

CRICKET COLLECTION

IN SAFE HANDS

Australians love cricket, but is that reason enough for the sport to be featured in the National Museum of Australia as an essential feature of our national culture? The Museum has just acquired a new collection that symbolises the deeper significance of cricket in our history.

Cricket lovers the nation over can tell you the icon of Australian cricket is the 'Baggy Green' cap. But why do we hold it in such high regard? It has taken a long time for the Museum to acquire its first example of this Australian cultural icon, largely due to their relative scarcity and the high prices the caps command when they do appear at auction. However, the Museum is now the proud owner of Greg Chappell's 1982 baggy green test cap, along with a cricket bat he used in 1980 at the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG).



Photo: George Serras

These items are part of a significant collection of cricket memorabilia the Museum recently acquired from leading Australian sports equipment entrepreneur and founder of The Crusaders youth development program, 'Swan' Richards. This collection will allow the Museum to explore Australia's more modern cricket history and personalities.

The Museum can now tell the story of the dominance enjoyed by wicketkeeper Rod Marsh and fast bowler Dennis Lillee in Australian cricket history throughout the 1970s and '80s, and of Wally Grout's first-class record eight catches in an innings for Queensland against Western Australia in 1960. They will add to the stories of the great Victor Trumper and Sir Donald Bradman that have been featured in the *Eternity* and *Nation* galleries at the Museum.

How many cricket lovers can tell you when the first international limited-overs match was played in Australia? Rod Marsh's baggy yellow one-day cap reminds us that he played in the first match which was held at the MCG in 1971 as a time-filler after heavy rain on the opening days led to the Test being abandoned. It was suggested by Sir Donald Bradman that the game be played as an experiment and to give the players some exercise, but the format was extremely popular and led to the establishment of regular 'one-day' or 'day-night' matches. Even more significant, though, is the light this throws on the changing nature of Australian society; the format proved to be a winner because of the time-poor nature of modern Australians who loved the fact that they could see a whole game of cricket after a full day at work.

The National Museum of Australia collects objects representing our obsession with sport because these stories give us valuable insights into our beliefs. We place so much value on that baggy green cap because it represents the hard work and devotion that is required to be presented with an item that fewer than 400 Australians have ever worn. It reminds players that they are part of a long tradition upon which the hope and pride of a nation hangs: it is a truly national historical symbol.

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Photo: Dean McNicoll