

ALWAYS AN OCCASION TO ANTICIPATE

By MAX WALKER

For a fast bowler, Sir Alec Bedser, was such an unusually likeable man ... bushy eyebrows and a mischievous glint, wide grin and a rather raspy English accent that originated closer to kidneys than throat. To shake his hand in greeting was to feel undersized in the paw department – massive hands. Thick, long and strong working man's fingers. This enabled him to comprehensively clamp his fingers around the ball. To vigorously rotate the seam was a natural extension of grip. Bradman more than once succumbed to the Englishman's deadly leg-cutter. Once bowled for a duck. So too many lesser talented willow wielders.

Sir Alec was a twin. When Alec and Eric stood together they were difficult to pick apart – identical. And, incredibly, when they were continents apart, Capetown to London, freakishly they would often choose to knot matching coloured ties on the same day.

I met Sir Alec for the first time in 1975 at the Edgbaston Cricket Ground in Birmingham. It was Day 2 of the First Test – Australia v England. Australia was invited to bat first and scored 359, thanks to a bad Mike Denness decision. The miscalculation would ultimately cost him the captaincy of England. Rain interrupted play on the second morning. Time to kill. During the break I found myself, incredibly, discussing the aerodynamics of “swish-n-sway” with the legend. We unconditionally shared wisdom, experiences and were quick to compare grips – leg-cutter / off-cutter – cradling bread rolls like any bowler would a cricket ball. In hindsight, quite surreal. Indelible.

By stumps that evening Australia had bowled out England for a meagre 101 runs. The scorebook records M.H.N Walker taking 5/48. Did Sir Alec Bedser genuinely “coach” an Australian to take English wickets? I believe so!! We won the Test Match by an innings and 85 runs ... and the Ashes. Tony Greig became the new skipper replacing Mike Denness. Graham Gooch bagged a “pair” on debut.

Several conversations followed in England ... years apart! Sir Alec was invited to Australia to celebrate the game of cricket at the historic 1977 Centenary Test Match in Melbourne. Four years later we were both part of an official players photograph at Lords to record the English version of the 100 year milestone. A friendship grew – as often they do with respected opponents – a privilege to know him ... well!

As a speaker the quick bowler was every bit as effective. At one Carbine Club Luncheon (Southern Cross Hotel) he was questioned by Australian fast bowler, Geoff Lawson, “If you were playing in today's limited 50 over cricket, where and how would you bowl to restrict the run rate?”

“In my day, we were always told the best way to restrict a batsman's ability to score runs was to bowl them out”!

Not exactly the answer Geoff – who was still playing – was hoping for. Nevertheless, much laughter/applause greeted the laconic reply.

Sir Alec Bedser became a life member of the Carbine Club and in 1996 received a knighthood for contribution to cricket.

His legacy within the cricket community remains a large footprint. An unforgettable man, with a big heart and generosity of spirit to match.

Still talking cricket, I met Keith Miller for the first time at my inaugural Carbine Club lunch. I was a guest of former president, Mike Winneke, who proposed my membership. The year was 1973. Australia had returned from a 2-0 Test series victory in the Caribbean. Ian Chappell (Captain) and Bill Jacobs (team manager) were the two guests of honour.

But several questions were asked of me also. I talked of Calypso Capers – intoxicated locals necking bottles of rum in the freedom stands (palm trees). Marijuana wafting on a gentle breeze straight through three-metre high rusty barbed wire fences. Cricket crazy policemen lining the boundary with their German Shepherd dogs, lips rolled up and teeth bared. I described lots of perspex shields and machine guns. This lunch, perhaps, kick started a speaking career. Rotary Club offers followed.

Another memorable cricket luncheon was a rather intimate affair – one guest only for each member. The venue was the Rose Hotel, Port Melbourne, part owned by Carbine Club member, Graham Halbish. A gathering of around 70 were treated, in camera, to amazing honesty and frankness from two current Test Players – Australian wicket keeper extraordinaire, Ian Healy and Pakistan’s tearaway fast bowler, with the Bollywood film-star looks, Shoaib Akhtar.

The week before I had interviewed the pair – television, radio and print stories discussed Shoaib’s nightmare. “BANNED FOR CHUCKING” headlined newsprint everywhere. Based on television footage, his action was judged to be illegal. The cricket world was fractured. The sub-continent outraged. Yet other countries suggested “fair call”. At 160km/hr he was seriously quick and dangerous!

I asked Shoaib how he handled the decision. Effectively his cricket future was killed instantly by the ruling. He simply answered, “Whilst ever God keeps His hand on my heart, I will continue my gift to bowl very, very fast ... that’s what I do!” Fortunately, the young man was able to rectify the flawed action at point of delivery. Shoaib, again, soon terrifying batsmen at every contest.

At a Carbine Club lunch prior to a Second Ashes tour of England, Australian captain, Ricky Ponting, was in a relaxed mood. We discovered that from 12 years of age, bat manufacturer, Kookaburra, had sponsored the kid from Mowbray, Tasmania. Still are. Talent is difficult to ignore. History may well acknowledge Ricky as numerically the heaviest run scorer in Test cricket history ... over-taking Indian run-machine Sachin Tendulkar and others.

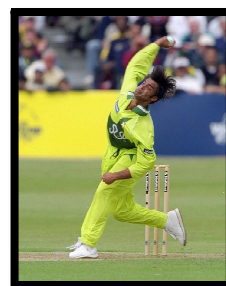
These shared “insights” from invited guests are what makes the Carbine Club such a special community to belong to. Who will we share a meal and a glass of wine with next? Always an occasion to anticipate.



Max Walker



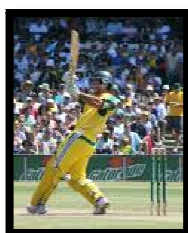
Alec Bedser



Shoaib Akhtar



Geoff Lawson



Ricky Ponting



Graham Halbish



Max Walker & Keith Miller

FOR SPORT AND FOR GOOD FELLOWSHIP

By BILL HOFFMANN

It is a great pleasure to have the last word in this collection of vignettes and record the profound contribution Alec Bedser made to camaraderie between English and Australian sporting identities and to Carbine Club ethos in the club's earliest days.

Alec played in five Ashes series, playing 21 Tests and taking 104 Australian wickets. He is the only English bowler to have taken 30 or more wickets in Ashes series at home and away. After retiring as a player in 1960, he was an England selector for thirteen Ashes series (plus one in which the Ashes were not at stake and the two one-off Centenary Tests).

He was also the manager for the 1974-75 and 1979-80 tours of Australia, after being the assistant manager in 1962-63 to the Duke of Norfolk. Despite Alec's extremely competitive on-field contribution for England in Ashes cricket, away from the playing arena he developed a strong rapport, indeed friendship, with Australian players and officials that manifested itself in the activities of the fledgling Carbine Club.

How that Australian affinity came about is best explained by Alec himself in his foreword to *2009 Wisden on the Ashes the authoritative story of cricket's greatest rivalry*. In part it reads:

I think my earliest Ashes-related memory is seeing the Evening News when Don Bradman scored 334 at Headingley in 1930. I had just had my 12th birthday. Six years later I remember listening to bits of Alan McGilvray's radio commentaries of the 1936-37 Ashes series in Australia and made my Surrey debut in 1939. After serving in Italy and France I arrived back at The Oval for the beginning of the 1946 season and after only ten games I made my England debut, took 11 wickets in each of my first two Tests and ended the season being selected for the tour of Australia which we ended up losing 3-0.

At the end of that 1946-47 series I began a remarkable run of four Ashes Tests in which I dismissed Bradman six times. In the fourth Test I managed to bowl him for nought, which I followed up by dismissing him again in the second innings of the last Test, and then again in both innings of the first two Tests in the 1948 series (including another duck). Although we never spoke much to each other on those tours (he didn't socialise much in his playing days), we became very close friends later, and I visited Don and his wife Jessie in Adelaide on countless occasions during the next five decades.

In 1953 we had a very strong team which famously won back the Ashes 19 years after losing them. I took 39 wickets in the five-match series. My last England tour as a player was to Australia in 1954-55. Unfortunately I got shingles on the way out, which laid me low for the entire tour. I played in the first Test, but was below my best and it proved to be my last in the Ashes. So it was from various pavilions that I watched Frank Tyson terrorise the Aussies while we retained the Ashes. I played my last Test for England the following summer, and I finally retired from first-class cricket at end of the 1960 season.

In 1961 I watched the whole of the Ashes series while writing for the Daily Mail. I particularly remember watching Fred Trueman's 11 wickets at Headingley, which included a spell of five for none. That series was the start of many years of watching Ashes Tests. I was assistant manager to the Duke of Norfolk on the 1962-63 tour, and was a selector right up to 1985. I was manager of the 1974-75 tour when the Australians unleashed Jeff Thomson, who terrorised our team much as Tyson had done to theirs 20 years earlier. Thomson had a wonderful action, and I think he may even have been a touch quicker than Frank.

During my long stint as a selector I was chairman for eight series against Australia, as well as two one-off matches, one of which was the Centenary Test at Melbourne in March 1977. Not only was that a marvellous game (with the result almost unbelievably being the same as in the first-ever Test which it was celebrating), but it was probably the most enjoyable match I ever attended as a spectator. This was because every former Ashes player from both countries was invited as the Australian Board's guest, and it was wonderful to meet up with so many old friends. Little did we know that behind the scenes Kerry Packer was recruiting players for his breakaway "cricket circus".

Our captain in the Centenary Test, Tony Greig, turned out to be Packer's right-hand man, so the following summer we appointed Mike Brearley as captain for the 1977 Ashes, which we won 3-0. That series was notable for the debut of a young allrounder named Ian Botham. By 1981 Botham had become a giant of Test cricket and was England captain. But after a poor start to that summer's Ashes series, we replaced him as captain and reappointed Brearley. He seemed to inspire Botham, whose performances in the next three Tests made his legend and retained the Ashes. I never thought I would again see such euphoria about cricket as there was that summer – but I was wrong. I was present at The Oval in 2005 when England won back the Ashes after a thrilling series, and it was great to see cricket celebrated across the country.

My Ashes experiences have led to lifelong friendships with numerous Australians as well as England team-mates. I have already mentioned my close friendship with Bradman, but I also treasure my friendships with many other Aussies as well. Indeed I was thrilled when four of them (Arthur Morris, Neil Harvey, Alan Davidson and Ken Archer) flew over to England in July 2008 to attend my 90th birthday party. It was a long way for them to come, but I hope they enjoyed meeting up and sharing memories as much as I did.

As I said at the beginning, the Ashes have been a major part of my life, but I think they have been a special part of many of other lives too, not just those privileged to have taken part but also the millions who have been entertained. Cricket is fortunate to have an international contest which is the envy of all sports.

In the *Wisden* article referred to above, Alec made mention of his great friend and ex-Surrey and England colleague Arthur McIntyre, a wicket-keeper. Arthur was born less than two months before Alec in 1918 and was the only England cricketer still alive who was older than Alec. On Boxing Day 2009 Arthur died and the honour of being the oldest living England cricketer passed to Alec.

From The Carbine Club's earliest days, Alec attended luncheons and often arranged for England players and officials to be guest speakers. He embraced and enhanced the Carbine protocol of "what is said in club stays in club" and spoke frankly to Carbine Club members on issues within the world of cricket.

The Bedser era witnessed highly controversial matters such as the abolition of the distinction between gentlemen and players, the introduction of One Day cricket, the exclusion of South Africa and Kerry Packer's World Series Cricket. It was his delicate job as Chairman of Selectors to remove Ian Botham from the England captaincy in 1981, and reappoint Mike Brearley, which he did by reversing the charges from a pub phone box because the coin slot was jammed.

The mutual respect and trust that developed between Alec and the earliest members of The Carbine Club were such that he was presented with life membership in the early 1960s. Alec Bedser was knighted in 1996, the first English fast bowler bestowed with that honour. I have incorporated a letter I received from Sir Alec in 1997.

SIR ALEC BEDSER, C.B.E.

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27.7.97.

Dear Bill,

I have received your letter regarding the activities of your sub-committee in compiling the History of the Carbine Club.

I was thrilled when I was made a life member way back in the early 1960s. The bee then was — Craddock (I've forgotten his Christian name) while ⁱⁿ ~~working~~ with English cricket teams I often attended your functions which I always enjoyed. I'm sure I persuaded the Duke of Norfolk to speak.

I'm not sure what you are looking for, regarding your "History of the Carbine Club." However I enclose some details which may be of interest.

If I can provide anything in particular I shall be pleased to do so. Max Walker will be able to help a lot.

Regards

Yours sincerely,
Alec Bedser.

As mentioned in Sir Alec's letter, he sent some material for the history of our club and made mention of fellow Ashes cricketer and Carbine Club member Max Walker – who has told in earlier pages of his friendship with and privilege to know Sir Alec – and a 1960s club secretary called Craddock. That was Trevor Craddock.



Bill Hoffmann



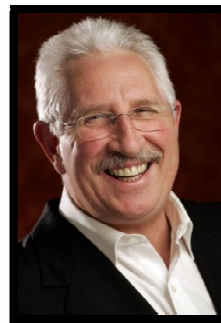
Alec's twin Eric, Arthur McIntyre, Jim Laker & Alec



The knighthood



Trevor Craddock



Max Walker

Trevor has been a member of the Carbine fraternity longer than any other person and is our sole surviving foundation member. Now in his eighties, Trevor wrote the foreword to this series of Carbine Club Classics.

This piece about Sir Alec Bedser, who – aged 91 – was England's oldest living cricketer when he passed away on April 4, 2010, wraps up the collection.

Trevor and Alec may live in different countries on opposite sides of the world and differed many times over the fortunes of national sporting teams and events. But there was great mutual respect over some fifty years, melded by that Carbine Club spirit penned by Harry Gordon decades ago:

*For sport
And
For good fellowship.*

