

Melbourne, Australia

Sunday 18th October

Letter from Australia

The coronavirus has made us all reflect on many aspects of our lives over the last 8 months, and for me the importance of connecting with friends, family and indeed, total strangers, has taken on extra meaning. You may have read that Melbourne and Victoria has been particularly hard hit in Australia, and over the last couple of months those connections have been largely restricted to households or daily walks in just pairs, or interminable zoom meetings or the like. For me personally, I've gone back to letter writing and mainly to people in the UK.

Where's this leading I hear you ask. Well, I was back in touch with my good friend **Nick Burnett** recently. Putting you in the picture – Nick and I go back to Leicestershire schools hockey days in the early 70's. After leaving school, I moved up to the North-West and stayed there until my escape down under. Hockey wise, I played at Liverpool Hightown, Knutsford briefly, Winnington Park and then on the way back from a festival in the Isle of Man I was set upon by messrs **Stevie Powell and Andy Foster** - I think we might have played a game against each other in the festival. Following a few more beers on the boat back to Liverpool (as if we needed anymore!) Stevie and Fozzy persuaded me that I should come and play at Timperley – at no point following that exchange did I regret the decision to move to the fine fields of Moss Lane. I joined Timperley in the early 80's and played mainly in the 1st team and was fortunate to be captain in the centenary year of 1986.

Moving on to my leaving of the club. I was invited to a function at the old shed in the summer of 1995 and there I was presented with a tankard and good wishes before my move to Australia. On reflection, I wish I had taken the time to gather a few more friends and players, past and present, to that function to let them know what a fantastic time I had had at Timperley. You might think that coming to Australia would have been the perfect opportunity to continue my playing career but to be perfectly honest the actual playing of the game was always a bit of a side salad for me. I've never had that competitive edge and drive which I saw all around me as I played. In fact, **John Wood** once said to me that I gave him the impression I could 'take it or leave it'. Don't get me wrong, I always wanted to win but in a way John had a point. My memories from those 12/13 years are all about the connections I made. Timperley families, the **Woods, the Ryders, the Entwistles**, all graced the old shed of the north with their friendships and their passions to hockey and all that Timperley stood for. Beyond the many players I befriended, club stalwarts were always there and so dependable in their commitment to the ethos of the club – **John Plant, Stan Johnson, Ken Walker** and even **Fred Wych**, who would often come along to cheer on his son **John** and the 1st team, are some of the names I remember from back then. Needless to say, the time spent at the bar with team-mates, umpires, opponents, was something I always enjoyed. And once the numbers had thinned out a bit in the front bar, and if you were brave enough, you could always venture into the back bar and continue the revelries with the ladies section. The fact that so many of the lady players still catch up on a regular basis throughout the year, though this time on various golf courses, is testament to the amazing connections made through Timperley sports club. Then at the end of the season, my favourite time of the year came along – Easter hockey festivals. You'll understand that what happens on tour stays on tour, but suffice to say that the Weymouth festival in particular holds many happy memories for me.

As far as connections are concerned, over the years I've kept in touch with many people I met through hockey. More recently, I've got back in touch with 'old' **Chris Ryder** following the tragic loss of young Chris, and then **Tim Reeve**, a close friend of Chris's, who now lives in Brisbane. How sad I was when I was back in touch with Tim again, as well as Nick Burnett and Fozzy, following the similarly tragic loss of **Pat Marston**, a bloke whose friendship to many so typified the nature and ethos of the club.

If this all smacks of sentimentality, that is exactly my intention. The tear in my eye is down to all the connections I made at the club back then and, whilst I've never regretted moving to Australia, I naturally miss all the friends I made and once the world returns to some kind of normality, **Timperley Sports Club** will be top of my list to visit on my next trip to the UK. And if you are reading this, I hope you did enjoy or are now enjoying the club much as I did – keep up those connections, re-connect with those lost, firm up those already made and make some new ones, you'll never regret it!

Alastair Rice