

SAMPLE EDITION

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THE
Nightwatchman

THE WISDEN CRICKET QUARTERLY

WISDEN



THE Nightwatchman

THE WISDEN CRICKET QUARTERLY

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

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

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Issue 13, out now, features the following:

Matt Thacker introduces the 13th issue of *The Nightwatchman*

Benj Moorehead on the joy of county commentaries when far from home

Mark Eklid revels in the ground with the crooked spire

Tim Wigmore remembers the birth of Durham CCC

Phil Walker owes his adolescent pleasures to Chelmsford

Brian Halford looks back on Glamorgan's triumph of 1948

Gavin Pike played in Wally Hammond's farewell game

Stephen Bates on two blazered Hampshire officers

Isabelle Westbury examines the women's county game

Howard Horner considers the wicket-keeper he adores

Emma John reveals why Lancashire won her teenage heart

Nicholas Hogg on how he came to wear Darren Maddy's jumper

The old timers The nineteenth-century county game, captured for ever

John Stern explains Middlesex's identity crisis

Matthew Engel on why his heart sings always for Northamptonshire

Richard Hobson recalls the Trent Bridge summers of Cairns and Lewis

Paul Edwards loves and worries about outground cricket

James Holland remembers an intoxicating time at Somerset

Harry Pearson opens up his 1984 red hardback diary

Michael Simkins on why it has to be Sussex

Henry Cowen chats to a trio from Warwickshire's glorious 1994 side

Mike Beddow explains why New Road is a forever affair

Ian McMillan reveals why time runs differently in Yorkshire





THE WIRELESS NETWORK

From a sultry Italy, Benj Moorehead tunes in to BBC county commentaries

Across the veranda the Mediterranean lies smooth and sparkling, *come una tavola* - like a table, as Luigino the local boar hunter describes it. You could fry calamari on the terracotta tiles underfoot. To one side the peaks of the Monte Argentario cut across blue sky, and all around in the pungent pines the cicadas hit fever pitch. A retreat to the kitchen offers respite. Stoop to fetch a cool roll of prosciutto crudo. And then from somewhere above comes a sound like an extractor fan. Then a distant, eerie public announcement. One or two lonely claps. Silence. Suddenly, quite loud, a likeable male Lancastrian voice...

"Something's being mentioned on the PA, but I suspect it will be raining a little bit otherwise they would have taken the covers off."

A Welshman replies.

"Yes, I think there may be a hint of drizzle in the air, with Lancashire marooned on 16 for nought off 7.3 overs. A couple of little tractors make their way around the boundary, either

side of the rope. Synchronised tractor driving. Course the one on the outside has to go slightly faster because he's got more ground to cover, going around a larger perimeter. Largest circumference of the circle. Sounds like a question on a maths GCSE paper, doesn't it? If the playing surface has a radius of 60 metres, and two tractors do ten laps of the ground to clear the water off the playing surface, how much further has the outer tractor driver driven?" Silence again. The Lancastrian recovers himself: "You can tweet us your answers at..."

It's rather like bending an ear to a rusty pipe that passes up the Italian coast through Switzerland, France and under the English Channel, eventually periscoping somewhere on the Old Trafford outfield, where two commentators are handily placed. In fact the noise is coming from a laptop hooked up to BBC Radio Manchester's coverage of Lancashire v Glamorgan in Division Two of the County Championship.

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In 2012, just as the axe was falling on a whole range of BBC local radio output – including county cricket – the ECB swooped in and tied up a deal with the BBC to offer something we could have only ever dreamed of: online commentary of every ball of every match. In the County Championship alone, this adds up to well over 3,000 hours of commentary a summer. And they say county cricket doesn't get the coverage it used to. On any given day from April to September you can expect to find a live broadcast, sometimes as many as eight Championship matches at a time. Skim through the scorecards, take your pick. A bit of Trescothick at Taunton, perhaps? Or Sangakkara at The Oval? We might poke our nose into another Leicestershire implosion at Grace Road. Or shall we indulge in the obscurity of Derbyshire v Gloucestershire?

Infinite riches, wherever you are. But for those of us, poor souls, who are drawn to live in such cricketing wastelands as the Monte Argentario, these commentaries are a lifeline: a portal into an abandoned world far away. There appear to be quite a few of us. One commentator recently counted 43 countries listed by his listeners. Neil in Norway who has just spotted an arctic fox. Anne who works at the library of the University of Michigan and has just cancelled an order of Arabic books. Harold, a curry chef working in Texas who began recording the commentaries so that he could bridge the time difference and listen to them while he was cooking. "It's like a metronome of life," Harold says. His experiment has turned into an online digital archive of every single minute of every single match going back several seasons. It's all there whenever you need it. "It wasn't planned," Harold says, "but it

didn't take me and others long to realise how therapeutic those recordings could be in the middle of the winter when the season seems so far away."

There is a glorious juxtaposition to listening to the County Championship in such uncrickety places as the Monte Argentario, Norway, Texas. It stirs the mind's imagination. The scenes described are more vivid and mysterious because they are so remote. One moment you are in the local bar drinking *grappa* with some garrulous old men who are cursing the Italian government for collecting tax, the next you are back home listening to Mr Lancashire and Mr Glamorgan still waiting for play at Old Trafford...

Mr Lancashire: Sixteen for none off 7.3 overs. We haven't got in as much play as we even managed on Wednesday. I suspect we'll be off and on a little bit. The weather for the weekend does not look great.

Mr Glamorgan: Talking of forecasts, I've been honoured this morning – I've been retweeted by @DerekTheWeather.

Mr Lancashire: Oh, right.

Mr Glamorgan: Derek Brockway, the BBC Wales weatherman.

Mr Lancashire: OK.

Mr Glamorgan: He's one of the most famous men in Wales.

Mr Lancashire: Is he?

Mr Glamorgan: Oh yes.

Mr Lancashire: Right.

Mr Glamorgan: He has presented a variety of programmes on BBC Radio Wales, such as *Weatherman Walking*. Derek has been to every corner of Wales with a television camera in tow.

Mr Lancashire (barely containing himself): I feel like I've missed out.

Mr Glamorgan: Anyway, it is still raining...

This is a service that, at times, is catering for those who like their Weetabix without any sugar on top. There's even one commentator whose default exultation is "Crumbs!" But it is all the more exotic for its undiluted charm. *Test Match Special*, the Amazon of cricket commentary to which all these regional varieties are but tributaries, is a completely different thing altogether, wrapped as it is in a sort of honeyed hum that feeds silkily into your ear. The online county commentaries, unceremoniously fed from press boxes all over the country, are crude, untamed, unvarnished, tinny. All in all, imperfectly brilliant.

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We'll leave the commentators aside for a moment, because the essential witness to the cricket is a droopy phallic object hanging by a thread outside the press box and wrapped in gaffa tape: the effects mic. A commentator takes one wherever he goes. At Headingley they have to build a tower of tables in order to reach the window from which to dangle it.

It would appear the effects mic – a modest piece of technology – is of limited value since, well, there is often very little for it to pick up. This is the County Championship after

all. Thus deprived of "atmosphere", almost to the point of thinking the commentators are drinking daiquiris in Cuba and making the whole thing up, the listener clings onto those strange noises that do filter through. Pitter-patter clapping. Sirens. Howling gales. Howling appeals. A distant tonk of bat on ball (if you're lucky). A passing lunch trolley. The chime of an ice-cream van. Airplanes. A drunk lunch party. Various unidentified sounds.

In the match between Yorkshire and Worcestershire at Scarborough last summer, there was a moment when the commentators were drowned out by seagulls. At Taunton in September, they were competing with the hammering construction works on the new pavilion next door. At Lord's there were days when the studied silence was broken by the irritating yelps of children on a class outing.

Sport on the radio only works if you can hear it happening, and there is just enough of it on the BBC commentaries for us to believe that we really are plugged into a county ground.

It is often the case that the effects mic is left on during breaks in play. Presumably this is to reassure us that the connection has not been lost, but the listener can't help but think the commentator has forgotten to turn it off, and we are hearing something we shouldn't be. Indeed the commentaries as a whole are a fly-on-the-wall experience, as if we are eavesdropping on two people talking about a cricket match (and Derek Brockway). But the sensation is stronger when all we have to go on is the effects mic. In this way a mass

of radiant picnickers could be heard during a lunch break in last season's Arundel fixture. And if you listened carefully before play began at Bristol during Gloucestershire's final game of the season, you could just about make out some west-country voices exchanging stories about the stunning defeat of Surrey in the 50-over final.

Most of the time there is nothing much to hear but a sort of faint fuzz. Then, without warning, the motorised hover cover will whirr into life - this was the extractor fan mentioned earlier - or a ghostly Tannoy address, barely discernible, will sift through the scores around the grounds. As the resumption nears you might hear a regular thud of a cricket ball hurled into the gloves of a wicket-keeper as he warms up for action.

For whatever reason we are denied this privilege at Derby. The line goes back to the BBC Radio Derbyshire channel, which serves up a string of excruciating 1990s smoochie hits at lunch, and some updates on the traffic along the Mercian Way at tea.

But what of those commentators? Essentially there is one to each county, a seasoned man of the shire, although a few have two. A sprinkling of floaters, normally younger and often female, are on hand to help the principals in their Herculean task of describing every ball of every match, and everything else in between. But deep down in Division Two support is thin on the ground. Leicestershire v Gloucestershire, for instance, is likely to enlist two commentators to talk us through 24 hours of cricket. No time to ponder between stints and return to the microphone armed with witty,

enlightening discourse. No allowances for the sort of long pauses you hear on a *TMS* summer broadcast, when the late-afternoon swoon of a home crowd can fill the gaps.

With such gargantuan shifts stretching out before them, a sort of Big Brother syndrome can affect the commentators. A comradeship evolves between them as they help each other along the way. Microphones are forgotten, and conversation veers. Topics include train stations, obscure British folk bands, the enormous number of overs left in the day, ornithology, nephology, baking, parking, cricketers vanishing under covers to retrieve the ball, umpires of yesteryear, shepherd's pie, cottage pie, steak-and-kidney pie, megatrons (light meters), the rules and regulations governing ice-cream vans at cricket grounds, hard Championship cricket, Derek Brockway, the merits of not allowing bowlers to take part in bowl-outs, the Luxembourg cricket team, theme tunes to children's TV shows of the 1960s, entangled cables, why on Earth everything has ground to a halt in the middle, what time will we finish and why we never ever know if this really is the last over of the day or not. Among other things.

As if filling the air over four days isn't enough, the commentator is saddled with other responsibilities: written reports for the BBC, highlights packages for the county's website, bulletins for local radio, player interviews, and even technical malfunctions. In adverse circumstances, the triumph of this eclectic bunch is to translate the diverse sound of county cricket across the shires while finding time to eat and pee in between. Along with their essential (but by no means trusty) lieutenant the

effects mic, they are the sound of the County Championship: unglamorous, odd, accented, and addictive.

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It was Mr Surrey who pioneered online ball-by-ball commentary for BBC Radio London in 2004. If Mr Surrey talked day and night for a year without pause he might not double his tally of hours spent behind a microphone. He is a master of his art, a keen observer of the paramount trivialities of cricket. Exposed to his commentary for the first time, you'd be forgiven for suspecting a clothes peg is pinching his nose. It is a voice which instantly conveys the feeling that there is no rush whatsoever; we are in for the long haul, and we'll take it session by session, over by over, ball by ball. Sentences and syllables are stretched out for as long as they will go, not least when a wicket falls. "Soooooooo ... Zafar Annnnn-sari goessssssss for six-teeeeeeeeen... annnnd Surrey are forrrrrrrrrty-threeeee for twooooo in the ... fiteeeeeeeenth ooooooer." In fact Mr Surrey is performing a great feat of juggling. For as a wicket falls he is tapping out the news on Twitter, but also cutting a segment of video footage for the highlights package it is his duty to produce for Surrey's YouTube channel at the end of the day's play. Perhaps it is this commentator whom Harold the chef has in mind when he describes the commentaries as a metronome. For the sound of Mr Surrey is indeed as reliable as a pendulum - only it is witty and endearing.

Mr Surrey has a sidekick, a self-styled Mark Nicholas who produces fashion and music events while moonlighting in the Surrey press box, where he is affectionately mocked for a modest

cricketing pedigree, a role he warms to. "Can I ask you a technical question?" he said during the Championship match against Lancashire last summer. "Of course," replied Mr Surrey. "Should I use the M6 toll road to get home or go through central Birmingham?" But Mr Surrey's sidekick isn't completely immune to reflections on cricket; it was he who dreamed up the Pickle Theory, which holds that a team can land itself in a pickle if it takes a hatful of quick wickets.

The Pickle Theory might not go down so well at Trent Bridge or Chester-le-Street, residences of Mr Nottinghamshire and Mr Durham, two belligerent motormouths whose impassioned loyalties leave little space for airy-fairy conjecture. Yet in between these two counties - that region where you might expect attitudes to be least forgiving, the land of Close, Trueman, Boycott, Illingworth - a benevolent, warm, generous voice eases us through every moment of Yorkshire's Championship season. Even at a time when his county is far and away the best in the land, Mr Yorkshire betrays never a sense of triumphalism but instead always respect for the opponents and love for the game itself.

No one has more radio updates to do than Mr Yorkshire. Updates are an intrinsic part of the BBC's online county service. Every now and again, a commentator will be asked to provide a live flash summary of the state of the game for the local station. It's a strange experience for the online listener. Here we are, plodding along towards tea, when suddenly we are drowned in a rush of words and energy. On occasion you can hear the commentator listening to the local station through headphones,

waiting for his cue while making sure his online audience doesn't miss a ball. Each commentator might have half-a-dozen updates to do throughout a day. But Mr Yorkshire answers to five local stations: Radio Leeds, Radio Sheffield, Radio York, Radio Humberside and Radio Lincolnshire. This means more than 30 updates a day. Consider a marathon runner who bursts into a 100m sprint once every mile. Mr Yorkshire, though, is indefatigable, weaving in concise, elegant snapshots of the match into the flow of the ongoing narrative so that they rise and fall in gentle undulations.

Mr Derbyshire happens to be a former New Zealand fast bowler who has become an expert at calling the game from square leg. The view from the press box is a common problem. At Taunton, for example, only one commentator can see the scoreboard and neither can see the whole of the ground. But at Derby you are at right angles to the pitch, the man on strike often obscured by the square-leg umpire, and a scoreboard nowhere in sight. Has the batsman been bowled? Did that pitch in line with the stumps? Is the ball swinging? What's the score? It's a lottery. But Mr Derbyshire, clawing at clues such as the pose of the batsman and the position of the keeper, provides a plausible perspective on what might be happening with great skill and verve. Like many New Zealand commentators, he is a force of enthusiasm – once admitting that he smiles at strangers (with mixed results) – and always tremendously caught up in the tactics of the game. In an apparently sedate passage of play he will throw down the gauntlet to his unsuspecting colleague who might just

be starting to wonder what sort of pie will be served at lunch: "OK Dave, let's do some crystal-balling. Put yourself in the captain's shoes: what would you do now?" And Mr Derbyshire will launch into a whole range of theories about fielding positions.

Mr Gloucestershire is a country boy through and through, always referring to his county as The Shire. He comes across as the sort of cheery fellow you find in one of those wonderfully small and dingy village sports shops, the type which has every piece of kit under the sun hanging from the ceiling and strewn out across the shop floor. Mr Gloucestershire would unearth just the piece of equipment you need. There is a hint of the mad professor about him. In quieter moments he loves to imagine a West Indies team of motorway service stations (always captained by Taunton Dean), and he will react to a dramatic event with the high-pitched cry of someone who has trapped their foot under the leg of a chair.

At Essex there are two Misters who describe themselves as "grumpy old men, but quite joyous and cheerful about being grumpy". They lament declining county standards, the mishandling of the County Championship, the way Essex CCC is subservient to the needs of the England cricket team. Their monopoly of the Chelmsford press box is occasionally shattered by a tell-you-how-it-is voice straight out of *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels* – in fact belonging to a former Essex fast bowler. Mr Worcestershire is your dyed-in-the-wool local radio broadcaster, a man who has his own Saturday-morning phone-in show, commentates on the Worcester Warriors, and loves

every blade of grass in the West Midlands. At New Road he enjoys a telepathic relationship with Dean the ice-cream man, and conducts a day's play with a serenity matched only by his Surrey colleague. Mr Somerset is a former director of the National Farmers' Union, has written a book on the great writers who were inspired by west-country landscapes, and is the son of a famous cricketing voice.

But for all the manifold personas, tangential discussions and strange noises that flicker down the line throughout the summer, there is still nothing quite like the cricket. And the commentators are excellent at describing it.

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On the face of it 2015 was a humdrum year: Yorkshire were champions, Surrey and Lancashire were promoted from Division Two, and Leicestershire scooped the wooden spoon. Plus ça change. But beneath the surface the season was, like every other in the County Championship's 125-year history, teeming with narrative, from tense finishes to microscopic moments that would be lost without the BBC's county commentaries. Michael Yardy making a century in his last appearance at Hove – only to fall short in his final innings a week later at Headingley, when Sussex were relegated. Kumar Sangakkara purring his way to a hundred on an anonymous, wintry Thursday afternoon at Old Trafford, having recently returned from the cauldron of his final Test appearance in Sri Lanka. The debutant Rob Sayer held aloft by his Leicestershire teammates after taking his maiden first-class wicket. Alex Wakely, the Northants captain and

opener, injuring his hand on the first morning of his side's match at Derby, unable to bat in the first innings, then saving the game on the final afternoon. Chris Jordan belting Boyd Rankin over long off as Sussex beat Warwickshire by one wicket at Hove.

And then there was Mr Leicestershire's reaction to the moment at Chelmsford when his county won its first Championship match in nearly three years. Mr Leicestershire mostly sounds like a man who has seen his county lose once too often, with a voice so soft and fragile that one longs for a colleague to put an arm round him. Then, last June, this: "Leicester's own Lewis Hill waits, as Nijar goes in and bowls to him, and he looks to push into the covers! He's going to get the run! He's got the run! Leicestershire. Have. Won. I'll say that again. Leicestershire have won for the first time in the County Championship since September 2012 – 38 matches and 993 days ago. And that's a long, long time for a county with a proud cricketing history and tradition, a county that's always punched above its weight in this, the greatest of games." Mr Leicestershire was just breaking into full stride. "And, you know, perhaps some of the critics in recent times should have paused to remember that this is a county that doesn't have a wealthy benefactor to pump millions into the club, or a council prepared to loan it and then write off tens of millions of pounds. It has to pay its own way, try to balance the books, develop its own players. Let's talk about how many players developed by Leicestershire have been snapped up by other counties with bigger resources and gone on to play for England: recently Stuart Broad, James

Taylor, Harry Gurney, Luke Wright. Those of an older vintage: the likes of David Gower, James Whitaker, Jon Agnew, Phil DeFreitas. So many more back into history. Domestic honours too: three times county champions, twice Sunday League winners, three times B&H winners, three times T20 champions. A better record than many other counties." The breakneck speed begins to slacken. "And Lewis Hill and Andrea Agathangelou walk off the pitch, and the Leicestershire players on the balcony applaud, and the Leicestershire supporters in the stands applaud. The last couple of years have been so hard to take. And while head coach Andrew McDonald says he doesn't want to see too much celebrating of a single victory, well, Andrew will have to forgive the taking of a moment to savour this one. Across Leicestershire and Rutland. In the city and in the towns. And in the villages. And far beyond." Mr Leicestershire's voice began to quiver. "I've had tweets and emails and letters from Leicestershire supporters listening all over the county, all over the country, all over the world. Well, they're all smiling now. And this win is for them, for all the staff at the club, for the players of the past who still care very much for the club, and of course for the players at the club now who have worked so hard for this day." Now the words limped out delicately. "And if you'll forgive me, I know my predecessor John Shaw will be looking down and smiling because this for him too, along with every other Leicestershire supporter. It's just the start, course it is. But it is a start. Every journey starts with a single step." It all came gushing out spontaneously in under three

minutes, and it left Mr Leicestershire almost broken – but released at last from the worst spell any county has endured since the war.

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One morning in late September. At The Oval, Mr Surrey and Mr Northants are toasting an Indian summer. At Bristol, Glamorgan's 18-year-old Aneurin Donald gets giddy within sight of his first Championship hundred and, amid the anguished cries of Mr Gloucestershire, is caught in the slips for 98 and drags himself sorrowfully off the field. "Look at the poor old boy. He's trailing his bat behind him... oh dear, my heart goes out to him. Poor old chap." Relegation hangs over Hampshire at Trent Bridge. At Headingley, Sussex – their Division One status on the line – have promoted Chris Jordan to open the innings for no apparent reason. Caught and bowled for 1. There are cheers at Taunton, where the last-wicket Somerset pair clinch a crucial fifth bonus point. Almost everyone, in fact, is busy trying to keep up with the ever-changing and horrendously complicated relegation scenario. At New Road Mr Worcestershire and Mr Middlesex are still on about a pair of crane flies seen copulating on the press-box window the previous day. They are still getting over yesterday's events at Derby too, where Zac Chappell scored 96 at No.10 on his Championship debut coming in at 154 for 8. Jimmy Anderson is bowling to Alastair Cook at Chelmsford. Lbw for 1.

All the while a lizard basks on the tiles by the rosemary bush on another raging day on the Monte Argentario.

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EXTRACTS

DERBYSHIRE

When I think about Queen's Park, one memory rises above all others. I was at a Derbyshire Premier League match, so there were only a few spectators dotted around the boundary here and there. I had settled on one of the park benches in front of the grass bank, my legs stretched out as I soaked in the warm sunshine and listened to the brass band behind me, when I heard the faint hum of aeroplane engines. Coming straight towards me was a Lancaster bomber flanked by two Spitfires from the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight. They passed right over the ground, on their way to or from an air show nearby. I cannot have been the only person who froze at the sight and unmistakable sound, but for a moment I was entirely alone, enclosed in a snow globe of an idealised English scene.

Mark Eklid

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DURHAM

The best things in life are worth waiting for. So it was for North-East cricket fans on 19 April 1992. It had been 100 years since Durham County Cricket Club were formed. Now, on this crisp Sunday, they were finally making their debut as a first-class county. The Racecourse Ground was a familiar venue to Durham cricket lovers. Nestled by the River Wear, with the city's cathedral and castle in view, it was a lush setting to watch the cricketing travails of Durham University. It seemed a little incongruous that the ground was now home to Ian Botham and Dean Jones, two of Durham's new recruits.

Tim Wigmore

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ESSEX

I had a single junior membership card. She, the run of the place. The scam was simple and devastatingly effective. My angel would be my mule. I'd go through into the members' area with my card (no ID photo - this was 1994) and she, in her Essex jumper, would wander in after me, flashing her smile at the old codger on the gate. I'd hand her the card and she'd head back out again, where, loitering on the other side and kicking their heels, would be any number of my mates. She would then hand one of them the card, they'd walk through the members' gate, and after a little while she'd follow, retrieve it, and walk it back through to the next lad waiting on the other side. And so it was that throughout the summer of '94 that I - aged 14-and-three-quarters, utterly unmanned by love - became the singular mastermind at the heart of perhaps the grandest larceny racket the County Ground had ever seen. I was Buggy; Laura my Blousey Brown. And it worked like a dream.

Phil Walker

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GLAMORGAN

Awaiting the triumphant Glamorgan team at Cardiff General railway station when they returned from defeating Hampshire on the south coast were hundreds of celebrating supporters. Wooller was not there, having headed to London to play for the Gentlemen of England against Bradman's Australians. So it was fitting that Johnnie Clay - a veteran from the rag-bag days of the 1920s - should lead the joyous team of 1948 as they made their way off the train, through the serried ranks of supporters and on to Cardiff Athletic Club for a celebratory party - which, in the words of the famous Welsh melody "Ar Hyd y Nos", went on all through the night.

Brian Halford

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GLOUCESTERSHIRE

Expectations were high when Hammond went out to bat to generous applause from a crowd of spectators smaller in number by around 20,000 than he would have been accustomed to in his pomp. The sympathetic Richmond captain quietly instructed his bowler to "give the old boy one to get him off the mark". He did, but sadly the former England captain with a Test average of 58.45 was soon dejectedly dragging his way back to the pavilion with no more than a couple of runs to his name. (Many years later I repeated this incident to a passionate, lifelong Gloucestershire supporter. For a moment or two he mulled over what I had said before shaking his head sadly: "You gave Wally a run to get him off the mark? You know, I wish you'd never told me that.")

Gavin Pike**HAMPSHIRE**

So when Tennyson came to stay it was a great thrill to the young boy to be allowed to sit in with them at dinner. He could not remember much of the conversation except towards the end of the meal when the family butler came in and whispered to his father. Wynyard fixed Tennyson with a gimlet stare and said: "Now Lionel, the maids have all been locked in for the night. You're not to try anything." This was a baffling remark to the boy. The following day, at the county match, young Wynyard approached Tennyson and asked for his autograph. Tennyson stared straight past him at his father and said: "Teddy, lend us a tenner." No money, no autograph. The memory had remained fresh in his mind for more than 50 years.

Stephen Bates

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WOMEN'S COUNTY CRICKET

"A stepping stone or a graveyard?" I was asked of women's county cricket not so long ago. In the past I would instantly retort that it was just one rung below the international fold, the gap not so big as many imagined. Increasingly scepticism has seeped in. The introduction of the Super League this summer might - perhaps - just bridge the growing divide.

Izzy Westbury

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KENT

Cricket, more than other sports, allows for a peculiar type of hero worship. A type that seems to go against statistics, talent, achievements, everything that in other disciplines guarantees adoration from the fans. Of course, cricket does have figures, titans of the game, who are rightly praised and loved for their ability - think Boycott, Botham, Flintoff. But cricket fans are also well known for their eccentric tastes (bacon and egg jackets, anyone?) and this can be seen in the identity of many of the individual players we hold candles for. We all admire the greats, but do we really adore them? Because I wager that all cricket fans have that one player that they, and very few others, hold to be sublime. Mine was - is still - Geraint Jones.

Howard Horner

LANCASHIRE

I've only been to Old Trafford a handful of times. That's pretty unusual for a Lancashire fan. But then, I'm not from Lancashire. I grew up 180 miles south of it, where the northern influence upon me extended only as far as the Yorkshire pudding that graced my roast dinner every Sunday. I did not have a Mancunian mother, or a dad from Dalton, or grandparents we visited in the holidays in Morecambe Bay. I may once have glimpsed the county out of the car window, on the way to a week in the Lake District, but I can't be sure.

Emma John

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LEICESTERSHIRE

Today, I'm walking. I want to see what memories the hike brings back, a psychogeography of batting and bowling moments with each step towards Leicestershire's cricket Mecca. I don't need reminding about the disappointment I felt when Viv Richards trudged back to the pavilion after failing early for Somerset, or my run out in the junior cup final when I was 15, sent back going for a sharp but well-judged single. And then a few years later, that six-a-side game where I slanted one back into Chris Broad's pads - don't worry, you'll hear more about that later.

Nicholas Hogg

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MIDDLESEX

I found a new hero in Middlesex's match against the Australians. St Vincent-born Wilf Slack was, like me, a left-handed opener, though that was all we had in common. After making a double-century, Slack strolled out of the Grace Gates, beaming (a "watermelon smile", according to Mike Selvey) with a sweater slung casually over his shoulders. There was a gaggle of autograph hunters, of which I was one, waiting for him. These are the indelible memories of childhood. Slack's form that summer earned him a spot on England's winter tour to the Caribbean, an ill-fated trip that brought defeat in all five Tests for England, a smashed nose for Gatting and the fastest Test century of all time for Viv Richards. Slack played in the second and fifth Tests in that series, making 52 in a century opening stand with Graham Gooch in the final match in Antigua. He played one more Test the following summer but three years later he died, following a series of blackouts, at the crease in Banjul, the capital of The Gambia. He was buried in his England blazer with his bat, and his funeral cortege passed by the Grace Gates.

John Stern

NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

persuaded the family to take me to the cricket. We didn't stay long but I got a glimpse, and the memory remains vivid. It was bank holiday Monday: Northamptonshire v Leicestershire: a sunny afternoon, a big crowd. We positioned ourselves near the now-defunct press box at backward square leg and watched Frank Tyson, hair thinning even then, running in from beyond the football touchline.

Matthew Engel

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NOTTINGHAMSHIRE

Much was made of their similarities in the early days, but their differences proved far more interesting. Cairns was the son of an international cricketer, Lewis of a Baptist preacher. Cairns had travelled extensively with his dad, Lance; Lewis spent his early years in Guyana, in an extended family led by a matriarchal grandmother. Cairns enjoyed a drink and a party, Lewis was shy, sometimes solitary, and teetotal - he followed fashion and preferred clubs to earthy bars.

Richard Hobson

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OUTGROUNDS

It is fifty years ago. A boy is sitting on the grass behind the boundary boards at Southport's Trafalgar Road ground. He is watching his first County Championship match. Lancashire are playing Derbyshire and the white figures on the echoing green hold him quite entranced. Some of his friends get fidgety or scoff their lunch early but he ignores them. He likes everything about the game: the spectacle, the skill, the numbers. Even the delicate architecture of three stumps with two bails in their grooves, the whole construction so easily disarranged, fascinates him. He is too young for either cider or Rosie. Cricket satisfies him.

Paul Edwards

SOMERSET

In the years that followed, there were many happy times following Somerset. County cricket was still important then and there were always heavy crowds at Taunton, not least because there were considerably fewer international commitments and the stars always played throughout the summer and between Test matches and ODIs. Once I came to watch Essex and saw Graham Gooch get a hundred. Later, he was walking around the ground with teammates Ray East and John Lever. My friend Bob and I asked for their autographs (on my latest homemade miniature bat) and not only did they oblige, Gooch gave me his cup of Slush Puppy.

James Holland

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SURREY

I was 23 when I wrote the diary, though anyone stumbling across it would imagine the writer to be a man in his sixties, recently retired, possibly after a 40-year stint in some branch of the civil service far removed from the exciting cut and thrust of procurements or reservoirs and drainage. It is written in a style so fusty it makes JM Kilburn seem like Hunter S Thompson. Players with Test caps are underlined in red felt-tip, bowling styles indicated by acronyms. The text is littered with phrases such as “not yet blooded at international level” and words like “plethora”. Inverted commas embrace any phrase even remotely “with it”, while exclamation marks explode apparently at random.

Harry Pearson

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SUSSEX

I can't recall much of my first match, beyond the fact that I got sunburnt and scoffed about 12 McVities blackcurrant-and-apple pies: but I did not need to consult Wisden to imagine the sort of match I must have watched; for the Sussex of my youth always seemed to be playing the same game, like a sort of cricketing Groundhog Day. At Hove, whenever I went for the next ten years, Sussex were always 50 for 4, with Jim Parks leading a dashing counter-attack that would inevitably raise one's flickering hopes only for them to be thoroughly dashed at some later point in the match. That's simply how it was, whether at Hove, Horsham or Hastings: indeed, before long I wouldn't have wanted it any other way.

Michael Simkins

WARWICKSHIRE

By chance, Trevor – or Mr Penney as we called him – wasn't the only cricketer at Warwickshire I vaguely knew. A friend of mine, David, had a dad who was quite well connected at the club. This meant that he counted a few of the players as friends and that every now and then I'd meet one of them. Most often it was Dominic Ostler. Unlike Trevor, seeing Dom was very cool – probably because he was an older man who was neither a parent nor an authority figure – but that didn't mean I was aware of what he'd achieved.

Henry Cowen

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WORCESTERSHIRE

Last year Sir Mervyn King, former governor of the Bank of England, became the county's president. As a boy he often watched cricket at the ground, and he has talked of a “spring in my step” when crossing the bridge over the Severn to arrive at “the most beautiful cricket ground in the world.” On his first visit to the committee's inner sanctum he brought along an autograph book with signatures of players – some of whom were in the room – from the team who won the county's first Championship pennant.

Mike Beddow

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YORKSHIRE

Thomas and I sit with some men who could have been shaken from a box marked “Yorkshire Four-Day Cricket Fans”. The youngest of them is probably, like me, in his late fifties. They all, and I'm not kidding, have copies of the Yorkshire Post which they flap open like Ordnance Survey maps. One has a sandwich box that seems to have one huge sandwich in it. Two are wearing straw trilbies. One is writing obsessively in a book with handwriting that looks like limping runes. They all seem to have the ability to glance up at the moment the ball is bowled and then back to their cryptic crossword or their sandwich or their rapidly filling notebook.

Ian McMillan

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THE WISDEN CRICKET QUARTERLY

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