

CHARLES LAWRENCE

1828–1916

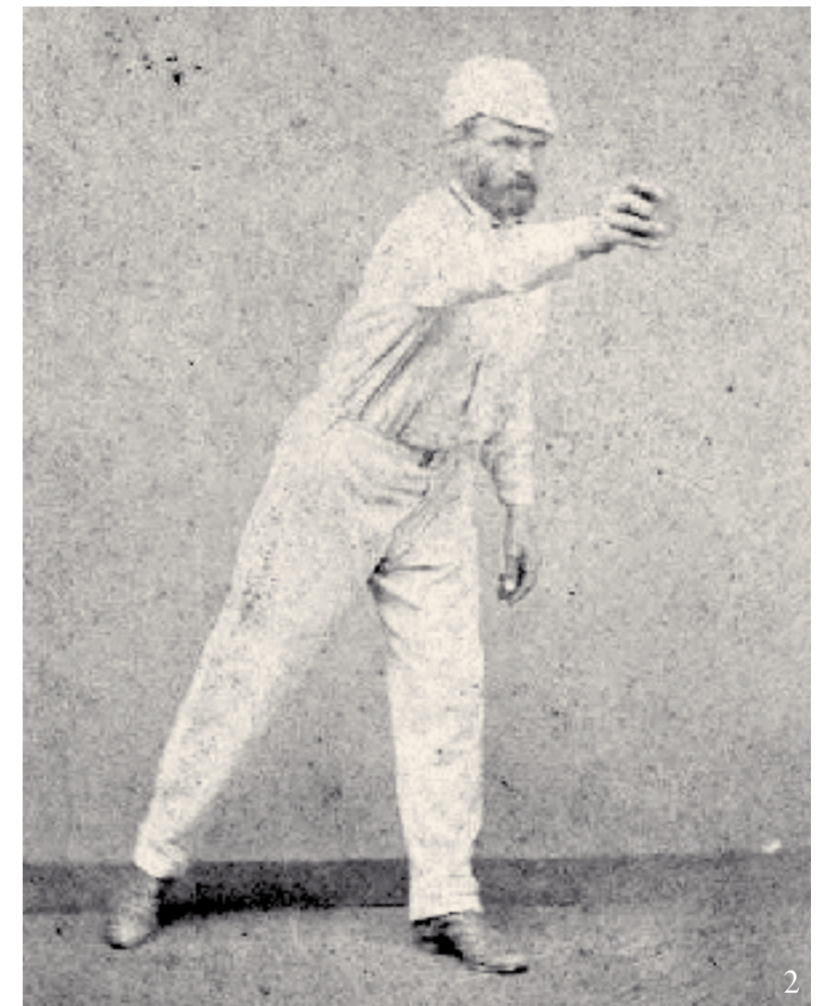


In addition to being described as the person most deserving of the title 'Father of Australian Cricket', Charles Lawrence can also lay claim to the title 'Father of Irish Cricket'.

In the centre of the photograph of the Irish XI that played against Birkenhead Park in Phoenix in 1858 stands Charles Lawrence, with black coat and beard. Lawrence was a cricket entrepreneur who had played for Surrey and Middlesex, and was responsible for setting up an All Ireland XI in 1855. From 1851 he was employed as the club pro by Phoenix, where he organised visits to the Park by major English clubs. He was a round-arm fast bowler who often reverted to underarm lobs later in an innings. As a young boy his models and heroes in London were the legendary Alfred Mynn and Fuller Pilch. His first job as a cricket pro was in Scotland at the Perth club. In 1849 he took all ten wickets, including Mynn's, for Scotland against the wandering professional All England XI. This team was organised by William Clarke, the founder of Nottinghamshire's home, Trent Bridge, and who was a driving force for professional cricket. It was Clarke who recommended Lawrence for the job in Phoenix.

Lawrence also became coach for Viceroy Carlisle; in 1855, he set up the new ground at the Viceregal Lodge and organised matches there as well as in Phoenix. In 1858 the Gentlemen of Ireland played the MCC at Lords, winning by an innings. Lawrence took 12 for 57 in the match. After ten years at Phoenix he toured Australia with HH Stephenson's team, which was the first touring side to travel there. He stayed on as pro to the Albert club in Sydney, which was the first home of the New South Wales Cricket Association. He returned to the UK in 1868 as captain, coach and manager of the first Australian side to tour which was made up of Aborigines.

From rubbing shoulders with the aristocracy in the Viceregal Lodge to travelling around the outback in Western Victoria, organising and coaching native Australians (who were sadly mistreated by colonials and their political leaders) Lawrence's adventures make a stirring story. He took part in 40 of the 47 matches played on that famous tour and became widely respected and trusted by the players. The *Daily Telegraph*, in unfortunate mid-19th-century colonial parlance, reported that although 'all are as black as night, these Indian fellows are to all intents and purposes clothed and in their right minds.' Twenty thousand spectators turned up at the Oval to see them play, including the twenty-year-old WG Grace. Lawrence encouraged his team to demonstrate Aboriginal skills after every match and this proved hugely popular and profitable. He played his last match at the age of seventy and was a superb pro, manager and organiser. Melbourne and the Melbourne Cricket Club (MCG) became his home and workplace, and he is described by Australian cricket historian and test player Ashley Mallett as the person most deserving of the title 'Father of Australian Cricket'. He can also lay claim to the title 'Father of Irish Cricket'.



1. The Irish XI that played against Birkenhead Park in Phoenix in 1858. Picture includes Charles Lawrence and Arthur Samuels.
2. Phoenix Club pro Charles Lawrence (State Library of NSW).
3. Lawrence's team of Aboriginal cricketers with Lawrence and William Shepherd, who helped manage and umpire the XI, on tour in Swansea, 1868 (State Library of NSW).