*, June 4, 1864, 4, for an English perspective on the various rules as played in England.
45. *Australasian*, November 4, 1871, 587.
46. *Bell's Life in Victoria*, May 28, 1864, 2; *Bell's Life in Victoria*, June 4, 1864, 4; Macrory, *Running with the Ball*, 119, 154.
47. 'Theories of Football', *The New Rugbeian* 3, no. 8 (December 1861): 293–6, TRR; Arthur Butler, *The Three Friends: A Story of Rugby in the Forties* (London: Henry Frowde, 1900), 11.
48. *Bell's Life Victoria*, May 28, 1864, 2; *Bell's Life in Victoria*, June 4, 1864, 4; *Bell's Life in Victoria*, June 11, 1864, 4; James Thompson, *The Victorian Cricketer's Guide: Containing an Original Account of the Late Inter-Colonial Match* (Melbourne: Sands and Kenny, 1859), 135–9; James Thompson, ed., *The Victorian Cricketer's Guide: Containing an Original Account of the Late Inter-Colonial Match* (Melbourne: Sands, Kenny and Co., 1860), preface, 110–1; Thomas Wentworth Wills, ed., *The Australian Cricketers' Guide for 1870-71* (Melbourne: J. & A. McKinley, 1871), 114.
49. Melbourne 1859 rules, Melbourne Cricket Club; Pamphlets IV Rugby, 'The Origin of Rugby Football. Report of the Sub-Committee of the Old Rugbeian Society, Appointed in July, 1895 (A.J. Lawrence, printer to Rugby School), The Laws of Football as played at Rugby School sanctioned by a Levee of Bigside on the September 7, 1846, 28–32, TRR; Barry O'Dwyer, 'The Shaping of Victorian Rules Football' *Victorian Historical Journal* 60, no. 1 (1989): 27–41; Macrory, *Running with the Ball*, 86–90; Gillian Hibbins, 'The Cambridge Connection: The Origin of Australian Rules Football', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 6, no. 2 (1989): 172–92.
50. Robin Grow, 'From Gum Trees to Goalposts, 1858-1876', in *More Than a Game: An Unauthorised History of Australian Rules Football*, ed. Rob Hess and Bob Stewart (Carlton South: Melbourne University Press, 1998), 11; Geoffrey Blainey, *A Game of Our Own: The Origins of Australian Football* (Melbourne: Black Inc., 2003), 53, 63–4.
51. Hibbins, 'The Cambridge Connection', 176–81; Mancini and Hibbins, *Running with the Ball*, 27–30.
52. Catching the football and being awarded a kick was already noted in the Rugby School rules in the 1840s. Macrory makes reference to the importance of the mark at several points in her book. Macrory, *Running with the Ball*, 45, 86, 96–101, 114, 118, 151; O'Dwyer, 'The Shaping of Victorian Rules Football', 35; Blainey, *Game of Our Own*, 51, 64; Mancini and Hibbins, *Running with the Ball*, 30; Sandercock and Turner, *Up Where, Cazaly?*, 22.
53. For example, *Bell's Life in Victoria*, June 4, 1864, 4; Macrory, *Running with the Ball*, 100.
54. Macrory, *Running with the Ball*, 100; Melbourne 1860 rules, MCCMC.
55. Gavin Daws, 'The Origins of Australian Rules Football' (Honours diss., Melbourne University, 1954), 8–13; Grow, 'From Gum Trees to Goalposts', 7; Edmund Finn, *The Chronicles of Early Melbourne 1835-1852. Historical, Anecdotal and Personal, by 'Garryowen'*, vol. 2 (Melbourne: Fergusson and Mitchell, 1888), 747–8; Blainey, *A Game of Our Own*, 11–2; Susan Priestley, *South Melbourne: A History* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1995), 180–3.
56. Hammersley also cited 1857 as the beginning of a new form of football in Melbourne. See *Sydney Mail*, August 25, 1883, 363.
57. *Australasian*, February 26,1876, 269.
58. *Sydney Mail*, August 25, 1883, 363.
59. H.C.A. Harrison, cited in Mancini and Hibbins, *Running with the Ball*, 119.
60. *The Chronicle*, August 5, 1911, 19.
61. Thompson, *The Victorian Cricketer's Guide 1859*, 135–9.
62. Wills, *The Australian Cricketers' Guide for 1870-71*, 115. Thompson's support for the prohibition of lifting the ball is based on evidence in the *Argus*, June 4, 1860, 5; *Argus*, June 11, 1860, 5, as discussed in Mancini and Hibbins, *Running with the Ball*, 43.

63. Thompson, *The Victorian Cricketer's Guide 1860*, 110–1.
64. Wills, *The Australian Cricketers' Guide 1870-1871*, 114.
65. Letter from Tom Wills to Horace, undated, Wills Family Archive, private collection of Terry Wills Cooke.
66. *Bell's Life in Victoria*, July 7, 1860, 2.
67. James Coventry, *Time and Space: The Tactics that Shaped Australian Rules – and the Players and Coaches Who Mastered Them* (Sydney: HarperCollins, 2015), 6–7.
68. Wills, *The Australian Cricketers' Guide, 1874-75*, 93.
69. *Argus*, April 28, 1860, 5; Hibbins, 'The Cambridge Connection', 181.
70. *Argus*, May 14, 1860, 5. Macrory notes a similar debate in England concerning the shape of the ball. Macrory, *Running with the Ball*, 108–9.
71. *Argus*, September 17, 1860, 5. Regarding using an oval ball and the difficulties this caused in Melbourne versus Geelong, see, *Bell's Life in Victoria*, September 8, 1860, 2.
72. Even after the controversy between Wills and Thompson there are scattered references to a round ball as well as an oval ball, see Nicholson, Stewart, de Moore, and Hess, *Australia's Game*, 46.
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78. de Moore, *Tom Wills*, ix-xi, 301–11, 347–50.
79. *Argus*, April 18, 1865, 5.
80. *The Leader*, May 13, 1865, 3; *Bell's Life Victoria*, May 13, 1865, 2.
81. The Rugby School rules designated 10 feet.
82. Recollections of George Glencross-Smith, a friend of Tom Wills, in Nicholson, Stewart, de Moore, and Hess, *Australia's Game*, 55–6. For a different perspective, see Roy Hay, 'Cec Mullen, Tom Wills and the Search for Early Geelong Football', *The Yorker* 42 (2010): 3–5.
83. Murray Bird, *Athenians and Red Invincibles: The Origins of Queensland Football* (Morningside Queensland: Sports Publishing, 2015), 20–3; Murray Bird and Greg Parker,

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85. *Geelong Advertiser*, September 6, 1875, 3.
86. *The Leader*, June 15, 1878, 13.
87. *The Sporting Globe*, May 16, 1931, 6.
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