



My favourite album



IT will be no surprise that committed crooner Bill Bennett, from Cyma, Neath, cites a compilation of the swing and easy listening greats as his My Favourite Album.

"I am going to go for The Best Album In The World — Ever, which is a compilation of some of my favourite singers, like Dino, Frank Sinatra, Tony Bennett, Matt Monro and Dusty Springfield.

"I love the singers from that era, because they are the singers I grew up with, and their songs are so enduring.

"Frank Sinatra said a great song is poetry set to music, and I think the songs from that era last because they are such wonderful stories.

"We don't really have a hit parade anymore, and I think the idea of the song which has a great story to it has been lost.

"Of course all of those singers have influenced me.

"Before I worked as a singer I used to be a Golden Greeter at Asda and I would be there with the mic telling shoppers about the special offers.

"I would sing happy birthday, if it was someone's birthday, in the Dean Martin style, until I was approached by a colleague to do a few songs at an event in Bonymaen.

"Now I have been singing for nine years at places like Swansea's Grand Theatre and in residential homes, and have my first booking at Pontardawe Arts Centre this year."

● Have you got a favourite album? Tell us why by contacting kate.clarke@swvmedia.co.uk

Where is this?



● IT is an eye-catcher which helps draw them in.

The clock tower stands as a calling card to Carmarthen Indoor Market which was opened in March 2009 by Princess Anne as the first stage of the St Catherine's Walk Shopping Centre, itself launched a year later.

The modern market hall replaced the original market which stood at the other side of the clock tower and gave way to the new development.

Balconiers keeping a cricket tradition alive

CHRIS Peregrine

"IT'S the cricket ground as much as the game which gives cricket its character."

Richard Bentley was not just talking about St Helen's, he was writing about it.

And writing about it with affection, the same sentiment felt by so many down the years towards a Swansea sporting stronghold that refuses to declare despite the harsh realities of the professional game in 2012.

That year on the calendar is the reason Richard committed those thoughts to print, the 40th anniversary of a society dedicated to supporting Glamorgan cricket and ensuring that the St Helen's innings continues for as long as possible.

It was Monday, August 28, 1972, that the St Helen's Balconiers' one began in recognition of a record first wicket stand of 330 between West Indian Roy Fredericks (228 not out) and local boy Alan Jones (105 not out).

So moved were some of the hardcore Glamorgan supporters that they took collection buckets around the ground and raised £109 for Jones, who was in his benefit season.

It was only a taste of the support to come over the next four decades, and counting. And once they had sorted out a name for themselves, taking their original favoured viewing spot — a long balcony in the pavilion — into the equation, it was game on.

And so to Richard, a Mumbles man but whose work in education took him to Worcestershire, and his contribution to the story.

He has compiled a celebration of the ground and the four decades of Balconiers' service in a collection of cricketing extracts, St Helen's — An atmosphere of its own.

Luck can play a part in the game itself, and so it did as far as his involvement was concerned.

About six years ago John Williams, the unstopable chairman of the Balconiers and former Swansea newsgagent, was watching Glamorgan play Worcestershire at New Road when something took his attention.

"We were in Worcester and I saw this man reading a copy of the Evening Post," he said.

Curious at the apparent extension of the Post's circulation area into the Midlands, John struck up a conversation with the reader to discover he was a Swansea exile. One thing led to another and the part-time consultant in educational television and author found himself agreeing to put the book together.

And Wednesday will see it launched officially, appropriately outside Fred's Bar in St Helen's at the start of the



CHAPTERS FROM HISTORY John Williams, left, chairman of St Helen's Balconiers, is presented with St Helen's — An atmosphere of its own, by Richard Bentley who compiled the book in celebration of the ground and the 40th anniversary of the Balconiers.

SWAD20120724C-001_C

Swansea and West Wales Cricket Festival.

"I had been reading a few cricket books, biographies and autobiographies, from players from other counties and they all seemed to mention St Helen's," said Richard.

"There was Arthur Milton who talked about at the end of the day the players sitting on top of the old pavilion and talking to the Glamorgan players. It was so much part of the atmosphere at the time."

Away in the distance but not too far, was Swansea Bay. St Helen's, in sight of the sea, was different to the rest.

Richard, who watched Glamorgan for the first time play there against South Africa on August Bank Holiday Saturday, July 30, 1955, was himself bitten by the bug.

"I just loved it," he said of his 'debut' at the age of 11.

And he was more than happy to take up the challenge of this celebratory publication. In it the spiritual home of

Welsh cricket is fondly remembered, with extracts from the likes of Glamorgan greats like Tony Lewis, Peter Walker, Wilf Wooller and Don Shepherd and visitors like Gary Sobers and John Arlott, the former who spoke with his bat on one memorable occasion and the latter who was simply a wordsmith.

Everyone Richard approached, publishers, families of those deceased, readily agreed to help.

"No one said no," he said. "It shows the genuine affection for St Helen's, the spirit of the place and the spirit of the Balconiers."

"I very much admire the work of the Balconiers over the last 40 years and the work that John Williams and his committee continue to do to support Glamorgan cricket. They are such a dedicated group. St Helen's is such a special place and it was great for me to be able to make a contribution from a distance."

John, preparing to front another festival, said: "I am delighted with it. It

pushes up the bar of our society."

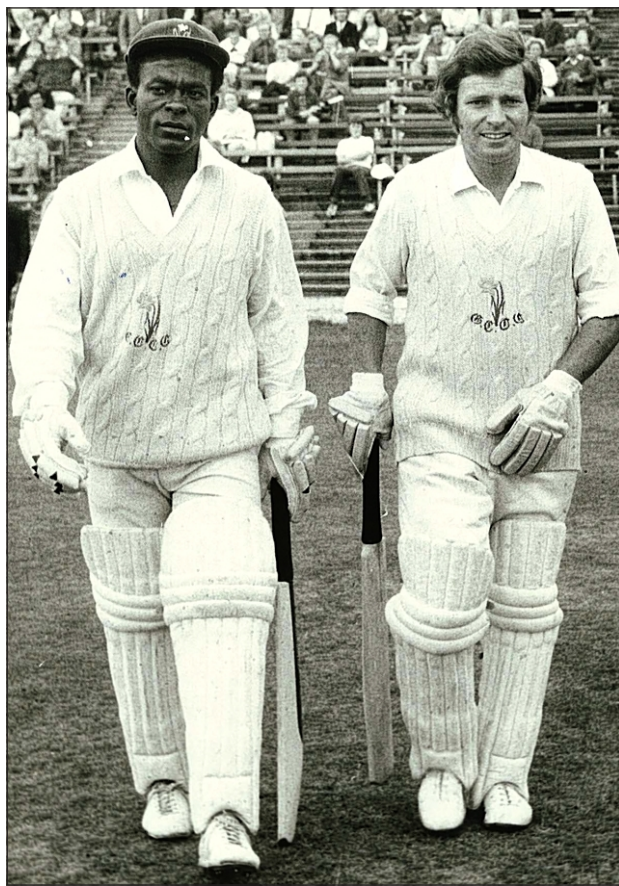
Richard, in his introduction, recalled as a young lad enjoying warm cheese and cucumber sandwiches there, dandelion and burdock pop and melting ice cream from the van.

"I remember the shout of white-coated scorecard sellers," he said. "The newly-printed card. The responsibility of entering the wickets (in best writing of course)

"I remember the crack of the ball on bat. The pounding feet of the boundary fielders. The speed of the ball."

"In short, I remember falling in love with cricket — and with St Helen's."

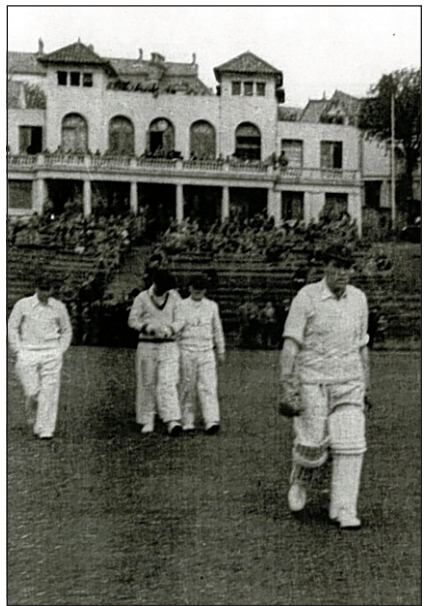
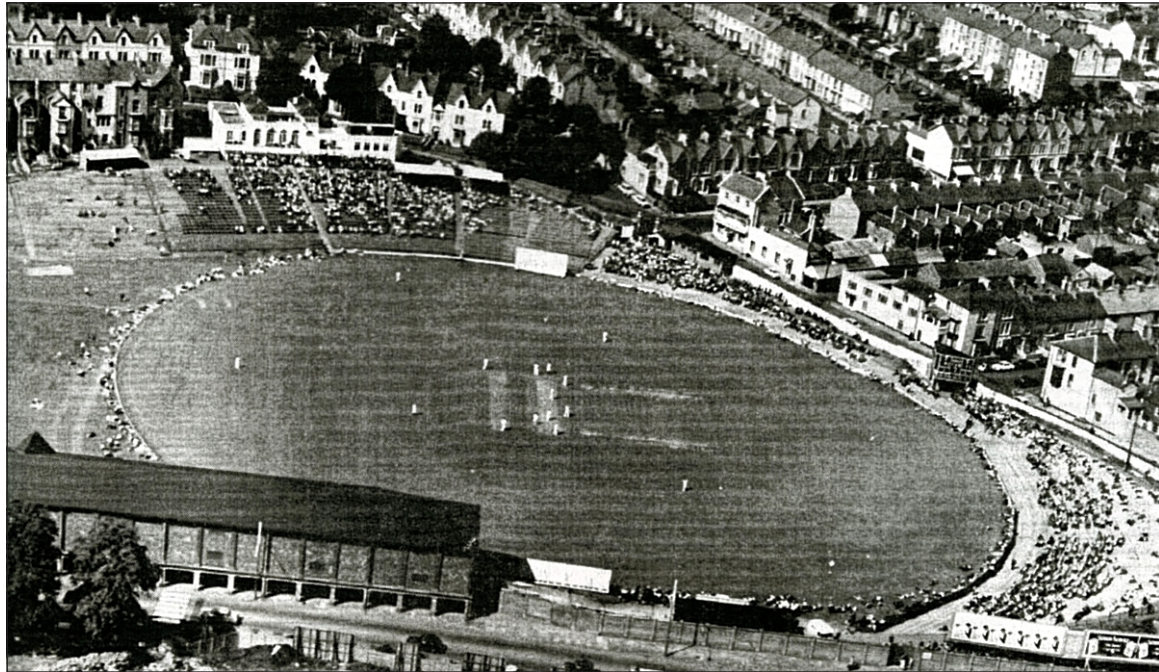
● **St Helen's - An atmosphere of its own, compiled by Richard Bentley and costing a minimum £5 donation to the Balconiers' campaign to ensure first class cricket survives at St Helen's, will be launched during Glamorgan's LV= County Championship Division Two match against Gloucestershire starting on Wednesday.**



STAR BATSMEN Roy Fredericks and Alan Jones, whose record opening partnership inspired the Balconiers, and, below, an aerial shot of St Helen's.



CRICKET HEROES Don Shepherd in his benefit match against Hampshire at St Helen's in August 1960, being congratulated by Wilf Wooller.



FAMOUS GROUND Glamorgan come out to field at St Helen's.

FORMER Sussex captain and president of Marylebone Cricket Club John Barclay recalls his County Championship debut at St Helen's while a schoolboy.

"At the fall of the eighth wicket I jumped up from my seat like a jack-in-a-box and fought my way through a throng of noisy Welsh supporters. 'See you in a minute' and 'Don't be long', one or two shouted as I began to descend the long flight of steps which would lead onto the field of play.

By now, with all the Glamorgan

fielders staring at me, my composure and routine for handling tension had completely gone out of the window and I was in a blind panic. 'Middle and leg please', I said to the umpire and carefully marked my guard.

The fielders were clustered around tightly, hemming me in like predators going for the kill. It was a frightening baptism.

As if things weren't bad enough Eifion Jones, the wicket keeper, began to talk loudly in Welsh to the surrounding fielders, an unnerving tactic which completely put the wind up me, as was doubtless the intention.

Malcolm Nash, left-arm over the

wicket, prepared to bowl. He hadn't seemed all that fast when I was watching earlier, but now the ordeal was terrifying.

He ran in unathletically and fizzed the first ball down the leg side harmlessly enough.

I had at least survived one ball and felt reassured and marginally more confident.

The second ball, though, was of fuller length and swung back at me late as I pushed forward.

It struck me on the pad and was greeted by a huge appeal. The umpire, Hugo Yarnold, raised his finger unsympathetically, and my first championship innings was over. I had yet to hit a ball."

How much? ... in 2004



IT is meant to be one of the happiest days of your life...

But the 'happy couple' will not be the only ones smiling, those who supply all the elements of the big day will have cause for celebration as well.

The cost of weddings, like most things, is only going one way — up.

In 2004 the average was £16,000 and this year that figure is expected to be around £20,248.



Now... ...and then



● The George pub formerly known as the George Hotel in Mumbles.

IT is still unmistakably Mumbles to those who like a wander down the promenade there.

The old picture shows the seafront in 1903, with much of today's walkway taken up by the line serving the much-lamented Mumbles Railway.

Across the road tucked in the corner, as now, is The George, known then as The George Hotel. Today that part of Swansea is still a magnet for people taking a stroll along the front.

● The archive picture is from Swansea — Simply The Best! by David Roberts.

● Have you got old photos of the area you live in? We would love to see them and take an up-to-date picture of the area. Send them to Features Desk, South Wales Evening Post, Adelaide Street, Swansea, SA1 1QT.