



SAMPLE EDITION

THE  
**Nightwatchman**  
THE WISDEN CRICKET QUARTERLY

**WISDEN**



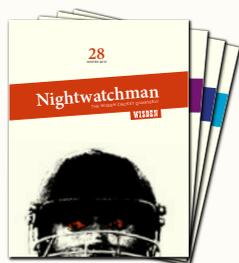
# THE Nightwatchman

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.

*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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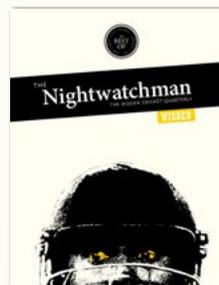
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## THE NIGHTWATCHMAN: BEST OF THE FIRST FIVE YEARS

**Jon Hotten** gets inside the mind of the nightwatchman  
(*issue 1, March 2013*)

**Tanya Aldred** goes on a very personal Fred Trueman adventure  
(*issue 1, March 2013*)

**James Holland** tracks down the spot on which Hedley Verity was killed  
(*issue 1, March 2013*)

**Patrick Neate** reflects on the game as a revealer of character  
(*issue 1, March 2013*)

**Matthew Engel** on his awkward relationship with Peter Roebuck  
(*issue 12, December 2015*)

**Tim de Lisle** on CMJ, a commentator of courtesy, clarity and decency  
(*issue 19, September 2017*)

**Rahul Bhattacharya** tells two stories of love and exile  
(*issue 2, June 2013*)

**Emma John** casts her mind back to a time when England only ever lost  
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**John Crace** played for Hemmingford Hermits. Then suddenly realised he didn't  
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**Alex Massie** delves into Douglas Jardine's Caledonian heritage  
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**Liam Herringshaw** digs up the dirt on fast bowlers  
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**Christian Ryan** wonders what happens to a shot that nobody remembers  
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**Vaneisa Baksh** goes back to the roots of West Indies cricket  
(*issue 1, March 2013*)

**Lawrence Booth** on the umbilical cord that connects Australia to England  
(*issue 6, June 2014*)





## EDITOR'S NOTE

In March 2013, when the first issue of the *Nightwatchman* emerged, blinking into the sunlight, I was worried that any initial enthusiasm would rapidly evaporate. I feared that there would be a lack of submissions, which would put the emphasis on our editorial team to come up with ideas and cajole those authors we admired into writing about them. Not a bit of it.

There has been, and still is, a steady stream of volunteers ready, willing and more than able to write about and around cricket. We've featured priests, and prime ministers, poets and palaeontologists, players and philosophers; welcomed some of the best-known names in cricket writing, along with a host of contributors for whom this venture has been their first time in print. *Nightwatchman* pieces have spawned four books, maybe more. And each issue has been a joy to put together.

In my introduction to the first issue of the *Nightwatchman* I said that our aim was to provide a platform for writers from all over the world to write about cricket related topics of their choosing. We wanted to encourage contributors who would not normally write about

the sport and give them the freedom to cover the topics they found interesting, to a length the subject matter merited, and in the style of their choosing. All that we were asking from our eclectic bunch was that the results of their labours of love were well-written, original, interesting and touched on cricket to some degree or other, however oblique.

In our first five years – or 20 issues – we published 393 individual essays, equating to nigh on a million words, from writers from every major cricket-playing nation and many more besides. We know that plenty of readers have come late to the *Nightwatchman* so we thought it would be a worthwhile exercise to put together this showcase edition to give them a flavour of what we are all about. Here, we have collected together 28 pieces that we hope will whet readers' appetites and encourage them to subscribe to the *Nightwatchman*.

And meanwhile, as we say each issue, if you would like to write for us or just let us know what you think about the *Nightwatchman*, please do get in touch at [editor@thenightwatchman.net](mailto:editor@thenightwatchman.net).

**Matt Thacker, November 2019**

...



## EXTRACTS

All kinds of people met in the bar at Gover's. 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.

**JON HOTTEN**

...

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.

#### **TANYA ALDRED**

• • •

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.

#### **JAMES HOLLAND**

• • •

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 Dadasakid. 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."

#### **PATRICK NEATE**

• • •

One of my favourite newspaper writers is a man called Dan Savage, who runs advice columns that appear mainly in the American underground press. Savage's work will not easily be mistaken for that of the traditional agony aunt: it deals, frankly and very explicitly, with sex. Indeed, it often deals with sexual practices I have never heard of, let alone attempted.

But Savage's responses are humane and sensitive. His general approach is that anything goes between consenting adults, and that if you can find a partner who shares your tastes, however *outré*, that is a form of Nirvana. Sex is Savage's business, and most of us might try to find a somewhat broader definition of happiness. "Something to do, someone to love and something to hope for" (attributed to various writers) is one I find very helpful.

All of which may seem a long way from the normal concerns of a cricket publication. But I couldn't help musing on these matters while I was reading *Chasing Shadows*, the new brave, fair-minded and compelling biography of Peter Roebuck by Tim Lane and Elliot Cartledge. At times it reads like a thriller. In their introduction, the authors offer a quote from me as one of their justifications for a book about a cricketer who never even played a Test match. "I think Roebuck was the most unusual character I've ever come across," I had told them. Having read the finished work, I would like to amend that: "unusual" is far too weak a word.

#### **MATTHEW ENGEL**

• • •

When CMJ died, Ian Botham called him "a true gentleman", which was right on several levels - he was genial, paternalistic, instinctively old-fashioned, the acceptable face of square. On air at the Benson & Hedges Cup final in 1994, Andy Lloyd, who was summarising, mentioned that Paul Smith of Warwickshire, with his rock-star hair, was a fan of Jim Morrison of The Doors. CMJ, for once, was stumped. "If you're listening, Mr Morrison," he said, "I apologise for my ignorance." By then, Mr Morrison had been lying in Père Lachaise cemetery in Paris for decades. But CMJ's conservatism - which went too far, as he later acknowledged, when he opposed the ostracising of apartheid South Africa - was free from the snobbery that was apt to sneak into cricket. It wasn't disdain for anyone less fortunate (he knew a charmed life when he'd lived one), so much as a steady belief in Queen and country, and family, and cricket. He loved the game both wisely and too well.

On tour, he would slip away to church when he could. I can see him now, heading off to evensong at close of play in 1990-91 in Adelaide, where the

cathedral stands at deep fine leg, as if waiting for a top edge. About 22 years later, his loving family and countless friends filled St Paul's in London for his memorial service. There were warm and well-judged tributes from Tim Rice and Jonathan Agnew, who did the simple thing that we often don't think to do at these mournful moments: he played a few clips of CMJ's commentary. It turned out that those cool, calm, collected tones, so companionable in the car and the kitchen, were also made to ring out in a cathedral.

#### **TIM DE LISLE**

• • •

One day at work I received a handwritten letter from a dashing Test cricketer. I cannot be sure now of the spill or strictness of its hand, whether rendered in ink or ball-point and in what colour, nor the sound of its words or the choice of its phrases. I cannot be sure because like a fool I lost the letter. I remember only that Budhi Kunderan had written to say he would be coming to Bombay and be happy to meet, and that was enough for me.

This was nine years ago. We met at his friend's home in Versova on Mumbai's north coast, not far from the office of the magazine I worked at, *Wisden Asia Cricket*. Budhi Kunderan wore jeans with a full-sleeve shirt, tucked in, sleeves rolled up. He wasn't ill or weak. He was slim and strong and good-looking, hair white, skin rich brown, eyes soaked in reflection. He was 64. Over half of his years he had lived in Scotland, and there he would die in two years. This seemed to be on his mind. The arc of his life. "I get the feeling," he said, "that this is my last trip to India. I am here to bid farewell to my homeland."

In the sticky mangrove air Budhi Kunderan told magical tales with distant contemplation. His father was against his playing cricket; when he was selected for his school team, his mother secretly altered her husband's clothes to make him his first set of whites. Because he hit 219, his "first time on a cricket pitch", the father saw his photo in the newspaper. The Test selection out of nowhere. Twenty and poor, he didn't own wicket-keeping gloves, and he went around to Naren Tamhane on match eve to borrow a pair: Tamhane was the man whose place he had taken in the side. And then he found it too noisy to sleep at home. So - I include detail from a conversation with his younger brother, Bharat Kunderan: Bazaar Gate Street in Fort, the thrum of the great city; their father, a clerk in Voltas Airconditioners, a migrant from Mangalore, from the Mogaveera community of fishermen; four sisters and three brothers, Budhi the second, a one-room-kitchen house, shared bathrooms - from there he walked down to the immense triangular maidan where he played for Fort Vijay. If you have played cricket in Azad Maidan, you might know Fort Vijay and the National Health Gym on the eastern side, near Sterling Cinema. There, on a parapet beside the gymnasium, Budhi Kunderan made his bed as he sometimes did. 1959-60, India v Australia at the Brabourne, five nights wicket-keeper Kunderan beneath the stars in Azad Maidan.

#### **RAHUL BHATTACHARYA**

• • •

"Oh, it's your cricket posters!" said mum. "You used to sit up in your room for hours making those!" she sighed nostalgically. "You were such an industrious teenager."

"She was such a nerd," snorted my sister.

From the floor, Angus Fraser looked up at me with a typically hangdog expression. He seemed resigned, as if spending the last 15 years wedged in between two pieces of cardboard, in a forgotten corner of a mouldering basement, was no less than he'd expected. Above him was a banner headline: "England lose again".

The posters, if they deserved the name, were the outworkings of four seasons of fanaticism. It started at 14 when, in the joyous aftermath of the 1993 Oval Test, I had bought every broadsheet so I could read about England's victory four times over. Some latent scrapbooking gene had stirred, and suddenly the reports were cut out and stuck up on my wall (having first been mounted on card: I wasn't a savage) where I could enjoy the words "England win, at last!" even as I fell asleep.

#### **EMMA JOHN**

• • •

The other reason I keep playing are the numbers. It's often said cricket is game of numbers and that the statistics don't lie. Perhaps not, but there are any number of ways of interpreting them. Take my batting average. Four seasons ago it was 6.25. Two seasons ago it was 4.75. A cold, forensic eye would detect a falling-off. That I had become about 20% worse. But here's the thing. When you are quite as bad as me, it's not always that easy to detect the decline. Scoring four really doesn't feel any worse than scoring six. Trust me.

Much the same applies to my bowling. Even in my prime - I must have had one, surely? - I was never a quick seam bowler, but as I've got older I've undoubtedly got slower. I like to think that greater accuracy and mastery of length has compensated for this deceleration, but that's perhaps open to debate. What's not up for grabs is that my effectiveness as a bowler was only ever minimal at best, so losing another yard of pace and becoming easier to hit isn't quite the disadvantage it is for the more able cricketer. Besides which, with one careless shot from an over-confident batsman or an unnoticed divot on the pitch, a terrible spell of bowling can be transformed into one that is merely a bit below par.

I'd imagined my cricket playing days continuing like this until enough of the Hermits had died that we could no longer raise even a team quorum. As I got slower and slower, so would the rest of the Hermits. Just as in Zeno's dichotomy paradox where the pursuer never reaches his goal, none of us would ever actually slow down so much that we came to a complete stop. Though it sometimes might appear that way when watching the Hermits in the field these days.

#### **JOHN CRACE**

• • •

Late October, 1932 and England's cricketers are travelling from Perth to Adelaide. The journey across the red, desolate, vast expanse of the Nullarbor Plain is long and tiring. Three times the party has to change trains. Boredom is an ever-present danger.

No wonder discussion turns - as it so often does when cricket-minded folk are cloistered together - to the favoured parlour game of selecting mythical all-time XIs to take on visitors from other lands or, even, other worlds.

A Greatest Englishmen squad is agreed upon - after much argument - captained by Horatio Nelson. The great hero of Trafalgar will lead a team chosen from the Duke of Wellington, Cecil Rhodes, William Gladstone, Benjamin Disraeli, Lord Shaftesbury, Lord Kelvin, Charles Dickens, Joseph Lister, James Simpson, James Watt and George Bernard Shaw. An impressive selection even if picking Shaw ahead of, say, Shakespeare remains a hard-to-defend wildcard.

It is a selection notable, too, for what it tells us about Englishness. Because many of those chosen are not English at all. Watt and Simpson are Scots, Kelvin a Belfast-born Glaswegian and Shaw a Dubliner. Even the Iron Duke was born in Ireland. No fewer than five of the 12 selected were born beyond England's borders and two of the remaining seven (Rhodes and Lister) made their mark outside England too (in Africa and at the universities of Edinburgh and Glasgow).

#### **ALEX MASSIE**

• • •

It has been argued that cricket is an invention of the Middle Ages. Perhaps it was. As for when truly fast bowlers appeared, most historians of the sport regard them as a 19th century development. Maybe they were.

I'm holding out for the old ball, though. It might be pretty much impossible to distinguish a thrown stone from a non-thrown one, but I refuse to abandon hope of the discovery of a fossilised "leathern orb".

I'm also holding out on my controversial hypothesis of 10,000-year-old fast-bowling Yorkshiremen. Archaeological colleagues will no doubt shoot it down, but before they do, I offer them a final piece of evidence. Can it really just be coincidence that Star Carr is located in the parish of Seamer?

#### **LIAM HERRINGSHAW**

• • •

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.”

#### CHRISTIAN RYAN

• • •

Of all the writing cricketers, only Sir Learie Constantine and Sir Vivian Richards make explicit connections between their heritage and their pride. Only these two constantly invoked a sense of lineage and carried that consciousness as sword and shield. Constantine had been right there at the birth of a West Indies Test team in 1928. Richards was there up to the end of its prime as a champion team in the early 1990s. Constantine and Richards, the alpha and the omega of a distinct era in West Indies cricket; what has happened since has been the consequence of a massive rupture.

At the end of the Richards epoch, the fractures began breaking apart. West Indies cricket, which should have celebrated and recognised its unique nature, never quite grasped its elements, and so there was no foundation of understanding to help it dig its heels in under pressure. After Richards it simply staggered forward, reeling from crisis to crisis and acting as punch-drunk as it looked. Various entities in the cricket world faced similar situations at one time or the other. How they responded made the difference. West Indies cricket was not dealing with one upheaval at a time – no one does because life never conducts itself in such a polite and orderly fashion. The events have been varied and the conditions diverse.

#### VANEISA BAKSH

• • •

It was the late Peter Roebuck who nailed it, in characteristically urgent fashion, light on facts yet strangely persuasive.

“No country appreciates Lord’s more than the Australians,” he wrote in *In It To Win It*. “Over the years, Australian cricketers have cocked many snooks, most of them at pomposity, patronising attitudes, snobbery and hypocrisy. More than might be thought, though, they have given the ancients of the game their due.”

The Oval might have produced more stirring Ashes moments over the years, mainly by virtue of hosting the last Test of the series – though it’s true that it did host the game, in 1882, that begat the newspaper joke that begat the urn. Other English venues, too, have their places in the annals: Old Trafford 1902 and 1956, Headingley 1981, Edgbaston and Trent Bridge 2005.

But, for Australian cricketers, it has always been Lord’s – the umbilical cord, if you’ll forgive the presumptuousness, to the mother country, and the place to be seen, if not necessarily heard.

#### LAWRENCE BOOTH

• • •

Then war intervened. Felix fought and, it is suggested, was wounded. Whatever his injuries, they did not hinder his appetite for cricket. Together with his brother Guido, another all-rounder, he became the mainstay of cricket in the German capital after the war as the sport blossomed. Bolstered by British troops and workers, the Berlin league consisted of 12 teams and the standard of play improved immeasurably.

In 1930, Felix and Guido were part of a Berlin XI that toured England. It was the same summer where a young Don Bradman confirmed his talent to English spectators, so the Germans’ visit received minimal coverage. The only time they made the national press was when they were barred from entering The Oval pavilion during a county match, a courtesy extended to all touring teams. “The MCC is pretty autocratic,” thundered the *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette*, “but at least it has some glimmer of sporting manners.”

Surrey were forced to apologise and invited the Berliners to attend the final day of the match between Surrey and Middlesex, where they were granted a sneak preview of the wicket for the final Ashes Test and an audience with Jack Hobbs, which all had a significant impact on Felix. He began to dream of a German team playing in front of packed stands against the greats of the game like Hobbs.

#### DAN WADDELL

• • •

When George Lucas sat down in the mid-1970s to write a film-script set in a galaxy far, far away, he had high ambitions. His aim was to make a film of literally mythic power. His manual was a book called *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, in which the author, Joseph Campbell, argued that mythologies everywhere all draw on the same basic themes. This is why the story of a great hero has such universal appeal. His feats, his flaws, the arc of his quest: all reach deep into the subconscious. Lucas learned the lesson well. The result, of course, was *Star Wars*.

Sport, unlike a movie, has no script. People would never watch it otherwise. Even so, there is the odd sportsman whose career strikes such chords in the imagination that it is hard not to feel that someone, somewhere, must have made him up. English cricket has certainly not been lacking for heroes these past 10

years. A decade ago, few fans would have imagined in their wildest dreams that England might end up three times Ashes victors, and briefly top the Test rankings. Flintoff and Vaughan, Strauss and Swann: these are names fit to rank with any in English cricket history. The present captain – a clean-cut former chorister who just cannot help himself scoring centuries – could hardly look more like a hero if he tried. Yet Joseph Campbell, in the admittedly improbable event that he could be resurrected and endowed with a working knowledge of cricket, would present none of these stars with the palm. There is only the one possible candidate. Kevin Pietersen may not have a lightsabre – but he is undoubtedly English cricket’s very own Hero with a Thousand Faces.

#### **TOM HOLLAND**

• • •

If Westminster Abbey is open to new ideas – a distinct possibility now that women can finally be ordained as bishops – the church hierarchy might consider a Sport Corner to complement the commemorated greats in the Poets’ Corner. The honour and glory would give our ageing pundits a late-autumn ambition, a final contest in which they’d never know the result.

The nation’s sporting champions contribute to the greatest happiness of the greatest number as surely as our poets and writers. If the England

fast bowler John Snow were included, primarily for his heroic bowling against Australia in 1970–71 (31 wickets in the series) then as a published poet (two volumes, 1971–73), his plaque could form a bridge between the Poets and the Athletes. He would be met halfway by Edmund Blunden, the only writer in Poets’ Corner with an entire chapter of his biography entitled “Cricket”.

#### **RICHARD BEARD**

• • •

Now here he was, about to play a midnight game at the top of the world with the sun still as bright as an English summer afternoon. A rush of emotion welled in him, causing a sharp inhalation, the air rasping in between his teeth. Suddenly, everything was beautiful. Everything.

“Ahoy, Alfred!” Lord Sheffield’s voice echoed around the fjord, summoning the ageing bowler to his trade. Sheffield crouched over his bat while fellow passengers took up makeshift fielding positions. Alfred removed his cap and slipped off his coat. Someone threw him the ball and he tossed it lightly from hand to hand.

“Come on, old-timer, do your worst,” grinned the aristocrat with mock derision. The corners of Alfred’s mouth flickered briefly with the hint of a smile, he gripped the ball in his right hand, looked down the wicket and took his first step towards the chalked bowling crease.

*Over the next three-quarters of an hour Alfred Shaw, two weeks shy of his 52nd birthday, would bowl out an estimated 40 people on the deck of the Lusitania.*

#### **CHARLIE CONNELLY**

• • •

So who’s your top cricket writer? Cardus? Ashis Nandy? CLR James? There was that golden period in the 1980s when John Woodcock and Matthew Engel were both cricket correspondents filing daily. Roebuck, rest his soul, wrote some wonderful stuff. Haigh is hard to touch these days.

Objectivity is impossible. It’s about who best presents the game to you: and it’s one of those deeply personal choices that life tends to offer. Whose vision of cricket most illuminates your own? It’s not about whether you agree with a cricket writer: it’s the extent to which the writer enables you better to enjoy cricket or better to endure it. The writer who best makes the business of cricket meaningful: a pursuit in which wisdom can be found without losing sight of the game’s essential triviality.

And so, without any disrespect whatsoever to the legion of excellent writers and excellent people I have shared too many press boxes with around the small but always vivid world of cricket, I am going to plump for James Joyce. True, he didn’t have the fearful yet soothing discipline of the daily file; he took seven years to write *Ulysses* and 17 more to write *Finnegans Wake*, which is leisurely even by the standards of old-fashioned Sunday- paper-men.

#### **SIMON BARNES**

• • •

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.

### GIDEON HAIGH

• • •

On the face of it, there's little to link a game of village cricket with a Sheffield Shield match. Still less if you compare the venues: Upton Grey were hosting Crookham on a pitch grazed by sheep, while New South Wales were playing South Australia at the Sydney Cricket Ground. And the connection recedes even further if you look at the dates: the village game happened in August 1933, the Shield match in November 2014.

Yet there is a fearful symmetry to these two encounters, a symmetry that gives irrefutable proof of the enduring danger of cricket. Both matches were abruptly abandoned when a player was fatally injured doing something he loved. There were differences. After Phillip Hughes was struck – in a fixture being live-streamed on the internet – bulletins flew around the globe, the cricket community could talk of nothing else, and a nation was consumed by sorrow. In Ben

Stroud's case the blow was witnessed by a handful and, though there was widespread grief in a small community that keenly felt the loss of a dear son, his death has left barely a trace.

### HUGH CHEVALLIER

• • •

Failing. To fail. To be a failure.

There comes a time in every self-aware person's life when you realise that you've failed. Perhaps even that you've moved to the next stage. That, like a diligent top-order batsman, you've converted a handy start, and *gone on*. And so, rather than having simply failed in some limited sense, there's been a Hegelian transformation of quantity into quality. The verb has become a noun. You are now a Failure.

Botham, of course, was in no sense a failure. But, oddly, some of the cricketers I've been fondest of were, at least on the greatest stage, failures. Some, like the elegant Paul Parker (one Test, average 3.2) or Mark Lathwell (two Tests, average 19.5), seemed too delicate, too fragile physically, mentally to survive. My all-time favourite cricketer, Wayne "Ned" Larkins, (13 Tests, average 20.54), in truth probably just wasn't quite good enough – though he could hit a cricket ball harder than any other English batsman of his generation. And what of the mystery of Ramprakash and Hick? Both sublimely talented, towering above every other player in the county game, and yet with such modest achievements in Test matches? So why do I love these, the failures, more even than a Boycott or a Gooch, who made the most of what they had, and what they had was plenty?

I've spent much of my life contemplating failure, both as an abstract concept and as a real presence, the elephant in the room of my life, trumpeting and defecating with joyless abandon. And as a theorist of failure I'm like one of those scientists who experiments on himself, injecting the untested drug, swallowing the untried serum, carrying the glowing block of radium in his trouser pocket.

### ANTHONY MCGOWAN

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It is great to watch, but it becomes ever further away from my own experiences of the sport, and I find myself yearning for the more relatable struggles of a Hicky, an Al Mullall, perhaps even an Ian Salisbury. The reason? I like our cricketers to play with a bit of fear, because fear is something I can understand. This devil-may-care, bulging-bicep certainty of thought and purpose? This is not the English cricket I was brought up with, and it makes me nervous and confused. Sometimes, it even makes me afraid.

Because cricket, for me, is fear. My own cricketing life has been absolutely saturated with and defined by it more than by anything else. If I could be said to play "a brand of cricket", it would be one of timidity, of physical and moral cowardice, of querulousness, of spineless, snivelling capitulation.

### ALAN TYERS

• • •

Let's think about Time. Let's think about Ordinary Time, as scientists call it, and Cricket Time, and its refinement, the measurement we know as Yorkshire Cricket Time

It would have been the mid-1970s, I think, and I was watching Yorkshire play Leicestershire at Headingley. The game had been interrupted by harsh Leeds rain a few times, and me and the lads were sheltering and debating whether or not the bloke over there with the long hair was really Eric Clapton and, if so, should we be so uncool as to go over and ask for his autograph. Suddenly, as if a cheap hotel shower had broken, the rain stopped and the game began again and the guitar god was forgotten.

Nothing happened for a few overs; a man who looked like a half-inflated balloon stood up and shouted in a voice that was sandpapered and polished on the streets of Ossett: "Come on, Yorkshire: they onny mek shoes!" The rain began to assert itself again.

#### IAN MCMILLAN

• • •

For those of us who fall in love with cricket on the radio, it's something television can never match. *Watching* is purely about the sport, in its most direct method of consumption. *Listening* is equally about the medium. But it's real. Vision is direct, audio is sport rendered in another form. In effect, the game becomes literature, becomes performance. Sport and art are false distinctions anyway: they're all part of pushing the limits of human capacity, pleasing the brain via aesthetics or narrative, finding new ways to generate expression.

Among sports, the length and pace of cricket make it special. The hours in a day's play, the lull between deliveries, the long steady periods where a match tilts in neither direction. Cricket has a surfeit of time. It has flux and flow. It is the place for the perambulation, the discursion, the non sequitur. Commentators can go into the fullest depth: topics within the game, certainly, but also further afield, tying in history and politics, classics and creation, reminiscence and mythology.

#### GEOFF LEMON

• • •

At times like these, I felt I came close to Ranji. But they were only fleeting moments. For the most part, the gulf in time remained, stubbornly refusing to narrow.

Then a couple of years ago – and almost a quarter of a century after my book was first published – I received a phone call that suddenly made Ranji feel very close indeed. On the line was an Englishwoman who introduced herself as Catherine Richardson, before adding cheerily: "I'm Ranji's great, great-granddaughter." To say this was a shock would be an understatement. To my knowledge, Ranji had never married and never had children, which was why he nominated a nephew to succeed him as Jam Sahib. I thought Ranji had given up all his secrets. It seemed not.

Several more phone calls followed before my first meeting with Catherine and members of her family. We met at a pub only a stone's throw from the Taunton cricket ground where in 1901 Ranji made his highest first-class score of 285 not out (in true "Golden Age" fashion, after a night's fishing and not much sleep). It transpired that they had conducted a fair bit of research of their own and what they told me, and what I subsequently found out, produced more surprises.

#### SIMON WILDE

• • •

So, if sport is war without the fighting, let's have this out once and for all. Let's decide the future of this great nation through a game of dice cricket, played by NSC rules. The teams will be made up of the finest men and women Britain has had to offer in the history of all time, against the most dyed-in-the-wool Anglophobes that ever walked the earth. Fictional characters are allowed. This is what post-Brexit Britain is about. It's Us v Them.

And since I invented this game, I get to pick the teams. There will be no parliamentary vote. The match is to be played in neutral Norway, and if we win, we get to have whatever version of Brexit we want, like tariff-free access to the single market and the forced repatriation of all European Nobel Prize winners to Barnsley where they can kick-start a northern powerhouse. If we lose? God help us.

#### DANIEL NORCROSS

• • •

The film crew had been through almost every room of the house, and were just about to leave when the producer spotted the mural. At first, she thought nothing of it. Shane Warne's house in the Melbourne suburbs was like a shrine to bad art. The motivational posters featuring tropical sunsets and soaring eagles. The Matisse rip-offs that looked like a child's school macaroni project. The Barack Obama "Hope" poster, but with Merv Hughes in the main role. This, however, was on an entirely different scale.

The cameras started rolling. "I'll run you through a couple of the names," Warne said. "So there's Bruce Springsteen and myself just chilling in the corner, having a drink. Springsteen's got a cricket ball in his hand, he's just asking questions about cricket. The legend Mick Jagger, he's just sitting in the pool chilling. Then you've got Frank Sinatra and Muhammad Ali having a bit of a tune, just singing along. Then JFK's just mixing with Sharon Stone and Marilyn Monroe. Two of my closest friends, Chris Martin and Michael Clarke, just having a bit of a chat. I tell you what, the artist has looked after Pup with those guns!"

When the programme eventually aired on Sky Sports in 2015 under the title "Shane Warne: Living the Dream", Warne was widely ridiculed for his vanity. Warne feigned indifference, but deep down he allowed himself a wry chuckle. Sure, he could be a touch outspoken at times, perhaps even unsubtle. But vanity was the last thing you could accuse him of. Besides, he knew the truth. The mural was not some fanciful imagining of an idealised poolside reverie. It had been painted from life.

#### JONATHAN LIEW

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## THE Nightwatchman

THE WISDEN CRICKET QUARTERLY

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