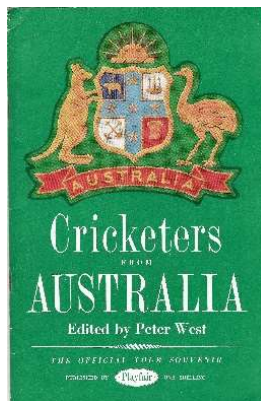


70 years ago the 21<sup>st</sup> Australians visited St Helen's.

As Richard Bentley recalls, it was a match that saw beguiling spin, aggressive stroke-making and dogged defence.

The 1953 Australian tourists were led at Swansea by their vice-captain and experienced left-handed opening batsman Arthur Morris, a veteran of several Australian Test sides including Bradman's 'Invincibles' in 1948 when he had topped the visitors' averages.



To the natural disappointment of the large Bank Holiday crowd at St Helen's, Lindsay Hassett – captain of the touring side – was rested along with several other survivors of the 1948 side, including Keith Miller, Ray Lindwall and keeper Don Tallon. But their absence was understandable as the hard-fought 'Coronation series' with England, combined with the long, hot summer of county fixtures, had been demanding. Added to this, the first four Tests had been drawn, and the fifth and deciding Test at the Oval was only two weeks away.

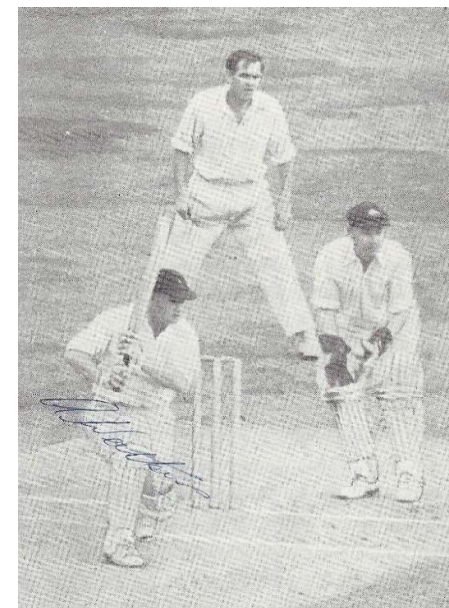
Despite the missing players, the Australian team to face Glamorgan was a strong one with several other survivors of 1948 side – Morris himself, Bill Johnston and Neil Harvey, together with experienced wicket-keeper Gil Langley – playing alongside some very talented younger players on their first Ashes tour – like Richie Benaud, James de Courcy and 17-year-old Ian Craig – all eager to impress and show form ahead of the eleven for the final Test being named.



I-r: Bill Johnston, Neil Harvey, Gil Langley

### The worst of starts

Umpire Dai Davies must have been mortified to see the first two Glamorgan wickets – those of Emrys Davies and Phil Clift – fall without a run on the board after Wilf Wooller had won the toss and elected to bat on what he later described as 'a perfect wicket'. But the home side recovered well with useful knocks from Gilbert Parkhouse, Willie Jones and Wilf Wooller to post 201 all out. However, the undoubted batting highlight of Glamorgan's first innings was a splendid fighting 76 from Allan



Allan Watkins batting against Australia at St Helen's 1953

Watkins who, during the previous Australian tour five years earlier, had enjoyed the distinction of being the first Glamorgan player ever to appear in an Ashes contest.

The bowling highlight was the 27-over stint from veteran left-armer Bill Johnson, returning from a knee injury and demonstrating his fitness by taking six Glamorgan wickets for 63 bowling in his fast-medium style (he was also a very effective exponent of spin). Richie Benaud's only success on this occasion was the wicket of Haydn Davies.

#### Harvey takes control



But it was Australia's first innings that produced the real heroics on both sides. After Arthur Morris and Colin McDonald got the visitors off to a solid start, with skipper Morris scoring 48 at better than a run a minute, the stylish left-hander Neil Harvey, batting at number 3, took centre stage and stroked his way to a match-changing 180 before being caught off the spin of Willie Jones. Incredibly, 132 of Harvey's runs came in the two hours before lunch on the second day, and 130 were in boundaries! He batted for only two and three-quarter action-packed hours.

It was a memorable knock by an outstanding batsman. Perhaps unsurprisingly, when the visitors arrived in Swansea, Harvey had already become Australia's most successful batsman on the tour. He had scored eight first-class centuries including one in the previous game against Surrey and another in the third Test, and he was well on the way to what would be

his final tally of over 2,000 runs on tour. At St Helen's, Harvey was well supported by a half-century from Ian Craig as Australia took a substantial first innings lead of 185.

#### McConnon spins Glamorgan back

For Glamorgan, the heroics came from off-spinner Jim McConnon, who always seemed to enjoy the challenge of bowling against touring sides. He took 7 for 165 in a mammoth 35 over bowling stint, including the notable wickets of Morris, McDonald, de Courcey, Craig, Benaud and Gil Langley. This outstanding performance put him very much in line for international selection, though it would be the following season before he would win the first of his England caps against Pakistan.



*I-r: Wilf Wooller, Jim McConnon, Haydn Davies and Gilbert Parkhouse taking the field at Swansea*

Glamorgan's second innings started even more disastrously than the first, and by close of play Davidson and Benaud had reduced them to an embarrassing 32 for 6, still 152 behind and with the first six on the scorecard – Emrys Davies, Gilbert Parkhouse, Phil Clift, Willie Jones, Allan Watkins and Jim Pleass – all back in the pavilion. The cause seemed lost. But rain offered a slight glimmer of hope, delaying the start on the third and final day until 1.45. Nevertheless, a challenging afternoon lay ahead.

### Wilf Wooller to the rescue



But not for the only time, Wilf Wooller came to his side's rescue! The Glamorgan captain, always the right man in a backs-to-the-wall situation, and ably supported by Len Muncer, defied the Australian attack. The seventh wicket pair resisted everything that was thrown at them, staying at the crease for what must have seemed a very long three-and-a-half hours. The Swansea crowd enjoyed and appreciated their fighting spirit and fierce determination not to be beaten. A tired Muncer was run out near the end for 50, but when umpires Dai Davies and Laurie Gray eventually called 'time' Glamorgan were 188 for 7 off 87 overs and, to the delight of the cheering spectators, had achieved a most unlikely draw. It almost felt like a win, but that would have to wait for another day and another Australian visit to St Helen's!

When Wilf Wooller shook Morris's hand at the end of his dogged rear-guard innings he had a hard-fought 71 not out against his name. And, as always, he had relished every minute of it!

For the record, two weeks later it was England who went on to win the fifth and final test at the Oval. After fairly even first innings performances, Australia were bowled out cheaply by the spin of Lock and Laker the second time they batted, and England were victorious by 8 wickets.

It was the tourists' only loss of their very successful 'Coronation Tour'.