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
days don’t have same sentimental attachment to

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

Roslyn Russell
Audience Development & Public Programs