

SAMPLE EDITION

8

WINTER 2014

THE **Nightwatchman**  
THE WISDEN CRICKET QUARTERLY



# THE Nightwatchman

THE WISDEN CRICKET QUARTERLY

Cricket's past has been enriched by great writing and Wisden is making sure its future will be too. *The Nightwatchman* is a quarterly collection of essays and long-form articles and is available in print and e-book formats.

Co-edited by Anjali Doshi and Tanya Aldred, with Matt Thacker as managing editor, *The Nightwatchman* features an array of authors from around the world, writing beautifully and at length about the game and its myriad offshoots. Contributors are given free rein over subject matter and length, escaping the pressures of next-day deadlines and the despair of cramming heart and soul into a few paragraphs.

There are several different ways to get hold of and enjoy *The Nightwatchman*. You can subscribe to the print version and get a free digital copy for when you're travelling light. If you don't have enough room on your book case, you can always take out a digital-only subscription. Or if you'd just like to buy a single issue – in print, digital or both – you can do that too. Take a look at the options below and decide which is best for you.



**Full subscription**  
Annual print  
subscription (with  
free e-book versions)  
**£27 (+P&P)**

[Click to Buy](#)



**Digital subscription**  
Annual e-book only  
subscription  
**£10**

[Click to Buy](#)



**Digital single copy**  
Single issue  
(e-book only)  
**£4**

[Click to Buy](#)



**Single copy**  
Single issue (with  
free with free  
e-book version)  
**£9 (+P&P)**

[Click to Buy](#)

Issue 8, out now, features the following:

**Matt Thacker** introduces the eighth issue of *The Nightwatchman*

**Benj Moorehead** digs beneath the stats to uncover the real Ken Barrington

**Matthew Engel** says we should cherish our counties

**Patrick Kidd** remembers the man who taught him to love cricket

**Christian Ryan** delves deep into Sunny Gavaskar's psyche

**Daniel Harris** on how the 2005 Ashes will be forever linked to his divorce

**Lawrence Booth** explains his mildly irrational devotion to Northamptonshire

**Charlie Connelly** recreates Alfred Shaw's heroics by the light of the midnight sun

**Kate Laven** on Derek Pringle's records of the non-cricketing kind

**Nick Harrison** on how girls wrecked his cricket career

**Russell Holden** wonders what role Afro-Caribbean cricketers will play in England's future

**Brian Halford** on the real-life inspiration for Wodehouse's most famous character

**Cold snaps** – a series of winter-themed cricket photographs

**S.J. Litherland** rewrites "The Twelve Days of Christmas"

**Ali Martin** on a hundred that passed the world by

**Neville Scott** meditates on life, death and cricket

**Mark Valentine** salutes the soldier with cricket's highest score

**Simon Creasey** elaborates on the role the inner voice plays

**Chris Bradshaw** spots some uncanny similarities between cricket and poker

**James Coyne** contemplates cricket's future in Italy

**Benedict Douglas and David Wilkinson** on an Anglo-Catholic partnership

**Scott Murray** longs for the return of the paunch

On the following pages you'll find an article by Ed Smith on how the cricket calendar influences his year and extracts from several other pieces.





## A MAN FOR ALL SEASONS

*Ed Smith on how cricket's annual rhythms remain even into retirement*

The rhythm of a cricketer's year sets the civilian calendar upside down. Spring brings anxiety as much as excitement, pressure as well as promise. Early dawns and newly cut grass announce the return of being judged – your game will soon be dissected, your character tested, your scores published. Cherry blossom and the smell of awakening signal work, not play.

High summer does not mark the sleepy indulgence of holiday but the peak of the working calendar. On cloudless July days, when offices empty suspiciously, cricket seasons are won and lost. In early autumn, as the working world revs up after its long sleep, a cricketer winds down; soon the pressure will lift, and your time will be your own again. Winter is recast as summer:

a time to reach an accommodation with missed opportunities, to play, experiment and escape.

I have known these things for many years, almost as long as I've lived. But I'm surprised they stay with me, even now. After all, there will be no big games this year, no pressure, no calendar of professional matches. Cricket has been replaced by writing. The batting crease has become my study, my cricket bat a keyboard. And yet the old feelings, brought on by the smell of the grass or the sound of a spring dawn, remain just as strong. A baseball man – cricket's cousin sport – put it best. "You spend a good portion of your life holding on to a baseball," Yankees' pitcher Jim Bouton reflected, "before you realise it's holding on to you."

Cricket, I am now learning, will always inform my experience of the seasons, especially those spots of time when nature mixes with memory. A farmer may sell his land and yet retain the seasonal body clock that once defined his life. A university don can move out from the quadrangle where he spent his working life and yet still half-wake at every hour through the night, expecting to hear the comfort of college bells.

So it is for me as an ex-cricketer. When a northerly wind blows in early April, I remember those pre-season practice matches, the coldness in the air exacerbated by the lack of nervous energy. The match's real point is not the play itself but the unthinking camaraderie back in the dressing-room, finding refuge in the instant coffee and laughter. By the end of play, when the temperature has dropped to a few degrees, your face glows with rustic ruddy simplicity. But always, not far beneath the surface, the old questions: will this be my year, can I break through, sustain it, make the England team?

Spring rain brings an odd kind of guilt. Where the working world feels only resentment at a damp bank holiday, the batsman has mixed emotions. When May showers turn the velvet mossiness even more lushly green, the batsman knows the day will bring no pressure or anxiety – but no challenges or opportunities either. Rain gifts cricketers random holidays, jokers shuffled into the pack of working days. But how to feel about them? To relish an empty day too eagerly is a symptom of bruised confidence. To pull back the curtains, see rain and feel instinctively relieved: a bad sign. By the end of that afternoon, after stretched-out card games and high-tempered indoor football, you feel a day has been

more fully wasted than does the office-worker trudging back home from a day trip to a sodden beach.

Later, in high summer when the air is hottest at two or three in the afternoon, I think of batsmen in full flow. There are two ends to the stick, of course. On the receiving end, in the field, there is the desperate certainty of watching a master batsman mercilessly compile a hundred in midsummer. Then a second, happier memory, days when I was the controlling figure myself, feeling invulnerable with the bat and, just as good, sensing that the fielding side knew it too. Even gently timed shots, lent on rather than hit, skate across the scorched and spike-scarred earth, the pale and brittle grass unable to slow the ball's journey to the boundary. The sun becomes your ally, helping the bowlers and fielders to wilt, sapping their belief as well as energy. In a way, heat and cold have the same effect: extremes magnify an advantage where temperate days narrow the gap, preserving hope.

When the shadows lengthen and the evening light softens, I remember the hardest job of all, opening the batting just before six o'clock, wondering how many overs I will have to negotiate, uncomfortably aware that the bowlers can roar in then rest up all night, knowing how much easier it will be tomorrow if only I can make it through, trying not to resent the fact that an accident of the clock has made my job so much harder.

Autumn proper, damp leaves and bonfires, will always feel like a chapter completed. A time to slow down, to gather, and to summon energy for another attempt.

...



F Scott Fitzgerald, writing about the sportswriter and humorist Ring Lardner, rebuked his friend for allowing sport to absorb too much attention when Lardner's receptivity was at its peak and his experience was most formative. "A writer can spin on about his adventures after thirty, after forty, after fifty," wrote Fitzgerald, "but the criteria by which those adventures are weighed and valued are irrevocably settled at the age of twenty-five. However deeply Ring cut into it, his cake had exactly the diameter of Frank Chance's diamond."

I don't quite agree with Fitzgerald. But it is certainly true that cricket got into me, my way of feeling. Throughout this year, my mind has wandered back to another cricket season, my first as a first-class player, 18 years ago. That spring is the most deeply imprinted, the April by which all the others have been measured. In fact, 1996 is now the exact halfway point of my life; perhaps it is natural to feel conscious of the hinge.

Each day I cycled to Fenner's, the university's ground, cricket bag on my back, precariously balanced. The first three days of practice, 1, 2 and 3 April, were all perfectly sunny - an augur. After making runs in the "friendlies" against other universities, I was selected to play for Cambridge in the season's first-class opener against Glamorgan. It was an astonishing anachronism that I could be playing first-class cricket as an 18-year-old amateur. Just as football was embracing the global outreach of the Premier League, cricket allowed England's two ancient universities - really no better than decent club sides - to retain the status of elite professional teams. We might have been out of our depth, but I told anyone who'd listen that

I would make a hundred on debut. At one lunch, challenged by a sceptical friend, we shook hands on a bet.

The first day of my first season was spent mostly in the field. It was a pattern I'd get used to. Our professional opponents would mercilessly tot up 300-odd for the loss of a wicket or two, then declare, inviting the student amateurs to suffer half an hour in the fading light, from 6 to 6.30, just the kind of mini-session that, much later as an opening batsman who'd experienced a good few failures, I would learn to dread.

Not then. I finished the first day of my career 13 not out, annoyed to have my innings interrupted. That night, meeting two of the university's old hands for a pint in the Cross Keys pub opposite Peterhouse, I casually announced that I needed only 87 more the following day. "Settle down," our opening bowler said, "you've only got 13!" I was only out by one. The following day I was caught behind for 101. I really ought to remember the celebrations that evening but I can't. The ambience of that week and that April month hasn't faded, the "fun" I can't remember at all.

• • •

I now live at the top of the North Downs in east Kent. A good day begins by walking across the valley to Elmsted, then rising again towards Hastingleigh. It is one of the remotest corners of England's congested south-east. Two Norman churches serve perhaps a dozen houses. If a car passes on your walk, you can count yourself unlucky.

Walk a little further, up onto the Wye Downs, and southern England opens up before you. It is too wild

to be straightforwardly pretty, more uncontained than the manicured spirit of the commuter belt. To the north and east, the Downs curve in a gentle arc. To the south and west, the land drops away quickly towards the Romney Marsh and the Channel beyond. Man has left his mark, too. There are grassed-over craters, a dozen yards wide, scars left by Doodlebugs in 1940.

When I lived in Wye 11 years ago, playing cricket for Kent, I would run up the Downs to train. With what now seems comic myopia, I never reached the remarkable view from the top. I had my circuit and stuck to it - aerobic goals came before aesthetic considerations or a sense of adventure. Talk about missing the woods for the trees! I am only half joking when I wonder how many more hundreds I would have scored if I'd slowed down and made it to the top.

The walker, thankfully, has outstayed the runner and this year I've walked the Downs every morning I've been at home. Nature's renewal is deepened by human continuity. Writing in his 1909 memoir *The South Country*, Edward Thomas, who lived and walked in Kent, tried to capture what made this landscape "mellow and serene, that knows not moorland or craggy coast". His answer: "Only a thousand years of settled continuous government... could have wrought earth and sky into such a harmony... We bow the head and reverence the labour of time in smoothing the grass, mellowing the stone."

It surprised me, coming back to live here, only eight miles from the St Lawrence ground in Canterbury where I spent such a good portion of an earlier career. The first few years after I'd left cricket, I half-consciously avoided Kent. It felt more likely I'd live in America or Europe than go back near the fields where I played cricket, when ambition was so bounded and narrow. It can be hard to tell which parts of our past will remain securely in the past, and which are aspects of ongoing experience.

We go looking for one thing and find another. Matthew Parris, in his autobiography *Chance Witness*, described how, as the MP for West Derbyshire, he needed a home in the constituency. "In moments of cynical calculation," he wrote, "I had thought of West Derbyshire as a rung on the ladder of politics. Now politics was beginning to feel like a rung on the ladder to West Derbyshire. I preferred it. It was this place, not Westminster, that meant more to me." He left the House but stayed at home in Derbyshire.

A common mixture of ambition and competitiveness led me to cricket, but something very different was left behind. Through landscape and memory, weather and nostalgia, a sense of place and belonging, cricket still punctuates my seasons and informs my home. It remains my liturgical calendar and, even though I no longer worship, the meaning survives.

• • •

**BENJ MOOREHEAD**

Ken Barrington. The name bellows from the bowels of English cricket.

There is a foreboding austerity in the very sound of it. It seems more likely to belong to an ancient era, perhaps that which joined Hobbs and Sutcliffe, or even Shrewsbury and Grace. Yet the name appears on the same scorecards as those of Cowdrey, Dexter and Graveney, whose trails still blaze. Can it really be that Compton, whose dash of modernity somehow endures, comes before Barrington?

• • •

**MATTHEW ENGEL**

At the same time the teams are becoming less and less like county clubs and more like quasi-corporate subsidy-based entities who happen to be based somewhere or other nearby. For all kinds of reasons, the festivals, the most cherishable part of county cricket, are almost passing into history. Since the players don't put themselves about, cricket's role as a unifying force is diminishing. What does Yorkshire CCC now mean in Hull or Middlesbrough, when the team hides itself an hour and a quarter's drive away? The notion of county and the county cricket club have marched downhill together.

• • •

**PATRICK KIDD**

"Sorry I'm late," he puffed. "Been at Chelmsford, couldn't leave. Middlesex 51 all out. Essex champions again." Our aeronautical engineering was put aside, and Shylock never had a chance. The rest of the class was taken up with Roger telling us all about how Derek Pringle and Neil Foster had taken the first four wickets for five runs and how the whole side had collapsed in 25 overs. He simply couldn't leave his seat while that was happening. He had our full understanding. Essex weren't in fact quite champions at this point, but by the end of the next day they were, after Graham Gooch's 259 had helped them to a first-innings lead of 515 – and against our deadliest rivals, too, who had denied us the title the previous year.

• • •

**CHRISTIAN RYAN**

A fast track to grappling with the innermost psychology of being Sunny Gavaskar, with what's palpable and what's fiction, is to mention his unmentionables – or closer to the nub of it, his box. I don't mean the 6×3×2 oblong inches of protective plastic. I'm meaning the irony of his box. Once lodged, in its correct place, Sunny's box was the cue for his teammates in the dressing-room to go silent, give the little man clear air, let his three-blades-whirring helicopter brain launch itself into the contest ahead. Yet he never actually got hit on the box. There's the irony. Such was the unbreachability of his defensive technique that Sunny's box's physical purpose was rendered N/A while simultaneously fulfilling an out-of-body need: for space, quiet.

**DANIEL HARRIS**

To get things going, Bangladesh arrived to play a couple of Tests – encounters of which I remember little, due principally to their coinciding with the decimation of my life. Roughly, we got on well, I still loved her, she didn't still love me, it happens.

I was introduced to this truism the day before West Brom at home; obviously United couldn't muster a win, just as they hadn't on my barmitzvah, just as they hadn't on our wedding. Then, three days later, came an embarrassing home kicking off Chelsea, before, the following afternoon, Malcolm Glazer bought the club. Suddenly, the only two things I was sure were forever, the only two receptacles for my unconditional love, were gone.

• • •

**LAWRENCE BOOTH**

This curious loyalty was never designed to boost my mood or salvage what little remained of my street-cred. It's true that a surprising number of press-box colleagues have a soft spot for cricket's least prepossessing county (though Leicestershire and Derbyshire come close). But such allegiances are often personal matters; we suffer mainly in silence. Besides, lines such as "I see Nigel Felton has ground out another nuggety half-century," and "will Tony Penberthy ever bowl an outswinger?" were hardly the stuff of first dates. No: to support Northamptonshire, as I have done for 25 years, has mainly been to confirm Henry David Thoreau's line about most men leading quiet lives of desperation. Come to Wantage Road on the final morning of a Championship match destined for a draw, and you'll get the picture.

• • •

**CHARLIE CONNELLY**

They balanced each other. Both passionate about the game and both having contributed their own legacies in different ways, Alfred excelling from the very beginning – carried shoulder high for the last mile home to Burton Joyce after his victorious debut at Hoveringham while still a boy – to become arguably the greatest bowler England ever had; Sheffield able to propagate the game of cricket in a different way through the good fortune of his social and economic circumstances. The simple man who used to walk five miles each way without a penny in his pocket just to practise and the aristocrat who on a whim could bring a golden-haired lad from a distant village because he'd heard a rumour he could drive a ball like Grace in his prime, made curious but genuine friends.

**KATE LAVEN**

And there, in a couple of gruff asides, are the clues to Pringle's love of record collecting. He likes to plod around grimy vinyl emporiums, some of them rat-infested, in search of elusive originals and he loves to place vintage vinyl on his 20-year-old record player and lose himself in the "noise".

• • •

**NICK HARRISON**

The girls arrived at my school at the beginning of my lower-sixth year. That first day they gathered like a murder of crows in front of the cricket pavilion. There was something ominous in their geography. I didn't know why they were there. And I knew nothing of their ways. I'd only read about them in biology books. But they came and they ruined everything for me.

• • •

**RUSSELL HOLDEN**

In tracing the emergence of Tymal Mills (close personal friendship and county mentoring), Daniel Bell-Drummond (scholarship to Millfield School), Keith Barker (cricket in the genes) and Chris Jordan (identification by the quintessentially English Bill Athey in his capacity as a talent scout for Dulwich College), I would argue that – though chance may have played a role in their development – the issue is far more deep-rooted and longstanding.

• • •

**BRIAN HALFORD**

Much of this scene – the marquees, the chatter, the colourful ring of spectators – was in place in August 1913 when Gloucestershire began a County Championship match against Warwickshire. But also present that day were two men whose paths' fleeting convergence was to leave an indelible mark on English literature and English life. For on this field Percy Jeeves played in front of journalist and author Pelham Grenville Wodehouse.

• • •

**ALI MARTIN**

These two undulating lines formed the 13th and 14th paragraphs of the Sun's report from England's second 50-over warm-up match of the 2013 ODI tour to India. They were bashed out by my numb fingers on a freezing-cold night at the Feroz Shah Kotla stadium on 8 January after a Delhi XI had cantered to their target of 295 in 48.3 overs. A six-wicket bloody nose for Alastair Cook's tourists – and a second defeat in a row – those two lines were my entire description of a bludgeoning 110 by Shikhar Dhawan. It was one of those times when the most noteworthy performance was anything but the most newsworthy.

**NEVILLE SCOTT**

For, without warning, The Times had also commanded that morning a 900-word obituary of Geoff Cook, a man I had then known for 25 years. Indeed, as we had discovered when we wrote a book, *The Narrow Line*, together in 1991, I had even seen Cook – a 19-year-old in only his third appearance for Northamptonshire – make his maiden first-class duck. It was not a memorable innings.

• • •

**MARK VALENTINE**

This year there have been commemorations for the many first-class cricketers who died during the First World War. But 2014 also marks the centenary of the death of a cricketing soldier whose name stands proud in the history of the sport, even though he never played a single game of first-class cricket.

• • •

**SIMON CREASEY**

Ian Bell does it. So do Michael Clarke, Kumar Sangakkara and Graeme Smith. You may or may not have noticed it but, if you look carefully, over the course of an innings, you'll see that most top-class batsmen appear to be mumbling away to themselves under their helmet. For some players, it's motivational pep talk: "Come on, you can do it." For others, it's an instructional aide during their innings: "Get forward, play straight." It may be audible to the fielders around them or an internal dialogue they play over and over until they finally get out (which is when self-talk tends to become expletive-laden) but, whatever form it takes, research suggests it can be of great benefit to sporting performances.

• • •

**CHRIS BRADSHAW**

Richie Benaud famously said: "Captaincy is 90 per cent luck, only 10 per cent skill - but don't try it without the 10 per cent." Despite being more of a horse-racing man than a card sharp (Benaud restricts himself to wagers on things that cannot speak), his adage sounds remarkably similar to something written by Doyle Brunson, one of the greatest poker players who has ever lived.

• • •

**JAMES COYNE**

Simone Gambino had his first experience of cricket at Villa Pamphili in 1967, aged nine, when a ball struck him flush on the nose. Most would have taken that as a sign to delve no further. But while in London visiting his grandparents, Gambino noticed the 1975 Ashes on television, and returned home to lead a team of Italians in the Rome league. He has an evocative black-and-white still of himself and six friends, clutching three bats and a pair of leather gloves on a sunny autumn day. It looks, from this distance, a heady time of wanderlust. "In all honesty, no... I don't look back on that time with much fondness," he says. "We went through four years of constant decline [1976 to 1979] because the expats refused to hand over the organisation. By 1979 we would turn up at Palazzola and form impromptu teams while never quite making it to 11 a side. You know the kind of childish attitude: 'It's my game, so I would rather tear it to pieces than have you fix it'."

• • •

**BENEDICT DOUGLAS AND DAVID WILKINSON**

In England, cricket and the church have a long association, with the history of swapping ecclesiastical black for cricketing white partly explicable by the values both aspire to. The Rev James Pycroft, in his other bible, *The Cricket Field* (1851), wrote that the cardinal virtues required for cricket were: "patience, fortitude, self-denial, obedience, good humour and an unruffled temper."

• • •

**SCOTT MURRAY**

An obsession with athleticism is threatening to ruin modern cricket. It's threatening to ruin all other sports, too - with the obvious exception of athletics - though some pursuits are gamely holding out. In golf, for example, last year's PGA Championship was won by Jason Dufner, a pleasingly pudgy somnambulant shuffler whose response to winning his first major was to fill up the Wanamaker Trophy - one of the most voluminous prizes in professional sport - with dirty 49¢ tortillas from the nearest Taco Bell.

# THE **Nightwatchman**

THE WISDEN CRICKET QUARTERLY

The eighth edition of *The Nightwatchman* is published at the beginning of December 2014 on a limited print run. So subscribe or order now to ensure that you get your copy.

Click to visit  
[thenightwatchman.net](http://thenightwatchman.net)

