

W.P. Howell – A Champion Spinner

William Peter Howell was known in cricket circles as ‘*Old Bill*’ to distinguish him from his son William Hunter Howell ‘*Young Bill*’ who also played for Cumberland and NSW – by coincidence the son was also a right-hand off-spinner and hard-hitting left-handed batsman. ‘*Old Bill*’ was born at Penrith on the 29th of December 1869 and died at Castlereagh on the 14th of July 1940.

A man of the land he had a farming property at Castlereagh where he concentrated on commercial Apriary and by the 1930s, he had 127 Bee hives in production. A strong, genial man of raw-boned build and massive hands, Bill learnt to bowl on the matting covered concrete wickets of the Hawkesbury district.



His playing career with Central Cumberland started in **1895/96** and extended to **1906/07** – although increased rheumatic trouble disrupted his appearances after 1900.

For the Parramatta domiciled club Bill’s career statistics were:

885 runs @ 15.00 (H.S. 63) and **223 wickets @ 18.67**.

Prior to entering the Sydney grade competition with Cumberland, his first major cricketing opportunity came in 1892 when he played for twenty-three of Nepean District against Lord Sheffield’s English team at Penrith - he snared 5/51 with his brisk off-breaks.

In 1894/95 a hectic burst of run-getting with Western Districts in the annual Country Carnival impressed the NSW State selectors, who saw him as a possible successor to the former International H.H. Massie, a renowned big hitter, and he won selection in the NSW team to play England. In a strange quirk of fate, Howell’s cricketing destiny was to change, and a future

international career materialise because of it. The Englishmen completely dominated the regular NSW bowlers (including the famous C.T.B ‘The Terror’ Turner) and in desperation the captain tossed Bill the ball, and he responded by clean bowling five batsmen to finish with the figures of **5/44**. He then morphed into a regular State bowler.

He became Cumberland’s **second Test** representative during the **1897/98** summer. Gaining the selector’s nod for the Adelaide Test after an impressive bowling effort on the same ground for NSW against South Australia – he made a very sound debut, opening the bowling with his brand of buzzing off-breaks to claim 4/74.

Following his Test debut, he played in the return NSW v. England tour match at the S.C.G. and produced batting fireworks. In the first innings he made 48 but later strained a muscle in the field and in the second dig he limped to the wicket with the immortal Victor Trumper as his runner – not much running was needed as the powerful left-hander unloaded on the English attack smashing 95 runs in 63 minutes.

His Test career comprised 18 matches between 1897/98 and 1904/05 – **49 wickets @ 28.91** (B.B. **5/81**), **158 runs @ 7.52** (H.S. 35). During that time, he made three tours to England – 1899 in which he took 117 wickets @ 20.35, 1902 taking 68 wickets @ 17.86 and 1905 he gathered 79 wickets @ 19.34. The undoubted highlight of his English tours took place in 1899, in his first bowl on English soil against Surrey at the Oval he sent the Australian Press and cricket fans into raptures when he proceeded to capture the whole ten of Surrey's first innings wickets (**10/28**). He later built a house and named it Surrey in honour of his bowling feat, and in the Surrey game he snared **5/29** in the second innings – **15/57** not a bad match.

On the return trip to Australia the 1902 team visited South Africa for a six-match tour, including three Tests. In the 3rd Test '*Old Bill*' was devastating claiming 4/18 in the 1st innings (including 3 wickets in 4 balls) and in the 2nd innings he grabbed **5/51** (including 3 wickets in 5 balls). The matches were played on matting wickets, and his early Hawkesbury training came to the fore. In the only non-Test eleven aside match, against Western Province he produced an amazing performance taking **8/31** and **9/23** including a **hat-trick** and to boot he made 57 not out – in five tour matches he captured **48 wickets @ 9.64**.

In his total first-class career, he captured **519 wickets @ 21.49** (B.B. **10/28**), scored 2,227 runs @ 14.84 (H.S. **128**) and accepted 126 catches. His 36 Sheffield Shield matches for NSW yielded 1,029 runs @ 22.86 and 159 wickets @ 19.05 – the greatest highlights being **9/52** v. Victoria in 1902/03 and **128** runs against South Australia in 1904/05 adding **221 runs** for the **9th wicket** with Rev. E.F. Waddy (who started with Cumberland in 1907).

For Central Cumberland Bill Howell was a bowling star, ever popular with teammates and the local Parramatta public from the moment he kicked his club career off in 1895/96 by taking **6/73**, **6/67** and **5/57** in his first three matches in the '*Bumble-Bee*' – ending the season with an impressive 32 wickets @ 15.71.

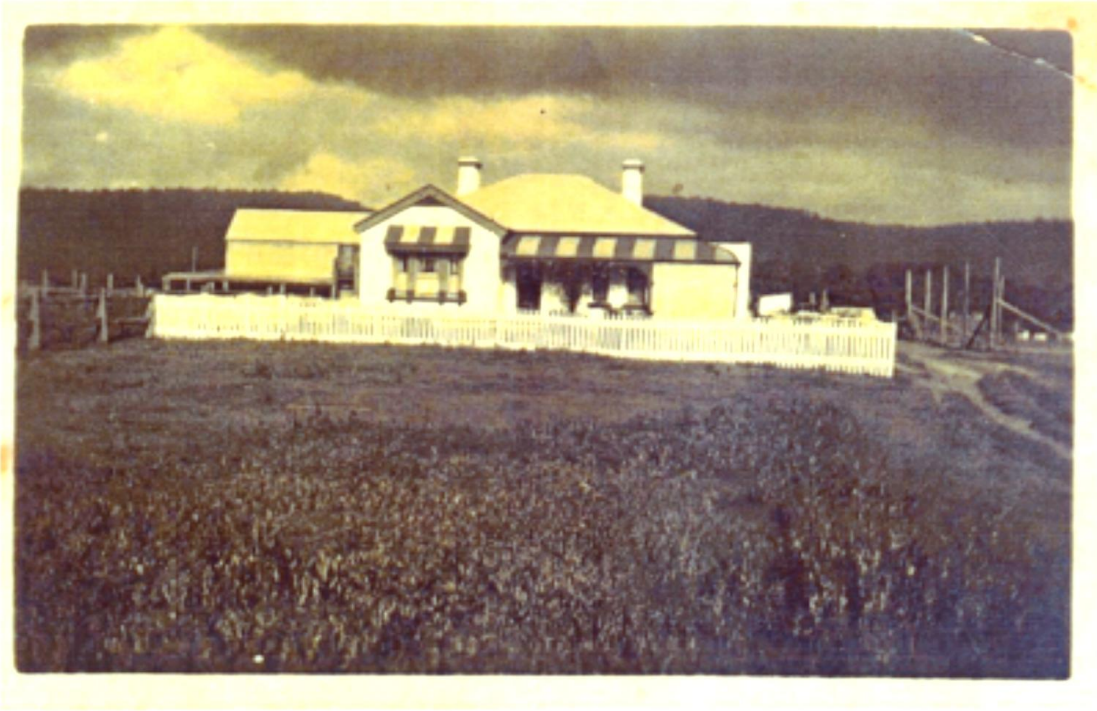
W.P. Howell's greatest contribution to the Cumberland club came in 1899/00 when he spearheaded the bowling attack to drive the team to win its initial **1st Grade Premiership** – W.P.H. was in his prime, capturing **33 wickets @ 9.54**. This wonderful bowler delivered many great performances for the club over the years, but his other standout efforts were – **46 wickets @ 11.58** in 1900/01, the highest tally in the whole competition and **43 wickets @ 18.74** in 1896/97.

In a 1900/01 in a match against North Sydney the wily spinner performed the very rare deed of claiming a double hat-trick (**4 in 4 balls**) when he clean-bowled the last four of the North's batting line-up.

The Nepean Bee Farmer wasn't just a prolific wicket-taker, he also harvested a family of eight children, three of whom went on to become 1st grade players for Cumberland and all secured large hauls of wickets. William Hunter '*Young Bill*' and Norman followed their father's trade of off-spin whilst big burly Arthur was a fast bowler. Howell senior was also possessed of a keen interest in Trotters and kept a few horses – ironically his best being named '*Leg-break*'.

After the passing of all the years since his playing days Bill's memory is kept alive by Howell Oval (modern day home ground of the Penrith District Cricket Club) that was named in his honour in 1956, and in the relatively new suburb of Glenmore Park there is the William Howell Drive.

The picture below is Bill Howell's home that was named Surrey in honour of his wonderful bowling performance against the Surrey County team in 1899.



SURREY – Castlereagh Rd Castlereagh

Home of William Peter and Neva Howell

Built 1900 - Demolished 1999

Named in honour of WP's bowling feat of 10 for 28 at SURREY in England 1899

[By Tom Wood – Parramatta District Cricket Club Historian]