



John Harms displays the Baggy Green Cap during the conversation with Gideon Haigh.
Photo: Damien Macdonald, National Museum of Australia

SYMBOLS OF AUSTRALIA

Gideon Haigh on the Baggy Green Cap

On Sunday 20 June cricket historian, journalist and club cricketer, Gideon Haigh, joined sports writer and historian John Harms in a very popular public conversation in Visions Theatre. Two days later he talked with *Friends* magazine editor Roslyn Russell in the Friends Lounge about the origin of the Baggy Green Cap and its recent adoption as a symbol of Australia.

While Australian cricket players have played in green caps since the turn of the twentieth century, their symbolic value is of more recent coinage, and dates from the mid-1990s, Gideon said. Leading Australian cricketers Mark Taylor and Steve Waugh were extremely emotionally attached to the green cap, and both played key roles in positioning it as the embodiment of Australian cricket values and expectations in that period. It also became a symbol of Australian cricket's success.

This was not always the case – Australian cricketers did not always play in caps, and they were not always green. In the pre-Federation period the Australian cricket team played in a variety of colours and raiments – red, black and yellow, and in the 1880s navy blue, with some gold braid. A picture of Fred Spofforth in the National Portrait Gallery shows him in a blazer of azure blue and white stripes and a brimless cap. Colours and uniforms generally represented the body that had helped to put the team together, for example, some teams played in the red, white and blue blazers and caps of the Melbourne Cricket Club (MCC).

There is no hard evidence, in Gideon's view, as to why Australian cricket turned to green as the national cricket colour, but it may have originated with the Australasian Cricket Council that adopted the old 'unofficial' Advance Australia crest as its emblem. The Australasian Cricket Council breathed its last in 1899, and the MCC took over the next tour of a national team.

The idea grew that the national uniform should be different to that of the MCC: a sage green uniform had been suggested in 1895, to place some distance between the national cricket team and the MCC. After federation there was a movement to form a representative body for Australian cricket, as the realisation had grown that, in order to survive, the team had to be stripped of financial control of cricket tours. Two administrators from NSW and Victoria created the Australian Board of Control of international cricket in 1905. The effect of this was to marginalise the MCC: Gideon has written about this in his book, *Inside Story: Unlocking Australian Cricket's Archives* (with David Frith).

The uniform was formalised, with a crest formed of a recent version of a coat of arms with 'Advance Australia' underneath. This changed to the official version in 1912, but the crest on the Australian cap did not. It retained the previous coat of arms – it was a hybrid, Australian cricket's own.

This hybridity created a problem for administrators, as the crest was difficult to control or trademark. It was not until 1998 that the Australian Cricket Board was able to

do anything to protect its imagery. During John Howard's time as prime minister, Australian cricket became more interested in its intellectual property. A Coopers Brewing ad that showed stubbies of beer wearing baggy green caps instead of lids caused consternation, but nothing could be done about it as the Board did not hold copyright on the cap. The Board actually considered shelving the baggy green and creating a new cap that they could copyright and control. Traditionalists on the Board and among the players wanted to retain the baggy green, and it was copyrighted with Howard's help.

Gideon remarked that 'An awful lot is assumed in Australian cricket,' owing to the tradition of honorary administrators. They do not report to company boards, they are custodians of the game rather than people acting on the principles of profit maximisation. Up until ten years ago players appeared in advertisements wearing caps, promoting all manner of things. This doesn't happen any more, unless they are representing the Australian team or one of its sponsors.

I asked Gideon about the recent focus on the baggy green cap, by contrast with earlier periods in Australia's cricketing history. While there is a very recognisable image of Don Bradman wearing a baggy green cap in the *Symbols of Australia* book, as Gideon remarked, 'it didn't have much traction for Bradman – he gave all his caps away, so did Ian Chappell and Richie Benaud'.

Gideon continued, 'For the players of the 1950s and '60s the cap was nice but just a piece of equipment. Some players thought the cap was a bit unfashionable – it looks a bit anachronistic.' At that time there wasn't any particular control over its distribution – whenever a player wanted a cap he could get one. Ken Eastwood played one Test match and got two caps, as the first one didn't fit.

'Was a bat a more potent symbol for many players?,' was my next question to Gideon. He agreed that this could have been so for players in the past, but things have changed. Players these days don't have same sentimental attachment to

*Gideon Haigh and John Harms talk about the Baggy Green Cap in Visions Theatre.
Photo: Damien Macdonald, National Museum of Australia*



specific bats, as they now use a lot of bats. Greg Chappell's bat in the Museum's *Australian Journeys* gallery lasted two or three years, but this would not happen now.

About ten years ago, Gideon said, bat manufacturers stopped pressing bats – if the layers were not pressed together the ball came off the centre with a spring. A cricketer may play three tests and toss them away, as they are less durable than bats of earlier times. Gideon thinks that there is now less sentimental attachment by a cricketer for a particular bat; maybe this explains the move to the cap as an enduring symbol of Australian cricketing excellence?

'Certain players have had a strong bond with their caps – any player develops an attachment to items of gear in which they have experienced success,' Gideon said. Victor Trumper, for example, had a strong attachment to his cap and never played without it. Steve Waugh is very superstitious player with a similar mindset to Trumper. He always carries a red rag, protects ladybirds he finds on the field – Gideon called him 'a stoical cricketer with a superstitious side'. If any individual cricketer is responsible for the baggy green cap's status as a national symbol, it is Steve Waugh, in Gideon's view.

A tradition began around the time of the millennium that Australian cricketers wear the baggy green cap in the first session of a Test match. Even Shane Warne, who doesn't usually wear headgear, wore one when required. What has not changed from its earliest years is entitlement to a baggy green cap – it can only be obtained by members of a team representing Australia. This has been and is a source of pride: Australian cricketers did not countenance class distinction, unlike the division between gentlemen and amateur players that characterised English cricket.

Gideon said that the baggy green cap 'means a lot to the current generation of players – they are constantly being told how important it is and how great they are'. Ironically, the emphasis is now shifting from egalitarianism to elitism, as cricketers who have played for Australia have been known to equate themselves with members of an exclusive club. He also talked about the tendency to see parallels between Australian cricketers and the Anzacs, an impression reinforced by Steve Waugh, who led the Australian team on a pilgrimage to Gallipoli in 2001.

Gideon concluded that, nowadays, 'the baggy green cult suits everyone – no one doesn't like it – team, administrators, fans, sponsors'.

Gideon Haigh's chapter on the 'Baggy Green' is on pages 207–213 of *Symbols of Australia: Uncovering the stories behind the myths*, edited by Melissa Harper and Richard White, University of New South Wales Press and National Museum of Australia Press, 2010, available in the Museum Shop.

You can also listen to Gideon Haigh in conversation with John Harms on the Baggy Green on Audio on Demand on the Museum's website – go to <http://www.nma.gov.au/audio/detail/public-conversation-bowled-over-by-gideon-haigh>

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