

SAMPLE EDITION

17

SPRING 2017

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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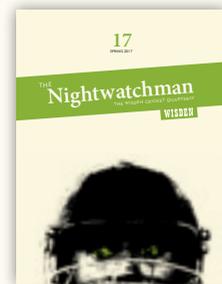
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Issue 17, out now, features the following:

**Matt Thacker** introduces issue 17 of *The Nightwatchman*

**Jon Hotten** gazes into The Oval's soul

**Sir John Major** on his (almost) lifelong liaison with England's oldest Test venue

**Simon Barnes** recalls Kevin Pietersen's moment of sporting perfection

**Charlie Connelly** makes a remarkable discovery at The Oval

**Raf Nicholson** doffs her hat to Rachael Heyhoe Flint

**Mike Selvey** comes over all misty-eyed as he remembers his youth

**Peter Mason** says when it comes to pavilions, he'd take The Oval over Lord's

**James Holland** revisits the accomplishments – and pathos – of Arthur Tedder's life

**James Mettyear** came of age in the long, hot summer of 1976

**Michael Holding** on the West Indies' home away from home

**Simon Wilde** delves into Charles Alcock's precious legacy

**Oval Farewells** - the ground has been the scene of many a misty-eyed goodbye

**Rob Smyth** talks to Devon Malcolm about pace like fire

**Marcus Berkman** asks you to sharpen your pencils and bring your A-game

**Rob Bagchi** gets nostalgic about Sunday finishes and tennis-ball cricket

**Elgan Alderman** revives memories of the quiet man of Surrey cricket

**Alan Tyers** works his fiction-writer chops to invent an Oval-inspired whodunnit

**Paul Eade** sees light at the end of a dark, Swedish winter

**Jon Harvey** on England's swift journey from despair to elation

**Nick Miller** discovers a Real connection

**Daniel Norcross** measures his life in Oval moments

**Matthew Engel** on a Lambeth Palace resident



SAMPLER



VIEW FROM THE GREAT HALL—(SEE NEXT PAGE.)

**MONUMENTAL FOUNTAINS AT BARCELONA.**  
We have been writing of late upon the construction of fountains, which demand very appropriate decorations to the Oval. From the artist's pen, however, descend from the interior of the water-works design, which has lately been completed at the Spanish fortified city and port of Barcelona, in the Mediterranean. The tablet

work was transported some three months since, and is dedicated to the memory of Vincent Marquet, ancient Councilor of Barcelona, and several members of the Catalan gentry, in the Mediterranean, in the beginning of the 15th century.

The fountain consists of a basin stone basins, with four wings, from the centre of which rises a cast-iron column, 15 feet 10 inches in diameter at the base, and 4 feet in height, composed of six pieces fixed into each other, and fastened by a bar which passes down the interior to the base of the fountain. On each wing is a cup, supported on a stem, throwing forth water through its mouth and side.

The monument was designed by the architect Don Francisco (now Don) Marquet, who proposed it to the municipality of Barcelona, and Don Vincent Marquet, then Mayor and Marquis of Barcelona, having undertaken the execution of the entire work, the statue, tablets, and other parts, were made on his premises under the direction of Don Juan Weyler, an English gentleman.

In the centre of the column is a fountain for raising the water, and as the water-pipe is adapted to make both above and below the reservoir, large enough to afford a main to water.

The work, the first of its kind in Spain, has given general satisfaction, and the civil, military, and civic authorities view with each other in celebrating its completion.

**FRINSTEADIANISM.—MANK'S FEAT OF WALKING ON HIS THUMB-TAILS IN ONE THOUSAND CONSECUTIVE HALF-SHOES.**  
Some years since, the feat of walking one thousand miles in one thousand hours was attempted here in an extraordinary, but before we have to record the

understand. This has been accomplished on the busy Great-west, Kingston Road, by Richard Mank, whose feat of walking proved testimony of the capability and endurance of the human frame, although unimpaired. Mank commenced this feat on Friday, the 20th of last September; but, being suddenly attacked with rheumatism, he was compelled to give up on the Monday following, after having walked 120 miles. The surgeon advised Mank to rest for a time to enable his health to strengthen. This he performed accordingly, and, still for a fortnight he remained under medical treatment. On Friday, the 10th October, he re-commenced his great task, starting for the first time at half-past six in the afternoon, on his march, full of spirit, completing the first 200 miles at 10 o'clock. On the 21st of October he reached London, 1400 miles, the second 200 miles at 10 o'clock, on the 22nd, the third 200 miles at 10 o'clock, on the 23rd, the fourth 200 miles at 10 o'clock, on the 24th, the fifth 200 miles at 10 o'clock, on the 25th, the sixth 200 miles at 10 o'clock, on the 26th, the seventh 200 miles at 10 o'clock, on the 27th, the eighth 200 miles at 10 o'clock, on the 28th, the ninth 200 miles at 10 o'clock, on the 29th, the tenth 200 miles at 10 o'clock, on the 30th, the eleventh 200 miles at 10 o'clock, on the 31st, the twelfth 200 miles at 10 o'clock, on the 1st of November, the thirteenth 200 miles at 10 o'clock, on the 2nd, the fourteenth 200 miles at 10 o'clock, on the 3rd, the fifteenth 200 miles at 10 o'clock, on the 4th, the sixteenth 200 miles at 10 o'clock, on the 5th, the seventeenth 200 miles at 10 o'clock, on the 6th, the eighteenth 200 miles at 10 o'clock, on the 7th, the nineteenth 200 miles at 10 o'clock, on the 8th, the twentieth 200 miles at 10 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Surrey's entire season – in which they won the County Championship for the first time since 1958 – as somewhere north of 35,000 enjoyed a peaceful, sunny day kept nicely in order by the official show security, the Hell's Angels. While the music began at 11am, it wasn't until sunset that things really took off, with The Faces – fronted by Rod Stewart in a tiger-print suit – tearing the place up in preparation for the arrival of The Who.

In tribute to the venue, the show's MC wore cricket whites and pads and carried a bat as he announced the headliners' arrival on stage. The bat was then wrested from his grasp by Keith Moon, who proceeded to use it as makeshift drumstick during the opening song "I Can't Explain" before sending it spinning far into the crowd, much to the alarm of the compere who'd borrowed it from the Surrey nets with a solemn promise to return it.

The Who played a storming set, the day passed off without any serious incidents, the Bangladesh fund finished the day £15,000 richer, Surrey's immediate financial future had been secured and *Melody Maker* described The Oval as "an ideal natural venue for staging a rock concert of this magnitude". All was well in Kennington.

Indeed, so happy was everyone involved that two further shows were arranged for the following September. The first, on 16 September, featured Hawkwind and Frank Zappa's Hot Rats Grand Wazoo Orchestra, but poor weather and high ticket prices meant the Oval outfield was barely half-full. Two weeks later, however,

the ground hosted the *Melody Maker* Poll Awards concert, a bill headed by Emerson, Lake and Palmer that also featured Wishbone Ash, Genesis, Focus and Fudd (although nobody, not even the most switched-on old head, seems to remember Fudd. Even members of Fudd probably don't remember Fudd). It was a glorious late-summer day and a crowd of some 30,000 prog-rock fans filled the pavilion, seats and outfield, sending up a giant cloud of hash smoke that drifted away over the gasholders, provoking a widespread case of the munchies right across south London.

Emerson, Lake and Palmer closed the night with a set that included a full-blooded rendition of "Tarkus", the seven-part first side of their album of the same name released the previous year. The cover of *Tarkus* featured an eponymous, heavily-armed, wild-eyed armadillo on tank tracks – it represented, according to Keith Emerson, Darwin's theory of evolution in reverse, something that can still be observed at the Oval's bars during the final session of a Test match Saturday. As part of the live show, two giant Tarkuses were rolled out on either side of the stage, trundling around in approximate symmetry and providing The Oval with arguably its most surreal moment (and I speak as someone who witnessed some of Robin Jackman's more enthusiastic appeals).

The armadillos proved to be a last hurrah for rock music's brief stay at The Oval, however. A clampdown on capacities at big rock events the following year led to The Oval being informed it could only admit as many people as there were seats

in the venue, making future events financially prohibitive. The venerable old ground had seen its last giant, wild-eyed, fire-breathing armadillo, at least until Merv Hughes ran in to bowl at Michael Atherton in the sixth Test of the 1989 Ashes.

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The closest thing The Oval has seen in terms of razzmatazz and hullabaloo since those heady rock days is probably when American sport has come to visit. In 2011, the Chicago Bears came to train ahead of an encounter at Wembley with the Tampa Bay Buccaneers. The NFL side arrived practically straight from the airport and the session was closed to all but the media. That much bulk and padding had not been seen on the hallowed turf since Inzamam-ul-Haq walked out to bat in the ill-fated 2006 Test. Surrey's Jason Roy and Matthew Spiegel turned out to give a few of the NFL lads a grounding in the basics of cricket, much to the amusement of the Bears' coach Lovie Smith (who, if names are anything to go by, would have fitted right in to a late-Victorian Gentlemen's XI, where he'd bowl some economical lobs and make a few useful late middle-order runs).

For arguably the biggest manifestation of American sport in Kennington we have to go right back to the spring of 1889 when the Chicago baseball team – who would go on to become the Cubs, but were then better known as the Colts – and an All-America side arrived in Britain for a series of promotional exhibition matches. Alas it was a grey, misty, drizzly March day when around 8,000 spectators,

including WG Grace, the Hon Ivo Bligh and the Prince of Wales – the future Edward VII – arrived to see what the all the fuss was about with this grown-ups' version of rounders.

While the crowd showed initial enthusiasm for the spectacle, and "frequently expressed their applause at the wonderfully smart fielding, catching and passing of the ball between fielders" according to the *London Daily News*, the unfamiliar nature of the game and the miserable weather meant "those present began to dwindle away rapidly after an hour's play", leading to Chicago's 7-4 victory over All-America concluding largely unobserved. One early leaver was the future king who, asked later what he'd thought of the game, said that, though he considered baseball "an excellent game" he thought cricket was "superior".

There have been quite a few nailed-on Australian victories at The Oval over the years, but a handful have definitely had nothing to do with cricket. Australian Rules football first arrived in Kennington in 1972 when a crowd of 10,000, including Prince Charles, watched Australia's leading side Carlton defeat an All-Stars team 84-78 in the first game of a world tour that also took in Athens and Singapore. By the late 1980s, Aussie rules football had become a semi-regular visitor to The Oval, although the last decade has seen only one game, in November 2012, when Port Adelaide pipped the Western Bulldogs in a thriller by a single point in front of a noisy crowd of 10,000.

The Oval's biggest sporting impact away from cricket, however, is based

in less far-flung climes: its role in the early days of Association Football. Indeed, the First FA Cup final was played at The Oval in 1872, and the game's showpiece occasion would remain in south London for 20 years. And, while FIFA recognises the 1872 Scotland v England match that took place at the West of Scotland cricket ground in Partick as the first official international match, The Oval had hosted the first encounter between teams representing England and Scotland two years earlier.

The man behind these pioneering football occasions was Charles W Alcock: secretary of the Football Association, of Surrey CCC and also of the Wanderers. In fact, the Wanderers triumphed in that first final against the Royal Engineers by a goal to nil in front of a crowd of 2000 – the ubiquitous Alcock was also in the side. The winning goal was a tap-in from close range by "AH Chequer", an alias for Morton Betts who also played cricket for Middlesex, Surrey and Essex. Seven members of that winning Wanderers team also played first-class cricket so maybe they had an advantage over their military opponents in a familiarity with their surroundings. As well as cricketing opportunities, the Wanderers had been playing matches at The Oval regularly for the previous three seasons, and would play a total of 151 games at the ground (only Corinthian Casuals, who played their home matches on the outfield at the Vauxhall End between 1950 and 1962 can claim to have played more).

The Wanderers and Royal Engineers met again at The Oval, in 2012, in a

special commemorative match 140 years after the first FA Cup Final for which the original FA Cup trophy was brought south from the National Football Museum. Despite being coached by the former Wimbledon boss Bobby Gould, the Wanderers couldn't repeat their Victorian triumph and were hammered 1-7. The Royal Engineers' captain was obliged to put on white cotton gloves to receive the ancient, priceless trophy, and thankfully resisted the traditional temptation to put the lid on his head.

Other sports have featured at The Oval too. Rugby Union found an early home in Kennington at the dawn of the sport, with seven internationals being played there in the 1870s as well as the Oxbridge game and North v South challenge matches. But damage to the surface caused by scrums spelled the end of the oval ball at The Oval ground. Hockey internationals were also played on the ground during the 1930s and there were even occasional lacrosse games.

Likewise, athletics meetings were a regular occurrence during the 19th century and, while a meeting in 1869 was a "wretched failure" according to one report, with the gate money "not within hundreds of what was expected", there was a notable cricket connection that went beyond the venue itself. As the competitors for the obstacle race (eight hurdles and one "obstacle") gathered, "to the surprise of many, Grace, the cricketer, appeared among the entries. Viney led until 130 yards from home when Grace took the lead and won in a common canter". So demoralising was the Champion's victory that Viney

gave up altogether and walked off the course with two hurdles still to jump.

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Away from sport, The Oval has been pressed into service in other ways. In 2008, the John Major Committee Room staged the inquest into the death of Jean-Charles de Menezes, shot dead by armed police three years earlier at Stockwell tube less than half a mile away.

There is some flickering footage from 1914 of the ground in use as an army training camp (something that caused Jack Hobbs' scheduled benefit match to be switched to Lord's with disastrous financial consequences), a laidback scene of khaki-clad men milling cheerfully among horses and field gun carriages at the Vauxhall End of the ground on what appears to be a warm, sunny day. Everything looks poignantly relaxed: one shot taken from an elevated position outside the ground shows a group of around a dozen soldiers mugging self-consciously for the camera, some waving their caps in the air, others standing awkwardly with their hands in their pockets not quite sure what to do, laughing nervously, the confidence of youth and the certainty that it would all be over by Christmas tempered by the presence of this new, unfamiliar technology.

Thirty years later, in 1944, the ground was converted into a prisoner-of-war camp with barbed-wire enclosures and watchtowers placed on the turf, the pavilion an incongruously grand sight beyond. The camp was designed to accommodate captured German

parachutists from the expected invasion, but they never came and the Oval turf stayed free of skydiving members of the Wehrmacht.

Another thing the Oval turf has also stayed free of is paw prints – greyhounds', specifically. Given the range of sports and events hosted by the ground over the years one might be forgiven for thinking that The Oval just says yes to everything. This certainly isn't the case, and there's no better example than the reaction to Surrey's announcement in November 1931 that The Oval's owners, the Duchy of Cornwall, were in talks with the Greyhound Racing Association to stage dog racing. The Duchy had mooted a deal by which Surrey could play at The Oval entirely rent-free if they accommodated greyhound racing under the auspices of the GRA, causing a cabal of local dignitaries to go off like a factory hooter.

There was a flurry of letters to the newspapers, largely from clergymen, at the possibility of "so sinister a menace to Kennington and its neighbourhood" as this "travesty of a sport" and the "attendant evils of betting and gambling". Even the Bishop of Kingston became involved, while the headmaster of Archbishop Tenison's School worried that, although "our prefects and senior boys are exercising a very fine influence on the school at present", the boys were "young, ardent and full of the spirit of adventure". The temptations of trackside bookies across the road might be too much for them to resist.

There were a few voices in favour of the plan, including a Surrey member

by the splendid name of Arthur Wallet, who pointed out the virtues of a sport where the competitors “never play for a draw: the dog is all out for the hare as soon as he spots it”. Another noted that he’d seen plenty of women at greyhound meetings so “it seems to me more conducive to the orderliness of the district that men take their wives to the races instead of going off on their own to a public house”.

Despite these solid cases, within weeks Surrey announced they’d scrapped the idea under the weight of the protests.

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What the handwringers would have made of the craze for pedestrianism in the mid-19th century, when vast sums were staked on feats of extreme walking, can only be the subject of speculation. Indeed, arguably the greatest sporting achievement at The Oval outside cricket was by a practitioner of pedestrianism in the autumn of 1851 and deserves much wider recognition.

It’s hard to imagine now just what a crowd-puller men walking vast distances, usually in small circles around a marked course, once was. In 1815, for example, a man named George Wilson attracted so many people when he attempted to walk 1,000 miles in 1,000 hours around a mile course on Blackheath in Kent – over 100,000 spectators was a conservative estimate – that he was arrested on a public order charge after completing 750 miles because the local authorities couldn’t cope with the sheer numbers.

In the late summer of 1851, a Sheffield man named Richard Manks was already a noted pedestrian even before he announced his attempt to walk 1,000 miles in 1,000 half-hours on a mile-long course on the outfield at Kennington Oval. It wasn’t the snappiest description of what was an incredible undertaking: Manks was proposing to walk a mile inside half an hour, every half an hour, until he’d walked 1,000 miles. If he covered a mile in, say, 16 minutes that meant he had 14 minutes to rest before starting the next mile – non-stop, no days off, no more than a few minutes’ sleep at a time, effectively for three whole weeks. It was the equivalent of walking from London to Rome without stopping for longer than a quarter of an hour.

Manks set off on 26 September and had covered 126 miles when disaster struck: an explosive attack of diarrhoea from which it took him nearly two weeks to recover (he may have visited the same burger van on the Harleyford Road as I did before a John Player League game once in the mid-eighties). On 10 October he began again, walking his mile every half-hour, day and night. He ate around ten times each day – a diet of game and poultry, roast beef, mutton and chops, washed down with strong beef tea. Old ale was his favourite restorative, while through the night he drank tea fortified with brandy.

The weather held for him until 28 October, three days from completing the task, when the heavens opened for an all-night downpour that soaked him to the skin. His feet by this time were a mess of blisters and sores,

but he pressed on relentlessly, snatching a few minutes’ sleep whenever time allowed, roused without complaint by the timekeepers with only a couple of exceptions. On 29 October, in the middle of the night, he fell into a deep sleep. “It was rather difficult to wake him,” said one contemporary report, “and as one attendant awakened him Manks dealt him a blow on the head, for which he afterwards apologised.” Let’s face it, we’ve all been there.

On Friday 31 October, the final morning of the walk, a few short miles from glory, a timekeeper went to rouse him at 2.30am, whereupon Manks “cried like a child and said ‘I’ll walk no more,’ and ‘Do you want to kill me?’” Fortunately the timekeeper persisted and Manks made it to the start on time.

He did it: 1,000 miles in 1,000 half-hours. Some 3,000 spectators were allowed inside The Oval to cheer him on for his final few laps, “with many thousands more outside”. History doesn’t record Manks’s purse for

finishing, but newspaper reports hailed one of the greatest sporting achievements ever attempted. By any standards, it’s an incredible feat of endurance: the physical exertion and sleep deprivation. He might even have been hallucinating fire-breathing, red-eyed armadillos at the Vauxhall End by the final couple of hundred miles.

Astonishing achievement as it was in itself, Manks’s mega-walk is, in my opinion, notable for another reason. The *Morning Advertiser* reported that to make things easier for spectators at an event than ran around the clock, “a number of variegated lamps have been placed in the most conspicuous parts of the course and one placed on each of the stakes that hold the ropes that form the ring”.

Not only had The Oval staged one of the most extraordinary feats of human endurance, it had also staged the world’s first floodlit sporting event, a full 27 years ahead of the football match at Bramall Lane that claims the accolade. Follow *that* with your armadillos.

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# EXTRACTS

The Oval deserves a love letter. It is a ground of the people. It is vast, by English standards, and it has a sad grandeur about it. It is London's Leviathan, watched over by its creaking steel sentinel, Gasholder No.1. When I think of it I think of late summer, the final Test, long shadows, the last of things.

## JON HOTTEN

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In good times and bad, The Oval has been a sanctuary for me. Watching cricket – most of all at The Oval – is totally absorbing, and events on the field have always been able to wipe my mind of all other issues. Sometimes, the whole world has shrunk down to the contest in front of me and, for a while, nothing else has mattered.

## SIR JOHN MAJOR

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The Oval is the last chapter, the denouement, the scene in the library when you find out who did it. It's not the scene where the ghost and the prince meet, it's the one where everyone ends in mincemeat. It's the conclusion, the end, finis – and so you walk back out into the Harleyford Road, as dismal a street as exists in all London, crying or laughing or wagging your head in puzzlement that the world can be the way it is.

## SIMON BARNES

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At the bottom of the honours board at The Oval, which marks all century-makers in Test matches at the ground, two names are inscribed: Jan Lumsden and Rachael Heyhoe-Flint. Lumsden – 123, 1976. Heyhoe-Flint – 179, 1976. Between them those names tell the story of an extraordinary Test match – a match about which the vast majority of those walking past those honours boards will be blissfully unaware.

## RAF NICHOLSON

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Alf's was where it began. Four miles from The Oval, towards the bottom of East Hill in Wandsworth, near the site of the old Ram brewery of Young and Co, there is an anonymous apartment block where once stood a garage forecourt and, behind it, a whitewashed double-storey warehouse. The only hint of its past existence comes from a sign announcing the side road as Cricketers Mews. Once a month we would leave school in Streatham early in Ken Dobson's little grey Austin A35, four of us each shoehorning in the elongated Gladstone bags that were the cricket cases of the time, and drive the four or five miles to the cricket school upstairs in the industrial building behind the garage

## MIKE SELVEY

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But The Oval's pavilion also offers that whiff of the real world which Lord's keeps so firmly at bay. Almost everything within its confines is wonderful, yet there's none of the art-gallery perfection you'll find on display at NW8. Some of its contents are ever so slightly knocked about, and the views from its upper regions are less mollycoddled and green-swarded than at Lord's – presenting, as they do, a full-frontal, gritty picture of London at large. You're at once able to savour The Oval's old world of wood panelling and yet be entirely sure that you're inhabiting the present day.

## PETER MASON

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A day of watching cricket at The Oval would have given Tedder an opportunity to slow the pace of his life. The mad tumble of aircraft over Flanders skies; the long days of little sleep in Cairo; the barely comprehensible demands of being Deputy Supreme Commander – these were over. He must have sat there and, from time to time at least, cast thoughts over that long career of his as runs were being scored and wickets taken in front of him. He must also have remembered those less fortunate than he – friends and colleagues who had not made it. A hundred faces and more. His first wife, Rosalinde. All those young airmen, gone forever. And one in particular: his eldest son, Dick.

## JAMES HOLLAND

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Saturday, 14 August 1976: day three of the final Test of a long, hot summer was my second visit to The Oval. I went with my mate, Little John. We were both just 18 and waiting for our A-level results. Cricket wasn't "cool" among most of our peers, but we'd stuck with it throughout the topsy-turvy swell of adolescence. As we joined the long queue at the turnstiles just down from Archbishop Tenison's, the heat was humming. And, with it, cracked the carapace of studied indifference that had become our default pose ever since it dawned on us – as we first sat in the exam room – that doing a bit of advance work for this potentially life-defining event might, after all, have been a good idea.

### **JAMES METTYEAR**

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The atmosphere was electric, and the crowd lapped it all up. The Oval being quite close to Brixton meant that the West Indians just kept turning up. They loved it here because they could really show their support for the team. They could have their musical instruments and drums – a proper carnival. Those days, we didn't have all this furore around safety and whether people would get hurt and attacked, so it was pretty much a free-for-all. As you know, they ran onto the field a few times when English wickets fell, especially Tony Greig's. So it was all fun and frolics and nobody thought anyone would get hurt. Though Dickie Bird was worried about the crowd running onto the pitch.

### **MIKE HOLDING**

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Lucky is the ground... except you make your own luck and the man who made The Oval's was Charles Alcock, secretary of Surrey for 35 years until his death in 1907. Alcock was one of the giants of Victorian sports administration, who played a leading part in the organisation of early football and rugby union internationals, as well as Test matches. The full extent of his pioneering work as administrator, official, player and journalist is chronicled in Keith Booth's book *The Father of Modern Sport: The Life and Times of Charles W Alcock* (2002), but what is relevant here is that Alcock applied to cricket some of the innovations he had first brought to other sports.

### **SIMON WILDE**

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Devon Malcolm bowled the fastest spell of his career at The Oval. This much we know, or we think we do. Nobody of sound mind would dispute that Malcolm's awesome performance against South Africa was the greatest of his career, but for pure, rhythmic speed it was surpassed by a short Sunday-evening burst against Australia on the same ground a year earlier. Malcolm's 9 for 57 against South Africa has defined his career, even his life, and is proudly referenced in everything from his number plate to his email address. Figures of 2.2-2-1-0 are less eye-catching, and less number-plate friendly; yet he regards those 14 balls in the gloaming as the quickest he ever bowled.

### **ROB SMYTH**

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Like any self-respecting London-based cricket loon, I have been to The Oval on many occasions, although recently I haven't remembered too much about it. I was there in 2013 when Chris Woakes and Simon Kerrigan made their debuts against Australia, and Kerrigan's mauling was so traumatic that I, along with several others in the crowd, concentrated thereafter on getting hogwhimperingly drunk. My main memory of the day is that people did not start making beer-glass snakes until the PA announcer specifically told us that we were not allowed to make them. I'm not sure it had occurred to anyone to do so before then. The one that passed over my head was the length of a brontosaurus.

### **MARCUS BERKMANN**

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We played for hours, long after the boozers had opened, a simple single-wicket format on that perfect August evening. Players drifted over to the pub for a while, but came back again and again, the draw of a game infectious and irresistible. The three original players – whose names I have shamefully forgotten – were generous but competitive, driven by a love of the game, affording us the chance to round off a day at the cricket in the most natural and appropriate fashion. As kids we had played on the outfield in the breaks and raced home at the close to play on in the twilight. And here we could do the same, restoring the cycle of childhood, playing and watching, watching and playing.

### **ROB BAGCHI**

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First-class batsmanship is one of sport's great contradictions. A pursuit inherently individualistic that can only happen as long as there's a man at the other end, watching every run, waiting for his chance. Without a man watching at the other end, Hobbs wouldn't have troubled the scorer once. No one watched Hobbs as much as Sandham did.

### **ELGAN ALDERMAN**

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Sitting on the little wall by the cricket ground, a few yards from where they said Darius killed the man, Carlton finished the burger and tossed the greasy wrapper on the floor. You never knew exactly what they put in the chicken at Perfect Pigeon, but it tasted good. He looked around. There was some cricket game on in the ground today, but only a few old people going to the match. The street was quiet. He took from his tracksuit pocket a Rizla, weed and a cigarette. A few moments' work later he was inhaling.

#### **ALAN TYERS**

• • •

Living in Sweden, the wait for this moment is at times overbearing. If the English winter feels long, the Swedish version stretches out interminably over months of flat deadness with the thermometer barely flickering above zero. While more southerly European climes can enjoy days or even weeks of respite – milder days when heavy coats can be discarded – Sweden offers no such comfort. Grim, grey weeks struggling through sludgy streets is the norm. The native population seems to accept it with a resigned shrug.

#### **PAUL EADE**

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It's summer 1997, and a wind of optimism is gusting across Britain: New Labour's Downing Street honeymoon is in full swing, "Cool Britannia" is at its zenith, Harry Potter appears on bookshelves for the first time, and the UK wins the Eurovision Song Contest. Dwarfing all of that, though, something far more momentous is brewing in the world of cricket. Having thrashed Australia in the first Test at Edgbaston, England possess a 1-0 lead in the Ashes and have a golden opportunity to regain the urn: can they turn the tables on the last four series and end eight years of hurt?

#### **JON HARVEY**

• • •

The yarn, as is often the case, is an excellent one. The story goes that the founders of Real Madrid – that famous old football club whose white shirts are perhaps the most identifiable outfits in European sport – were inspired to choose their pristine image by an afternoon at The Oval. Alas, they weren't great admirers of WG or inspired by an SF Barnes cutter. But supposedly, just before the club was established in 1902, two of Real's founders were in London and watched Corinthian, the old association football side known for their gentlemanly spirit, play at the Kennington ground. So impressed were they by the sportsmanship and dignity on show, that they took the team's white shirts as their own.

#### **NICK MILLER**

• • •

Since then I've managed to tick off two more Oval-related ambitions: to commentate a men's international for TMS (in which I jinxed Jason Roy on 162, within one lusty blow of surpassing Robin Smith's then England ODI record); and go out to bat on the square in an actual match. I'd always imagined I'd be in whites, in front of a full house, scoring a match-winning double-hundred for England. As it turned out, it was a 10-over-per-side pyjama match for journalists in front of 50 bored stewards waiting for a charity game later that evening. My name appeared on the electronic scoreboard as Norcuff. Still, someone served me up a dreadful pie and I hit it for four through extra cover (yes, the outfield really is lightning quick) before being bowled for nine. I am, therefore, pretty much complete. All that's left is to convince the Surrey committee to name a window – or more likely an accessible lavatory – after me.

#### **DANIEL NORCROSS**

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The best exponents [of after-dinner speeches] have tended to be outsiders, experts in fields beyond cricket yet still steeped in the game. They have a light touch, but have something profound to say. They know how to hold such a room. It is not an easy trick. Twenty years ago, when I was editing Wisden, I sat next to a man who delivered such a speech. He was Lord Runcie, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, resident of Lambeth Palace and regular visitor to his local cricket ground: The Oval. As he spoke, in his rich, rather fruity, voice, I kept thinking: "I'm listening to something wholly magical." And I bitterly regretted that no one was taping it.

#### **MATTHEW ENGEL**

# THE **Nightwatchman**

THE WISDEN CRICKET QUARTERLY

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