

## SUSSEX MARTLETS AT THE ASHES...



**Perth.** Even if you were a Martian on the flight down to Perth from Singapore, you could not have avoided the deep sense that a major sporting series was about to start. Passengers resplendent in their England hats and shirts, supplying constant chatter about cricket and how this time round we had a real chance of knocking over an ageing and weakened Aussie side. On the plane the buzz of excitement and anticipation was palpable with the Test due to start the following day.

Having booked ourselves into our waterfront hotel, Desmond and I set off in exploration of the city only to be ambushed by fellow Sussex supporters David Dumigan and Peter Coles in some dodgy Irish pub, where the Guinness proved an able antidote to any jet lag. The following morning, possibly as a result of a tincture or two too many from the previous night, we set off for the Optus Stadium in totally the wrong direction, but it provided a scenic tour of the city in daylight which was, of course, a bonus. Eventually we reached the relatively new amphitheatre, capable of seating 60,000 and able to host AFL, Rugby Union as well as Cricket, to take up our seats right behind the bowler's arm.

Stokes wins the toss and surprisingly decides to bat – shock, horror from all quarters. Is he feeling well? Doesn't this England only know chasing? But India, a year beforehand, had batted first and won – ah! there's the clue. But of course, they had also spent eight days warming up on the WACA and not two days on a feather bed at Lilac Hill against England's 2<sup>nd</sup> XI.

Crawley nicks off in the first over for 0, no surprise there; Root does the same but in the 8<sup>th</sup>; Pope makes a nervy 46; Brook, who is keen to audition for "Strictly" it appears by his constant dancing down the wicket, make a valuable 52 nevertheless. Starc bowls a full length and gets a 7-for. England all out 172. Well, as the adage goes, it takes two innings to judge a strip. England similarly bowl pretty full and get due reward. Carey top scores with 26, Stokes gets a 5-for and the Aussies are 123-9 at the end of day 1. Early on Day 2 they add 9 more runs and England have another go. Crawley nicks off in the 1<sup>st</sup> over for 0 – sorry, have I said that before? But Duckett and Pope start to build an innings and with a lead of 100 and only 1 wicket down, Desmond and I feel the time is right for a quiet libation in the company of Paul Walker, David and Peter once again.



*Desmond Devitt, Paul Walker & Nigel Russell*

By the time we get back to our seats England have lost five wickets, three of which fell on our score of 76. Atkinson top scores with 37 and we are all out 164. Could this possibly be the session where we lost the Ashes, we ask? Oh well, we try to convince ourselves, a lead of 204 would require the Aussies to score the highest innings total in the match so far. If we bowl as well as we did in the Aussies' first innings, surely we have a good chance still – surely. Head has other ideas, Stokes's usual golden touch eludes him and he appears to confuse the bowlers with the length he wants them to bowl. We get it badly wrong, Head bats brilliantly with 123, supported by Labuschagne with 51 and the game is all over by 5 p.m. on the second day, a loss by 8 wickets. Harrumph!

Perhaps easy to say in hindsight, but England looked short of match practise and, let's be generous, we'll put it down to nerves that they tried to play with such irrational bravado. A fellow spectator aptly commented that he had just witnessed two T20 games. Where was the discipline and respect for the format? The match needed dissection over a large glass of something foaming. If this was to be the mindset for the rest of the series, what chance of winning the Ashes? As we wandered round the city in the next couple of days, it was littered with shell-shocked and disconsolate English fans looking for entertainment. Desmond and I took off to Freemantle (where we visited the original convict prison, a suitable venue for the England team we felt) and Rottnest Island (a wonderful and not-to-be-missed opportunity, but nonetheless an over commercialised sand dune). Before we headed off to Margaret River to continue our 3 weeks in Oz, we had a delightful dinner in Perth with David, Peter together with Jon and Ali Filby.

We left Perth with the song "Things Can Only Get Better" ringing in our ears. How wrong can one be! That said, what a fantastic experience it was in an attractively well laid out, relaxed and friendly city.

*Nigel Russell*



**Brisbane.** It turns out that Brisbane is quite a long way to go for one game of cricket. The jet lag left me as I boarded my flight home and then came back for another week when I touched down.

Mr. Walker joined me a matter of minutes after I got to Brizzie and we were lucky enough to have a couple of days exploring before the game. A day on the river and, a day on the beach later, we were baking in our blazers at the top of the Gabba.

Easy to forget in the doom of it all, but that was a rare good day with Joe Root's ton and then Sussex all-rounder Jofra smashing it to all parts. It was also a privilege to watch Alex Carey standing up to Naser and Boland and his catch of a ball that entered sub orbit running back over his shoulder with Labuschagne seemingly climbing on him for the entire journey for no discernible reason.

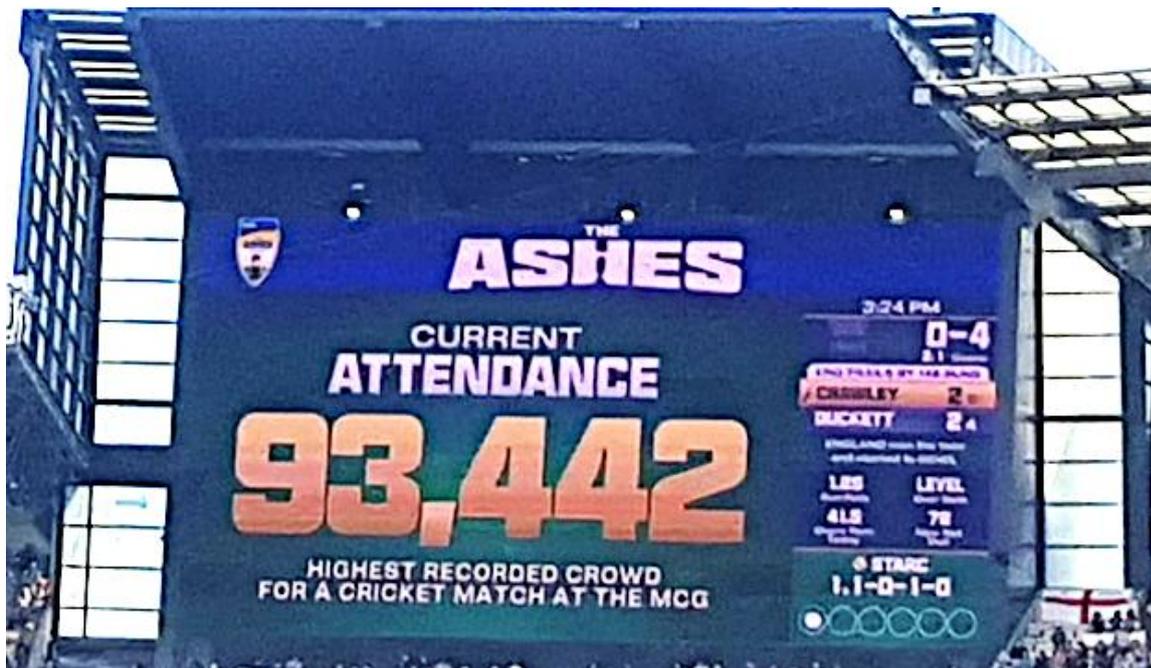
Day two on the pitch less positive, but a shared ginger beer with Neil Billing and some hours of cultural exchange with new friends made in the seats around us, added memorably to it.

A day in the mountains and a final hurrah at The Breakfast Creek Hotel (undeniably the most Australian place in Australia) capped off a fabulous memorable week in a wonderful country with a great mate.

When can we do it again? Did somebody say tour...?

*Phil Savage*

## Boxing Day Test Match At The “G”



Boxing Day dawns cloudy, cool and breezy in the Melbourne suburb of Glen Waverley, more like April in England than Melbourne in mid-summer. Talk on the way to the ground is how many wickets will fall on day one – 13 or 14 was the general consensus – how wrong were we! The train to Richmond took 40 mins followed by a 10-minute walk to the “G”. The MCG is a magnificent place to watch cricket; ease of access is a good start. Approaching the stadium, the stands look big enough from the outside, but only from inside is the true scale of the arena revealed, as the playing area is sunk to accommodate the lower seating level. Our seats at mid-off/long-leg are towards the top of the first level, very similar to the lower Warner Stand at Lord’s, an excellent view.

England win the toss and not surprisingly invite the Aussies to bat. By the time play commences I’ve been to the merchandise shop to buy a thick hoodie, it really is that cool.

The Aussie openers start positively with few alarms until the 7<sup>th</sup> over when the carnage begins, possibly when the lacquer has come off the ball and it started to grip in the over-grassed surface. Four down at lunch was a decent first session for England, but there were murmurs from the pundits that it should have been even better. No worries, we happily settled for 152 all out. Mitchell Starc bowls the first over from the Members’ End with 94,000 in the house. What an atmosphere! How intimidating it must be to walk out to bat. Inside five overs England’s innings is in tatters! There seems to be a replay of a play-and-miss every other ball in a barrage of unplayable deliveries. Root barely lays bat on ball during his 15-ball duck. Brook plays the only way he knows, which was probably the right way in the conditions, to top score and a few lusty blows from Atkinson takes England to 110 all out. To cap an extraordinary day Scott Boland opens the Aussie’s second dig and bats out the final over of the day.

The MCG is a huge stadium hosting cricket and Aussie rules football, but it’s not the only major entertainment and sporting arena in the area. Rod Laver, John Cain and Margaret Court tennis and concert arenas are right next door, as is AAMI Park home of Melbourne Storm Rugby League Club and Melbourne Victory Soccer Club. For good measure Olympic Park Oval, home to AFL team Collingwood is also adjacent, as is Gosch’s Paddock, a large open space maintained to the highest standards for elite training but also available for some public use. This area comprises the finest campus of sporting and entertainment venues that I’ve ever come across and I’m looking forward to experiencing Rod Laver for a couple of Open Tennis sessions later in the month.

Day two is brighter and a little warmer and our seats today are high up but again at mid-off/long-leg. We are whisked up by several escalators and then a few almost vertical steps to our seats. Surrounded by families and groups of lads, they are friendly company if staunchly Aussie, but even they didn't see what was coming. The pitch continued to play tricks and was difficult to bat on as Carse, Tongue and Stokes kept going with great heart in the absence of the injured Atkinson. Helped by several rather casual strokes, Australia were rushed out cheaply again leaving England 175 to win, which would be the highest score of the match.

We had it as a 50:50 match but thankfully Crawley and Duckett started positively putting on 51 and we were on our way to a famous victory inside two days. I'm not sure another 91,000 spectators could really believe what they had witnessed, but all left royally entertained.

*Charlie Hartridge*



## Hartridge on tour – Ashes 25/26



*A brace of Hartridge....(Andrew & Charlie)*

**Perth.** Turning 35 when this Test should have been reaching its climax on day 5, surprisingly this Martlet ended up on the 40 Club tour to Perth. After two days of madness and the birth of Travball we enjoyed fixtures at Scarborough, Western Suburbs (twice) and Warnbro Cricket Clubs with fellow Martlet Paul Lack. Going down 3-1, we took the moral victory and a few of us headed up to Brisbane for round 2.

**Brisbane.** Different colour ball, same result. Bazball faded into the night sky despite Joe Who's century in an entertaining stand with Sussex's finest. When getting the "champion treatment" from Steve Smith one could only sit back and chuckle into a schooner of four-x, reminiscing of captaining a Martlet team including Joffra to an infamous loss against Ardingly College many moons ago! The obligatory post-match trip to Noosa was indulged in – luckily the *Daily Mail* snappers weren't interested in my antics!

**Adelaide.** What a lovely city and finally a proper game of cricket at a proper cricket ground. But that was that, after 11 days the Ashes were gone and hopefully snicko with it!

**Melbourne.** Some back-up Hartridges arrived as 10 of us enjoyed a proper Aussie Christmas at my Aunty and Uncle's and not a turkey in sight – lovely! We arrived at the colosseum that is the MCG and along with the other 93,440 could not believe what we seeing, despite the 10 inches of grass being visible from row Z of the bleachers. A bucket list event ticked off and thanks to the groundsman a bit of respite for the English!

**Sydney.** Fortunately, the dress code at the SCG is not that of Arundel and I was able to sneak into the Pavilion and pass on some constructive criticism to Baz and his long-suffering disciples. Surely, it's time for a change? 4 world-class centuries were witnessed, but the same outcome. 4-1, a fair result. J. G. Bethell, one for the notebook.

**Footnote.** Some readers will have been on the 2000 tour, when the Martlets played in Perth, Adelaide and Sydney. I can remember the last leg of that and that as a 10-year-old I was allowed by Charlie and the long-suffering Sheila to fall from a great height into the Parramatta River! Despite that childhood trauma I did return 25 years later. A wonderful country, any cricket lover should experience. You will love it!

*Andrew Hartridge*

## **Martlets in Oz 2025-26**

On the first leg of our flights home from Sydney were a good few of the England team. My youngest son James had spotted Duckett checking-in and Tongue at the duty-free. Bashir and Jacks boarded before us. Then there was Root queuing up to get aboard. The world's greatest batsman, calmly chatting, looking tanned and happy to be going home, a child's ruck-sack over his shoulder.

Ordinarily, I may have congratulated him on those two tons. Perhaps told him how excited Phil Savage and I were cheering him on to his first in Brisbane. We exploded with joy when it finally came ... like he was family, or a fellow Martlet. Back then when hope still burned and the Ashes series was alive.

But I let him be. Lucky bloke! I was cricketed out ... as I'm sure he and the rest of the team were. That feeling, at the end of a cricket tour (especially recent Martlet over-40s adventures) when all you can think of is your own bed. I couldn't help but think, as I tried to nod off a couple of hours later – what if? Oh, the pure joy of being on that flight, with the Ashes and with the boys! Heaven help the poor attendant who would have tried to stop me getting into the first class if that had been the case.

My emotions were torn between the wonderful memories of experiencing Australia and the feeling that we should be bringing those bloody Ashes home. This was our best chance for decades and we totally blew it. But I was incredibly lucky to have been there. Here are a few of my highlights.

**Perth.** On the way out of the ground at the conclusion of day 2, I overheard a couple of Aussies talking. One said to his mate “I knew the Poms were gonna give up ... but I thought it would be after Adelaide rather than on day 2 of the 1<sup>st</sup> Test”.

After no sleep for 48 hours, pure adrenaline and alcoholic ginger beer had got me through day 1. After the madness of day 2, spent with Tim Gregory and Tom Drake-Brookman's father, I visited the WACA and marvelled at the lack of available shade – one has to be grateful for small/large mercies on days like these.

What a treat to see Nigel and Desmond at lunch on day 2. Then thereafter on an unforgettable day at Desmond's long-lost cousin's vineyard near Margaret River. I must have developed a taste for the local vino, as a tasting tour of the Swan Valley vineyards, with Jon Filby, was another highlight of the Western Australia experience. I met up with Knaresborough's Aussie overseas, Eben, from 20 years ago (he stole my mum's heart apparently) for cricket, beach swims and a barbie (of course). My hosts, Mal and Narrissa moved me to tears, as they morphed from strangers to life-long friends.

**Brisbane.** This was a fabulous city, made all the more enjoyable by sharing its pleasures with Phil Savage. Great climate, river-side bars and restaurants and snorkelling at Moreton Island in the lead up to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Test. We loved day 1 and Root's first Ashes ton in Oz. But day 2 was gruelling and we gave up the quest for tickets for day 3 in favour of a glorious trip to the Glass House Mountains. We drove up the Sunshine coast and took in a phenomenal surf competition and a little local grade cricket. Then back to Ashes trauma at the famous Brekkie Creek hotel in Brisbane. We were the only Poms in the oldest bar in Queensland. By the end of a beer and whisky-soaked night we'd made some new friends and (almost) forgotten about the cricket. I saw Stokes' brave last stand on day 4 after Phil flew home. The tropical storm that night arrived too late to save a sorry England team.

**Adelaide.** Harry kindly picked me up at the airport and it was great to see him. He even invited me out for drinks on night 2! We were lucky enough to bump into both Matt Ritchie and Mike Atherton.



*Mike Atherton, Harry Walker, Matt Ritchie & Paul Walker*

A beautiful city and the loveliest of Test cricket grounds (a brief, but warm walk from my digs). A lovely local solicitor, her sport-obsessed husband and an adorable black labrador called Robson were my generous hosts here.

Before the match I gave a lecture at the University law faculty and visited the local courts. I was well looked after by a friend of David Josse KC, who gave an excellent speech at last year's club dinner. David Plater is a professor of law and, much more importantly, has a wife who insisted on lending me her member's card for all five days of the Test!

A visit to the scoreboard, with my landlady Sarah, the day before the Test, was made all the more memorable by a brief encounter with Pat Cummins. His wife hails from Harrogate – of all places (my new home). Sadly for England, he was steely eyed, incredibly fit and on a mission to make it 3-0. Guess what? That's exactly what happened.



*Pat Cummins with Paul Walker*

Despite the defeat, it was wonderful to spend time with fellow Martlets – the irrepressible Steve “the human Ashes” Lovell, Neil Billing, Laurie Cadle, Stuart Ritchie, Rob Burgh and also some members of Yorkshire Romany.

**Melbourne.** The Ashes were gone but there was still time for Christmas. My first warm Xmas was a little strange, but Melbourne is an invigorating city with a cracking atmosphere. The Test was strange and could realistically, given the pitch, have gone either way. The win was nothing to get carried away about – but we did! For about 20 minutes.

The Great Ocean Road blew me away more than the MCG – I'm sure that wouldn't have been the case if there had been something at stake. I bumped into another Joe, this one from my new chambers in Leeds, completely by chance, in a city street. He had been instrumental in my (virtually) seamless move to my new family of barristers in Park Square. Needless to say, beers and oysters were to flow.

I dragged Harry and James away from the Airbnb pool on the final morning for a drive to the Hills, where James saw his first kangaroo. Not sure who was the most bewildered!

**Sydney.** For some reason I feared Sydney would be an anti-climax. While the Test was underwhelming, at times the city was incredible. An amazing humid, pleasant heat was to be treasured, as the clock ticked towards a return to the inevitable January blues. Bondi, the Bridge, the Opera House, the people, the transport system, what a place!

I preferred the SCG to the MCG and managed to get in on three of the five days. It was lovely to properly re-connect with an old friend from Yorkshire. His daughter invited the Walker boys, whose plane had landed at 7.30pm that evening, for a New Year's Eve party at her apartment block overlooking the Harbour Bridge. That night felt cinematic.

I had dreamt of visiting Oz as a child and it seemed as far away as the moon. This trip really was a dream come true. But it was the people that made it. The hospitality and kindness I experienced was staggering. The weather, beautiful and varied places, food, beer and wine played their part... as did a little cricket.

In many ways the holiday of a lifetime (until I go back in four years) despite the England team's best endeavours to ruin it!

*Paul Walker*

### **The Ashes are for Everyone...**



In a deft touch following the conclusion of the fifth Ashes Test, Cricket Australia invited spectators onto the playing surface to join the teams for the awards ceremony at the Sydney Cricket Ground.

In unique scenes, and very respectfully, spectators flooded onto the outfield surrounding the square and in front of the Men's and Ladies Pavilions. Spectators and players mingled together. The awards were presented. The Ashes, in that moment, belonged to everyone.



That said, the disappointment of this edition of the Ashes was manifest – joining the tour at Adelaide and five days later, the game was up. Many will have put their life savings into touring with England with scant return. Winning a test down under at the M.C.G. was welcome relief, even in two days. The rest should go down as one of the biggest regrets in cricket history, and certainly the England players deserve to be haunted by their collective failure, with Bethell and Tongue the only ones deserving of credit for emerging as test cricketers.

In other thoughts, there was no sense that Brook contributed to the leadership of this squad, further evidenced by his hushed-up disciplinary from the preceding O.D.I. series in New Zealand. Rather, it seemed all was left to talisman Stokes, certainly on the field. In contrast, the strength of the relationship between Stokes and Root at the conclusion of the Boxing Day Test was a joy to see, with their delight at winning an Ashes Test in Australia. And for Root to score two centuries on Australian soil was affirmation, if it was ever needed, that he stands tall with the greatest cricketers ever.

Once the hiatus over this tour is concluded, focus will increasingly turn to the 2027 Ashes. Can England regain the urn or will Australia again retain the Ashes? And, for others, their careers will end, most likely Stokes and Root. Will they be able to draw their entry in the scorebook to a close in the same style as Broad did at The Oval in 2023?

*Stuart Ritchie*

### **POSTSCRIPT – Hobart**

Prior to returning to ‘blighty’, Nigel Russell and Desmond Devitt had great pleasure in spending time with Adrian and Liz Ford in Tasmania. They are very happily settled into life there and having seen something of it, “what not to like” as the saying goes.

An excellent round of golf was enjoyed – although “round” is a slight exaggeration, given that it was curtailed at about the 13<sup>th</sup> to accommodate more important business: lunch with Liz and their daughter, Emma.



*Desmond Devitt, Adrian Ford and Nigel Russell*