



A GRAND DAY OUT IN SWANSEA

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The Gower Peninsula, the Welsh Baritone Voice and well prepared Laverbread are among the true splendours of the Good Lord's creations. The City of Swansea is the gateway to the Gower. The grand sweep of Swansea Bay stretches from the Mumbles Lifeboat station and Oystermouth, past West Cross, The Mayals, Singleton Hospital and the University of Swansea to the steep residential terraces around Brynmill, the Brangwyn Concert Hall, the City itself and the Docks. The latter are now delicately renamed the Maritime Quarter to appease the post-industrial sensibilities of a generation who were spared the toils and memories of the copper, coal, iron and slate trades of the 18th and 19th centuries, and the explosive ordnance of the Luftwaffe, which enlivened my parents' childhood in the town.

Until the mid 1960s, the sea frontage of Swansea Bay was owned by the steam train and the tram, which would chug past one of the more curious sports grounds of the home nations. Swansea Cricket and Football Club, or the St Helen's Ground nestled in Brynmill at the foot of a steep hill, behind the Mumbles Road and enclosed by Gorse Lane, with the Cricketer's Pub to the East and Bryn Road to the North. It is a hybrid site in the shape of a truncated oval or light bulb, which doubles as a rugby club ground in the winter, and the itinerant home of Glamorgan County Cricket Club for occasional county home matches during the summer.

As a 1957 graduate of the Swansea Hospital's maternity service, with itinerant parents who would make the annual summer trek back to Swansea throughout our childhood for our annual vacation from the near abroad, be it Nottingham, Newcastle or Cheshire, I would walk for many miles around the highways and byways of the Gower.

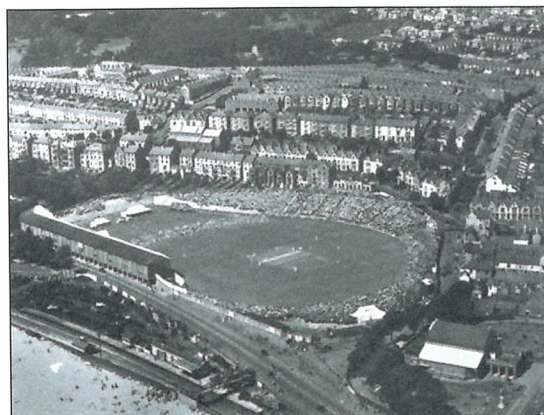


Figure 1: A first class cricket match at St Helen's in the 1950s

On Saturday 31st August 1968, a few days before the start of the new school term and a new life in secondary education, our father decided that the time had come to initiate us with a rite of passage into the intricacies of county cricket. My six year

old brother Christopher and I were packed off to St Helen's with our sandwich lunches, to occupy ourselves for the day at the foot of the East stand, below the windows of the Cricketer's pub. Nottinghamshire were the visiting club, for the first day of a three day match against Glamorgan. The sun was shining gloriously, and most of South Wales was on the beach or anywhere but St Helens.

The history of cricket dates back to the seventeenth century, if not before, and was covered in the free press during the 1700s as a county level sport. The laws were codified in 1744, and the game spread to the colonies, including North America, the West Indies and Australia, before 1800, and to South Africa. The County game was formalised in the 19th Century, with Sussex being founded in 1839, and internal tours developed following the visit of a team of English professionals to the USA in 1859. The inaugural Test Matches with Australia were played in 1877. W.G. Grace played his inaugural first class match in 1864. Only war halted the march of cricket in the 20th century. The number of cricket matches played around the world over the three centuries before 31st August 1968 is incalculable, as is the number of overs bowled in that time.

In all of first class cricket history before the day on which we watched our first ever County Cricket match, one particular batting achievement had never been recorded. In 1967, the wonderfully entertaining Pakistani batsman Majid Khan had hit 34 runs in a six ball over, and by a twist of fate, he was fielding for Glamorgan as the overseas player that day against Nottinghamshire. No batsman had ever cleared the boundary with strikes on six consecutive deliveries in one over, scoring 36 runs.

Nottinghamshire batted at a brisk pace and piled up the runs on a ground with a short boundary and an excellent wicket. The former England cricketer J.B. Bolus scored 140 runs, striking six sixes over the course of his innings, and his opening partner R.A. White scored a further 73 runs. By tea, as the shadows began to cross the ground, Notts had amassed over 300 runs, with the Glamorgan bowler Malcolm Nash taking four of the five wickets to fall.

The fall of the fifth wicket belatedly brought the languid, loping West Indian all rounder Gary Sobers down the long flight of steps from the pavilion. Sobers was already a legend from his achievements in Test cricket over the past decade, including the then highest Test score of 365 not out. The events of the next 60 minutes or so are recorded in exquisite detail in Graeme Lloyd's book, *Six of the Best* (Celluloid Limited 2008, Cardiff). One over in particular, bowled from the Pavilion End by one Malcolm Nash to one Garfield St Auburn Sobers, has become a cricket legend. Ball after ball soared upwards, and four of them over our heads and over the East stand. As the over progressed, the crowd became increasingly animated, willing the next ball over the ropes. Knowledgeable old soaks in the rows behind informed us of the significance of the spectacle as six followed six; 36 runs in six balls!

BBC Wales were filming that afternoon. I have re-watched the grainy coverage of that over to the late Wilf Wooller's astonished commentary on many occasions. As the camera shoots its blurred black and white images from high above the

Mumbles Road end, it pans over the Cricketer's Arms and the patchily occupied stands below, where at least one small pair of blessed young boys became witnesses to an extraordinary piece of crickering history.

Figure 2: Gary Sobers hits six sixes on 31st August 1968. Pictures courtesy BBC Wales.

