

THE
Nightwatchman
THE WISDEN CRICKET QUARTERLY

THE SELECTION



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THE NIGHTWATCHMAN SELECTION

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THE Nightwatchman

I'm the nightwatchman
I lie awake
Wondering what's gonna happen when the dawn breaks

I'm the nightwatchman
I take the fall
I'll always be around when you call

'Cause all that I have is yours
I'd give it all and more to be by your side in the morning light

I'm the nightwatchman
Alone in my bed
Fighting the ghosts and the demons inside my head

Morning has broken and I've got to go
How it's gonna end I don't know

But all that I have is yours
I'd give it all and more
When they let you down, call me I'll be around
'Cause all that I have is yours
I'd give it all and more to be by your side
In the morning light
In the morning light

Written by Neil Hannon & Thomas Walsh (The Duckworth Lewis Method)

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THE SELECTION

To give you an idea of the kind of content featured in *The Nightwatchman*, we have produced this taster, including eleven (a good cricketing number) extracts from pieces that have appeared over the first three years of its existence. When we started out in spring 2013, I wrote the following... it still stands today.

The Nightwatchman, with Wisden's backing, will provide a platform for writers from all over the world to write about cricket-related topics of their choosing. It has no editorial line, no agenda. Whatever their specialist field – and we hope to encourage contributors whom you would not normally find writing about cricket – our writers will be given the freedom to cover the topics they find interesting, to a length the subject matter merits, and in a style of their choosing.

It is the dearth of long-form writing on cricket – with the notable exception of the Almanack, which increasingly provides independent, quality, considered editorial – that led us to set up *The Nightwatchman*. We believe that this relative shortage of interesting, original, insightful and in-depth cricket-centric writing is down to lack of opportunity rather than lack of talent, and we are looking to address that. We hope *The Nightwatchman* will be the place people come to read cricket writing at its very best.

Writing will of course endure, but it needs nurturing so that the next generation understands that there is a whole host

of interesting things to read beyond a tweet and a blog. The sprawl of the web contains much good (and much bad) cricket writing, and the ability of anyone, anywhere to set themselves up and start broadcasting to the world has brought to light plenty of excellent writers on the game. But the medium is about immediacy, about breaking a story, more than crafting a piece that can be consumed and contemplated at leisure.

While technology and the internet have changed the world and the way we view it, it is our belief that the written word, particularly long-form writing, still has its place. We are not railing against the onrushing waves, demanding the digital tide be turned back – we want *The Nightwatchman* to be accessible wherever you are and whenever you want it, so it will always be available in e-book formats as well as print – but we can't disguise a love for paper, for the specialness of printed matter. It's the materiality, the physical connection, the smell, the positioning on – and population of – the bookshelf, the passing down the family line, the inscriptions, the annotations, the knowledge of ownership.

The Nightwatchman is open to anyone and everyone – it doesn't matter if you are a cricket journalist, a historian, a student, a mathematician, a musician, a player or a poet. We'll look at all submissions (but promise nothing) that fulfil our basic criteria of the pieces being about cricket (however tangential) and being interesting, original and well-written. And we hope that within these pages you will find writing that interests, excites and inspires you.



DON'T THINK OF AN ELEPHANT – THE NIGHTWATCHMAN'S LOT

Jon Hotten delves into the psyche of the nightwatchman, the man who highlights cricket's glorious idiosyncrasies

The first nightwatchman I knew, or at least the first who admitted to being one, was Alf Gover. Alf had taken 1,555 wickets for Surrey and England but he was most famous for his cricket school, a low-level, two-storey building with a whitewashed front halfway up East Hill in Wandsworth. Viv Richards, Barry Richards, Andy Roberts and Sunil Gavaskar are among Alf's alumni, but anyone with the price of a half-hour net – about four quid, from memory – was welcome to try and fit their cricket bag longways through the school's slender side door and up the narrow stairs that opened out onto the snooker room, washed in its murky yellow light, and then past the bar, into the changing rooms and up to the nets via a thin corridor with heavy canvas hung across it at the far end.

I went there every week for five or six winters in my teens; if I have had my moments when I can play this game (debatable) it's down to Gover's. I must have seen Alf hundreds of times, and he was always dressed identically: immaculate cream flannels, a silk cravat under his stiff collar, white hair swept nobly back and, most impressively, his England sleeveless sweater, the three lions in its centre, now so long it almost reached his knees. Sometimes, in his office, which was behind the snooker room, he would wear a blue England blazer too. Alf was in his seventies then, but he still bowled hundreds of overs in the nets, his arm brought down almost to the horizontal by the years, his pace a distant memory. In retrospect, it was like facing a very slow version of Lasith Malinga. He could put the



ball wherever he pleased, and would often call the shot he wanted you to play (“one to drive”). It was traditional that newcomers would have their first lesson with Alf so that he could make an assessment of their game before he allocated them to one of his coaches. There was a famous story that he’d told Viv Richards that he wouldn’t make it if he kept hitting the ball so much on the leg-side – I didn’t believe it: Alf would have known genius when it presented itself to him.

All kinds of people met in the bar there. Harold Pinter, who called cricket “God’s greatest creation” went sometimes, and Timothy West, the actor, took his son along; Monte Lynch used the nets in the winter, pounding ball after ball from anyone who’d bowl at him; and Alf’s coaches, a fluid line-up of travelling pros that washed into south London from across the globe, brought in all sorts of strange, nocturnal characters, most of whom engaged in long snooker matches on Alf’s pay-as-you-go table. The barman was a guy called Terry who had another job humping electrical goods into houses. He once told me a brilliant and no doubt greatly exaggerated story about delivering a fridge for Dave Vanian, the lead singer in the Damned. “He slept in a coffin,” Terry said mournfully. “He showed me it.” Alf would, very occasionally and if the bar was quiet, tell some stories too. One of them was about the time he was nightwatchman at The Oval. He survived for the evening and when play resumed at 11am the following day, he found himself seeing the ball so well he batted for another hour, at which point his partner, having received a signal from the balcony, came down the wicket and said: “Alf, I think you

might get out now, we have some very good batsmen waiting to come in.” His partner was Jack Hobbs. His captain was Douglas Jardine.

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The use of the nightwatchman is one of cricket’s implacable enigmas, a tactic that has been employed almost since the game began. Its effectiveness has always been disputed and never been proved. Nonetheless it persists and probably will as long as matches are played over successive days. It is a notion based on human fallibility, a defence of position, a counter-intuitive decision to place a player of lesser ability into a parlous situation that others are better equipped to handle. Beyond that, it is an identifier of the game’s greatest single divide: that between batsmen and bowlers, men whose professional lives are consumed by thoughts of how to overcome one another. The very act of needing a nightwatchman, when wickets are falling at the end of a day, is indicative of failure: batsmen who have lounged in the field for hours have been unable to survive at the crease for a few minutes; bowlers who have trooped exhausted from the same arena are now expected to clean up after them. It has a sacrificial element to it. It tells one member of a team that they are more expendable than another, that their abilities are more lightly regarded. It is about rank and position. In a game so finely attuned to psychology, the nightwatchman taunts a player with his mental frailty and displays it to the world and, when it is over for the day, the batsman who has declined to go in must change in the same room as the bowler he has required to do so. Some

captains have banned the idea; others have exempted themselves from responsibility for it. In an age where the prevailing mindset is aggression, the nightwatchman is a laying-down of arms, a brief if temporary surrendering of the initiative. It's a move that piles pressure not onto the opposition, but onto the team employing it. And yet it lives.

• • •

Glory for the nightwatchman is double-edged, because it is not his primary function, or even close to it. Instead it is his lot to strap on the pads, tighten the thigh guard and the chin strap, carefully locate the box, and then rummage through the dressing-room for any other kind of available padding that the lower-order man might not always think to pack; an arm guard, perhaps, or a chest protector, before striding down the steps to the inevitable disappointment of a crowd wanting to see a big name further discomfited. Nathan Lyon walked out to a rapturous standing ovation, his face a picture of joy beneath his visor until he realised that the SCG thought he was Ricky Ponting. But the more usual noise goes one of two ways: ironic beery cheers or a low disillusioned hum combined with dutiful applause. This is what the crowd thinks of the nightwatchman.

Our man, though, might barely hear the crowd. He takes guard to face a team with confidence surging through it, his very presence serving them notice of the timorous state of their opponents. He knows that the batsman he is protecting doesn't fancy it, and if an accomplished batsman feels that the chances of being dismissed quickly are

higher than usual, then what chance does he, as an acknowledged lesser player, have? He knows that if he fails, that man will have to bat anyway, in even more parlous circumstances. And he knows that he cannot play with any freedom, cannot dispel those nerves with a full swing of the arms. The game has narrowed itself down to this: the cut strip, the constricting field, the pressing bowler. All around him is aggression, and yet he cannot meet like with like.

There is an old psychological experiment that consists of a single sentence: "Don't think of an elephant." Everyone reading it does. This is the mental realm of the nightwatchman, whose brief is similarly singular: "Don't get out." It's a negative thought, a negative state that any sports mind-doctor would tell you to avoid, and yet it is unavoidable because it is true. Don't get out. Don't think of the elephant.

And there's a further twist. Just as those people who yearn to own fast cars are exactly the people that shouldn't be driving them, those temperamentally best suited to a job like nightwatchman, the extroverts, the happy-go-lucky, the glass-half-full merchants, are most likely to play a big shot to "relieve the pressure" (read "get that beery, end-of-the-day cheer from the crowd"). It is a job for the spiky, the introverted, the cussed, a job for the men who don't want it. England's most successful nightwatchman of recent times, Jimmy Anderson, who survived on 26 of 28 occasions, is proof of the character required. He has a highest Test score of 34, a highest first-class score of 37 not out, an average of 10. His repertoire of shots is limited, his demeanour at the crease stoic. He is quite clearly not

a batsman, and furthermore, he will never approach those distant foothills of a bowling all-rounder. At the first opportunity, he handed the job over to someone else, feeling, apparently, that his seniority as a cricketer was being impinged upon. In all of these ways, Jimmy was a perfect nightwatchman.

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Perhaps the position persists because it is so equivocal, so unprovably right or wrong. One study, which looked at 113 instances, found that the collective nightwatchmen had a mean career average of 15 in their usual position, and an average of 15 as nightwatchmen too. The effect of a nightwatchman on subsequent partnerships is examined, as is its effect on the final score. But what the data cannot provide is an answer to what would have happened without one in those precise circumstances. The study is called *The myth of the nightwatchman*, a title intended to be conclusive but that instead carries more weight when read another way. Nightwatchmanship eludes statistical clarity because its truth is very simple: it works when it works.

The word itself is a beautiful and evocative one, redolent of safety. Someone to watch over us, to take away that angst and fear, just for a short time while it's at its worst and as darkness draws near. A long career in professional cricket is in part an accrual of scar tissue, of mental wounds that must be constantly overcome. For batsmen it is the psychology of the game that is its real key, and for all of the notions that cricket is a team sport, each man stands at the crease alone. Perhaps the act of being a nightwatchman can be seen as a gift too.

John Arlott once said to Mike Brearley: "You know Mike, you're the only one who realises it doesn't matter." All of us – players, coaches, followers, fans – are in the business of taking cricket seriously, and there's a marvellous absurdity to that. The game does things to us. Here's a story that might be the best nightwatchman yarn of them all. In a match against the touring New Zealanders, Nottinghamshire's Kevin Saxelby dislocated his shoulder swinging at a wide. That is the nightwatchman, and that is cricket, in all of its mad glory.



WAITING TO SEND

Gideon Haigh talks about what he talks about when writing

I have been asked to write a piece for *The Nightwatchman*. About what I'm not entirely sure. I feel faintly uneasy. But then, at this prospect, I always do, and somehow it has always ended up getting done.

It's made me think at any rate. Because this month is actually 25 years since the publication of my first cricket article, in *Wisden Cricket Monthly*. It concerned a County Championship match at The Oval, all four days of which I attended, in which Lancashire made 803 in reply to 9 for 707. At the moment, coincidentally, I am sitting in the living room of one of the players who made a hundred in that game, Mike Atherton, now my friend and *Times* colleague. He is at the other end of his dining-room table in the act of writing a column about England's selection for the third Ashes Test. He is using a battered old silver MacBook Air identical to mine. The tableau is a little like a literary Magritte painting. Because while I watch someone write a column, I'm contemplating a column about columns.

Mike is looking out the window just now. He hasn't typed anything for a

few minutes. We were chatting earlier about Gary Ballance and Ian Bell, the difficulty of sizing replacements up given the lack of pace and the shallow ranks of spin bowling in the County Championship. He's drawing a few ideas together, preliminary to committing his thoughts to print, as am I. Curious: I've never really thought about how people do this, including me. Yet it's the form of writing I've done most of: columns of 900-1,000 words about cricket, expressing opinion, describing action, capturing moments. And it's very different to my other main form of writing, of books, which I do alone, surrounded usually by other books. Today Mike and I have only one another for company; quite a lot of the time we tap away in a room full of other people describing similar events, at similar lengths, for similar publications.

In some senses, it's an activity that's changed little from a hundred years ago when the likes of Pelham Warner wrote for the *Morning Post* and Philip Trevor for the *Daily Telegraph*. After the First World War, Neville Cardus raised it to an art form in the *Guardian*. He might not recognise cricket any



more, but he could still relate to the act of writing about it. Certain unchanged aspects of cricket lend themselves naturally to opining: the amount of time it takes; the amount of that time in repose, between balls, between games; and now, funnily enough, the degree of its electronic diffusion, which means that many, many people see it who aren't there and who wish to check their views against those who are. As a proportion of overall output, there's probably more opinion generation than ever, television and radio bearing the main brunt of instant reporting.

In the apparatus dedicated to following the game, written media occupy a special, at times slightly uneasy space. We do not pay for our privileges: our lanyards reveal us to be "non-rights holders". We are less of a clerisy than in the days of, say, EW Swanton or John Woodcock, and are now in some respects quite marginal to the game. The true opinion shapers are the eminences of the commentary box, heavy with playing honours – Mike, of course, doubles as one of those. But there's still something about words nailed down, rather than in flight, that provokes response. As Cardus wrote in comparing the publics whom he served as music critic and cricket writer: "If I said that the *Hammerklavier Sonata* was the last thing Beethoven wrote, I'd get a couple of dozen letters, 75 per cent from foreigners. But if I said that Sir Leonard Hutton made 363 at The Oval in 1938, I'd get thousands from Yorkshiremen alone."

Mike's just got up to make coffee, wonders if I'd like one. Frankly, I should be making the coffee. I sometimes say that between us we played 115 Tests for

England, but I enjoy no natural authority. I'm no more than averagely opinionated about cricket; I am fair-to-poor at prediction, no better than ordinary as a judge of talent. My head is overstocked with cricket memories mixed with history and biography, while I've an abiding interest in cricket's business and politics, partly because these seldom seem to interest many others. But in this sense I don't feel myself much advantaged as a cricket writer, especially given my everyday earnest incompetence as a cricket player.

Which may be why I've continued at it – for the stimulation of the constant low-key stress involved in finding new things to say about old things. Batsmen hit a ball, bowlers try to get them out; players play well and badly, set records good and bad; players get picked and dropped; coaches, selectors and administrators are perceived as a result to have succeeded and failed. A writer of female erotica once said to me: "The challenge with writing my stuff is that sex is such a repetitive activity." I replied: "That's the challenge with writing my stuff too." How many ways can you describe the activities of cricket meaningfully, in such a way that it doesn't sound like something said many, many times before, but also in such a way that doesn't sound like a flight of gratuitous fancy? I've wondered this for 25 years, then consoled myself with the advice that the Martian gives Woody Allen in *Stardust Memories*: "You want to help mankind? Tell funnier jokes."

Being a current player, even an exceedingly modest one, adds a little layer of interest too. Winning; losing; staying in; getting out; attacking; being

attacked: it's not only big-time cricketers who do these things. Funnily enough, just last summer I developed a new sense of sympathy with modern players. I won my very first flag in 40 years as a club cricketer. On retirements I had until that time taken a fairly unsentimental line – that rational self-appraisal was the duty of every cricketer; that big wins should be regarded as opportune moments for graceful departures. But if top cricketers feel anywhere near as good as I did after forming part of the Yarras 3rds in the Mercantile Cricket Association C-Grade, then I don't wonder that quitting is hard, because my first instinct was not to rest on my laurels but to want to feel that good again.

Hmmm. Mike has just typed something. Must have been good, because he is – the best in the business, I think. And he just wrote something else. I bet it was smart. Unlike this rubbish I'm writing. Maybe this wasn't such a great idea. There's that voice – the voice that tells you you're missing the point, off on your own folly, speculating idly. But, of course, some days it's like that. A trend is hard to delineate. The ideas refuse to form. On the days you are writing about an actual game, the play may be uninspiring, the context unclear. You commit too early. You start too late.

Of course, you hanker to watch exciting, dramatic cricket; but, perhaps even more so, you wish it to occur on a timetable conducive to straightforward interpretation and punctual delivery. The two do not necessarily always go hand-in-hand. An example that sticks in my memory was the Lord's Test ten years ago, when England walked off to a “glory-glory-Ashes-coming-home” ovation at tea having bowled Australia

out for 190. As this was obviously the story, I duly wrote so for the *Guardian*. Then English wickets started falling. “Yes, that's not good for England;” I said after each. “But hey, the story is still their bowling and Australia's batting, right?” Not with England 7 for 92 it wasn't. My 1,000 carefully chosen words had perforce to be dustbinned, 1,000 more in praise of Glenn McGrath cobbled together. Not that the first lot were bad; they were just wrong for the occasion. Not that the second were any better; they were merely more current.

I swapped stories recently with Martin Johnson, who inevitably had a better one, about a 1993 B&H Cup group game involving Surrey and Lancashire at The Oval – the first in which cameras were used for line decisions. There was a run-out sent upstairs which revealed only David Shepherd's ample posterior, around which Martin crafted a typically wry and waspish column, then filed it with Surrey on 1 for 212 chasing 236 as he was embarking on a hot date. Unfortunately, Surrey promptly lost their last nine wickets for 18. Martin found himself on a phone trying to dictate an additional paragraph that a) salvaged the piece, and b) redeemed his evening. He had to admit he rather failed. A week or so later he ran into the game's individual award-winner, Neil Fairbrother, whom Martin had failed to mention in his piece at any stage. Fairbrother, he said, did a double-take. “I know what you're thinking;” said Martin, getting in first. “And you're right.”

Watching a day's cricket in order to write of it critically, I've often thought, is like trying to review a stage show in which two theatre companies attempt simultaneously to present different plays, absorbing into the cast their

unwilling rivals. Space and time fluctuate unhelpfully too. Perhaps you have 800 words when you want 1,000; perhaps you have 1,200 when you need only 700; perhaps you have early-Friday deadlines when you need the time to weigh and consider. At least in my experience, rare are the days you leave feeling you've got it even half-right, and there can be very bad days when you feel it is entirely wrong, and no sooner have you filed than you rewrite compulsively in your head. Pressing the "send" button is the best and worst moment of the day, the long-term question being whether relief or regret will be the abiding emotion.

Hmmm, I've just mentioned that 1993 game to Mike. He remembers it; he played in it; it's on YouTube. That's one thing that has assuredly changed since the days of Cardus: the tools at our disposal. When I started, some colleagues still arrived in the press box weighed down with *Wisdens*. Now it's more Google than googlies, no score being more than a few keystrokes away. Cricket writing features more stats because there are more stats handy; a "good stat" is almost tantamount to a scoop.

Back in the day, there was an almost-puritanical commitment to arriving at one's own perspective. In *The Australians in England* (1961), Charles Fortune described his shock at finding that a few reporters in the Lord's press box were listening to radios. What was the world coming to when scribes required help in arriving at their opinions? What would Fortune make of our quarters now, festooned with screens, humming with radio headsets, a nerve centre of social media? As a luddite, I confine myself to studying the occasional replay; but I've also sat next

to reporters who've barely raised their heads from Twitter.

This being so, I may be the wrong person to reflect on how this shades what we write. A broad consensus usually *does* form on a day's play, and always has, not because cricket journalists are particularly conformist thinkers, but because groups of people watching and discussing the same thing will tend to agree on the narrative that divides them least. In that sense, watching, reading and listening to other media, social and antisocial, expedites a process bound to happen anyway. But it does place a heavy onus on those in the business of the instant: one of my friends from Cricinfo recently described to me the experience of walking in the back of a press box to see a hundred or so laptop screens all showing his website. It also poses a challenge to stay fresh and new when daily journalism is at best a third draft of history, and possibly even a fourth. Given the game's modern fascination with epiphenomena – stats, quotes, replays, graphics – you might wonder where the incentive to watch the play still comes from. Perhaps in time a day's play will come to be regarded purely as a form of data generation. I hope I won't live to see it.

Mike's got his head down now. How's his piece going? "Almost done," he says. "I was thinking more about the column I have to write tomorrow." Yes, we – all of us – in a way are on this treadmill, meeting the moment's needs, shooting at moving targets. After a while you just have to draw a line under things, let your piece go and hope to do better tomorrow. "I'm just going to file," says Mike. Think I might do the same.



TWO YORKSHIREMEN

Tanya Aldred uncovers a little more of her father when she goes in search of his hero, Fred Trueman

When I was small, we had shelves of cricket books crawling up the walls. I ate my way through most during my bookworm years, a greedy, speedy reader. But one I didn't pull out. A small volume with a green cover: *Fast Fury* by Freddie Trueman.

The pages were off-white with funny textured paper; the cover was slightly ripped about the spine: there was something just off-putting about it. So there it stayed on the bottom shelf, tight to the left, increasingly a prisoner of time.

I should have picked it out, am ashamed not to have done so. Freddie Trueman was, is, the absolute hero of my dad, Anthony, who bought the book, complete with FS Trueman scrawled in blue biro on an inside page, from the Ilkley branch of WHSmith when he was 14. It cost him 12s 6d, and there was a little about the way he would deliberately tuck it back into place, like a stray hair firmly returned behind an ear, that said this, children, this really is something.

Why Trueman? Just how good was he? Where did he come from? Why did the raging fast bowler with 307 Test wickets turn into a grumbling old man of the radio? And why had he inspired such devotion in my father, a quiet man with a very different upbringing? I didn't know the answer to any of these questions.

Then in late 2011 Chris Waters, a friend from the days when he would disgruntledly follow Kevin Pietersen around as cricket correspondent of the Nottingham Evening Post, published a Trueman biography. It had fantastic reviews, winning a mantelpiece of awards.

Here was the chance to make up for 39 years of determinedly not reading something that I definitely ought to have read. Who was Fred? Who, for that matter, was Ant?

My dad was born in Leeds at the Tower Wood Nursing Home on 23 June 1947. It cost my grandmother Jeanne seven



guineas for board and lodging and five pence for laundry. Her husband, Bob, was away working in Africa and Jeanne named her bouncing boy Anthony Hugh. A telegram came back: call him Robert. So she did, on paper, but won the war – Anthony he remained.

Jeanne's mother was French, short of temper, with a liking for Craven cigarettes, and had come to Yorkshire from Paris around 1910. When her husband died young, the family were left sophisticated but broke. Bob was the son of an electrical engineer, Leeds born and bred, and qualified as a quantity surveyor by studying at night school. There are amusing sepia pictures of him wandering the moors in a tweed suit. They were very different, Bob and Jeanne, but they married in a registry office off the Euston Road in 1938 and had three children – Christine, Susan and Anthony.

The family were happy in the Leeds suburb of Roundhay, but in 1951 moved to north Harrow in Middlesex – the beginning of a journey of bettering themselves. They ended up living on St George's Hill in Weybridge, an exclusive estate in London's commuter belt made famous when John Lennon and Ringo Starr moved in and which the Diggers had tried to turn into common land in revolutionary 1649. My poor dad, fuzzy-haired, who cried at the slightest provocation, was sent to prep school in Watford to board from 10 and then onto Milton Abbey in Dorset – a boarding school of cold showers, early-morning runs and common minor cruelties.

So the Aldreds of Weybridge embraced the south, but prick the surface and

the white rose ran thick. They went "back home" every year, holidaying in Ilkley and Wharfedale and York. My grandfather might have joined the golf club and held court in the boardroom, but his accent stayed proper Horsforth. My grandmother baked Yorkshire pudding for lunch and parkin for sticky fingers in mid-afternoon. High tea was served with thick sticks of celery in a glass on the table and bread and butter in a basket. And young Anthony wanted to play not at Lord's or The Oval but Headingley. He followed Yorkshire's scores in the family copy of the Daily Telegraph; and in particular the progress of that big-bottomed and jet-haired lummoX from the mines.

Sixteen years before my father, Trueman had been born near Maltby, eight miles from Rotherham, 10 from Sheffield and just four north of the Nottinghamshire border. I wanted to go and see the spot that Waters describes so evocatively in his book, to breathe the air. It took two trains, a bus and a false trail when a smart woman in red wearing a hat pin touched my shoulder, directed me off the bus and in the direction of Fred's sister's house, only for her not to be in. A mini-cab drove a couple of miles into the countryside and I started looking for Scotch Springs and the miners' cottages now scorched from the earth. As I clambered up scrubland in four inches of thick January snow, armed with a text of directions from Chris, I found the place.

So it was here where Trueman was born, in an outside toilet, so fast he was caught by his grandma Elizabeth Stimpson, whose reward was to have her new grandson take her maiden name as his middle: Seward.

Waters meticulously plots his uncompromising life growing up beside the smell and sounds of the pit yard. There was little money but a lot of love. Trueman may have grown up coarse but he grew up close with his parents and siblings, especially his beloved older brother Arthur. It was tough: his father burnt his clothes at the end of the garden when he finished working and was in despair when Arthur followed him underground. But there wasn't much choice: it was the mine or the forces. Unless you were Fred, where raw talent led to Yorkshire CCC, England and a different sort of life.

But it never was quite the young boy's dream. Waters describes an awkward bugger, thrust into the Yorkshire and England teams at a time when class and seniority had a huge bearing on the way that you were supposed to behave. There were some difficult men around, and just about the worst man-management of a young, extremely talented, eager, if uncouth and socially all-at-sea young bowler it is possible to imagine. Patronised, ignored, fobbed off, laughed at – Trueman never forgave Yorkshire for their behaviour, which culminated in them asking him to pay £120 towards the cost of his own retirement present: a £220 silver cruet. They didn't even manage to engrave it.

I was unaware of quite how Boys' Own Trueman's first international series was. My dad must have told us but by quite early on in our childhood his "when I were a lad in Yorkshire" stories had lost their gilt. We laughed at them, and their sackcloth undertones, and slowly he stopped telling.

Of course the England debut came at Headingley – 5 June 1952, against India. It included a spell of three wickets for nought in eight balls and terrified the visiting batsmen whilst wolf-whistling the crammed stands. Eight wickets followed at Lord's, and at Old Trafford he took 8 for 31 in the first innings – then the best return by a genuinely fast bowler. England had in their hands raw dynamite.

They blew it, of course – their handling almost as inept as Yorkshire's. After the 1953–54 West Indies tour, a diplomatic disaster for which Trueman took much of the blame, he missed 23 of England's next 26 Tests. And all the while he bowled and bowled for Yorkshire in a talented team with a dismal camaraderie – at least until Ronnie Burnet took over in 1958.

Eventually Trueman found men who knew how to handle him and became what he was in his pomp – magnificence. YouTube shows a wide-paced, rhythmic run-up, a left shoulder forward, majestic side-on action, a flurry of rolled-up sleeves, an uncontrollable head of hair. A swagger. A foot drag. A black-and-white superstar.

Ardent royalist, churchgoer, Tory: Trueman was nothing if not surprising. If he grew cantankerous on air with age, in person he was, mostly, incredibly generous – giving money to a stranger who knocked on the door on Christmas Day, raising funds for good causes, organising a tribute dinner for his old mucker Brian Statham who had fallen on hard times. He was the one who brokered a peace with Geoffrey Boycott when Boycott was diagnosed with cancer. He also had a deep passion for dogs, one of whom, William, caused

carnage in the Test Match Special box, eating two microphones.

His second wife Veronica told Waters a story of Fred's terrible anxiety that a new dog they were going to fetch wouldn't like him. "When we arrived at the kennels, Fred started pacing around the office while the staff went off to fetch the dog, then he went to the toilet, then he came back out again, then he started fidgeting around in his chair... Eventually they brought this dog through and of course the first thing it did was bound over to Fred and lick his face, and the relief on Fred's face just had to be seen."

Ant loves dogs too. He still mourns the last one, a daft brown thing - in tears as he dug the grave in the garden: deeper and deeper he went as if in shifting the earth he could restore the wag to the still tail.

Water's book hangs together beautifully - the questioning, the research, the unpicking of a life lived rumbustiously, all this paints a vivid picture of Trueman. From the young Fred who loved bird-nesting with friends to the old man of the Dales who would reach for the bird book from the comfort of his armchair to identify something colourful in the garden. A flawed man, a sometimes bitter man, but mischievous, quick-witted, kind.

To my dad though, all this was by the by. It was the young, fit Trueman who

was everything. He saw him play only three times: at Lord's in 1961 against Australia, when Trueman hung about for 25 in the first innings and my dad collected Tizer bottles from the grass to earn pennies at the shop; at Headingley in 1963, when he went with his cousin Christopher to all five days and saw a slightly under-par Trueman take six wickets; and at the Gillette Cup Final of 1965 when Yorkshire thrashed Surrey and Trueman took three wickets in an over. Not much to feed off, but enough for dad.

"The sheer excitement of watching him, this seemingly large man starting his run and just getting faster and faster and then that perfect action and the anticipation of wondering, would he get a wicket? Childhood heroes are magic and that's what Fred was."

Cricket wasn't everywhere then. Test Match Special only started in 1957, and not many had televisions: heroes were in the head, imitated in the garden, not captured on the computer, ready to call up day or night.

Trueman was a link to the place Anthony called home but would never live in again. He needed that. Because the boy who moved from Leeds when he was only four, who has not a single memory of living in the place, and who has the voice of a Surrey commuter, considers himself, still, a true Yorkshireman.



VERITY'S WAR

James Holland sets off for Sicily, where he pieces together the last days of one of Yorkshire and England's greatest spin bowlers

The Plain of Catania in Sicily, and a pilgrimage of sorts. It is one of the most fertile parts of the island, largely flat and low-lying, bisected by rivers and dominated by the towering presence of Mount Etna. Hedley Verity would have seen Etna from the moment he landed at first light on Saturday, 10 July 1943, as part of the biggest seaborne invasion the world has ever known. There's always a halo of cloud surrounding the summit; there would have been when Verity was here and there is when I visit the place nearly 70 years on. Cloud, or is it smoke? I am not sure but it hangs there, a contrast to the deep and cloudless blue of the sky.

Working out precisely where the 1st Battalion, the Green Howards made their attack on the night of 21 July, 11 days after landing, takes a while. I am armed with a copy of an original hand-drawn map, found in the battalion war diary, but one that is remarkably accurate. At any rate, I have managed

to marry it up easily enough with an image from Google Maps: the tracks running down from the railway line, the curving dykes that were such a feature of this part of the plain, and even the buildings that had once been battalion headquarters.

Getting there, however, is another matter. New roads run to the south and north of the site, there is now a large factory to the east of the map, roughly where D Company began their attack. It is difficult getting off the main road and down to the rough lane that leads under the railway embankment, but eventually we manage it, and suddenly we are driving down the very same track marked on the hand-drawn map back in July 1943.

And there are the remains of an old barn or farmhouse, also shown on the map. The roof has gone and inside it is wild and overgrown, but we are now at the point where Captain Verity led his



B Company into battle. The start line, to use the parlance of the day. We park up and walk along another rough track, also marked on the map, climb a dyke and look north. Up ahead was where Verity walked, behind the creeping barrage of artillery fire. It's where the enemy were dug in: the railway embankment and the curving dyke, the Massa Carnazza, was where the Germans had their forward machine-guns, each set up with interlocking fire. These were expensive in ammunition, and not the most accurate weapons, but in any initial assault, there was nothing to beat the MG42 for weight of fire. These beasts could pump out 12 bullets per second, enough to slice a man in half.

We walk on, over water meadows in which creamy cattle with bells around their necks peacefully munch grass. We are nearing the site where Verity and his B Company had been left in the open, the barrage suddenly lifted, but still with more than 200 yards to the curving dyke and the enemy positions.

A high fence bars our way. Beyond, orange groves with large ripe fruit dangling from branches now stand where 70 years before had been cornfields. We retrace our steps, and eventually manage to approach the old battleground from the side. Some farm workers spot us and ask me what we are doing. A poor explanation in pidgin Italian ensues. They let us walk on, so that we are now behind the old German lines. But the place where Verity made his charge is hidden; those same orange groves, protected by more high fencing, now cover the spot. Later, I mention this to an Italian friend. "Ah," he says, "Mafia estates."

What is striking is how completely the din and violence of war has gone from this quiet corner of the world. But for many of the same features remaining, it is hard to imagine that it ever happened at all. I feel wistful, standing there beneath the oranges, their sweet scent heavy on the air, thinking of one of the greatest of English bowlers, lying out there, bleeding, gasping for breath, on this patch of Sicilian soil, knowing he would most probably die.

The Second World War affected the lives of every man, woman and child who lived through it, and that included sportsmen. Hard though it may be to imagine Kevin Pietersen or Graeme Swann being packed off to war, that is exactly what happened to the vast majority of first-class cricketers between 1939 and 1945. In Britain, conscription had been reinstated in May 1939 for men between the ages of 20 and 21, and on the first day of the war, 3 September 1939, Parliament passed the National Service Act, under which all men between 18 and 41 were made liable for conscription into the Armed Forces. There were, of course, exceptions – those with skills or jobs that would benefit the war effort, such as farmers, physicists, even trade union officials and lighthouse-keepers. But not cricketers. They had to put away the whites and the bat, and put on battle dress and pick up a rifle instead, and like every other Tom, Dick, and Harry, go off and fight for King and Country.

One of those was Hedley Verity. That Yorkshire had won the Championship so regularly was in no small part due to Verity, who took an astonishing 1,956 first-class wickets in just 10 seasons at

an average of 14.87. Not only did he top the English averages five times – including the 1939 season – he also took 10 wickets in an innings twice – including 10 for 10 against Notts. His record also included nine wickets in an innings seven times, eight wickets in an innings 13 times and an extraordinary 34 seven-fers. In 1934, he took 15 for 104 against Australia at Lord's, including 14 wickets in a day – a record never to be bettered. Included among his victims was the great Sir Donald Bradman, dismissed for 36 and 13. It was England's biggest victory over Australia at Lord's, by an innings and 38 runs.

Hedley Verity was, without question, one of the great spin bowlers, arguably England's best ever spinner. Who else compares? Laker perhaps? Swann was not in his league, for all his flair. But more than that Verity was, by all accounts, a lovely fellow. His face strongly suggests this – there is determination there, but a gentleness too. Quiet, unassuming and always generous towards others, Verity volunteered for the army out of conviction. He believed that Hitler and the Nazis were an evil that had to be stopped.

He first considered joining in the autumn of 1938, during the Munich Crisis. Meeting with an old friend, Colonel Arnold Shaw, of the Green Howards, whom he had first met during the India Tour of 1933–34, he asked his advice. Shaw suggested he read some military textbooks and told him to get in touch again should war break out. The Colonel sent him a number of books about military tactics during the South African tour of 1938–39, which he read avidly.

When war was declared he got in touch with Colonel Shaw, who now commanded the 1st Battalion, Green Howards and arranged for him to go to Officer Cadet Training Unit. It seems Verity quickly showed a natural aptitude for military tactics. The best spin bowlers have sharp intelligence and a tactical mind, and Verity brought these skills to soldiering. The 1st Green Howards remained in Britain until the autumn of 1941, by which time he had become a captain and a company commander.

The 1st Green Howards were to be part of the Allied assault on Sicily, attached to 15th Brigade, 5th Infantry Division, in Eighth Army. While the Americans of Patton's Seventh Army were given the western flank of southern Sicily, Eighth Army had the task of capturing the south-east, with its key airfields and ports. All seemed to go to plan initially with the Italian defences swept aside. Resistance, however, stiffened as they encountered the better trained, equipped and motivated German forces who had set up a blocking position, known as the Hauptkampf Line, to isolate the north-east of the island.

Suddenly, Eighth Army found itself up against the veteran 1st Fallschirmjäger Division, newly arrived in Sicily from the Eastern Front, and the Fallschirm Panzerkorps Hermann Göring, barely less formidable. The immediate British targets were the port and airfields of Catania, but what was worrying General Alexander, the Allied Commander-in-Chief, was that if the Allies were held up for too long, then more and more German troops could pour in as reinforcements across the Straits of

Messina, the narrow channel of sea that linked Sicily to the mainland.

The Plain of Catania is an easy place to defend and a difficult one over which to attack. Beyond lie the hills around Misterbianco, in which enemy guns could be easily concealed, while in the plain itself any attacker had to negotiate horrible amounts of water channels and ditches as well as the major River Simeto. All along were teams of machine guns and mortars. Yes, the Allies had big reserves of artillery and air power, but these could only support the attackers. Ultimately, it was the job of the men on the ground to get the task done.

There is a misconception that those fighting through the Second World War got off lightly compared with those battling it out on the Western Front. In fact, for a front-line infantryman in the Second World War the chances of survival were as bad, if not worse, as they were a generation earlier. And in many ways, there was not a huge amount of difference in the method of attack. Enemy positions were usually softened up with air and artillery barrages, and then the infantry advanced out across the open.

So it was that 5th Division were ordered to continue the push towards Misterbianco. On the night of 18/19 July 1943, 13th Brigade managed to gain a shallow bridgehead across the River Simeto, but the following night it was the turn of 15th Brigade - and the 1st Green Howards.

There were two schools of thought about how to conduct night-time attacks. The first was to infiltrate as

silently as possible in the first glimmer of dawn. The other was a night attack with artillery support - a heavy bombardment of enemy positions followed by a creeping barrage behind which the infantry would advance. The advantage of the latter was that it meant the enemy were cowering - or better, being blown to bits - while the infantry began moving forward. One major disadvantage, however, was that the enemy knew an attack was coming. Another was that invariably, the reality didn't live up to the plan. Successfully following a creeping barrage was all about timing - and being able to stick to timings that had been carefully worked out on paper, in daylight. The trouble was that at night, walking over unfamiliar ground and with little means of communicating with the companies either side, and with the noise of battle all around, it could be very difficult to stick to those timings.

B Company was to lead the Green Howards' attack, and Verity was B Company Commander. In effect, he was leading the entire battalion assault. One can only imagine what must have been going through his mind. As Company Commander, he would have had around 100 men - ten per cent were always left out of battle - made up from three platoons and his own company headquarters. He was responsible for them, for leading them, for getting them to the right positions, and for urging them into potentially lethal enemy fire. It was an incredible responsibility, one that he was no doubt equipped to handle, but which must, nonetheless, have weighed heavily upon him.

They had been moved up to their start

position by lorry at around 10pm, then before the attack the barrage had opened up. In any attack, officers had to lead by example, and especially so company commanders. The noise would have been deafening. Shells hurtling over, screaming as they sped through the air. Explosions up ahead, the flashes of light blinding in the darkness. This was Verity's first taste of combat. Nearly four years of training had come to this moment. His heart would have been pounding - adrenaline coursing through him.

They crossed the road behind the barrage at around 2am on the morning of 20 July, but were still struggling across the open ground, lined with ditches and water courses.

When the barrage finally ended, it must have been apparent to Verity that already the attack was far from going to plan. His B Company had done well. They were well ahead of the other companies, but still some distance from the enemy, which meant they were both exposed and isolated, with no support on their flanks. Without the deafening barrage, the abruptness of artillery silence would have been alarming. Ahead were fields of corn which gave comparatively good cover, but night attacks - especially the first experienced - were incredibly confusing and disorientating. Machine guns would now have been rattling, bullets hissing and zipping all around, and flares rising into the sky with a hiss, then a crack as they burst, and a crackle as they slowly descended, lighting up the ground like the floodlights at a day/night match.

As they approached a curving dyke,

at first mistakenly thinking it was the railway line, they began crawling under withering machine-gun fire. It was now around 4am. The Germans used tracers in their machine guns, which would have been arcing towards them at knee height, little stabs of light, fizzing over their heads. Then mortars began falling around them too. They pressed on and managed to push the enemy in front of them back across a dyke, the Massa Carnazza. Behind them, the corn and few trees were catching fire, which silhouetted the Yorkshiremen as they tried to advance.

Captain Verity, desperately trying to take stock and think clearly, recognised that with their limited resources - a few light machine guns, grenades, sub-machine guns and rifles - the key immediate objective was the farmhouse. He therefore ordered one platoon round towards the farmhouse and another to give covering fire. No sooner had he done so than he was hit in the chest by a piece of flying shrapnel. Still leading his men, he continued to shout: "Keep going! Get them out of the farmhouse and me into it!"

A moment later, Lieutenant Laurie Hesmondhalgh, who was Verity's second-in-command, was also hit and killed outright. Beside the wounded Verity was his batman, Private Tom Rennoldson. The Company was still struggling to make headway and it was clear that, unless they were quickly relieved by A and D Companies, they were going to remain trapped.

In fact, A and D Companies were desperately trying to help their stranded colleagues, but were being pegged back by the same withering

machine-gun and mortar fire that was decimating B Company.

By 4.30am it was all over. The attack had failed. B Company, without their commander and second-in-command, began to fall back, as did A and D Companies, so that by the time dawn broke Verity, with Rennoldson still beside him, was stuck firmly behind enemy lines.

Smoke hung over the battlefield while the dead and wounded lay where they had fallen as the sun slowly began to rise. Verity and Rennoldson were soon captured. The Germans brought a broken mortar carrier from the farm, packed it with sheaves of corn, lifted Verity onto it and took him, with Rennoldson still in tow, to their field hospital a mile or so to the north. It was a farmhouse, nothing more.

That afternoon, Verity underwent an emergency operation in a stable at the farm. As he was lifted onto a table, a grenade fell from his shirt. After a moment of panic, Rennoldson was ordered to unprime it, which he did. He remained with Verity until that evening, when he was taken away. It was the last time he saw him.

As darkness began to fall again, the makeshift hospital came under British artillery fire. It had clearly already been hit – there were holes in the roof and the windows were glassless. As Verity was recovering from his operation, a German ambulance was hit and exploded, killing all on board. Two doctors worked ceaselessly through the night.

He and the other wounded – British and German alike – survived the night and the next day were taken to

Misterbianco and put onto open railway trucks, ferried up through Sicily and then transferred onto a ship and across the Straits of Messina to Reggio on the southern tip of Italy. Bundled off again, put into trucks, Verity and his fellow wounded were taken to a hospital and then the next day placed on another goods train, on straw, to begin a slow journey north to Naples. It is a journey of less than 300 miles but it took two whole days. All this travel, and being lifted on and off trains with little water or food, was not helping the wounded man. His bandages were filthy and he had been given no relief for the pain. By the time he reached Naples he was very ill indeed. Fever gripped him and his wound was now infected.

Nor was this hell-journey over. From Naples he was taken by truck to the Italian military hospital at Caserta. There Corporal Henty, another wounded Yorkshireman, recognised him. Word soon spread amongst the wounded British troops that the great English bowler was there with them. Verity talked to Henty, showing him photographs of his wife and sons, Douglas and Wilfred. He was in increasingly terrible pain; the wound was festering badly, and part of a rib was broken and pressing against his lung. Eventually, three days later, on 31 July, he was operated on again, and had part of his rib removed. Only a local anaesthetic was used.

At first, the operation appeared to have been a success, but then he suffered the first of three haemorrhages. He remained conscious to the end, talking about his repatriation and getting home again once the war was over. But he was in a bad way. The fever already suggested his wound was infected. One

of English cricket's great bowlers finally died later that night. He was just 38.

Tragically, the attack on the Plain of Catania was to have been Verity's first and last action. Before they had left Egypt, Verity had played in a cricket match with Lieutenant-General Miles Dempsey, commander of XIII Corps. Dempsey, a keen cricketer, was anxious to have Verity on his staff. Verity initially declined; he did not want to abandon the men he had trained with and commanded before experiencing any action. However, he had agreed to leave the Green Howards and join Dempsey's staff following the attack on the Plain of Catania, and so he would have done had he not been wounded that night. Dempsey later commanded Second Army in Normandy and beyond; Verity could have finished the war as a colonel or higher, playing an important role as a witness to the high command of the Allied war effort. It was not to be.

It is hard to find anyone who had a bad word to say about him. Comrades and cricketing foes alike lined up to sing his praises, not just as one of the finest English bowlers ever to play the game, but as a person too. Perhaps one of the most touching stories, however, came from Douglas Jardine. Despite their very different backgrounds, Verity and Jardine had become firm friends during their playing days together with England. Verity had even named his elder child Douglas in Jardine's honour.

They hadn't played together for years, and before the war Jardine had joined the Territorial Army and been sent to France with the 1st Royal Berkshire Regiment, part of the British Expeditionary Force. His battalion fought well, first along the River Dyle and then shoring up the southern line near St Omer as much of the rest of the BEF retreated to the coast. Eventually, with the Germans pressing hard from the south and having been shelled incessantly and bombed from the air, the Berkshires had been given the order to fall back too.

Exhausted and hungry, they had eventually reached the beaches. Dunkirk had been hard to miss: thick, acrid smoke shrouded the town from where the oil depot at the port had been bombed and set ablaze. Along the beaches, the scene was one of desperation: half-sunken ships lying off the shore, abandoned or ruined vehicles, upturned boxes of rations and ammunition, and thousands upon thousands of men, all waiting to be evacuated home.

Somehow, Jardine became separated from his men, but was spotted in the nick of time and ushered aboard a waiting destroyer.

"We're bound to be all right, sir," said one of his men. "She's named after your favourite bowler." The ship was *HMS Verity*.





CRICKET AS COMPLEX NARRATIVE (OR HOW KP LOVES HIMSELF)

Patrick Neate draws on his experience of reading and writing novels to claim that cricket is not so much character-building as character-revealing

I am currently working on a feature film script. A novelist by trade and instinct, I am finding it a testing process; a tricky exercise of discipline and concision. The opening line, for now at least, is: "You can learn everything you need to know about life from the game of cricket: the old man told me that."

The script is an adaptation of one of my own novels, *City of Tiny Lights*, a gumshoe I once believed would presage a whole new genre of suburban thriller. I even had a name for it: *Chiswick Noir*. Good, eh? Almost a decade later, my novel remains, so far as I know, its only exemplar.

The protagonist of *City of Tiny Lights* is a Ugandan Indian private eye called Tommy Akhtar. He's a hard-drinking, hard-smoking hard man with a fine line in repartee. Tommy and I have little in common but cricket-mad fathers. That opening line is borrowed directly from mine.

Dad was a much better sportsman than I ever was. (Funny, I originally completed that sentence as "than I'll ever be" but,

in my forties, perhaps it's finally time to concede defeat.) He played first-class cricket for Oxford alongside the rare talent of Abbas Ali Baig and under the captaincy of the great "Tiger" Pataudi, once taking 78 off a touring Australian attack that included the likes of Garth McKenzie and Richie Benaud. He went on to captain Berkshire and play good club cricket for Richmond for many years.

In, I think, 1987, we played side by side in a scratch team that he organised. Chasing around 250, I opened and was out to the first ball of the innings. Our batting soon collapsed and I remember Dad walking out at number seven or eight, saying: "I'll just have to do it myself." And he did, returning a couple of hours later with an unbeaten hundred to his name.

Afterwards, in the bar, he enjoyed his moment in the evening sun and we stayed much later than he'd planned. He then had to drive me to Taunton, you see, where my school team was playing the next day. We arrived not much before midnight and then he turned straight round and drove all the way back to London.



On the way to Somerset, he'd told me (in no little detail) how to score a century and, the next afternoon, I duly did, the first of my cricketing life (which makes it sound like many followed – let's leave it like that). I was sorry he was not there to see my innings, but I rang him from a payphone in the evening and he listened while I talked him through every run. I'm not sure what part of this story I find most revealing.

The father-son relationship expressed through sport is a complex thing. We all know the archetype of the competitive dad who loves humiliating his boy at everything from three-and-in to Connect 4. It's not quite equivalent to pinning the kid's feet together and abandoning him on a mountainside, but surely every father of sons has a touch of Laius about him. My old man was certainly no more competitive than most and would never have enjoyed my humiliation, but he never let me win either.

A couple of years later, I was captain of my school first XI. We were an average team led by an average captain, struggling for form. I had never been an expansive batsman, the strongest part of my game a kind of bloody-minded obduracy; but by the time I was 18 I'd stopped moving my feet altogether and just poked at the ball like a tramp at a rubbish bin. I'd turned into some kind of cricketing mollusc: I want to say a schoolboy Chris Tavaré, but I think Jimmy Anderson (the batsman) would be a better comparison. If any captain had set a field with nine arranged in an arc from first slip to point, I'd have never scored a run.

The climax to our season was always the match against the MCC and that year Dad was their captain. They took

first knock and racked up a bucket-load of runs.

When we batted, I was determined to do well and I was at my most crustacean. I left a lot and limped (or limpeted) to 30 in about an hour and a half. Then, Dad took the ball himself. I had faced him countless times in the nets and we both knew he was no bowler, a slow-dobbing mixture of leg-breaks that didn't break and in-duckers that didn't duck. He arranged his field carefully and at great length – a short leg, slip, gully and the rest in a ring. "Well," he announced to one and all, "we've got to see if they'll go for it."

I left the first delivery and played down the wrong line to the second. To the third, I launched myself up the wicket and swung my bat with, the mythology tells me, "all my might" – Oedipus the King! The King!

Unfortunately, I made no kind of contact and a thick outside edge lobbed a dolly to backward point. Dad declined celebration, like a footballer returning to a much-loved former club. As I walked past, he said: "Bad luck." Then: "This is a very character-building game."

You can learn everything you need to know about life from cricket and when Dad and I now watch we agree on much – for example, that Kevin Pietersen is a genius for our times (i.e. he has made a virtue of stupidity), and that, while Ian Bell must never be asked to bat for our lives, there'd be no better man to arrange flowers prettily at the funeral should Steve Waugh be dismissed. However, Dad's assertion that cricket is "character-building" is, if not wrong, certainly meaningless. Isn't everything character-building? Sitting in a pub, drinking your life away; sitting in a garret, writing your

life away; sitting in an armchair, spectating your life away – they're all as character-building as each other. Of course what Dad meant is that cricket builds good character. But I'm not sure there's much evidence for that either. Dad will often say of an acquaintance: "Well, he's a cricketer. Must be all right." But I assume he's joking because, while I've made many friends through cricket, I've met my fair share of tossers too.

Cricket is "the gentleman's game" and the motto "it's just not cricket" spread throughout the Victorian Empire. But, for me, these just bring to mind Oscar Wilde's description of a gentleman as "one who never hurts anyone's feelings unintentionally". After all, the "gentlemen" who decided what was or wasn't cricket were a limited bunch who were, at the time, part of a culture engaged in some of the most rapacious pillaging of other people's resources the world has seen. Cricket was their game and, like the great swathes of pink across the globe, it was played by their esoteric rules. WG Grace may have been the first cricketing genius, but he was also renowned for his gamesmanship and/or cheating (depending on who you believe). And the subsequent century and a half of cricketing history is a litany of nefarious tactics, ball-tampering, match-fixing, surreptitiously effected run-outs, catches claimed and disputed, and so on.

But, perhaps the most telling example of the bizarre hypocrisies of cricket is "walking". Walking (or not) is an issue as old as the game itself. Walking is regarded as the height of gentlemanly conduct, a kind of sporting hara-kiri. And yet, let's face it, the term would never have come into existence were it not for the fact that some (including, of course, the great WG) didn't. Walking is the game's Hippocratic

oath and its hypocritical taboo. I remember being given out caught behind at school. When I reached the pavilion, our cricket master chastised me for a full five minutes – cricket is a gentleman's game, he pronounced. If we don't play it like gentlemen, we may as well all give up now. Why didn't you walk? "Because I didn't hit it," I said.

So, I no longer believe that cricket builds character (in any meaningful sense). Instead, I have come to see that cricket reveals it; and isn't that a whole lot more interesting?

All sport is narrative: its central appeal to spectators being the highs and lows, the struggles overcome, that signify a story. But most sports are plot-driven pulp, built on archetypes of heroism and villainy with little of the nuance of truly great storytelling. I don't think it's any coincidence, for example, that football lasts 90 minutes (or 120, with extra time). After all, between 90 and 120 minutes demarcates the ideal Hollywood structure: a formula in which the surprises are necessarily unsurprising since the key purpose of the medium is to reaffirm and reassure. Of course, Bradford City occasionally beat Arsenal and Verbal may or may not be Keyser Söze. But these are the exceptions that confirm the core principles of a limited-narrative medium.

Cricket is, I think, different. If most sport is driven by plot, cricket is driven by character, and the nuances to be found therein are, if not limitless, as diverse as humanity itself. This idea fascinates me.

I sometimes teach novel writing – such is the fate of novelists of a certain stature (writers of Chiswick Noir, for example). On such courses, my opening gambit

generally goes like this: “What is a story? We meet our protagonist at point A. We follow him or her through to point Z. Typically, that protagonist will be faced with a personal flaw or external problem which he or she will have to overcome in the other letters of the alphabet. Enough said.”

It is a facetious little speech, but it does the job, more or less, and it allows me then to go on and explain why I consider the novel the premier narrative form.

Allow me to give, say, *Middlemarch*, George Eliot’s masterpiece, the A-to-Z treatment by way of illustration. Dorothea, an idealistic do-gooder, makes an ill-starred marriage to a crusty, deluded intellectual in the mistaken belief that personal and social fulfilment can be found in academic pursuit. After her husband’s death, she eventually marries his young cousin, giving up material security and highfalutin ideals for love and, we are left to hope, some degree of redemption.

I haven’t read *Middlemarch* for a while but, from memory, this is an adequate summary. But, it is also ridiculously reductive. Aside from ignoring the other great strands of plot and theme, it denudes our protagonist of all the subtleties of her character that conjure our empathy even as she infuriates and delights us in equal measure.

Put simply, while the 90-minute screenplay is necessarily built on character tropes of assumed common values and expectations, the novel form affords the storyteller space to build complex people who can be by turns comic and tragic, heroic and villainous, idealistic and cynical. My point? At its best, cricket, in

its revelation of character, is the sporting equivalent of the novel.

I remember watching a Test match with Dad as a kid. I can’t be sure, but I want to say it was during England’s home series against Pakistan in 1982. That summer, England dominated the first Test before threatening implosion against the seemingly innocuous swing bowling of Pakistan’s opening batsman, Mudassar Nazar. England lost the second Test by ten wickets before scraping home in the third for a series win.

I remember David Gower was particularly bamboozled by Mudassar’s gentle hoopers and, after one dismissal, the commentator described his shot as “careless”. This was, of course, one of three adjectives most used to characterise Gower throughout his career, the others being “elegant” and “laid-back”. In fact, so powerful was this critical stereotyping that Gower has become a triangulation point for all left-handed batsmen and, indeed, “careless” dismissals since.

But, on this occasion, Dad took issue. “Careless?” he said. “He’s not careless. You don’t get to play Test cricket if you don’t care.”

It’s a comment that’s stuck with me.

Let us briefly imagine David Gower: The Movie – create its “beat sheet”, as the movie business likes to call it. The screenplay would undoubtedly identify “carelessness” as our hero’s fatal flaw within the first ten pages, probably illustrated by some anecdote of schoolboy insouciance. Act One would culminate with him striking his first ball in Test cricket to the boundary, before a decline in Gower’s fortunes to the

Midpoint (say, the time he was dropped for the Oval Test in Ian Botham's great summer of 1981). Our hero would then fight his way back to the end of Act Two where he would ascend to the captaincy for... well, let's make it the "blackwash" series of 1984. He would show renewed mettle in defeat, which would then lead to a grand series win in India, before the glorious summer following culminates in Ashes triumph and a glut of runs for the man himself - the golden boy all grown up. This is the feature film version. I'm not suggesting it's a particularly good feature film, but it pushes the necessary buttons.

David Gower the Novel, on the other hand, would be a very different undertaking. I won't try to plot it here, but I know that we couldn't simply signify our protagonist with "carelessness". In fact, there is no need to plot the novel here since it already exists in the person of Gower himself. And it is a subtle tale that can only be précised to 117 matches, 8,231 runs at an average of 44.25 - greatness by anyone's standards. And that is why Dad took offence to that single careless adjective.

All spectators are, of course, guilty of careless description. I have already been so myself, characterising Ian Bell as a flower-arranger. So, by way of contrition, I will use a moment from Bell's career as one of my examples for the comparison of two sports instead of two narrative media.

In 2008, John Terry, Chelsea captain, stepped up to take a penalty in the shoot-out which could win his club the Champions League for the first time. As he struck the ball, he slipped and sent his shot wide. It was a moment of high sporting drama, certainly; if you were a Chelsea fan, some tragedy; if you

were one of Terry's many detractors, an instant of glorious *schadenfreude*. But I challenge anyone to claim it revealed much meaningful about his character. No doubt in Chelsea-hating pubs across the country, JT was derided as a "bottler", but does that even approximate to a truth we believe? The fact is he missed a penalty kick he'd have scored nine times out of ten. He slipped. Shit happens.

Now, let us look at Ian Bell's dismissal in the first innings of the first Test against India at Ahmedabad in 2012. India had scored 521 and England were struggling at 69 for 4 when Bell walked to the wicket. Then, he tried to hit the very first delivery he received back over the bowler's head to the boundary and spooned a simple catch to mid-off. I'm sure commentators used the word "careless", though I don't actually remember the invocation of Gower. It was an extraordinary shot, no doubt, but it also seemed more than that - in some way a summation of Bell as cricketer and man. In no particular order, Bell was batting at number six, a kind of ongoing reminder of a perceived weakness - we all know (and he knows) that he has the talent and technique to bat at three, but isn't trusted to do so. We all know his reputation for scoring easy runs - even the game in which he hit his 199 against South Africa in 2008 eventually petered out into a high-scoring draw, while his double-century against India in 2011 was milked from a beaten team at the end of a long summer. The former young maestro was one of three senior pros in the England top six, the go-to men to bat their team out of a crisis. His place in the team was under pressure from the next generation of tyros and he was due to return home after the game for the birth of his first child. Lastly, we all know that cricket is a game in which

you have to trust your judgement and, to Bell's credit, he trusted his. Unfortunately, that judgement was terribly flawed, but would we have preferred him to poke forward nervously and nick to the keeper? Perhaps we would. The incident reminded me of something else I tell would-be novelists: when you're writing well, you can reveal more about a character in one moment than in 20 pages of exposition.

Of course I recognise that the oppositions I describe between cricket and other sports, and the novel and other narrative media, are false. There are plenty of unremarkable cricket matches and careers, plenty of epic examples from any other sport you can think of; innumerable bad, unsophisticated novels and many great films of considerable complexity. Nonetheless, I would maintain that the observations underlying these false oppositions ring true. There is something about cricket at its best that sets it apart – the space and time that allow for character development, the empathy and identification between player and spectator, the struggles of an individual against the backdrop of an interwoven narrative of a wider war for ascendancy (or, if you will, a “team game”). There is something about the novel form which, at its best, is exactly the same. Or, to put it another way, in the words of Tommy Akhtar, private eye, in the last scene of my film: “The Yanks will never get cricket. They'll never understand a five-day Test match that ends in a draw. They like victory and defeat. But victory and defeat are generally nursery rhymes, while a draw can be epic.” Cricket, like a novel, like life, often ends in moral stalemate. And it's all the better for it.

If describing Ian Bell as a florist smacks of carelessness, then describing KP as some

kind of idiot savant is unfortunate (see the KP Genius Twitter account) so, by way of conclusion, let me rectify that here. After all, the idea for this little essay came about while re-reading Anna Karenina against the backdrop of Pietersen's recent conflict with his teammates, his captain, his coach, and the ECB.

Pietersen was, I began to consider, rather like poor, doomed Anna. He was regarded as self-serving, his judgement fatally flawed, seemingly hell-bent on alienating himself from his peers. He was characterised as a mercenary, and certainly he had no desire to live in anything but the considerable style to which he was accustomed. But, like Anna, his true tragedy was an ill-starred love: a love that could not be condoned by polite society, but would not be contained by its strictures either. But who did KP love?

As I read on, I slowly came to conclude that KP also resembled Count Vronsky; as Leo Tolstoy describes him, “a perfect specimen of Pietermaritzburg's [sorry, 'Petersburg's'] gilded youth”. Vronsky is a brave soldier raised for derring-do and impressive in the regulated environment of his regiment. But he is a man of limited imagination whose bravery derives not from moral courage but the whims of his own desires. Indeed, when Vronsky resigns his commission, it is not from principle but to pursue the self-gratification of his love for Anna, a love that can never fulfil either of them.

And so it dawned on me: KP is neither Anna nor Vronsky, he is both of them – the cricketing manifestation of Tolstoy's epic of doomed love.

Is this a step too far? Certainly. But fun, nonetheless... “



MIANDAD & I

Saad Shafqat co-wrote Javed Miandad's autobiography during the early days of this century; here he gets behind the myth of the man

Life on Javed Miandad's speed-dial is not easy. You could get called any moment, without warning. There's never a text message beforehand, and the calls can come when you least expect them to. When the name Javed Miandad is flashing on your cellphone screen, it isn't something that can be ignored. Miandad wants to have a word. Something is up. Whatever you might be doing at the time must be set aside. And if it so happens that you are in the middle of something that takes priority over everything else - driving a car, perhaps, or calls of nature - then you had better have a good explanation and you had better return the call at the earliest.

Oh sure, you're human, and sometimes you just feel like putting him off. It's been a long day, you've fought with the wife, the kids are in your face, the boss won't leave you alone and you have a ton of things to do. Taking a call from Miandad isn't your favourite activity at the moment. Yes, I confess, sometimes it happens and the feeling cannot be avoided.

But then good sense kicks in. This is the same Javed Miandad who cleared

the boundary in Sharjah when nothing else mattered to millions of Pakistanis; the same Javed Miandad who stared down West Indian bouncers from 18 yards to make that unforgettable match-clinching 114 in Georgetown; the same Javed Miandad who amassed an unbeaten fourth-innings double-hundred on a merciless minefield in Colchester. How can you not take this man's call? You have to. You must.

Interestingly enough, the calls are almost never about cricket, although cricket does get worked into the conversation eventually. I happen to be a physician working at a busy hospital in Karachi and the calls invariably have a medical context. Miandad is experiencing certain symptoms, or his wife or other family members are. Or he has heard of a new nutritional or vitamin supplement and wants to check out its provenance. Or he or someone he knows needs an appointment to see a medical specialist. Or it is some combination of these needs. I take care of the issue as a priority. It's the least I can do.

Once the business end of the conversation has been settled, cricket



comes up. Sometimes I'll bring it up, but more often he does. His habit is to first let a few seconds of silence elapse. You can hear him chewing paan masala at the other end, a slow and gentle mastication with an occasional grunt or two. After that, there is a tic-like clearing of the throat. "So, what else is happening?" he says in a relaxed, drawn-out manner.

In the beginning I used to take the question at face value and try to answer it, but I quickly learned my lesson. In fact, Miandad has no interest in what else is happening. This rhetorical question is simply his signal to indicate that, his immediate concerns satisfied, he will now expound on some aspect of the great game - its technicalities, personalities, controversies, governance, or political dimensions. Within the cricket universe, no topic is out of bounds.

How I came to enjoy this chummy relationship with Miandad is a story in itself. My introduction to cricket as a pastime coincided with Miandad's arrival into the international arena. He made a brilliant hundred and double-hundred in his debut series and took the cricket world by storm. He was audacious, cheeky, loud, impudent, and daring. He danced down the wicket to bring up his 100 and 200. This was late 1976 in Pakistan, and Miandad had had a hard time breaking into a batting line-up populated by Zaheer Abbas, Majid Khan, Mushtaq Mohammad, and Asif Iqbal. But now that he was in it, he put all the other stars in the shade.

Meanwhile, here was I, an 11-year-old kid from middle-class Karachi waking up to cricket's infinite pleasures and

possibilities. Javed Miandad stood out as the game's most immediate and thrilling symbol, and he became deeply etched on my psyche. Miandad's unique appeal was that he did not disappoint. Even against heavy odds, he frequently delivered, and when he failed, you could see that he had still fought tooth and nail. Every now and then, he would do something spectacular. When that happened, the effect was indescribable.

Before long, I began to feel as if I knew Miandad. Whenever he was out in the middle, I would watch him closely from the stands or on television. Depending on the particular circumstances of the match and Miandad's body language, I believed I could tell what was going on inside his head. It wasn't a psychosis on my part, nor anything metaphysical or abstract. I understood clearly that I had no actual connection with Miandad and that he obviously had no clue about me. I realised that I am only one among millions of Miandad fans. But I did identify with him deeply. I felt I understood him and his thoughts the way you can understand the attitudes and thoughts of a friend or associate with whom you've spent a great deal of time.

By the time Miandad retired, I had moved to the United States and was going through a very preoccupied phase of my life as a neurology trainee in Boston. There was hardly any time for cricket. Back then in the US, with the internet and satellite television still in their infancy and no newspaper coverage to speak of, the international game was nearly impossible to keep track of anyway. Yet even in this hopeless void, Miandad remained foremost in my thoughts.

During his playing days, I would devour every scrap of text I could find that mentioned Miandad's name. Now that he had quit, I became hungry to read the story of his life. In the late 1990s, the demands of my neurology training schedule finally eased up, and I reconnected with cricket mates from Karachi and began following the game on the internet. Around that time, two fine cricket books appeared - an autobiography of Hanif Mohammad (co-written with Qamar Ahmed and Afia Salam) and a Pakistani cricket history by Omar Noman. Pakistan cricket is not known for its bibliographic output, but these two works gave me hope that perhaps a book from Miandad too was around the corner. Miandad was back in the international limelight as well, taking over as coach for a highly publicised Pakistan tour to India; this further intensified my desire to read his autobiography.

By late summer of 2000, when I relocated to Karachi, I could take it no longer. Thanks to a resourceful friend, I tracked Miandad down and persuaded him to narrate his life story to me. *Cutting Edge - My Autobiography* appeared three years later.

Our first session took place at his mother's house, which is located in a northern suburb of Karachi, on a street that bears his name. I had arrived equipped with a dictaphone and a folder containing all his international scorecards. There was a vague outline of the book in my head, laid out more or less chronologically, though with separate chapters focusing on the teams that had been his toughest

opponents - West Indies, India, Australia, and England. This was going to be my first meeting with Miandad. Prior to this we had had only two brief phone chats, and that really hadn't provided much idea of what to expect from the interviewing process. I thought we might start with the occasion of his Test debut, and take it from there.

It was late on a Sunday afternoon by the time I reached his house. Miandad greeted me at the door and invited me to come upstairs. He was business-like and not particularly friendly, though he wasn't unpleasant either. We sat in a sparsely furnished room on the top floor of the four-storey house. Thin shafts of fading sunlight streamed in from a window. An errand boy brought tea, water, and biscuits. I set up the tape recorder, pulled out a notepad, and prepared to ask the opening question, but I was too late. Miandad had already begun speaking.

He started with his deceased father's love for cricket, and went on to discuss his brothers and sisters, before spending a good deal of time talking about his beloved mother. Tea was consumed and another cup was called for. After that, he pulled out a packet of paan masala from his pocket, skillfully split it open, and emptied the contents into his mouth. Dusk had fallen; Maghrib prayers were offered. Thereafter Miandad moved into high gear and spoke about learning cricket as a boy. He talked about his formative influences, mentioning his older brother Bashir, his father's friend AR Mehmood, and some of his father's associates from the Karachi Cricket Association, including Muzaffar Hussain, Dalpat Sonavaria, Saifuddin Valika, MU Haq,

and MS Baloch. It was utterly absorbing stuff. After several hours – at around 10 or 11 pm – he announced that he was tired and that I should come back tomorrow for more.

Over the next several months, I met Miandad approximately once a week – even following him to Lahore and London – and recorded all that he wanted to say about his life and career. After a few sessions, he began joking and swearing in my presence, a clear sign that we had become friends. For a while, I remained awed simply by the fact that I was discussing cricket with the legendary Javed Miandad. After a few weeks that wore off, and the sheer enjoyment of being in Miandad's company took over.

Among the more entertaining experiences was being out with him in public. Everybody recognises him and tries to wave or greet him; Miandad insists on acknowledging each wave, and responding to every greeting. Once while we were stopped at a traffic light, a newspaper hawker approached the car and slipped a cache of popular newspapers and magazines through the window. Miandad reached down for his wallet, but the man refused to take money. Miandad thanked him. At another traffic stop, a flower vendor spotted Miandad and immediately stepped forward with circlets of sweet-scented jasmine. This man wouldn't take money either. Miandad smiled and feigned reluctance, but eventually accepted the gift. Our journey continued towards a roadside paan shop where Miandad got out and replenished his supplies. He met the shop owner like they were old friends.

When I embarked on the autobiography project, a number of people cautioned me that Miandad would be more than a handful. He was supposed to be difficult and temperamental, and could become downright unreasonable at times. I, however, found him to be nothing but a gentleman – warm, affable, keenly intelligent, and at ease with himself. He has a strong empathetic side and would much rather cheer for the underdog than the favourite. He can also be incredibly funny. When the mood is right, there are few things more enthralling than Miandad and his cutting wit.

Early on during the interviews, it became clear that Miandad loves going off on tangents. At first, I tried to make him stick to the topic and stay focused, but it was hopeless. The only viable strategy was not to resist. If you interrupt him, he'll ignore you, and if you try and become a bit forceful and throw up some follow-up questions, he will simply keep talking through whatever it is that you have to say. Sometimes you do have to prod and probe to get him started, but it doesn't take much.

Relating his life story was enjoyable for Miandad. He was happiest when discussing his batting exploits. He particularly enjoyed going over the details of his famous Sharjah innings from the AustralAsia Cup final of 1986. In his own judgment, it is the best display of batting he ever produced. When recalling moments at the crease, he would frequently get animated. Even while seated, he would execute a flourish of the arm to imitate a square drive or a leg glance, to emphasise some point about a stroke he had relished. He often said that

to play the best shots it is imperative to get into the bowler's head. "It's all about anticipation," he stressed frequently. "You have to read the bowler's mind and predict his next move."

Getting into the moment and reliving old memories came easily to Miandad. When we spoke about the controversies that he had become embroiled in from time to time, latent emotions were brought alive. He became angry and saddened as if the whole thing was happening all over again. It never lasted long and his mood invariably recovered quickly, but it did reveal a powerful ability to recreate and re-experience circumstances inside his head.

Nor was this limited to the past. Once while I was with him, Miandad received a phone call from his nephew Faisal Iqbal, who has also played for Pakistan. Faisal was on tour and had just been told that he would be playing an ODI against England the next day. He was calling Miandad for advice. When Miandad received the call, he was enjoying a steaming cup of tea stretched out on a recliner. At first he uttered a few standard lines, but soon the tempo picked up. Suddenly, the tea was set aside and Miandad jumped up on his feet. Cradling the phone between his left cheek and shoulder, he mimed a straight drive and then a back foot defence while speaking into the phone. "Be sure about your fourth stump," he said to Faisal, wagging his finger.

The surest sign that Miandad is taking you seriously is if he closes his eyes. It is an indication that you have passed his basic mental screen and he has

chosen to contemplate what you have just said. Once that happens, you know that you have made the cut. You have been granted an audience where it really matters.

After that initial rebuff on the Imran-Akram debate, I had made another couple of attempts at engaging Miandad on the issue, but did not get very far. I wanted him to absorb the question, to close his eyes and ponder it. Instead, he appeared disinterested and would simply make a dismissive motion with the back of his hand, waving the question away.

Some months later, a new situation emerged that encouraged me to take another crack. Miandad's older brother was about to undergo an angioplasty, and Miandad and I were seated in an adjoining room along with the cardiologist, who happened to be not just my friend but also a Pakistan cricket die-hard. Preliminary activity was underway and it was not yet time for the procedure. The cardiologist said it would be another 20 or 30 minutes. Despite the medical context, the setting was relaxed. The patient was symptom-free and his angioplasty was being conducted on a non-emergent basis. Miandad was in a convivial mood and my cardiologist friend was thrilled to be in his company.

I could not resist bringing up the Imran-Akram question again. Miandad waved it aside. I was hoping my friend would follow up, and he did exactly that, insisting that it was a question Miandad had to answer. "They are both excellent," Miandad replied, sounding weary. "How can you compare the two? You really can't."

"Imran's average, economy, and strike rate are all better than Akram's," I said. "Not by much, but Imran does come out ahead."

Miandad replied that statistics were helpful only up to a point. "There are different conditions, different opponents, so many other factors that influence statistics," he said.

This was certainly more than Miandad had offered on this topic before, but I realised that to get any further, the question would have to be framed more narrowly.

"Imagine you're in the middle of having a net," I said to Miandad. He looked at me with some attention. Ok, I'm listening, he seemed to say.

"Both Imran and Akram are in the nets too," I continued. "They are both at peak ability, taking turns bowling at you full throttle. Who gives you more trouble?"

Miandad looked at me for a moment. Then he closed his eyes, and I knew I had finally hit the sweet spot. He scrunched up his face and swayed his head slightly from side to side. I could tell that he was recreating the scenario in his head and transporting himself. There was a frown on his forehead and creases at the corners of his mouth. He placed a hand under his chin and rested his elbow on the table in front.

Several seconds passed. Soft and steady beeping emanated from the

heart monitor inside the angioplasty suite. My friend picked up a cup of tea and took a sip. I broke a chocolate biscuit in two and gobbled up the smaller fragment. Miandad remained meditative. We prepared ourselves for the pithy pearls of cricketing wisdom that were about to emerge.

"Let us be clear," he said finally. "They're both great bowlers, but sooner or later I would have overpowered them both."

It was a quintessentially Miandadesque disclaimer. We nodded our heads avidly, readily conceding the point and indicating with eagerness that we wanted him to continue.

"But it would have to be Wasim," he said eventually. "Yes, Wasim would have given me more trouble."

Months of stalking and I finally had my answer. It felt like I had reeled in a marlin after angling the high seas for a long and difficult stretch of time. I was satisfied but my friend wanted more.

"Why Wasim?" he asked. "What was so special about him?"

"He was so good at moving it both ways," Miandad responded without missing a beat. Lifting up his right hand, he brought the index and middle fingers close together pointing skywards, gripping an imaginary seam. "Inside and out," he said, gently rocking the hand from side to side. "Inside and out."



ISLAND VOICES

Vaneisa Baksh on the historical, and continuing, importance of radio commentary and commentators in the Caribbean

Technology, that beguiling maverick, has spread its tentacles into every cranny of human existence, moving with such speed that it barely takes one generation to forget the good old days.

Trying to explain a vinyl 78 rpm phonograph record to a 20-year-old while she fiddled with a car radio that was reading, displaying and playing music from her iPod, made me acutely aware of just how quickly things change. It did not take more than 25 years for vinyl to be bypassed by cassettes and the digital gadgets that followed in a mad rush.

It reminded me too that the thing I call a car radio, could not really be accurately identified that way any more, and that triggered another set of thoughts about the changing relationship with radio.

Growing up, there was little direct access to radio — my father saw it simply as a source of noise — so we were quite late in getting one. But from the houses that surrounded us so intimately you could hear their breakfast conversations as plainly as if you were passing the toast, there was always the sound of a transistor going. There were not many stations to choose from — one or two AM and maybe one FM — but it was the ubiquitous staple in every Caribbean household.

In Trinidad and Tobago, the one radio station, Radio Trinidad, had come in 1947. It was part of the Rediffusion Service dished out also to Guyana, Barbados and Jamaica by the Rediffusion Group of London. It offered programming from the mother country and it was English commentators who brought immediate news of West Indian fortunes as their cricketers travelled to



foreign lands making their way in the world they would one day conquer.

It is a testament to the brilliance and eloquence of the men who did it that they captured the imagination of so many hopeful West Indians, ears glued to the radio, day or night, with descriptions of their heroes at play.

It is no exaggeration to say that many West Indians learned to love cricket through the radio. Ian McDonald, who has written poetically and beautifully on West Indies cricket and players (among many other things) for decades, told me that “radio was huge in my following cricket early on, and cricket was, of course, of great importance in my love of sports”.

It was the medium that allowed the masses to participate in real time, whether at home or work, in games that were coming from what would have been truly exotic locations. Newspapers would bring reports, but those would not be immediate. In the Caribbean, television came in the '60s — in Trinidad it was in 1961, and the following year, the year of its independence, the first state television station was set up. Prior to that, the only time people could see their heroes was when they played locally. Even then, this being West Indian islands surrounded by sea, few could attend matches that were not taking place in their territories.

The relationships generations formed with Test cricket were filtered through the commentary of John Arlott and other overseas broadcasters. The imagery they invoked suited a West Indian culture deeply immersed in

its oral traditions. Commentator Joseph Perreira, known throughout the cricket world as Reds, tells of his deep admiration for Arlott: “He had that lovely poetic voice. There are things I still remember him saying: ‘I welcome you to Old Trafford. It is so cold and grey not even the pigeons have appeared.’ Or another time, ‘Ramadhin and Valentine must have bowled more maidens than are sitting in the crowd.’ He taught me how to use the atmosphere; not to fight the atmosphere. There was theatre in his voice. It was beautiful.”

Reds grew up in Guyana, the southside of the West Indies. From the northside, Tony Becca, a Jamaican newspaper columnist of similar vintage, shares that sense of Arlott’s dramatic flair.

“Arlott was not an expert, but I will always remember his descriptions of a cricket match: he made the players live, you could ‘see’ them playing the game, and the match itself was like a drama.”

Arlott’s influence and charm are indisputable. Something in his style, that combination of delivery, panache, wit and knowledge, invoked something of the griot — the teller of tales whose charisma reaches deep within Caribbean bellies.

The great stories of West Indian heroics had traditionally been handed down by mouth. Written accounts would come as a literary culture began to flourish in the mid-twentieth century, but in the early days the listener had the liberty to configure a hero based on the storyteller’s skill.

Thus the radio offered its own magic, transmitting tales of brave deeds done in lands far away. How could it not be enthralling? The former West Indies fast bowler Ian Bishop's first memory of cricket was of lying on the living room floor at night with his brother, diligently copying down the scores made by a Test debutant far away in India. The batsman was Viv Richards. The Bishop boys were building their archive of inspiration from a distant daylight brought to sparkling life by a commentator's voice.

Paget deFreitas, a veteran journalist who grew up adoring Richards in Antigua, tells of how he followed that maiden hundred at Delhi in 1974: "Berry Sarbadhikary, the Indian commentator, screamed excitedly - 'That's a big hit. The ball is going 20, no 30, no 40 metres over the stands!' It filled me with pride, confirming that the world was recognizing my hero." That was the same voice Ian Bishop was hearing, from the living room floor in Trinidad.

You'd have had to love cricket, though, to take the tinny transistor sound of those times. It used to drive Curtly Ambrose crazy, the way his mother would be listening till all hours of the early morning. He wasn't interested in the game, and she was obsessed. She dreamed her big dreams for her sons, and when Aldensa, the elder Ambrose, migrated and dropped cricket, she set her sights on Curtly. And that was that.

Today a plethora of technological devices have stripped cricket of artifice and mystery. Replays: real time or ultra-slow motion; angles: up, down, sideways, or inside the stumps.

What can you hide? You can measure a bowler's action to the nth degree; calculate a batsman's weakness based on the number of times he's got out to a ball landing in precisely this spot at exactly that speed. What's missing from this surround-sound, big-screen, high-definition picture?

Imagination.

Radio leaves you with something of your own to bring to the game. The listener has to take in the information and do with it whatever his mind pleases, filling in whatever he finds missing. Television, on the other hand, presents a complete image, one that might even flatten out the lustre of a beautifully described stroke.

Radio leaves you with something of your own to bring to the game. The listener has to take in the information and do with it whatever his mind pleases, filling in whatever he finds missing. Television, on the other hand, presents a complete image, one that might even flatten out the lustre of a beautifully described stroke.

In recent times Cozier has been joined by Michael Holding, Ian Bishop, and Fazeer Mohammed. Each brings a different style but maintains respect by knowing the game intimately and bringing that knowledge to their commentary.

It is the value added by commentators that has prevented radio commentary going the way of vinyl. The magic of its hold does not lie in the technology; it emanates from the storytellers within. It has disturbed McDonald deeply that recognition of their role

has not been adequate. In a speech he gave some years ago to honour Cozier, he talked poignantly of the Keeper of the Flame.

“In the vast and lovely literature on cricket there is not very much about cricket writers themselves and even less about cricket commentators. I have often wondered why. After all, every art needs those who describe, elucidate, and interpret what the artists themselves create. In cricket it is no different. Cricket would be infinitely the poorer had it not been described and illuminated by writers like Neville Cardus and CLR James and by outstanding commentators like John Arlott and Johnny Moyes. There is an essential book waiting to be written on the art and achievements of such men.

“In any such book, high up in the list demanding inclusion, and still young enough to strengthen his claim further, stands Tony Cozier. As all-rounder cricket writer, historian, and commentator he must surely be a candidate for selection in any World XI. As a writer on the game CLR James for the West Indies stands quite alone. Indeed his only possible rival is Neville Cardus and CLR clearly surpasses Cardus in profundity of analysis and depth of historical insight. Tony Cozier, he would be the first to say, is not in that class as a writer. But

CLR and Cardus did not also make their mark as commentators. Nor did they ever undertake the arduous, routine — but vitally important — task of recording the history of the game, season by season, for a whole nation as Cozier has done so indefatigably.”

For generations, Cozier has been the griot, the voice we trust coming out of the radio, and it is as much to his credit as it is to the outstanding gentlemen who went before him that radio remains culturally rooted in cricket. It is a link which has survived many of the new kids in town. But now that cricket itself has evolved into an entirely different kind of spectacle, I wouldn't be surprised if that enduring relationship is fractured. The times, they are changing so rapidly, what comes next is anyone's guess.

But with the world still so far from being even-handed in its distribution of resources, what might be the given in one corner is the rarity in another, and the Caribbean is full of these astonishing chasms. It is still possible to find a modest rum shop right down the road from your five-star hotel.

And if you want to understand the root of rum-shop talk, and why there are so many experts on every corner, look around. Bet there's a radio sitting on a shelf behind the counter, nestled between two half-full bottles.



THE UNREMEMBERED SIX

Christian Ryan on Chris Tavaré's uncharacteristic innings

Some school semester in 1969 or '70 – it was spring – a hazel-eyed boy under the influence of a particular teacher, a Mr Briggs, could feel his future floating out in front of him, uncertainly, like the insects. He thought about following the insects. The west Kent commuter town where he went to school was a place of lakes, deer, old trees and valleys. Insects were what engrossed the boy. He liked listening to Mr Briggs talk about them. So many insects, anywhere you look – what makes each of them so interesting? How is it that wherever there is a habitat, they'll find a way of living? He discovered and read a book about animal behaviour, and his curiosity grew. He sensed he could be happy in that future, that world, it made him excited, and it was an outdoors world. But a second world – and this world, the way the boy carried himself in it, was very much an interior world – was also just beginning to flicker at him. That was the spring he got picked in the school's first XI.

Cricket is a game played on a dirt pitch and grass. But it exists on the wind – the space, a kind of ether, between the ball/

stroke that's just happened and those about to happen next, and the balls just bowled or about to be bowled and strokes executed or awaiting execution in all the games of cricket being played somewhere simultaneously of whatever duration, overs-span, age level, seriousness, etc, and also, most tantalising, every ball or stroke ever. Twenty-five seconds later another one comes along. But the ball/stroke that's gone doesn't actually go anywhere. The ball/stroke hovers. Nearly always, it is hovering in a place most people cannot locate, and the people who potentially could locate it – inside their memory, imagination, in a newspaper report or book, on YouTube – are at that moment not doing so. But it is still there, somewhere. Ted Dexter once drove Tom Veivers for six during a tour game at the MCG. No footage exists. Yet a handful of the still-living recall it, and consider it maybe the finest stroke ever struck in Melbourne. One, Bill Lawry, told Jonathan Agnew last December that Dexter's drive, "went halfway up the sightscreen, it was just flat, I was at mid off and it could have killed me, a tremendous strike of the ball."



The Lawry/Agnew podcast is currently google-able. Probably soon it will get dragged down, and definitely Lawry and the others who were present will someday die, and years may fly by without a single person giving a second's pause to dwell on what happened that day when Tom Veivers bowled, but even then the moment will be forever safe, forever there, this sentence's existence marginally increasing the prospect of a future kid or grown-up enjoying the sudden exhilarating feeling of that drive of Ted Dexter's popping into their head. What, though, of the ball/stroke that is unfilmed, unwritten of, untalked about, and unremembered by anyone who was there? What then?

One afternoon Chris Tavaré hit a six.

It happened in a three-day match in Newcastle, Australia, where the sky was bright and Northern New South Wales won the toss and made 163. Curator Ken Stace's pitch at the No.1 Sports Ground was flat and good, so 163 was below-par and anticlimactic, especially as cluey judges reckoned that of all the Northern NSW line-ups ever assembled this lot had balance, experience and the best shot yet at knocking over a touring England side. They had extra incentive, too. A pre-game function was held at Newcastle City Hall and whoever did the invitation list forgot one team. The locals downed sullen beers among themselves instead that night. Late the next night, after the disaster of 163 - top score was Rick McCosker's 53, out hooking the last ball before lunch - a telephone rang at the Travelodge Motel. It was Kent calling to tell Tavaré he'd been appointed the county's new captain.

So next day, the day after his twenty-eighth birthday, walking out to bat, it is possible Tavaré felt in a place of some kind of

serenity. Loose soil on the outfield, the result of recent top-dressing, had disappeared after a morning's gentle mowing. Nearly 1600 spectators, paying two dollars a head, were in. Tavaré would have noticed the gasometers across the street - evocative of The Oval, London. Or did the parked cars sidled up against sections of the boundary remind him of the outground at Folkestone, Cheriton Road, scene of a 42 and a 0 he'd made two months before?

In Newcastle some people watched from their car seats. And Tavaré batted, seatbelt on. He and opening partner Graeme Fowler lasted nearly two hours together at a scoring rate of 1-point-squirt-all per over.

Batting's a chew-a-person's-insides-up ordeal. It asks that you be dominant while requiring you make yourself vulnerable - the ball, object of your downfall, rests in the bowler's hands and is outlawed from touching yours. Your goal is twofold, to survive and score runs. Routinely Tavaré made it onefold, and in this way he's in a category of not much more than one. Invincible in defence, uninterested in scoring, he was - if we apply the twofold test - a half batsman, with the aura of an anti-batsman. Once, Tavaré spent 67 minutes on 0. Later, same innings, he spent 60 minutes on 24, first-class cricket's only batsman to have endured a pair of scoreless hours in the one innings. Adding to the burying-my-goldfish feel he did it at HQ, the Home of Cricket, Lord's: like fatulence in the front aisle at church. I mentioned Tavaré being a one-man category - unlike the other blockers and stonewallers who clog cricket's scorebooks, and as distinct from the rearguard specialists, the human barnacles, the many vexing pissants (eg Geoff Boycott, who in some parallel timeless Test universe is still putting on 92 for the second wicket with Tavaré in Mumbai); unlike them, Tav, perversely, was

so unrelentingly boring and so predictable in his boring-ness that it became not at all boring. It became – something other. This was a creepy concept to try bending your mind around, sitting on the couch, TV switched to the cricket. You could not watch. You could not look away. Your head was filled with Tavaré. And it was filled with a stack of issues and stuff totally unconnected to Tavaré. Peering at Tavaré could have the effect, unusually, of making a person feel as if they were peering in on oneself.

Naturally, only a cricket watcher whose own insides were reasonably chewed up would react that way to Tavaré. In Newcastle, Fowler was caught at short leg, David Gower came in, and he and Tavaré added 90, Tavaré's contribution being 30 – and at some point during their partnership the crowd started hooting.

“Yeah, I remember, maybe,” says Michael Hill, Northern NSW's captain that day, “there was some hooting. But look, we played Rest of the World in 1972 and Graeme Pollock and Sunil Gavaskar added about a hundred after lunch, in even time, perfect batting, beautiful batting. They got hooted because the ball kept going along the ground. Very tough judges in Newcastle.” Also, at an indeterminate hour, possibly post-hooting, and certainly after the morning's batting was done and he'd squeezed in some side-practice, England's captain Bob Willis returned to the Travelodge to answer letters. Willis was resting this match. Gower stood in. And the captain on tour always has bags of incoming correspondence to keep up with.

There's a little-seen Patrick Eagar photo of Tavaré – different innings, same summer, a fast bowler is about to let fly. It is a rear-view landscape shot. It is, to the uninitiated, a photo not of Tavaré but of four slips and

two gully fielders, crouching chevron-style not arc-style, a mildly unusual geometric formation which is why Eagar has taken it from behind. But if you are a Tavaré person it is to Tavaré your eyes cling. In the far left corner of the frame, he is waiting on the crease. Dangling exactly vertical is his bat. That's not how the textbook teaches you to do it. In the same vertical line, going up, are his weirdly long forearms, his above-the-elbow region, and the back of his helmeted head. Textbook-wise, he should be approximating a back-to-front question mark, but he's an exclamation mark minus the dot, an unbent line – with some air of impermanence, as if he has just floated into shot, and is tilting, tipping ... Tavaré! This is what stills photography can do to the stillest batsman the game has known. It can render him so still he starts sliding backwards. I can't look at the photo without feeling unsettled and downhearted, and I don't think that's right and I don't think Eagar intended it that way. In another photo – just a grainy square in a magazine, no photo credit, badly cropped, the bat's sawn off at the top – Tavaré is essaying a drive: bareheaded, aggressive, everything's flowing, classical. And I don't know which of the photos, unless it's neither of the photos, is playing tricks.

After dealing with the ball, each ball, he would wander halfway to square-leg, head bowed. Whether he was relieved to have survived the last ball or gathering strength for the next, no one was sure, and nothing showed on his thin face. Cheekbones jutted out of the gauntness; his eyes seemed deep-set in their sockets. When people picture him now, the thing they are picturing is often that walk towards square-leg, which was not a tic he started off with but something that developed many years into his career, by which time he'd been to Oxford and completed a zoology degree.

He still thought about the insects – how, wherever there is a habitat, they'll find a way of living.

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Perth, in the summer that straddled 1977 and '78, was a yellow-lit city of flies, highways, the Channel 9 Appealathon, sand, Hungry Jack's signs, a sort of LA of Australia running at quarter speed, where ambition is soaked up in sunscreen and washed off in the shower block afterwards, and where Tavaré came to bat at No.3 for the University Cricket Club. He was well loved by teammates. At least three still see and keep in touch with him.

Greg Davies – “Square of the wicket: fantastic. Particularly on the off side. Tavs rarely let anything short get past him.”

Leigh Robinson – “Chris was a stylish batsman. Seemed to be getting out caught behind. But he had lots of shots. Hit the ball quite hard.”

Colin Penter, captain – “A dashing player. Very strong off the front foot. Strong cutter. Wasn't a big hooker. Still strong through the leg-side, though, off pads ...”

He averaged 14 in October, 13 throughout November, 6.75 in February and 10 in March. In between he collected a 68 at James Oval in his only innings all January. On the last day of 1977 he made 125 at Cresswell Park, hammering the Claremont-Cottesloe bowlers in an elegant and brilliant exhibition that included a two-hour partnership of 162 runs with Greg Davies, who nonetheless can't quite place it.

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Was it really an urge to catch up on his letter writing that drove Bob Willis back to the Newcastle Travelodge? Watching Tavaré bat can have been no easier for those who knew him than it was for us, who could only guess at him. A fortnight later Tavaré assembled 98 runs across nine hours, fifty-three minutes and two innings at the WACA, and Willis in his tour diary painted the dressing-room scene thus: “Two of the side lying on benches, not watching the game at all, and two more intent on the television. Some were reading or playing cards.”

“I do enjoy watching Tav bat,” Willis himself would say to Mike Brearley in earlier times. Something unbearable, beautiful, painful – loveable – wraps round the cricketer who plays his own way, even if it is a closed-off way. Their vulnerability is palpable. So much is on show, and at stake – nothing less than a likeness of them. If Tavaré was batting, that meant Willis's grateful bowling knees were getting some sorely needed sleep. But even for Willis this was a delicately balanced thing. The phenomenon of Tavaré setting himself at the crease, like a tree's roots expanding, freed the batsmen around him to play their strokes, or else it pressured them into having to overplay too many strokes, no one could predict or tell which and it changed on an innings-to-innings basis. And yet Ian Botham would say: “I like batting with Tav.”

Botham was next man in – “best player England has produced since Dr WG Grace”, shouted the Newcastle Herald, advising its readers to flock to the ground. Immediately Botham got away with a backward sweep and a heave, which made his Ashes miracles of 1981 feel close. An off break came down, and he drove and edged it to slip.

Accompanying Tavaré the whole circumference of Australia was his wife Vanessa, and he was happier with her

nearby, although aeroplane tickets were pricey and a player's tour fee modest. Also, she had phobias about flying – for which she required sedation – and heights as well. And this tour of Australia consisted of 25 flights in 127 days, from one downtown hotel to the next, most of them taller than the Newcastle Travelodge. It was hard on her, worried him. Getting to Newcastle alone had involved a coach, a 20-seater plane, then another coach. Test cricket – the seconds between those heavy-footed walks towards square-leg – was strain enough.

“Unsmiling,” remembers Bob Holland. “Serious. Tall. He played with a straight, dead bat, or let balls go, and there was no reaction to any sledging, no annoyance, his character did not change.” Holland, joined by the captain Hill and Colts offie Steve Hatherell, was part of a Northern NSW spin trio against Tavaré. A big-breaking, back-spinning leggie, Holland played 11 Tests for Australia, and first grade till he was 52, and in his life bowled to Sobers, Gavaskar, Viv, the Chappells, never another like Tavaré. “Can’t think of another one. With first-class cricketers, when they got half an opportunity to attack, they usually did. He wasn’t like that. He would wait and wait and wait.”

Holland’s spin partner Hill had encountered English occupiers before: John Edrich, Geoff Boycott. Tavaré was something unique. “But closer to Edrich than to Boycott because Boycott was much more technically perfect.”

In Newcastle, a breeze fluttered across the ground and Tavaré called for a sweater. “Hit the fucking ball,” hollered a spectator, “and you’ll keep yourself warm.”

Alien-seeming to some Australians, this was a man who donned a headscarf, pinafore and attended the England touring squad’s Christmas Day dress-up lunch as Hilda Ogden

from Coronation Street. Quintessentially English was another interpretation: he did the *Telegraph* crossword, roast beef was his favourite food, and the place he best liked to play cricket was The Parks in Oxford. He mixed well with others but was early to pyjamas and bed. Not a big drinker, he’d drink a bit. Shirts, not always quite figure-fitting, were perfectly ironed. The tour social committee fined him, affectionately, for braininess. In interviews it was as if he had a cutting and brilliant riposte that would put everyone on the floor but something was holding him back from using it. And so he’d give the predictable answer in his downbeat voice. Installed in his car, future county teammate Peter Roebuck noticed, was a device to make it go exactly 70mph on motorways. Cricket wrested control away, it was cricket controlling him. How he was doing on the field – that’s how and who he was. “Sometimes tortured”, according to Willis, who he’d come to for advice, and then follow the advice. Self-preoccupation was not a problem. He’d make team-centric suggestions about field settings, training routines. Generally, though, he did not speak a lot. He liked gardening, and woodwork, and films, and home. He once said to Willis that maybe a degree of screwed-upness was crucial to both their success.

Alien-seeming – they did not think that in Perth.

Something was afoot in Newcastle.

Tavaré hit an off-drive so hard it hurt the hands of the fielder who stopped it. In the 89th over he was 85 not out and the Northern NSW bowlers reached for the new ball. Tavaré stepped forward, sort of skipping. Some shots, visiting commentator and pundit Henry Blofeld saw, showed a lovely flowing arc of the blade. To the spinners he, occasionally, danced.

Ghost rumours linger, of what journalist Alan Gibson thought he saw when Tavaré batted half a day at Leicester during the 1978 county season – “Some of his drives reminded me of Beldam’s pictures of Victor Trumper”; of a 27-ball ton at Crystal Palace’s football field in the 1981 Lambert and Butler Floodlit Cup.

In Newcastle, hitting Holland to the midwicket fence brought up 100. “Frustrating,” Holland recalls. “Bowl six good balls and he’d play six back, so I’d try tossing one higher, it would be slightly overpitched, and he’d hit it hard and very, very classical.” In stands of 55 with Derek Randall and 37 with Ian Gould, Tavaré was the dominant partner. Vic Marks had heard him remark once or twice before: “I’d love to be able to play like Lubo [Gower] or Gatt [Gatting]. I can’t.” Now Marks and Tavaré added 47, Marks making six of them.

Suppose in Newcastle, Australia, he batted four seasons in one day. If, watching Tavaré, it turns out we never really knew him, is it possible to know anyone, by watching?

He moved from 123 to 131 in two balls, off-driving then on-driving Hill right and left of the sightscreen. His first fifty had taken 222 minutes, the last fifty took 50. When, half an hour before stumps, he was bowled for 157, nearly no one who came to the ground had left, and people clapped.

Sometime between 50 and 85 a six was hit, an on-drive.

Hill remembers spilling a catch – “a sitter, waist-high, two hands, standing in the gully where I’d fielded all my life” – when Tavaré was 34 not out and ex-Test man

Gary Gilmour was bowling off a seven-pace run-up.

Part-timer Robert Wilkinson remembers the wicket he took, Gould (though he misremembers it as Gower), “caught at midwicket”.

Matthew Engel’s *Guardian* report makes no mention of a six.

Wicketkeeper Kerry Thompson admits, “nothing about the match jumps out at me.”

Hatherell has “virtually no memories of Tavaré”.

One photo exists of Tavaré’s innings, and he is on-driving, along the grass.

Left-arm quick Timmy Towers died of cancer at thirty-six.

Holland remembers Eddie Hemmings’s nine wickets and shrewd strategising (“despite the burden of a pillow under his shirt”).

Mid-on fielder Greg Arms remembers Holland bowling from the southern end and Tavaré hitting from the north, towards the city, “a couple whistling past me”.

No one remembers a six.

At the school where it all started, Sevenoaks School, that’s where he is now, teaching biology, with additional responsibilities for school hockey, netball and cricket. It does not take much – being there’s enough, he says – for his own school cricketing days to come roaring back fresh, and from there it is a small leap to other balls blocked, hit high, still rising, never landing.



THE BRAT GROWS UP

Dileep Premachandran ponders Virat Kohli, India's 21st Century No.4

What did we do at 18? Surreptitiously smoke fags on the balcony? Write awful love poetry to obscure objects of desire? Skip exams to read Kerouac? Ponder the latest advancements in string theory? Or as Pulp sang in "Common People", "watch your life slide out of view?" Whatever we did or didn't do, it's not usually an age associated with grief and emotional scarring.

But for Virat Kohli, the weeks following his 18th birthday were the worst of his life. His father, who had dreamt of his second son donning national colours, died. It had been almost a decade since Prem Kohli took Virat and Vikas, his older brother, to Rajkumar Sharma's academy in West Delhi. Vikas's passion for the game had faded. Not so with the younger kid. Sharma recalls a naughty child who was "a bit chubby" but who seemed a born leader: "He wanted to dominate even then."

Sharma never asked for Virat's innate aggression to be reined in, and he admired the confidence with which he approached every task, whether with bat or ball. And by 2007 the young

man still mourning his father was part of the India Under-19 side about to embark on a tour of New Zealand. The team's coach, Lalchand Rajput, wanted his wards to have an idea of the sort of conditions they would encounter, and asked some senior stalwarts to speak to the side.

One of those was a former Mumbai teammate preparing for the World Cup in the Caribbean later that year. When Sachin Tendulkar arrived at the Wankhede Stadium, the group of young men stopped their horsing around and stood in awe. Most of them were seeing him in the flesh for the first time, this man whose feats they had wanted to emulate since they were old enough to grip a bat or ball.

Kohli still smiles when he recalls that first meeting, a month after his father's death. He remembers how he had goosebumps in 30°C heat. Tendulkar had a quick chat with the group about New Zealand. Kohli stared. "I didn't even blink my eyes because I couldn't quite believe it," he said. "It was something truly special."



Nearly seven years later, in November 2013, both the hero and the fan were back at the Wankhede. Tendulkar was playing his 200th and final Test. Kohli, who won his first India cap 18 months after that first interaction, was the champion-in-waiting, with an enviable ODI record and showing signs of maturity in the five-day game.

As Tendulkar walked back after his final innings, a fluent 74, a nation went into meltdown. Though it was mid-morning, most of India's news channels were discussing nothing but the last act, and there were enough tears shed to fill an Olympic-size swimming pool. Kohli must have been emotional as he arrived at the crease – Tendulkar has mentioned in his book how both of them were in tears in the dressing-room as Kohli presented him with auspicious wrist threads that his father had given him – but he hid it well. The first ball he faced from Narsingh Deonarine – the first of Indian cricket's After Tendulkar era – was laced through cover for four.

Almost eight years earlier, Kohli had been accompanied to the crease by an altogether different kind of grief. The Delhi team he had just become part of were playing Karnataka in the Ranji Trophy. His four previous first-class knocks had yielded 10, 42, 13 not out and 21. Those in the know expected big things from him, but there was still a chasm between potential and performance.

At stumps on the second day, Delhi were shipping water at 103 for 5 in response to the visitors' 446. Kohli was batting on 40. A few hours later, Prem Kohli passed away. Sharma was away in Sydney at the time. Not knowing who else to turn to, Virat called him, asking what he should

do. Sharma was at a loss, and ended up telling the boy to follow his heart.

The next morning, to widespread amazement, Kohli was at the ground and marking his guard. He batted more than a session before being adjudged caught behind for 90. When Sharma next spoke to him, Kohli was in tears. "He was crying not only for his father, but because he was given out wrongly," said Sharma. That afternoon, on returning from the Feroz Shah Kotla, Kohli helped his brother perform the last rites.

That one innings, long before he became Under-19 captain or national team prospect, pitchforked him into the public eye. The rough edges were many, but coaches, teammates and opponents all felt that his toughness would take Kohli a long way.

Every nation has its magic number. For Australia, the titans have usually batted at No.3 – Sir Donald Bradman, Greg Chappell and Ricky Ponting. The English greats tended to be opening batsmen – Sir Jack Hobbs, Herbert Sutcliffe, Sir Len Hutton, Geoffrey Boycott, Graham Gooch. If you look at the history of Indian cricket though, it's No.4 that counts.

Rahul Dravid, one of the all-time greats at No.3, used to joke that his was the one Indian wicket that used to be cheered most, because it often meant Tendulkar's arrival at the crease. And once he was there, the mood and tenor would quickly change. For years, the catchphrase used to be: "Shush, the boss is batting!"

Kohli evokes a very different response. He has never inspired the kind of

devotion that Tendulkar did, primarily because he was the anti-Sachin in his teens, a brash, potty-mouthed David Beckham wannabe. Yet, love him or hate him – and there are few shades of grey in this relationship – he makes people watch the game. Whether it's pulling off improbable run-chases or blowing kisses to Mitchell Johnson after smashing him around the MCG, Kohli doesn't live in the shadows.

On his first tour of Australia in 1991-92, Tendulkar made two centuries. The one in Perth – a considerably quicker pitch then than it is now – was an innings for the ages. When he next visited the country in 1999-2000, he made another sublime hundred in Melbourne even as the team he led disintegrated around him. Eight Tests, three hundreds, and Australian talk of how he might be the best since Bradman.

Kohli has also played eight Tests on Australian soil. There have been five hundreds, three of them at the Adelaide Oval. Against the same core group of players that routed England 5-0 in the Ashes the previous season, Kohli made 692 runs in four Tests. Despite that, much of the talk has been about his behaviour, on and off the field. Tendulkar created a template for an Indian cricket hero. Kohli, who grew up idolising him, doesn't conform to it. As a result, he doesn't get anything like the same adulation.

The sad thing about Kohli and the new generation of Indian cricket icons is that no one will really know them. The BCCI's media policy has seen to that. Perfunctory press conferences, a blanket ban on interviews, an overarching contempt for the written and spoken media. During the Old Trafford Test in 2014, I was fortunate enough to play some cricket in a friend's back garden. As I chucked down my off-breaks, the older son asked me what Kohli was like. If he had asked me the same question about Tendulkar or Dravid, or Laxman or Kumble, I would probably have chewed his ear off. But for Kohli, I didn't have an answer. I doubt I ever will. I've spoken to him a couple of times. He's always engaging and personable in front of the microphone. But have I ever seen behind the façade? Not once.

Maybe one day, the board will take a more enlightened view. Kids, whether in West Delhi or Chorlton, need their heroes. Kohli would be the first to attest to that. "When playing cricket as kids, we all pretend to be a particular player," he told me, as animated as I'd ever heard him. "I always wanted to be Sachin. I wanted to bat like him, so I tried to copy the shots he played and hit sixes the way he used to hit them. He was the one player that always made me think: I want to bat like him."

Tendulkar. Kohli. So similar. Yet, so very different. Two No.4s – the past, present and future of Indian batting.





OF MYTHS AND ORIGINS

Tom Holland unites Lord's, Piltdown Man and Pope Gregory the Great, contending we're happier believing what we want to believe

The summer of 1912 was one of the wettest on record. Month after month, rain lashed the cricket pitches of England. Sydney Barnes, whose 69 wickets came that season at a cost of just over 11 runs each, may have enjoyed the damp conditions – but no one else much did. The cricketers of Australia and South Africa, who had been invited over to participate in an innovative triangular tournament of Test matches, had a particularly miserable time of it, dodging torrential downpours whenever they were not being skittled out by Barnes. The entire season, everyone mournfully agreed, had been an utter wash-out.

Meanwhile, in the Sussex village of Piltdown, a solicitor and amateur fossil-hunter by the name of Charles Dawson had been enjoying an altogether more productive summer. Between June and September, he had been busy making a series of remarkable finds in a local gravel pit. Disastrous though the weather had been for cricket, the puddles in the quarries of Piltdown had done little to

dampen Dawson's apparent aptitude for palaeontology. His discoveries, announced to a packed session of the Geological Society of London just before Christmas, appeared little short of sensational. Thick, brown-stained pieces of a hominid skull, together with the fragment of a lower jaw closely resembling a chimpanzee's, pointed to Piltdown having been the home of the oldest known Englishman. *Eoanthropus dawsoni*, the creature was christened: "Dawson's Dawn Man". Half-monkey, half-human, it appeared to be that Darwinian Holy Grail: a missing link.

The rejoicing in British palaeontological circles was certainly immense. That summer, despite all the hours of play lost to the weather, the England cricket team had still managed to record a series of convincing victories, beating Australia 1-0, and thrashing South Africa in all three of the matches scheduled between them. On the field of palaeontological play, though, it had been a much sorrier story. Britain's two traditional rivals, France and



Germany, had long left British scientists scratching around haplessly in their wake. The Abri de Cro-Magnon, a large cave in the Dordogne, had given its name to the oldest known modern humans ever to be found in Europe, while the Neander Thal, a valley just east of Düsseldorf, could boast the find of an entire species of extinct prehistoric humans. No wonder, then, that Dawson's finds were greeted by British palaeontologists with such relief. *Eoanthropus dawsoni*, it was officially announced, dated back almost a million years. This made it the oldest human ever found in Europe. Dawson, it seemed, had racked up a truly significant score for England.

Or had he? Not everyone was convinced. It was noted by some specialists that the skull of Piltdown Man appeared anachronistically large for a creature that – based on the evidence of Dawson's finds, at any rate – had possessed an almost simian jaw. But the most polarising find of all was yet to come. Two years on, and the discovery was announced, not of human remains, but of something even more remarkable: a human implement. Carved from a large piece of elephant bone, and uncovered by Dawson in the very sediment where he had earlier found the fragments of Piltdown Man, it bore an unmistakable shape: that of a cricket bat. Here, for any patriotic Englishman, was a truly stirring possibility: that the age of CB Fry and Sydney Barnes was linked by a bond of fellowship to that of the earliest known human ever to have trodden English sward, almost a million years before. Either that, or the find was a fake.

Amazingly, it would take another 40 years before the elephant bone "cricket bat" was definitively debunked. Only in

England's Ashes-winning summer of 1953 was it at last demonstrated to everyone's satisfaction that the discoveries made at Piltdown had indeed all been plants. To this day, the identity of the forger remains a much-contested mystery – with Charles Dawson, the man who had originally begun prospecting in the gravel pit, the odds-on favourite. The "cricket bat", though, as the most extraordinary and improbable find of all, has long been regarded as a special case. Some have suggested that Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, who had a house nearby, and was as keen a cricketer as he was supreme a crafter of mysteries, might have planted it. Others have nominated Martin Hinton, a volunteer at the Natural History Museum who would go on to become its Keeper of Zoology, as a possible candidate. Chris Stringer, who is currently the Museum's leading specialist on human origins, has plausibly argued that Hinton had rumbled the Piltdown fraud, and was aiming to tip off the culprit. Hence the cricket bat: he had deliberately planted the most absurd object he could come up with. Hinton, though, had miscalculated. "To his horror, instead of terminating the whole Piltdown saga, this bizarre piece was heralded as the world's oldest bone implement." The British public, it seemed, quite liked the idea of their prehistoric forebears wielding cricket bats.

Play was being made at Piltdown with two mysteries, not just the one. Whether the elephant bone had been planted by a fraudster or by a scientist looking to warn the fraudster that his game was up, its shape had clearly been no accident. *Eoanthropus dawsoni*, unlike Neanderthal or Cro-Magnon Man, had been found not far from the Sussex county ground at Hove, and the discovery at Piltdown of a cricket bat had served subliminally to brand him as all the more English. There

was, however, a further twist. If hardly a puzzle on the scale of human prehistory, the origins of cricket were – and remain – a theme fit to perplex even considerable scholars. The antiquity of the game remains to this day an important aspect of its mystique – and the proof of this antiquity is precisely that so much of its early history is lost in the mists of time. Cricketers who take the field at Piltown do not need to believe that *Eoanthropus dawsoni* had once taken guard there as well to know that they are engaged in an activity with roots much older than themselves. Even in the early 19th century, when a wicket was laid out at Britain's most famous prehistoric monument, it was not merely the resemblance between stumps and the nearby sarsens that made the cricket there seem in perfect accord with its setting. "Near where Stonehenge uprears its head," ran a poem published in the *New Sporting Magazine* in 1833,

"In antiquated grandeur

A cricket ground's been lately made,

Which to the scene adds splendour."

Cricket and ancient stonework: a match made, so it seemed, in heaven.

In the event, the ground at Stonehenge was abandoned in the 1860s – and even though the Chief Druid of Wiltshire, a notable off-spinner, petitioned John Major in 1995 to have it restored, the request was turned down. "The two bails," so the Druid had helpfully explained to the Prime Minister, "as a man and woman, are balanced on their fates to make up the fivefold wicket which must be defended against the fiery red sun." It is hardly surprising that Major should have been less than convinced by this. A man of decidedly un-mystical

temperament, he was also a notable historian of cricket's early years – and knew perfectly well that the sport was not remotely as ancient as some enthusiasts liked to think. A decade after leaving office, he published a book on the topic, in which he surveyed various references to the game supposedly made by medieval authors, and found them all wanting. The claim made by an eighth-century monk that a sport with bat and ball was being played in Florence; by a twelfth-century poet that young men enjoyed a leisure activity called "cricks"; by a clerk in the reign of Edward I that the Prince of Wales, the future Edward II, was passionate about a game called "creag": all were dismissed by the former Prime Minister as evidence for the existence of cricket in the Middle Ages. Wielding Occam's Razor as deftly as a great batsman might execute a late cut, Major convincingly dispatched any attempt to demonstrate that the sport might have been played before the Tudor period. "Things not known to exist should not be postulated as existing."

Nevertheless, an intriguing question is left hanging: why the desire, evident both at Piltown and in the array of bogus references compiled by Major, to push back the origins of cricket? As Lord's celebrates the 200th anniversary of the first match known to have been played on its current pitch, a clue is to be found, perhaps, in a phrase originally applied to it by Australia's longest-serving Prime Minister, Sir Robert Menzies. The ground, so he declared in a tone of reverent anglophilia, was nothing less than "the Cathedral of Cricket". MCC, as well they might have been, were delighted by the epithet. Sir Pelham Warner, the nearest to a pope the club has ever possessed, was particularly thrilled. In his dotage, short-sighted and forgetful, he once demanded to know of Menzies

himself the identity of the man “from the colonies” who had coined the phrase. It has stuck ever since.

Nevertheless, had the epithet appealed merely to MCC’s sense of self-worth, it would never have achieved the undoubted resonance that it has done beyond the purlieu of St John’s Wood. No other sports ground in the world, perhaps, can rival Lord’s for sheer ecclesiastical ambience. The great towers of the Pavilion; the walls of the Long Room, adorned with memorials to the greats of yesteryear; the bitter arguments over whether women should be permitted into the inner sanctum: the resemblance to Canterbury Cathedral is unmistakable. In AD 601, four years after the arrival of St Augustine’s mission to Kent, the man who had sent him, Pope Gregory the Great, wrote to the local pagan king, urging on him a Christian code of behaviour. “Strengthen the morals of your subjects by outstanding purity of life, by exhorting them, terrifying, enticing and correcting them, and by showing them an example of good works.” In 2000, in a similarly ex cathedra manner, MCC issued a preamble to the Code of Laws, officially declaring the existence of what it termed “The Spirit of Cricket”. The game, so cricketers were sternly reminded, “owes much of its unique appeal to the fact that it should be played not only within its Laws but also within the Spirit of the Game. Any action which is seen to abuse this Spirit causes injury to the game itself.” Much diminished though MCC’s role in cricket may now be – with India controlling the game’s purse-strings, and the headquarters of the ICC relocated to the tax-friendly shores of the Persian Gulf – the club still affects a certain moral leadership. Lord’s remains,

in that sense, what Canterbury is to Anglicanism: the Mother Church of a worldwide communion.

“It’s not cricket.” No other sport has a phrase quite like it. The polychrome glitz of Twenty20 notwithstanding, let alone the running sore of betting scandals, there is still to this day a certain metaphorical value that attaches itself to a pair of cricket whites. Humbug or not, the distinctively sacral character of Lord’s, together with the moral pretensions of MCC, play crucial roles in affirming this. Just as Canterbury serves to anchor English Christianity to the inheritance of its past by virtue of the long line of its archbishops – unbroken since the sixth century – so does Lord’s, as the oldest Test ground in the world, provide even the owners of IPL franchises with the reassurance that cricket, amid all the cheerleaders and the Yes Bank Maximums, still retains a certain measure of class. Simultaneously, steeped in tradition though the ground is, it draws in turn for its aura of sanctity on a history even older than itself. Just as the cathedral which stands today in Canterbury is not the building originally founded by Saint Augustine, so is the ground which still bears its founder’s name one that had migrated via the nearby St John’s Estate from Dorset Fields in Marylebone. Lord’s arrived in St John’s Wood already trailing a back-story.

Yet to walk through the Long Room, and gaze at paintings which date from a time well before Thomas Lord had made his first deal, is to be reminded that even the founding of Lord’s is merely a punctuation mark in a much longer story. The great Victorian Pavilion itself, of course, is only one of several that have stood on the site – and the very first, a rough wooden structure that burnt down back in July

1825, took with it a good deal more than the Pavilion itself. Lost to the flames was the greatest collection of cricket memorabilia that had then been assembled in one place: papers, scorecards, and records of the very earliest days of the sport. The damage was irreparable – and the effect has been enduring. It has ensured that our knowledge of cricket in the centuries before the founding of Lord's is – to a far larger degree than it would have been otherwise – a thing of shreds and patches. Our understanding of its evolution is regrettably dependent upon the vagaries of fortune: much that we would like to know has been lost; much that has survived inevitably serves to give us a limited perspective on what may actually have happened. Lord's, with its incomparable museum and its venerable traditions, has certainly preserved for us much of what we know about cricket's past – but, inevitably, it has served to freeze and distort it too.

Augustine, when he landed from Rome in Kent, was not the first to bring Christianity to Great Britain. Many shades and varieties of the religion already existed on the island. What a bishop sent by the Pope possessed, though, to a degree that not even the abbots of great monasteries such as Iona or Lindisfarne could rival, was the heft of prestige: a prestige that derived from the authority of the Roman Church as the guardian of Christian orthodoxy. In like manner, the establishment of Lord's as the one and only “Cathedral of Cricket” would never have happened had MCC not already provided the sport with a definitive body of laws; nor would their codification of what had previously been a fluid and varied set of rules ever have been accepted had they not been quite so aristocratic. The influence of MCC's seizure of the commanding heights of

cricket was to be not only on the future, but on the past. Just as the line of descent traced by the Christian authorities of Augustine's day had no place for gospels and beliefs long since branded as heretical, so did the founding of Lord's emphasise one particular understanding of what cricket had been, at the expense of numerous others. As a result, the version of its history that we have is, in every sense, canonical.

Yet it is the measure of a great tradition, perhaps, that beyond such sources and records as we do possess, it will inspire fantasy. In “Jerusalem”, the hymn that for over a decade now has been serving the England cricket team as its entrance anthem, a particularly haunting myth is evoked. That long before ever Augustine travelled to Britain, Jesus had travelled there as a young man, accompanying his uncle to Glastonbury, is a story the English have always yearned to believe.

“And did those feet in ancient time

Walk upon England's mountain green?

And was the holy Lamb of God,

On England's pleasant pastures seen?”

To which, of course, the answer is no. The Countenance Divine no more shone forth upon our clouded hills than did proto-hominids in prehistoric Sussex develop a prototype of the Gunn and Moore out of elephant bone. Yet Blake's poem, like the Piltown cricket bat, bears witness to our desire to believe in things that cannot possibly be true: less in what might have happened than in what should have happened. Ancient and modern: it is the mark of cricket, more than any other sport, that in our imaginings it can simultaneously be both.





CRICKET AS ESCAPE

Sam Collins on love and loss

I am writing this in the North Terminal of Gatwick airport, tucked in a corner of high ground safely above a tidal wave of fake tan. My wife is wandering around somewhere, wondering why she married a cricket journalist, and our plane has been delayed for a couple of hours. In a microclimate of instant meals and quicker turnovers, it feels like a long time. But, of course, it's not. Some people say a five-day Test match is a long time, but it's nothing compared to four years. Most people would consider 140 years a very long time, but in the scheme of things it is infinitesimal. Two hours is not a long time. Two hours is what I have to write this piece.

My phone won't stop buzzing. I find it difficult to concentrate at the best of times, but it's almost impossible at the moment. We're releasing a film about something that a lot of people care about, and if nothing prepares you for releasing a film about something a lot of people care about, certainly nothing prepares you for trying to distribute it yourself. I've lost 20 minutes already. Suddenly, this time is precious.

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Test cricket is all about time: the time it takes to play it, the time it has been "alive". That it has been alive for 140 years is because it has something special, something that nothing else has replicated in all those years, something that allows it to mean something to people all over the world.

Four years ago, my friend Jarrod and I decided to try and make a film about Test cricket. I'm not sure why it started - maybe we wanted to mean something. We'd been making piss-take videos about Test matches for a few years and, while they were fun, there's only so long you can make piss-take videos about Test matches. Looking around the press box, unless you were Atherton or Holding - which we clearly weren't - there wasn't much to want to be. Hit up or get out. So we started making the film.

The subject was obvious. Everyone around us kept saying Test cricket was dying. Some said it because they thought they meant it; others said it because they thought other people meant it; others said it because the others were saying it. But none of this talk of "dying" really seemed to



be anything other than a convenient way to pass the time. So we thought if anybody could plunge to the bottom of this well of nothingness and bring up some truth for people to drink, it was probably us with our lion-costume mascot and our £196 video camera. Besides, we had nothing else to do.

When we started the film I was 28. I'd been with Sophie for a year. Apart from her, I had no real commitments and nothing to lose. It was the sort of decision you make when you are 28. Four years? Ha! We thought it would take six months.

It turned out that being young, naive and probably a bit of an idiot was the best weapon I had. People end up saying things to you that they probably wouldn't if they considered you to be a "proper" journalist. But the more incompetent we were, the more time dragged on. Then we got lucky. As the years went by, we gradually worked out how to pan out from the car we were following, and it turned out that car was driving towards a cliff in slow motion. We just had to be stubborn enough to hang around and watch it fly off.

...

Last week was the film's London premiere. The previous day we buried my mother. Technically she was cremated, but it doesn't sound right to say: "We cremated my mother." She was 74 - old, but not that old. The day before that was my unborn baby's five-month scan. It was a long week.

Jarrold wrote a few years ago about having his son: "until now I'd been a son, now I was a father." It was simple but brilliant, because it just summed up how things sort of happen but you can only grasp the enormity of what they mean when they are over, and even then you can't really put it into words. Losing a parent is like that. It happens to everyone, but everyone's experience is different, and I'm still not sure you can actually say anything more profound to describe it than: "Yesterday I had a mum and today I don't."

...

We hung on, got the film made - for one reason: people love cricket. People we'd never met before, from different religions and different continents, rich and poor, gave us a lot of their money to make a film about something they loved. We had to finish it.

And in the end, our film wasn't just about Test cricket; it was about the whole game. More specifically, it was all about the battle for the money those fans were pumping into that game. Jarrold and I were just the naive Johnny Appleseeds (copyright Harsha Bhogle) who stumbled upon a story about businessmen-cum-administrators taking this precious thing; this game - which was so important to so many people, and as a result now so unimaginably valuable commercially - and apparently deliberately, wilfully, shrinking it as a means of retaining control. And when a sport is shrinking, it is dying. Meanwhile, most of the journalists looked the other way, and the fans unwittingly sat on their

sofas, drank Pepsi and renewed their satellite-TV subscriptions to fund the whole sorry process. A modern, human story, set in cricket.

• • •

Ten years ago, just after the 2005 Ashes, my mother got breast cancer. I can't remember how I felt, so my 22-year-old self must have just assumed she would beat it. This was a woman who had fought for air as the younger twin in the womb. Whose own father died early. Who was thrown through a car windscreen into a brick wall when some drunk prick crashed a car on the way to her first dance – yes, they still “danced” in the 1950s. She had plates in her face, scars on her stomach, but fight in her heart. She waited 20 years to marry the man she loved, miscarried at 41, and still kept on going to have the children they wanted. By 2007 – no hair, one breast – she had beaten the cancer. She was tough.

But by the time I'd started the film it was clear things weren't right. First there was a black-out. Then an occasional loss of balance. Then tiredness. Then shortness of breath and temper.

Was it the cancer drugs? Ask the doctor. The doctor doesn't know. Was the cancer back? For two years the doctor doesn't know. Why has my arm stopped working? Everybody has an opinion, a solution. None of them work.

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Now here's some truth. Cricket is dying and I can tell you what it looks like. The

market is winning. It will be Twenty20 and it will be India. The rest will cease to matter. Protest all you like but if you play market rules the market will win. For 140 years cricket has fought everything we've thrown at it. But it can't beat the market by itself. Cricket needs our help.

Cricket is a game, and games have rules. Rules have rulers. And in cricket's case the job of its rulers is to protect this ancient, wonderful sport in all its forms from being destroyed by the market. And if those rulers aren't capable of doing their job, then we need to find some people who are. That is what proper governance exists for: to protect things that are important from what we ordinary, base, flawed human beings can do to them.

Our film has shown that we cannot trust the men who run this game. Now we have to fight them, and we have to replace them.

• • •

As the film progressed, so my mother deteriorated. Slowly, relentlessly.

It turned out to be some sort of twisted lovechild of Parkinson's disease and ALS. I'm still not sure exactly what it was called because we were told so many things that eventually the name became irrelevant. When someone is about to shoot you in the face it doesn't really matter what gun they are using.

Watching someone you love wither before your eyes in ultra-slow-motion is not something I can recommend.

We became a household of meaningful silences. What could you say to a woman whose mind and memory remained perfectly intact as her body gave up; who knew exactly what was happening to her?

I wish I could say she took it with smiles and laughter, but this wasn't a film. She was sad, then she was depressed and then she was angry and finally she was afraid. This disease was a fucking bastard. It took away her independence, her ability to look after her family, her chance to watch a son get married, and finally her dignity.

By the end, in a house full of her own things, she had one meaningful possession: a battered old watch that she clutched permanently in her good hand. She was, quite literally, clinging onto time. When her lungs began to shut down, there was no fighting it any more.

We had tried *everything*. And there was *nothing* we could do. And - although I loved her more than any man can love a game - that's why it was better when it was over.

When I am at home now, every time I catch sight of one of the old bats, balls, pads or gloves she bought us, I see my mother. I was about to say I see my childhood, but on second thoughts I think I see her parenthood. I suppose

I'll find out what that means in a few months' time.

All I know for sure is that the day my mother finally died, I watched Test cricket. I wondered why Gary Ballance stayed so deep in his crease, how bad Mitchell Starc's ankle was, whether Ian Botham really had been hacked. At tea I cried for 19 minutes, and smeared the tears on my face like a sunscreen that will never wash away. And then I laughed at Mitchell Johnson.

Four hours later, I watched it all again with my father and my brother.

• • •

In five days' time I'll be on a plane home again, back to the start of the real battles. Some things in life we can't win. I suppose the things that keep us going are the ones we can.

Cricket doesn't have to die. A billion people is a pretty big army. We may not all have weapons, but we have eyes, ears, tongues and fingers, and now our game needs us to use them. Please, help us [#change cricket](#).

Visit www.deathofagentlemanfilm.com to find your nearest showing of the film. For more information on the [#change cricket](#) campaign, and to sign the filmmakers' petition, visit www.change cricket.com.

CONTRIBUTORS

Tanya Aldred is a freelance writer and co-editor of *The Nightwatchman*.

Vaneisa Baksh has been writing and researching on West Indies cricket for 20 years. She is based in San Juan, Trinidad. She loves cricket and calypso, though not the ones composed by the Queen's Park CC members when she campaigned for female membership. She writes a column for the *Trinidad Express*, edits the campus magazine of the University of the West Indies, and has completed a thesis on Caribbean cricket culture through the study of player autobiographies.

Sam Collins is a freelance journalist, broadcaster and filmmaker. He has worked for the *Guardian*, ESPNcricinfo and *The Cricketer*. *Death of a Gentleman* - an independent feature documentary film on the future of cricket - is his first film and was released this summer. He is the proud owner of a golden duck at Lord's, and finds writing short biographies surprisingly hard.

Anjali Doshi is co-editor of *The Nightwatchman* and former cricket editor at New Delhi TV. She is as unimpressed by Lord's as the HQ of

cricket as Sunil Gavaskar and Michael Holding because she doesn't think a spaceship belongs on a cricket ground. Her twitter handle is @anjaliadoshi

Gideon Haigh has been a journalist for 31 years, written 31 books and edited seven others. Not that he's a man for figures.

James Holland is a historian, writer and broadcaster. The author of *Battle of Britain* and *Dam Busters*, he is also the author of a number of novels. He has written and presented acclaimed documentaries, including most recently *Normandy 44*, to mark the 70th Anniversary of D-Day. His proudest moment remains lecturing to MCC in the Long Room about Hedley Verity and Keith Miller. Follow him @james1940.

Tom Holland is a prize-winning historian whose books - *Rubicon*, *Persian Fire*, *Millennium*, *Shadow of the Sword* and *Dynasty* - cover the rise and fall of ancient empires. He has made documentaries for the BBC and Channel 4, and presents Radio 4's *Making History*. His translation of Herodotus for Penguin Classics is out now. His first six, hit while playing for the Authors XI, became a Twitter sensation

and has already featured in the *Evening Standard* and Radio 4's *Front Row*. His Twitter id is @holland_tom.

Jon Hotten is the author of *Muscle*, a book about the mad, bad world of pro bodybuilders, *The Years Of the Locust*, a true crime account of the murder of a boxing promoter by one of his fighters, and *My Life And The Beautiful Music*, a novel set in Los Angeles during the hair metal years. He writes *The Old Batsman* blog, and is one of the co-writers, along with Sam Collins and Jarrod Kimber, of the allegedly controversial documentary *Death Of A Gentleman*. This year he ghosted Simon Jones' memoir, *The Test*.

Patrick Neate writes books, screenplays, journalism, poetry and, on occasion, friends' job applications. In another life he was an opening batsman generally described as 'dogged', 'dull' or 'defensive' and, once, as 'this little piece of turd clinging to the pan like he thinks he can save himself'. In this life he's had some lousy if less memorable book reviews.

Dileep Premachandran is editor-in-chief of *Wisden India*. Starting with Eden Gardens in 2001, he reported on the most successful decade in India's cricket history. Drawn to the sport by Greg Chappell's batting and the dynamism of a peerless West Indies team, he chose the easy option - writing about the game. He lives in Bangalore with his wife, and a daughter who likes whacking whatever's within reach with her cricket bat. He tweets @SpiceBoxofEarth.

Saad Shafqat writes an opinion column on *ESPNCricinfo*, and is also professor of neurology at Aga Khan University in Karachi. He is the co-author of Javed Miandad's autobiography *Cutting Edge* (Oxford 2003) and has also published the novel *Breath of Death* (Chlorophyll 2012), a medical thriller. Saad takes pride in being objective, although admits to being hopelessly soft on Imran Khan, Javed Miandad, Hanif Mohammad, Inzamam-ul-Haq, and Wasim Akram. His most memorable cricketing moment is when he offered to bowl to Miandad and was told to "stick to what you're good at"

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