

SAMPLE EDITION

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AUTUMN 2022

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 39 – AUTUMN 2022

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RUNS IN THE FAMILY

Jon Hotten digs into the Ashes origin story

*When Ivo goes back with the urn, the urn,
Studds, Steel, Read and Tylecoat
return, return,
The welkin will ring loud,
The great crowd will feel proud,
Seeing Barlow and Bates with the urn,
the urn,
And the rest coming home with the urn.*

I am sitting in a room, actually a rather nice office in London, with a man who may be the owner, or at least the custodian, of the most famous artefact in cricket, perhaps the most famous in all of sport - the tiny terracotta urn that has become the physical representation of the Ashes. "Well," says Ivo Darnley, who is both the namesake and the great grandson of the Ivo mentioned in the verse above, "I'm not sure... I think we may need a lawyer in the room. Lord's wrote to me recently... well in 2019, to say the archivist was changing. They definitely keep me informed and in touch. I

believe officially the Ashes have been 'lent in perpetuity'..."

• • •

The Darnley family is one of those that goes back. Ivo is the twelfth Earl. The first was John Bligh, who assumed the title in 1725. And before John, there was a Lord Darnley, Henry Stuart, who married Mary, Queen of Scots and fathered James VI of Scotland before his demise a couple of years later, strangled and blown up in a murky and conspiratorial plot for which some blamed Mary and her next husband, the Earl of Bothwell.

For many of those centuries, the Darnleys have been cricketers. The fourth Earl, John Darnley, appeared for Kent and MCC 27 times between 1789 and 1796. His brother, Lieutenant General Edward Bligh, was even more prolific, described by Arthur Haygarth as "one of the best gentleman bats of his day." The fifth Earl died young of

lockjaw after cutting a toe in a wood chopping accident, but the sixth, John Bligh, played for the Gentlemen of Kent against the Gentlemen of England in 1848, and two of his eight children would go on to leave their mark on the game. Edward, the seventh Earl and first son ("enormous and terrifying and died young,"), played first-class cricket for Kent and "spent money like water". Second son Ivo Bligh, born in 1859, would become the best and most famous of them all, the first England captain to win the Ashes.

"We've got his letters," says Ivo. "He went to a prep school called Cheam, where he had a miserable time in his first term. Then they discovered he could play cricket and he seems to have had a really happy time. As a boy he was meant to be easy-going and quite charming. He went to Eton. He was captain there, and he was captain of Cambridge."

His game was shaped by George 'Farmer' Bennett, the Kent professional employed by the sixth Earl to coach his children at the family seat, Cobham Hall. Ivo had all-round talent, winning a place in the Cheam school team with his bowling although he later injured a shoulder in a tug-of-war match on the journey to Australia, forcing him to concentrate on his batting and fielding ("a capital long-field and point" said *Wisden*). It was at Cheam that he first met the Studd brothers, CT and GB, who would become immortalised in the same team and the same verse as Ivo.

Standing six feet three - perhaps only Grace of his contemporaries loomed larger - Ivo's elegant driving saw him make hundreds for both Cambridge

and Kent against Surrey, and it was his poor health rather than lack of ability that seems to have halted him. "There can be little doubt that, had he remained in full vigour, he would have developed into a really great batsman, for he was only twenty-one when his breakdown occurred," reports the Almanack.

Bligh's schoolmate CT Studd was at the wicket with Ted Peate in the seminal Test match at The Oval in August of 1882. England needed just ten to win, and if they had got them, who knows where we would be today. Studd, at the end of a golden summer with the bat, had for some reason come in at No.9. He had not faced a ball when William Barnes was dismissed, and then looked on in horror as last man Peate swiped a two through square leg before trying again and being comprehensively bowled. "I couldn't trust Mr Studd," he said, somewhat enigmatically. A week later came the *Sporting Times* obituary, and the birth of the Ashes.

• • •

What follows is part folklore, part love story, all sporting serendipity. The hubristic newspaper joke about the Ashes caught on to the extent that when Ivo brought together his party to tour Australia in the English winter that followed, he told them that he would "return with the Ashes". He would have to do it without Grace, Hornby, Ulyett and Littleton, none of whom toured.

"I think he couldn't afford to take Grace on the trip," says Ivo Darnley. "Grace wanted to go first class and take his wife, and Ivo couldn't afford

it." Whatever the reason, *sans* the Champion and England's other stars, Bligh's men stood up, winning two of the three Test matches to fulfil the promise he had made before the team sailed out.

In Australia, Ivo Bligh also fell in love. Four of the tour's nine matches were played in Melbourne, and most of the tour's socialising took place at Rupertswood, the country estate on the outskirts of the city where the team stayed before its games at the MCG. Rupertswood was owned by Sir William Clarke, president of the Melbourne Cricket Club, and it was here that Bligh met Florence Morphy, who was employed as a governess and music teacher to the Clarke family. It's easy to imagine those languorous, light-hearted summer days in Rupertswood's landscaped gardens and shaded rooms, the relationship between Ivo and Florence flourishing over drinks and dinners and slow-moving outdoor games.

Early in the tour, Bligh's XI played a friendly game against the Clarke family's staff and guests at Rupertswood. There is a story that after the match Lady Clarke and Florence Morphy presented Bligh with an 'urn' for the Ashes, and then another more substantial report of a presentation at Rupertswood after the series was completed in March 1883. What we know for sure is that the terracotta urn that Bligh brought home to England had the verse above this story pasted onto it, along with a label that says simply 'The Ashes'. That verse first appeared in *Melbourne Punch* magazine on 1 February 1883. Then there is the report in the *Hobart*

Mercury of 4 June 1908, decades later but still cited, that described, "a tiny silver urn, containing what they termed the ashes of Australian cricket."

Were there two urns? Was the joke made once and then perpetuated? Or was the terracotta perfume container that Bligh brought home to England the first and only urn?

"It might have come from Lady Clarke, off her dressing table," says Ivo. "That's the family folklore. We have no idea..." What they know is that Ivo stayed on for another five weeks at Rupertswood, wooing Florence. He came home to England without her, "and I believe the urn comes back in his suitcase," says Ivo. "They treated it as a love token, from a pretty girl to him. He came back to the UK alone, because he had to ask his father's permission [to marry]. And his father took a very long time. And then Ivo went back and got married just outside Rupertswood."

Ivo's elder, terrifying brother Edward died in 1900, and the earldom passed to Ivo, along with Cobham Hall. The family's dwindling fortunes and Edward's profligate spending left Ivo and Florence with an almost empty house in which to live.

"The sixth Earl had spent no money modernising whatsoever," Ivo explains. "Then came economic problems with agriculture at the end of the 19th century. Grain was beginning to be imported from North America and agriculture went into a slump. Ivo's elder brother inherited and had a child. She inherited pictures, tapestries and other contents, which is why Ivo came back to a somewhat unmodernised

house. He then started selling. The fourth Earl, who died in 1831, had lived during the French Revolution, and was fortunate to have cash, with which he brought pictures out of France. Some fantastic paintings – Titian, Rubens, Veronese, Snyder. There are Titians in the National Gallery that were ours. Tintoretto's 'The Origin of the Milky Way' as well. The family actually sold Titian's 'The Rape of Europa', a magnificent picture, in 1896."

Elected to the Lords in 1905, Ivo settled into the familiar life of his ancestors. Those matches in Australia would be the sum of his international career. "It was a while until the Darnley urn became *the* urn," says Ivo. "Family lore said that he had wanted that. He was a charming, gentle man, something of a hypochondriac because he hardly played again. He took up golf and became captain of St George's. He built himself a golf course. In the 1920s, he and Florence built a house called Puckle Hill, and I think he died there."

On Bligh's death in 1927, Florence loaned the Darnley urn to MCC. There was one more mystery that went with it, that of its contents. "People say it was knocked over and therefore we don't know what the contents is..." says Ivo. "I don't know if there even is a contents. There are some references to it as a bail, some as a ball, some as a veil."

Florence lived until 1941, "and she told my grandmother that it's a veil rather than a bail, and granny was absolutely determined, but I'm not sure that's right either. My granny was the third wife, she married in 1940 and [Florence]

died in 1941, so they didn't know each other that long. My grandmother always maintained that Florence had said it was a veil. But Florence was a very old lady at that point."

If Ivo Darnley is the owner of "what started life as a worthless little terracotta urn, not much better than an egg-cup," then he is an extremely relaxed one.

"Have you ever touched the urn?" I ask.

"No, I have not."

"Do you want to?"

"I'm intrigued to. But we're in the year 2022, and they've been looked after by Lord's for almost a hundred years. When Australia was doing well in the Noughties, the MCC took the Ashes to Australia [in 2006-07]. Mum and Dad travelled with them. I was shaving and I heard my father on the radio. He had been rung up in the middle of the night by the Australian Prime Minister, to say that the Australians had won it so many times and could the Ashes travel... Mum and Dad went to Rupertswood too, so that was sort of full circle."

"But..." I say, feeling my once-in-a-lifetime opportunity slipping away. "We could jump in a cab right now. It's 20 minutes to Lord's. We'll walk in and tell them that Ivo's great grandson is here, and we want to touch the urn."

"Hmmm..." Ivo says, a tone I take as an extremely polite demurral. "I've lived with it all my life... I think it's in the right place."

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EXTRACTS

On 11 June 1909 the *Cambridge Independent Press* carried the following item: "A mild sensation has been caused in the cricketing world by a bowling machine, which has been invented and patented by Dr Venn, the President of Caius College, and his son Mr JA Venn. The capabilities of the machine were put to the test by the Australians on Thursday, and Victor Trumper has expressed an opinion that the new machine will be of special value for schools and for practice generally."

In fact the machine had clean bowled Trumper three times in a row – a hat-trick!

ROD EDMOND

• • •

At around 5.30pm on the blustery Tuesday afternoon of July 31, 1956, Emrys Davies, the umpire at the bowler's end in the fourth Test between England and Australia at Old Trafford, came out of his crouch, long white coat flapping at his ankles, and stabbed his left finger towards the tourists' batsman Len Maddocks. It was the climactic dismissal of the match, which England won by an innings and 170 runs. The bowler in question was the 34-year-old Surrey off-spinner Jim Laker, whose final figures were 16.4-4-37-9 and 51.2-23-53-10. No one had ever taken 19 wickets in a Test before, and it's quite possible nobody ever will again. As the Aussie batsman Neil Harvey, happily still with us today at 93, put it: "What Jim did at Manchester wasn't just a great piece of bowling. It was a bit of history."

CHRIS SANDFORD

• • •

Constantine's four wickets played a key part in Nelson's win, but one incident had far-reaching consequences. Unnoticed by most spectators, a brief exchange took place between the two professionals, which led Constantine to unleash a barrage of short-pitched bowling at his predecessor. Although Blanckenberg received numerous blows, he never flinched on his way to scoring 77 out of a total of 127 before being bowled by Constantine's slower ball. Many years later, this memorable clash was the seed for a persistent rumour: that Jimmy Blanckenberg was a Nazi who fled to Germany during the Second World War.

GILES WILCOCK

• • •

That is a whole lot of fast-twitch, and yet the quickest of the lot may well have been a 6ft 8in Dutchman who made his first-class debut, aged 18, for Somerset against Waqar's Surrey at The Oval in 1991 (the year the latter blitzed his way 113 Championship wickets at 14.75). The absence of Adrianus 'Andre' Petrus van Troost from YouTube allows for the fishermen's tales of Rooster's Rockets to become even saltier, but there is no shortage of eyewitness accounts that place him in the express pace bracket, if not the one above (the "fuck me, I *really* don't want to face this guy" category).

SCOTT OLIVER

• • •

When the West Indies toured India in 1948/49 the selectors, in their wisdom, chose John Goddard to lead the side. They did this despite the fact that George Headley, who debuted in 1930, had long been one of the game's great batters, was an outstanding student of the game, and a man of great intelligence.

Goddard, who was white, had played only four Tests with moderate success and was 10 years younger than Headley. He had led the West Indies to victory against England at Bourda and Sabina Park during the 1948 series which featured a rather peculiar arrangement of Headley being named captain for the first Test and last Tests, with Trinidad and Tobago's Jeffrey Stollmeyer due to captain the second and Goddard slated to skipper the third.

It turned out, however, that a back injury ruled Headley out of all but the first Test and Goddard ended up captaining the fourth match at Sabina Park. The unusual arrangement was a compromise that followed a fight waged by prominent Jamaican politician, Noel Nethersole, to have Headley installed as leader. It is an indication of the attitudes that prevailed at that time that such a battle was even necessary.

GARFIELD ROBINSON

• • •

The Nuremberg trials at the end of World War Two are widely considered to be the birthplace of simultaneous interpreting. Since then, intense, nervy interpreters have been helping people who speak different languages to communicate in real time at international gatherings, conferences and meetings. They sit in little grey boxes called booths, unceremoniously shunted out to the fringes of meeting rooms. I aspire to be one of them.

But I also like cricket and vast green fields. I spent much of my youth enthusiastically running from deep midwicket to deep midwicket to help out my older teammates. Manning the periphery seems to have become what I do. And over the course of my conference interpreting studies in Geneva, I have realised that there is plenty more that unites simultaneous interpreting and cricket, and specifically batting. Cricket may have a thing or two to learn from interpreting, and vice versa.

ARTHUR BEARD

• • •

Norfolk has been the birthplace of several English Test cricketers, including the legendary Bill Edrich, his nephew John, Peter Parfitt, Clive Radley and, more recently, Olly Stone. Despite all that raw talent, the county has never achieved first-class status. Yet, in 1942 a team drawn from Norfolk proudly represented England in the most unusual Ashes series ever played.

JOHN WILLIS

• • •

In the summer of 1960, the England cricket great, Yorkshireman Sir Leonard Hutton had been retired for five years; and along with his wife Dorothy and two sons, Richard and John, was living in the south-east of England. At the time he considered this change of address to be a temporary move away from his beloved Yorkshire. It was a relocation that was more convenient for the former England captain's new role as a cricket journalist with the London *Evening News*; and later, as the international representative for the engineering firm JH Fenner & Co. There was also the added advantage for a man increasingly suffering from bronchitis and arthritis, that the winter temperatures were several degrees higher in Surrey than they were in his northern homeland. In a 1966 letter to John Arlott he wrote: "The weather is bad here, but not as bad as Yorkshire, this is an impossibility. In January and February, they hibernate in Yorkshire."

MICHAEL BURNS

• • •

"It's mad, isn't it, how you can still be disappointed when you score 290-odd. Only cricket can do that for you. I'm really thrilled that I put a really big score together but there is a tinge of disappointment."

Alastair Cook there, talking to the media after his mighty 294 against India at Edgbaston in 2011. He's right, of course: only cricket can do that for you. Staggering achievements wrapped up in anti-climax; right from cricket's most famous number – 99.94 – through to hat-tricks in a losing cause, to epic innings that fall a mere ball or two short of breaking long-standing records.

DANIEL BRIGHAM

• • •

"You represent the essence of cricket and you represent everything we play for," Kumar Sangakkarra tells Fernando Sugath, via video message. The message is recorded in the hallowed halls of the Long Room. Somewhere in the background it's easy to imagine white-haired MCC members still grumbling about the cancellation of the Eton v Harrow game from the annual calendar.

It is watched, meanwhile, in a tiny subterranean room – bed, toilet/shower, hob and microwave squeezed into a space perhaps a quarter the size of a Lord's dressing room – in the Beirut suburb of Hadath. Here, Fernando has lived for over 25 years, working during the day, six days a week, at a home furniture store before withdrawing in the evening to act as concierge, unpaid, in return for his lodgings. Before the financial meltdown in Lebanon, he earned \$300 a month, the vast majority of which was sent to Sri Lanka. Now he's lucky to make half of that.

WILLIAM DOBSON

• • •

A decade or so ago, I was at the St. Lawrence Ground in Canterbury for the first day of the Championship game against Hampshire. I remember the day well, because in the glorious Kentish sunshine (the sun always shines on Canterbury) I spent much of the afternoon strolling round the ground with Stephen Saunders, who was then one of the people with responsibility for Hampshire's collections of cricket memorabilia.

I had recently been asked to chair the Kent Cricket Heritage Trust, a newly formed organisation charged with looking after, expanding and publicising Kent CCC's collections. When I say "asked", what I really mean is that I had been unable to attend the previous evening's general committee, and I was rung up the next morning to be told that I had been voted unanimously into the chairmanship of this as yet unformed Trust about which I had previously been told nothing. I quickly realised that however keen I was about the challenge which had been given me – and I was and still am – my problem was that I had very little practical experience to bring to the job. So I have an awful lot of *Wisdens* at home and a signed letter from Don Bradman, but what do I know about looking after trophies, old bats and one-hundred-year-old minute books? What is the right way of going about it? Is there a right way? What do other counties do?

JONATHAN RICE

• • •

Despite a long history of attempts, there has never been a properly measured world record for throwing a cricket ball. The longest unverified throw of 140 yards 2 feet – further than the length of a football pitch – is said to have been made in the late 1880s by Robert Percival on Durham Sands racecourse, a 16-acre stretch of flat ground next to the River Wear in the north east of England.

Crucially, though, that effort has never been accepted by the *Wisden Cricketers' Almanack*, which although it first mentioned the feat in its 1908 edition, said in 1997 that "the definitive record is still awaited". As no serious official attempt has been made to set such a record in the years since that judgment, the statement still holds true.

PETER MASON

• • •

In recent years, the divide between cricket at state schools and private schools has become increasingly apparent. Cricketers, commentators, coaches and fans have bewailed the predominance of privately educated players at the game's top levels. While shows like *Freddie Flintoff's Field of Dreams* and books like *Crickonomics* bring awareness of the problem into the mainstream, the perspectives of the children it affects are often overlooked. As a teacher at a large West London state school and a member of a club nearby where most young players are privately educated, one Tuesday in April gave me a first-hand insight into the experiences of both.

WILL YATES

• • •

One of cricket's many charms is the memories it holds of matches played and watched, characters admired, anecdotes remembered. Its curse can be one-way conversation with unknown fellow spectators who interrupt your enjoyment with their knowledge of mind-numbing stats sometimes punctuated with killer questions like: "Which England captain was born in Italy?"

Some of us still lucky enough to play – in my case more than 60 years since my first league game – prefer to be doing just that and coaching youngsters rather than listening to these rambling monologues of those who once met Viv Richards on a train.

JOHN BOOTH

• • •

The media landscape was a very different place in the late 1980s.

Twitter was something birds would do in the St Lawrence Lime at Canterbury. Instagram sounded like a quick way of weighing something and circulation figures of the national press were measured in the millions rather than the modest six and five figures we see today.

Picking up a copy of the next day's newspaper at one of the major London train stations in the small hours was as close to instantaneous as cricket coverage got.

Hardly surprising then, that some cricket supporters threw money at the problem.

In an era where the national newspapers devoted a fair amount of column space to not so discreet 0898 telephone lines, cricket got in on the act too, launching a range of ball-by-ball services to devotees of the domestic game. All for 35p a minute.

For the cost of a loaf of bread – and possibly a pint in pubs situated outside antiquated grounds such as Hampshire's Northlands Road – you could be transported directly to grounds up and down the country.

RICHARD EDWARDS

• • •

On 25 July 2022 an independent review conducted by Plan4Sport found Cricket Scotland to be "institutionally racist". There were almost 1,000 direct engagements with the review that were heard or read from people's experience. Most damning of all, the review found that "there is no evidence of mitigating against the risk of racism in any form". In other words, racism was allowed to exist.

Born in Glasgow, Qasim Sheikh began playing cricket at the age of seven at Clydesdale CC. His mother introduced him to the coaches as "the boy who sleeps with his bat" and he was given his international debut by ex-coach Andy Moles at 19. Sheikh traces his journey into cricket back to the subcontinent, where he would watch his family play. "Upon my first visit to Pakistan as a toddler I already had a bat in my hand. I would push my uncle and my dad to bowl at me no matter what time of day it was," he remembers.

His mum showed unwavering support for Qasim's sporting endeavours. "She drove me everywhere and anywhere to chase my dreams. She even flew out to New Zealand to watch me play in the U19 World Cup for Scotland. I give all my achievements to the support of my parents. Without them I'd be nowhere in cricket or life."

But now, the 37-year-old is speaking out about the racism he faced during his time playing the sport he loved.

UM-E-AYMEN BABAR

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