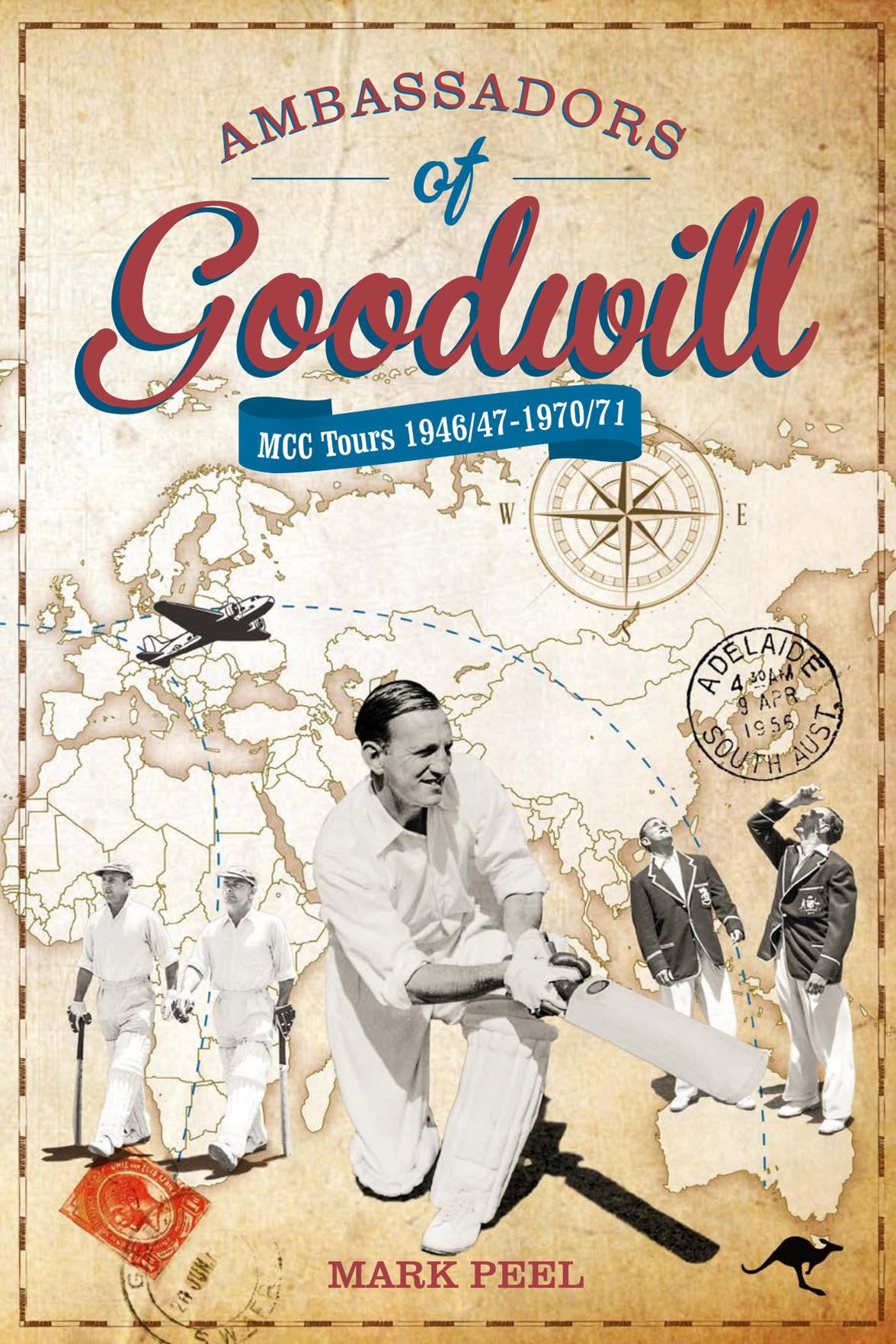


AMBASSADORS *of* Goodwill

MCC Tours 1946/47-1970/71



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Chapter 1

Australia and New Zealand 1946/47

IN July 1945, Clement Attlee's Labour Party won an overwhelming victory with its promise to build a new, fairer world out of the ruins of the old. Yet alongside this mandate for change there was a yearning for familiarity. Cricket, like everything else, had been severely disrupted by the war, but MCC, the private gentlemen's club which had governed the game since the late eighteenth century and was renowned for its feudal outlook, was in no hurry to move with the times. Untouched by a government which affected little interest in controlling sport – although Attlee himself was an ardent cricket lover – the authorities at Lord's continued to place their faith in leadership by amateurs, social deference and imperial solidarity. Critical to their brief was the organisation and management of England's overseas tours, which had become ever more frequent since countries such as India and the West Indies had gained Test status. In an era where communication and sporting contact were limited, the arrival of an MCC team in distant parts was a cause of immense excitement. Those representing the club were constantly reminded of their ambassadorial role throughout the six-month trip, which placed great store on protocol and hospitality, something some teams found easier to live up to than others.

In the summer of 1945, the country had revelled in a wonderfully entertaining series between England and the Australian Services XI.

Captained by Walter Hammond and Lindsay Hassett respectively, the two teams, espousing the new mood of optimism, played in a spirit of friendship unimaginable in Ashes encounters pre-war. Not only did they stay in the same hotel and change in the same dressing room, they tempered their competitiveness with a lighter touch, which provided them with some of the happiest cricket of their careers. 'This is cricket as it should be,' noted Hassett. 'These games have shown that international cricket can be played as between real friends – so let's have no more talk of "war" in cricket.'³

During these matches, the Australian Services manager Keith Johnson sounded Lord's out about an MCC tour to Australia in 1946/47. With Britain still reeling from the effects of war and no obvious replacements for pre-war players such as Kenneth Farnes and Hedley Verity, both killed on active duty, Lord's thought that such a tour would be premature. The ABC, however, persisted and at a farewell luncheon for the Australian Services XI at London's Claridge's Hotel on 1 October, Dr H.V. Evatt, Australia's foreign minister, who had close links to the ABC, made the case once again. Confronted with such a request, MCC quickly relented. It was the least they felt they could do for a country which had contributed greatly to the Allied war effort and which, for all its new links with the USA, continued to strongly identify with Britain and its Commonwealth of Nations.

Despite some speculation that the team might fly to Australia to reduce the time spent away from home, Lord's stuck to their traditional policy of travelling by boat. Such a journey, they said, gave the players the opportunity to relax at the end of the season and get to know each other, but with the date of departure set as 31 August 1946, there was little time for the selectors to experiment. Hammond, a professional turned amateur when he assumed the England captaincy in 1938, remained in charge for the home series against India in 1946; and, given his continued prowess with the bat, he remained the logical choice to lead in Australia, age notwithstanding. Friends advised him not to go – he was 43 and struggling with his fitness – but the lure of leading MCC in Australia overrode all other considerations.

The rest of the party had very much a familiar feel to it, with only three under the age of 30 – hardly ideal for a tour of Australia, where the stifling heat and vast grounds placed a great emphasis on stamina. Laurie Fishlock, the Surrey opening batsman, and James Langridge, the Sussex all-rounder were, like Hammond, over 40; Bill Voce, the Nottinghamshire opening bowler, at 37, was no longer the tearaway of bodyline infamy, and Dick Pollard, the Lancashire fast bowler, at 34, had lost his best years to the war. Len Hutton, Cyril Washbrook, Bill Edrich and Denis Compton, along with Hammond, constituted a formidable batting line-up, but the bowling lacked penetration. Much would depend on Alec Bedser, the Surrey opening bowler, and Doug Wright, the Kent leg-spinner. The full team was W.R. Hammond (captain), N.W.D. Yardley (vice-captain), A.V. Bedser, D.C.S. Compton, W.J. Edrich, T.G. Evans, L.B. Fishlock, P.A. Gibb, J. Hardstaff, L. Hutton, J.T. Ikin, J. Langridge, R. Pollard, T.P.B. Smith, W. Voce, C. Washbrook and D.V.P. Wright.

With the early departure date (shipping arrangements hadn't returned to normal) and no break in their county commitments beforehand, the team struggled to get themselves properly prepared. Compton called the weeks before sailing the hardest in his life. It was his wife, Doris, who had to go and purchase his clothing and mark every article, which included ten pairs of white flannels, a dozen white shirts, a dozen pairs of white socks and two dozen handkerchiefs. Edrich, one of the last to be selected, had to arrange fittings for suits and dinner jackets – each player was given 100 extra clothing coupons for an Australian trip – and settle his private affairs for seven months. On Friday 30 August, Hardstaff played for Nottinghamshire before travelling to Lord's for the farewell dinner in an agitated state. His luggage, labelled Perth, had been sent to Scotland; but, fortunately, owing to the efforts of the veteran baggage master Bill Ferguson, it was intercepted and retrieved in time.

At the farewell dinner at Lord's, Attlee, the guest of honour, reminded the party that they were embarking on more than a cricket tour: it was a goodwill mission. Then, after receiving a rousing send-off from press and public at Waterloo station, they took the boat train to Southampton. As someone who had only returned home from

Burma the previous October and struggled to adapt to domestic life, Hardstaff had mixed feelings about setting out once again. He was one of four survivors, along with Hammond, Fishlock and Voce, from the 1936/37 MCC tour to Australia. On that occasion, as the train made its way to Southampton, a pair of cricket-mad twins raced to Woking station from their home nearby to see it pass through. Ten years on, one of them, Alec Bedser, the solitary bachelor in the team, was delighted to be making his first tour of Australia, even though it meant an unprecedented separation from his brother Eric. Three days later, he was delighted to hear that Eric would be accompanying him after all, following a gift of £500, courtesy of Alfred Cope, the celebrated football pools promoter.

The SS *Stirling Castle* was a converted warship carrying several hundred war brides and their children to Australia. Compared with previous tours, the voyage lacked glamour. The accommodation was spartan and the strongest refreshment was orange juice, but the food – by home standards – was copious and highly appetising, causing the players to put on weight, none more so than Pollard and Voce, both of whom had been granted special army leave for the tour. On the first day, the team were mobbed by female autograph hunters as they played cards on deck.

Thereafter, things settled down and they helped look after the children while their mothers participated in the ship's sports. They also amused themselves playing a variety of deck games until the sweltering heat of the Tropics put paid to that. Such was its intensity that at night Bedser, Pollard and Ikin decided to sleep on deck in deckchairs.

On 24 September, in beautiful weather, the *Stirling Castle* berthed at Fremantle, Western Australia, amid great anticipation from the locals. Cameras flashed, interviews were sought and autographs were requested as the team disembarked. The lord mayor of Perth officially welcomed them, and throughout their three-week stay they were given access to the most exclusive tennis and golf clubs, taken on fishing expeditions and invited to a variety show at Perth Town Hall. At the close, the show manager asked for a member of the tour party to say a few words, and Paul Gibb, hardly the most gregarious

of individuals, was the man deputed to go up on the stage and do the honours. He admitted to being dumbstruck.

After a week of extensive net practice, the tour started with a gentle warm-up against Northam and County Districts, where every run scored was cheered by the local agricultural community. MCC won at a canter, but the real highlight of their trip into the bush was the marvellous hospitality accorded them. 'The team has gone down well so far – as it is very friendly, and there is among most a real effort towards sociability,' wrote the *Daily Telegraph* cricket correspondent, E.W. Swanton, to his sports editor, Frank Coles. 'Offsetting this a little, Hammond has not quite caught on with the press. The first ship interview was rather sticky, and ever since he has been rather suspicious and defensive, except in the case of those he knows well. I think he tries to create a good impression, but is very self-conscious and anything but an easy mixer.'⁴

Swanton was flagging up a conundrum which became ever more evident as the tour progressed. Having seen Hammond's social limitations in South Africa in 1938/39, he feared that the appointment of Lancashire secretary Rupert Howard as manager was the wrong choice. Howard, the owner of a thriving textile business, was a charming man who had managed the previous MCC side to Australia in 1936/37, but he lacked the strength of character to point the captain in the right direction. Swanton's forebodings were strengthened on the way out by the baggage man, former England wicketkeeper George Duckworth, who intimated to him that Bryan Valentine, the highly popular captain of Kent, should have been captain instead of Hammond.

At first, these were but small clouds on an otherwise clear horizon as Hammond carried all before him. Ensconced in more luxurious accommodation than his team-mates on board ship, he participated affably in deck games and invited some of the players to his quarters to discuss the challenges ahead. On arrival in Australia, he was feted not only for his stature as one of the giants of the game, but also as the captain of MCC, out to re-establish historical links between the two countries. While no natural orator, he kept to his script at official receptions, even expressing the hope that his old rival Bradman

would play in the forthcoming series, and won much gratitude by sitting with blind ex-servicemen in Perth, giving them a ball-by-ball commentary of MCC's game against Western Australia. Crowds rose to him as he came in to bat, and, when visiting the Melbourne Tivoli to watch British comedian Tommy Trinder, he entered the theatre to a standing ovation. 'Wally is intensely popular and wherever we go night and day he is recognized by all classes of people who come up to him to shake his hand,' wrote Howard to Colonel R.S. Rait Kerr, the MCC secretary.⁵

Hammond's double century in the opening first-class match against Western Australia further enhanced his reputation, but in both that game and the subsequent one against a Combined XI, his bowlers made little impression. After several weeks in Perth, MCC were given a fond farewell by the city as they set off on a two-day rail journey across the Nullarbor Plain to Port Pirie, an industrial port, where the railway line ran down the main street. Confined to non-air-conditioned coaches which were hot, dusty and uncomfortable, the players found sleeping difficult, but they relieved the tedium by playing cards and singing along to Pollard's repertoire of jazz and arias at the piano.

An overwhelming win against South Australia Country XI was the prelude to their arrival at Adelaide, the most genteel of Australian cities and boasting one of the world's loveliest cricket grounds. There they were immediately taken to a reception in the town hall, hosted by the lord mayor. As the players took their place on the dais, there was prolonged applause. The mayor called Hammond 'one of the greatest sportsmen of all time' and went on to remind his audience 'how proud we are to be members of the great British Empire'. MCC's game against South Australia assumed a greater significance once Bradman had announced his intention to play. A lot of water had flowed under the bridge since the Australian captain had been carried off the field at the Oval in 1938 with a broken foot. After being invalided out of the Australian Army in 1941 with acute fibrositis – a muscular complaint in the spine – he worked for a stockbroking firm in Adelaide, and when that went bust in July 1945, he set up his own brokerage. The end of the war saw him play a few games for

his club and state, but, with his health still suspect and a company to run, he missed Australia's short tour to New Zealand in March 1946. Following complications with gastritis and with a towering reputation to protect, Bradman remained non-committal about his future as speculation reached fever pitch. In the end, public pressure and his desire to play again led him to ignore medical advice and make himself available for South Australia's match against MCC, the first tentative step back towards the stage he had graced for so long. Entering at 26/2 in reply to the tourists' 506/6 declared, a frail-looking Bradman struggled against Pollard and was missed twice during his innings of 76. 'In my view, he is still a good player and will get plenty of runs against us but he is not the player he was,' Howard wrote to Rait Kerr.⁶

After they had secured the better of a draw against South Australia, MCC's overnight journey to Melbourne was stymied by a strike by Victoria Railways, forcing Howard to seek permission from Lord's to fly instead. The team enjoyed a comfortable two-hour flight on a Dakota, pointing the way to an alternative form of travel on future tours to Australia. With centuries from Hutton and Compton and ten wickets in the match for Wright, MCC comfortably beat Victoria, regarded as the strongest state team. Unseasonably bad weather then seriously curtailed their next two matches, against an Australian XI and New South Wales, although not before Bradman had returned to prominence in the former. 'Don batted very much better for Australian XI than he did at Adelaide and he is still a menace,' noted Howard.⁷ Looking stronger and fitter than previously, he thrilled his countrymen by announcing his return to Test duty. His mere presence shifted the odds firmly in Australia's direction, since they had unearthed a crop of new talent based around a formidable opening batsman in Arthur Morris, two exceptional fast bowlers in Ray Lindwall and Keith Miller, and a superb wicketkeeper in Don Tallon. England, in contrast, lacked youth and versatility, their pedigree in batting scant compensation for their frailties in the field and Hammond's unimaginative leadership. Edrich recalled that he told the team on board ship that the state matches should be used primarily as practice for the batsmen, and that consequently 'we got

out of the way of winning'. In the match against Queensland prior to the first Test, Hammond's captaincy was subjected to a withering assessment by Brian Sellers, Yorkshire's abrasive captain, who was covering the tour for the *Yorkshire Evening Post*. If he gave another display like that, England stood little chance in the Tests, Sellers opined. Not only should he show greater consistency in his field placings, he needed to smile more and offer greater encouragement to his team.

Although Sellers's remarks weren't markedly different from those of many of his colleagues, his position as an England selector who had chosen Hammond as tour captain caused deep offence. Once the storm broke, Hammond was hounded by the press, and, although Lord's cabled to reassure him of their support, the damage was done. Sellers's outburst had both hurt and depressed him.

Hammond's mood wasn't lightened by events on the opening day of the first Test at Brisbane. Australia, on winning the toss, were soon 9/1 when Bedser had Morris caught. Bradman entered to a thunderous ovation but looked something of a novice against Bedser as he struggled to find his bearings. Having proceeded nervously to 28, he attempted to drive Voce and the ball flew high to Ikin at second slip. The catch seemed clear-cut, and it was only when Bradman demurred that the England side appealed. To their astonishment, umpire George Borwick – a veteran of the 1936/37 series, like his partner, Jack Scott – immediately ruled not out, declaring it was a bump ball. The reprieve incensed Hammond, who approached Bradman at the end of the over and muttered, 'That's a bloody fine way to start a series.' He knew the critical importance of getting Bradman early, and now, with fortune eluding him, he saw the Bradman of old lay waste to his bowlers as they toiled in the heat. 'Just finished a most unfortunate day in the 1st Test,' wrote Howard. 'Bradman was definitely out caught by Ikin at 2nd slip when he was 28. Our boys and Wally were very sick and we shall not have the umpire Borwick again in any match.'⁸ 'Hammond never forgave Bradman for not walking,' wrote Australian cricket writer R.S. Whittington. 'Indeed, his bitterness over that incident affected his judgement and attitude for the rest of the series.'⁹

On 162 overnight, Bradman was out for 187 the next morning, but a century from Lindsay Hassett, a survivor, like Sidney Barnes, of the 1938 tour of England, 95 from all-rounder Colin McCool and 79 from Miller played England out of the game. Determined to extract every advantage, Bradman batted on into the third day, while Australia scored 645 before letting loose Lindwall and Miller, Australia's most intimidating pair of opening bowlers since Jack Gregory and Ted McDonald in 1921. Convinced that Hutton, England's premier batsman, was vulnerable to pace, particularly the bouncer, they singled him out for treatment. Whether they deliberately targeted his damaged left arm, the result of a serious war training accident, is unclear, but there was an element of hostility which went beyond the normal rules of combat. 'I must say that when I bowled to Len I felt a sense of personal grudge I have never known against any other batsmen,' confessed Miller.¹⁰

After enduring a barrage of bouncers, Hutton was bowled by Miller for seven before rain brought play to a premature end. Later that evening, a violent thunderstorm reduced batting to a lottery on a drying, uncovered wicket the next day. In near-unplayable conditions, England fought valiantly, none more so than Edrich, who was hit repeatedly by the lifting ball. His unflinching resolution drew admiration from his fellow front-line fighter pilot Miller, who failed to appreciate Bradman's command to bowl even faster. England had reached 117/5 before another deluge, one of the most ferocious storms ever witnessed in Brisbane, left the ground waterlogged in minutes. Contrary to expectation, play began almost on time the following morning, and, under a hot sun, Hammond's men were once again condemned to bat on a treacherous wicket. All out for 141, they followed on, and, hard though they fought, they were no match for Miller and Ernie Toshack, a tall left-arm medium-pacer, who took 18 wickets between them in the match. Afterwards Hammond told his players, 'Don't worry. I'll see that those two don't umpire us again,' empty words as it turned out.

MCC weren't sorry to leave Brisbane. Aside from the climate, they weren't impressed with either the facilities at the cricket or their accommodation. Howard noted that the Bellevue Hotel, taken over

by American forces during the war, had deteriorated greatly since their previous visit in 1936 and 'it seems to have acquired most of the lower night life of Brisbane'. They moved to the more expensive Lennon's Hotel, where the quality of food and service left something to be desired.

From Brisbane, the team went their separate ways. While the majority departed to Gympie to play Queensland Country XI, a delightful romp into the outback which left them in good heart, a brooding Hammond drove Hutton and Washbrook through the night to Sydney. 'We got so many hundred miles on the way,' recalled Washbrook, 'and when the petrol tank was nearly down he said: "Right, we'll fill up with petrol and try and get a room for the night." So we pulled up and he'd hardly spoken a word. In Australia in those days you couldn't get petrol after six o'clock so we went to a small country hotel and asked if there was any possibility of accommodation, but there wasn't. Len and I had to go and knock somebody up to get us some petrol and he drove us on down to Sydney from that moment onwards. We got to Sydney and there were four days in which Len and I were free, and himself of course. He put us down at the hotel and said "Cheerio", and we didn't see him again until four days afterwards. Amazing fellow. ... Wally was a difficult man to live with. He never asked anybody their opinion.'¹¹

Aside from the turmoil in Hammond's personal life – his divorce from his wife, Dorothy, had been splashed across the Australian press, and his new love, Sybil Ness-Harvey, a South African beauty queen, was struggling to adapt to life in Britain – events at Brisbane had rekindled his frosty relationship with Bradman. Two singular men and two wonderful cricketers, they confronted each other throughout the Ashes battles of the 1930s when bodyline and England's 903/7 at the Oval had allowed ancient feuds to fester. It was Hammond's misfortune that, despite his stellar record, he walked in the shadow of the greatest run-machine in history, and the constant comparisons seemed to irk him. While his relationship with Bradman remained correct in public, the England captain was the first and only person known to have spurned an invitation to his home, and he dissuaded his team from fraternising with him.

As his troubles mounted, so Hammond became ever more detached and moody. He seldom discussed field placings with his bowlers, and he rarely praised or encouraged them or spent time with them off the field. (As captain, he normally travelled around Australia in his Jaguar with Howard, while the rest went by train.) 'He tended to be individualist and uncommunicative;' recalled Compton, 'worse still, he didn't seem to be part of the side ... There was an absence of that sense of community and all being in it together which is an important element in keeping up the spirit of a side, and to which of course the captain has the most vital contribution to make.'¹²

'Hammond in Australia in the first post-war series was a shadow of his former self,' wrote Edrich. 'The rapport we had developed had diminished and his judgement became impaired by the burden of leading a side shorn by war of penetrating bowlers. He became edgy, retiring and irritable, especially when he complained about us fraternising with the Australian Test players.'¹³

On the eve of the second Test at Sydney, Compton awoke to discover no sign of his room-mate Edrich, an incorrigible bon viveur, after a night on the town. He took the precaution of ruffling his bedclothes, and when Hammond entered the room inquiring of Edrich's whereabouts, Compton quickly improvised. 'Oh, didn't you know, Wally, Bill takes a long early morning run to prepare himself for the cricket. He'll be back in a few minutes.' Hammond, appearing to accept the explanation, replied, 'Well, tell him not to be late; the coach leaves for the ground at ten o'clock.'

Minutes later, the dinner-jacketed Edrich returned very much the worse for wear, having drunk the night away with a former bomber pilot comrade. Given his frazzled state, Compton was disconcerted when Hammond won the toss and elected to bat. With Washbrook out almost immediately, Edrich found himself in the middle. At first, he couldn't lay bat on ball, but, once into his stride, he batted splendidly. So well did he bat that his dismissal – lbw to McCool for 71 – smacked of anti-climax. When Evans taxed him about his demise, Edrich replied, 'Godsders, I think I'd sobered up by then.' On a perfect wicket, England's timidity against the spinners Ian Johnson

and McCool cost them dear. All out for 255 on the second morning, they fought back briefly after torrential rain caused havoc with the wicket. Morris was dismissed by Edrich, and when Johnson appeared as nightwatchman for the injured Bradman, nursing a thigh strain, Barnes appealed repeatedly against the light, much to the indignation of Hammond and the crowd when it was eventually granted. Barnes's later admission that the light had been playable and that he acted as he did to prevent Australia losing more wickets that evening reflected the steeliness which characterised Bradman's captaincy.

In vastly improved conditions after the weekend and in front of a record Monday crowd at Sydney, a fourth-wicket stand of 405 between Barnes and Bradman, who each scored 234, placed Australia in an unassailable position. But despite being 316 ahead at the end of the fourth day, Bradman wasn't yet finished. He angered his opponents the following morning not only by batting on so he could use the heavy roller to break up the wicket, but also by only informing them ten minutes before the start. Eventually he declared at 659/8. 'I visited the England dressing room during the ten-minute interval and have never seen so angry a Test team,' recalled Whittington. 'There was no obligation upon Bradman to notify his opponents of his intentions that morning, but the Englishmen, quite understandably in my opinion, regarded his failure to do so as an act of extreme discourtesy; as just another attempt to humiliate them.'¹⁴

Fired up by Hammond's homily to take the game to the Australians, Hutton opened with a brilliant cameo of 37 in 24 minutes, with some scintillating stroke-play against Lindwall and Miller. It sent the crowd into raptures, and they groaned when he lost control of his bat and hit his wicket. His onslaught heralded a more robust approach by England's batsmen. Edrich scored 119 and Compton 54, but once they were out, McCool bowled Australia to a second consecutive innings victory, hardly the ideal Christmas present. The team celebrated with a private lunch at their Sydney hotel and later attended Tommy Trinder's Christmas Night Party at Bondi Beach Town Hall. The next day, they travelled to Canberra, the federal capital, where they were entertained by the

high commissioner. 'What a dull affair it turned out to be,' confided Gibb to his diary. 'Little parties stood around a lawn lit up with coloured lights and talked among themselves.' Scathing about the lack of food, drink and musical entertainment, he concluded: 'Not a great advertisement for the United Kingdom.'¹⁵

After a cocktail party the following evening, where they were introduced to the governor general, the Duke of Gloucester and his wife, Gibb had dinner with Bedser, Hardstaff and Voce. The mood was one of general disillusion about the way the tour was being run: the lack of organisation at net practice, the lack of general information and 'a complete lack of interest on the part of the captain and manager in the welfare of their men!'¹⁶

MCC's flawed selection came home to haunt them for the third Test at Melbourne. On the eve of the match, Langridge withdrew from the twelve because of a strained groin muscle, then Voce left the field on the first morning with a similar injury. With Edrich also temporarily incapacitated after receiving a painful blow on the shin from Barnes, England looked to Bedser and Wright to hold the fort. They responded magnificently and at one stage reduced Australia to 192/6, 79 of these from Bradman, only for McCool to rescue them with an undefeated century. Australia made 365 and dismissed Hutton early, but Washbrook and Edrich flourished to finish the day at 147/1. The next morning, Edrich was soon out, controversially lbw to Lindwall off an inside edge; and when Compton followed lbw to Toshack, padding up to one that he thought had pitched outside leg stump, he, like Edrich, departed in high dudgeon. Hammond looked a picture of fury as he made his way to the wicket and was out cheaply to a rash stroke. With Washbrook also falling, England had surrendered the initiative, but a century partnership between Ikin and Yardley took them close to Australia's total. 'I fear the boys are beginning to take a poor view of the situation,' Gibb wrote mid-match. 'With decisions given to Bradman excepted, I should say that the umpires, without being good, try to be reasonably fair, but what small bias there is tends to go against us.'¹⁷

With Morris leading the way with 155, Australia carefully extended their lead until an aggressive eighth-wicket partnership of

154 between Tallon and Lindwall put them out of sight. Set 551 to win, Hutton and Washbrook gave England heart with an opening stand of 138; and when they faltered in mid-stream, Yardley, with another half-century, and Bedser helped save the match – the first drawn Test in Australia for 65 years. The Ashes, however, remained ‘down under’. ‘Sorry we again did badly in the 3rd Test,’ Howard reported to Lord’s. ‘We are not only weak in bowling but we are weak where we thought we were strong. Hutton will not face the fast bowling – he is obviously scared and particularly of the bouncers. Compton is far too venturesome for one thing and plays with his pad ... Wally I think his eye has deteriorated and now misses a lot in the slips.’¹⁸

While the record Melbourne crowd couldn’t have been more sympathetic towards England, the umpiring provoked a war of words in the press box between the rival sets of correspondents. The English contingent, led by the acerbic E.M. Wellings, the cricket correspondent of the London *Evening News*, had taken exception to Borwick and Scott, comparing them unfavourably with standards back home, while the Australians viewed their carping as a convenient veneer for England’s shortcomings. They were simply not good enough. Good enough or not, Hammond wasn’t prepared to let the matter drop. Although Borwick and Scott had umpired all five Tests on the MCC tour of 1936/37 to general satisfaction, age had apparently caught up with them. While even the best umpires are prone to error, England felt aggrieved that they had been on the wrong end of some crucial decisions. They also objected to the persistent no-balling of Bedser and Wright and the fact that both umpires were too precipitate in their decision-making. Before the third Test was out, Hammond wrote to Bill Jeanes, the secretary of the ABC:¹⁹

Dear Sir,

I beg to inform you that I am not satisfied with the Umpiring in the three Test Matches which have been played.

It is my opinion that both Umpires have given hurried and incorrect decisions, and I am not prepared to agree to

their further appointment. My specific and tangible reason for this objection is that they are both incompetent.

Yours faithfully,
W.R. Hammond

With the ABC reluctant to pander to pressure from the media and short of obvious replacements, they proved less than accommodating in their reply. They asked for specific cases of alleged mistakes, and when Hammond refused to give them – this would amount to questioning umpiring decisions – they wouldn't budge.

Controversy continued to dog Hammond as he was assailed by sections of the press for failing to accompany the team to Tasmania. The manager explained that he needed a rest, having played nine out of the ten previous matches, but his absence upset the locals and did little to foster team spirit. A Sydney journalist attributed England's poor showing to an excess of hedonism and late nights, allegations which Howard vigorously rebutted. He said that he'd never known a more careful-living set of players than the present English team.

Under the relaxed leadership of the popular Yardley, Compton recovered his touch in Tasmania with two centuries, and in the next fixture, against South Australia, Hammond rolled back the years with a magisterial 188. Sadly, it proved a false dawn as the England captain, afflicted by fibrositis, could only muster 18 and 22 in the fourth Test at Adelaide, his swansong against Australia. Defying his critics who claimed that he couldn't play fast bowling, Hutton, in company with Washbrook, gave England the best of all starts, and after he was out for 94, Compton took up where he left off and played with total assurance for a chanceless 147. England scored 460 and made early inroads into the Australian batting, with Bedser bowling Bradman for a duck with what the latter called the finest ball that ever dismissed him. Thereafter, little went their way as centuries by Morris and Miller kept them in the field for two days in temperatures of over 100°F. The conditions proved too much for Bedser, who had to be led from the field and taken into the showers still wearing his boots. It took him the best part of an hour to come round from heat exhaustion.

Facing a narrow first-innings deficit, Hutton and Washbrook again proved their class with their third successive century opening partnership, before the latter was given out caught behind to what appeared to be a bump ball. With Toshack accounting for the middle order, England collapsed to 255/8 before Compton found a worthy partner in wicketkeeper Evans, who, shunning his normal attacking instincts, took 90 minutes to get off the mark. During their stand, Compton, skilfully farming the strike, clashed with Bradman. Frustrated by his failure to attack Evans, Bradman pushed his fielders back when Compton was batting, inviting him to take a single, a ploy which Compton stubbornly resisted so that the match descended into stalemate. When Bradman remonstrated with Compton for flouting the spirit of cricket, Compton retorted that he would play properly if Bradman did by setting orthodox fields. Later there was further friction when Bradman upbraided Compton for damaging the wicket with his spikes as he advanced down it to the spinners. 'But we have to bat on this,' said Bradman. 'I am terribly sorry, but I am playing for our side,' responded Compton.

Compton's second century of the match permitted Hammond to declare, but, bizarrely, he delayed it until one ball after lunch, supposedly as revenge for Bradman's delay in informing him of his decision to bat on at Sydney. Bradman called it 'the most inexplicable decision I have ever known. It simply deprived the spectators of an additional ten minutes' play and served no useful purpose.' He later wrote that 'Hammond showed little imagination on that tour and did not display the leadership and tact required of an overseas diplomat which international captains on overseas trips are required to be.'²⁰ Requiring 314 to win in 195 minutes on a good pitch, Australia displayed little interest in taking up the challenge. Morris emulated Compton by hitting two separate centuries in a Test, and Bradman finished undefeated on 56, but thousands left the ground discontented while he was still batting, something that Jack Fingleton, the former Australian batsman turned journalist, had never seen before. Hammond, too, was upset that Bradman had taken the safe option, 'but the toughest Australian skipper ever was not giving away a chance'. He again expressed unhappiness with the

umpiring, but kept his criticisms private, as he did on all matters, in the name of diplomacy. He wrote to Lord's to express his relief that MCC weren't too disappointed with the results, since he felt his team had carried out the main purposes of the tour: to get cricket restarted at Test match level and to continue the goodwill between England and Australia.

Hammond wrote his letter at Ballarat during MCC's match against Victoria Country XI. He had fielded to lunch on the first day before retiring with fibrositis. He not only missed the fifth Test, but never played in Australia again. His vice-captain, Yardley, took over and immediately relations between the two teams improved. On a rain-affected pitch at Sydney, the fifth Test produced the best cricket of the series. Once again England's luck deserted them as Hutton, now approaching his pomp, was forced to retire on 122 with tonsillitis, missing the rest of the match. After he and Edrich guided England to 151/1, the middle order again disappointed, but thanks to Wright's 7-105 they led narrowly on first innings. McCool in turn troubled the England upper order, and only Compton, with 76, prospered. Needing 214 to win in challenging conditions brought the best out of Bradman, and his 63 paved the way for Australia's five-wicket victory.

Having concluded their tour of Australia, MCC, bar Hutton, Hardstaff, Gibb and Langridge, who returned home early, flew to Auckland, while the baggage went by boat. A wharf strike at Sydney prevented it being loaded, and, with no solution in sight, Howard phoned Dr Evatt at Canberra. He told him about the problem and said that he, Evatt, was their only hope. Evatt assured him that he would do what he could but told him he was not to breathe a word about it to anyone.

In New Zealand, the team was given a royal welcome and crowds flocked to watch them play. After a win against Wellington and a draw against Otago, bad weather ruined the sole Test at Christchurch, Hammond's final Test. The crowd stood to him as he made his way to the wicket, and the New Zealand team gave him three cheers, gestures which inspired him to play to the manner born. His 79 was one small consolation after a harrowing few months in which,

form and fitness aside, he had been outsmarted by a leader whose ruthlessness quashed any hope of a new era in Ashes cricket. 'As for the spirit, I don't think the "goodwill" series helped one iota, and in this Bradman must accept his share of responsibility,' wrote Fingleton. 'He was a good and a shrewd leader, but not a generous one.'²¹ Aside from his unwillingness to curb the number of bouncers, he'd encouraged his fielders to appeal vociferously. At Sydney, he irked Edrich by appealing from point when Compton was hit on the pads.

'That was a pretty good appeal for an Australian captain to make,' Edrich remarked.

'Why? It was plumb out,' Bradman replied.

'I fancy Bradman's cricket was a different game from the one I played,' he later reflected.²²

'Don was the king as far as I was concerned,' opined Compton, 'but there was a win-at-all-costs streak in him that could turn him into less than a likeable opponent.'²³

'The tension on the field really grew out of Bradman's interpretation of the spirit of the game,' concurred Evans. 'He was out to win, and at all costs.'²⁴

Given the shortage of talent available, England were always going to come second best to Australia, especially once Bradman returned to the ranks. It was to the team's credit that they never gave up despite fortune being against them, and in Bedser and Evans they unearthed two great prospects for the future. Whether more inspiring leadership by manager and captain would have made much of a difference is a moot point. Swanton, an early critic of Hammond's, later wrote: 'It was heart-breaking to see morale, which had started so high when we sailed, sink into a general state of disillusionment.'²⁵ Bedser, a great admirer of Hammond in his youth and grateful to him for the way he welcomed his twin brother, Eric, into the party, nevertheless had cause to revise his opinion. 'I found him to be below my ideal as a captain. I was still inexperienced and would have appreciated some words of advice and encouragement from the great man on the first big occasion of my cricketing life.'²⁶ Another critic was Gibb, who felt liberated at the end of the tour. 'Free perhaps from an ever-present

awareness of my erstwhile skipper's presence, free from his quite unpredictable and rather untrustworthy moods.²⁷ What particularly shocked him was the failure of both captain and manager to inquire after the health of Peter Smith and himself on returning to the tour after minor operations.

In other ways, manager and captain fulfilled their role quite adequately. Aside from the fact that nearly 850,000 watched the five Tests, which netted MCC a profit of £50,000, the team were popular wherever they went. 'Because of the perils and tribulations of the Homeland during the war, no previous team had so many ardent well-wishers in Australia,' wrote Fingleton.²⁸ Compared with some past tours, he thought the general barracking was insignificant as the traditionally partisan Australian crowds warmed to this MCC team and wished them well. The most intense piece of barracking was directed at Barnes in Sydney for his repeated appeals against the light; later, at Adelaide, there was Australian disapproval of Bradman for spreading the field against Compton, and at Sydney, in the final Test, they deprecated the over-use of the bouncer by Lindwall and Miller.

While all tours have their fair share of platitudes between officials on both sides, Howard never deviated from his belief that the primary role of this tour was to strengthen the bonds between the two countries. 'England can survive as a first-class power for world peace, only by a continuance of that cooperation in the British Commonwealth of Nations,' he declared in his end-of-tour broadcast to Australians. In this capacity, he'd supported Western Australia's efforts to join the Sheffield Shield, he'd called Melbourne the best ground in the world and he'd complimented Port Pirie for their hospitality when a former Australian player had questioned their right to stage a match against MCC. An accomplished speaker, he was lost for words when the Queensland Cricket Association donated £100 towards the rebuilding of his ground, Old Trafford, after it was seriously damaged during the war. (The Australians were also very generous in sending food parcels to austerly Britain.) At the end of the Test series, he paid a handsome tribute to Australia's superiority, making light of the fact that the tide of fortune hadn't always flowed

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in his side's favour. His discretion and good cheer, along with that of the team, won over their hosts. Bradman commended them for their sportsmanship, Dr Evatt said they had made lifelong friends in the country and that was more important than winning, while the secretary of the ABC assured Lord's that the Australian public had showed nothing but the kindest feelings towards the team. 'They realised what a marvellous job England had done during the long years of war and wanted to pay homage to your representatives.'²⁹ From an English perspective, the UK high commissioner in Australia, Edward Williams, called the team 'excellent ambassadors', and as far as captain and manager were concerned, the players acquitted themselves to the highest of standards. 'In all my experience,' wrote Hammond, 'I have not known or travelled with a finer lot of men and they have fulfilled their task admirably,' the most ironic of accolades from a captain who appeared intent on keeping his distance from them.³⁰