

SAMPLE EDITION

40

WINTER 2022

THE  
**Nightwatchman**

THE WISDEN CRICKET QUARTERLY

**WISDEN**



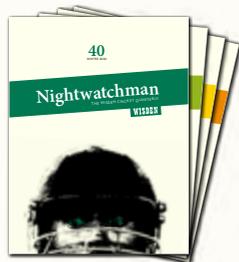
# THE Nightwatchman

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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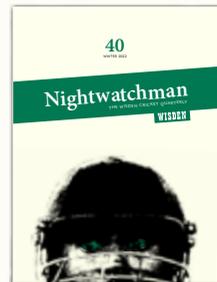
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**Matt Thacker** introduces issue 40 of the *Nightwatchman*

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## PLAY ON

### *Shomit Duttha on how he came to write a cricket-themed play*

My play *Stumped*, currently available as a digital production, is a two-hander about Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter at an ill-fated cricket match in the Cotswolds. I wrote it in the first lockdown of 2020. The process, however, was a long one.

The idea of writing a play with Beckett and Pinter as characters came about sometime in the 2000s. I was playing cricket for Gaieties CC, which was run by Pinter (in intense if avuncular fashion). I was also doing on a doctoral thesis on the ancient Greek comic playwright Aristophanes, who was fond of putting his favourite playwrights into his plays. In perhaps his best-known play, *The Frogs*, the tragedians Aeschylus and Euripides appear as antagonists in the underworld, competing for artistic supremacy. Part of me felt that it would be a salutary antidote to my PhD to turn from scholar to writer and pen a modern version of *The Frogs* with my own favourite playwrights, Beckett and Pinter. Initially I perhaps put it off for fear of how Pinter might feel about

such comic treatment (besides seeing him through Gaieties, I was regularly playing bridge with him and his wife Antonia Fraser). But even after he died in 2008, the play remained unwritten.

Flash forward to 2015, I found myself organising a cricket match between a Pinter XI (Gaieties CC) and a Beckett XI (the Dublin-based Theatrical Cavaliers CC) for the “Happy Days” international Beckett festival in Enniskillen. They kept two days free for the game but it rained solidly both days. We ended up playing a game indoors (which happily we won, witnessed by a crowd of at least three, possibly as many as six). We also put together an evening event, somewhat better attended, with readings and footage linking Beckett, Pinter and cricket. It had been suggested rather last-minute that, as part of this, I write a comic skit with Beckett and Pinter playing in a cricket match. I declined, as I didn’t want to do a rushed job, but realised afterwards that what I ought to be doing, rather than a modern version of *The Frogs*, was writing my own ‘Aristophanic’

play about Beckett and Pinter *set at a cricket match*.

Once again this new incarnation of my Beckett-and-Pinter play remained unwritten (though, in my defence, putting on another play got in the way, as did breaking my neck and needing a prolonged period of recovery and treatment).

I finally ended up writing my play a few years later during the first set of Covid restrictions in 2020. Like most people, I found myself in a peculiar state of stasis, waiting indefinitely and stuck in one place. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the situation put me mind of Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* and Pinter’s *The Dumb Waiter*, the two plays an Aristophanic approach would also suggest. It therefore made sense for the play to start with Beckett and Pinter waiting to go in to bat (Beckett once told actor John Alderton, who was playing Estragon in *Godot*, to think of himself as doing exactly that). It also seemed fitting that in my play, as in both of theirs, the characters are confined to, or return to, a single location; information is uncertain and comes from mysterious sources; certainty is elusive and hope is regularly deferred.

Writing the play in the that first part of lockdown, when I found myself in a comparable situation to the one I had put my characters in, felt like a kind of immersive “method writing”. That my characters were themselves writers who had put their characters in similar situations involving waiting only added to the sense of *mise en abyme*.

If the first act of my play focuses on occupying one’s time while waiting, as

at the start of lockdown, the second is more about going stir crazy, as most people did when the prospects of a return to normality seemed remote. The play ended up resembling an anxiety dream formed in the merged minds of Beckett and Pinter filtered through with my own – a sort of surreal *ménage à trois* with two characters in search of an escape from an author. Or perhaps we were all trying to escape from one another, like the three characters in Sartre’s *No Way Out* (Pinter actually played one of the characters in a film version of Sartre’s play in 1964; the year, coincidentally, that my play is set).

My working title was *Yes...No...Wait*. This was based on the three possible calls when batting, albeit placed in an unpromising order. The ‘*Wait*’ doubled as a nod to *Waiting For Godot* and *The Dumb Waiter*. It also hinted at the fact that the title of *The Dumb Waiter* itself alludes to *Godot* and the play involves numerous echoes. All three plays, for instance, begin with a character fiddling with his boot.

The writing of the play was influenced in part by the rhythms and tempo of cricket itself. For me one absorbing aspect of the game, particularly when your side is batting, is the pattern of periods of waiting punctuated by sudden events. This is especially the case with the kind of time cricket that Gaieties like to play, typically a declaration game with tea between innings and the last twenty from 6.30pm (much more interesting, from a dramaturgical perspective, than the thrash-metal tempo of the short-form game).

I recently watched the play with some Gaieties players and they picked up on

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."

• • •



## EXTRACTS

In the fourth Test of England's series in India in March 2021, Rishabh Pant played one of the most audacious innings in the history of Test cricket. Moments after having reverse lapped Jimmy Anderson for four, on 94 he launched Joe Root high over midwicket to move to his hundred. Sunil Gavaskar, the excitement palpable in his voice, announced that this was "the new India - a bold India."

In that moment I was transported back to 1996 and the memory of Sachin Tendulkar launching Min Patel straight over the sightscreen, like Pant advancing from 94 to 100 with one effortless blow. "It surprised everyone," bellowed Mark Nicholas, "but nothing that this young man does need surprise us any more."

### WILLIAM DOBSON

...

I feel slightly dizzy as I reflect on it (and it's not a Parkinson's symptom). It happened so long ago, and it launched 50 crowded years: life-changing. It led to the opening of a door to what turned out to be a very intensive life in cricket-writing.

It was a massive gamble which a sensible chap would never have attempted. But in early 1972 I was desperate. Attempts to get onto the cricket-writing stage in both my countries, England and Australia, had been frustrated. Having sold up in Surrey, Debbie and I and our three youngsters had returned to Sydney after my mother died. My dad was in a bad way. Debbie comforted him while I searched for work as a cricket writer. The sound of slamming doors was numbing, though I did end up working for the Australian News Bureau, thanks to a nudge to one of his mates by Jack Fingleton, whom I'd come to know while odd-jobbing for Hayters during the 1968 Ashes series. What did the future hold with the ANB? A posting to London perhaps? More likely Singapore. Hopes dashed.

### DAVID FRITH

...

Dewsbury, May 1927 - the town may be better known for rugby league, and the Dewsbury and Savile Ground was never one of the jewels in the Yorkshire crown, but from 1883 to 1933, at least one County Championship game was held in most seasons. Perhaps the death knell came in 1933 when Yorkshire declared at 128 for 4 and still beat Essex by 10 wickets (Hedley Verity 11 for 74).

### PATRICK FERRIDAY

...

John "Jack" Crawford William MacBryan was a 12-year-old Exeter schoolboy when "Moonlight" Graham stood in a field on the other side of the Atlantic waiting for the chance to make something happen. But, despite the distance of their lives and the incomprehension that they would most likely have for one another's chosen game, they share a connection.

MacBryan at least had the ability and good fortune to have a long first-class career with Cambridge University and Somerset, appearing in 206 matches over a period of 25 years. He played his first innings in the County Championship as a 19-year-old in 1911 whilst training as an officer at Sandhurst. On the outbreak of war, he was among the first wave of soldiers to go to the front and was soon wounded and captured at Le Cateau on the Western Front, spending the next four years in a prisoner-of-war camp.

### GARRY WHITE

...

Twice in a week, I found myself explaining something about cricket to Americans.

On a lovely Monday afternoon in August I was giving a guided tour of Caernarfon castle. I'd been doing it for seven successive summers and I reckoned I'd been up and down the towers and along the battlements more than 3,000 times... with groups of fidgety school kids, backpackers from Australia, holidaymakers who liked to heckle and, of course, all kinds of Americans.

On that particular day, the last tour of the afternoon, I had a serious and academic couple, retired teachers from Boston. I was tailoring my tour for them, leaving out the little jokes I used with teenagers and Aussies, and giving them a lot of serious history.

### STEPHEN GREGORY

...

On 8 May 2022, the inaugural Green Afghanistan One Day Cup began at the Khost National Ground, just a matter of hours after the Taliban's Ministry for the Prevention of Vice and Promotion of Virtue passed a decree enforcing all women across Afghanistan to wear the burka. In the same breath, the celebration of men's domestic cricket in Afghanistan was accompanied by a stark reminder of the oppressive reality of social life for Afghan women. This damning comparison leaves a bitter taste. Yet, two individuals very close to the inner workings of Afghan sport, Diva Patang and Ismail Miakhail, contend that patience is not only a virtue, but a necessity. For both Patang and Miakhail, sport remains a symbol of hope and unity for the Afghan people, with a central role to play in the future of women's rights.

### HENRY WARNE

• • •

The first photo I'd like to discuss is the beautiful image of Wally Hammond cover driving a spinner in the MCC's game against New South Wales in 1928 ('keeper Bert Oldfield is up to the stumps). For me, this is the purest distillation of batting in an image I know of: the history of the sport in one photograph – the essence of cricket.

Hammond's drive, with the bat's follow-through ending up above his head, contains strength and poise, grace and power, stillness and movement. There's even a rakish touch, for – dashingly – Hammond has what looks a red hankie in his right hip pocket.

### LUKE ALFRED

• • •

Here's a quick pop quiz. When the Rolling Stones toured America in 1972 and found it expedient to assume aliases when booking flights or registering at hotels, which names did they choose for themselves? The Stones, let it be remembered, were then at their most gloriously debauched, and rarely a day went by without some story appearing in the press about one or other of them having been detained by the drugs squad, or managing to burn down his own house. So you might think that they would have adopted monikers with a raffish or an evocatively narcotic feel to them: Samuel T Coleridge, Thomas De Quincey or Charles Baudelaire for example, all of which found favour with other such groups of the era.

### STEVE MENARY

• • •

*Steve Helson, 16, is the hero and principal narrator. He is up against it. He is the only child of a disintegrating marriage. He has just left a sink school. He has no social life, no girlfriend and no career prospects. The only thing holding him together is his dream of becoming a professional cricketer. But his lonely pursuit of the dream takes him into a new network of relationships. Life will still deal him some inswinging yorkers, but cricket will bring big changes not just for him but for everyone he meets.*

### RICHARD HELLER

• • •

The promise of £7,000 for a day's work is unlikely to tempt an Indian Premier League star out of bed, let alone get them onto the field of play. In the early 1980s, though, it had some of the biggest names in world cricket falling over themselves for a shot at the jackpot.

For those of a certain vintage, this period will always be remembered for the incredible number of inordinately gifted all-rounders gracing both international and domestic cricket.

### RICH EDWARDS

• • •

Needing six runs for victory from eight balls with three wickets in hand, the odds were in Australia's favour, especially if Benaud, on 52 and batting confidently, could relieve Grout of the strike against the pace of Hall. From his fielding position at mid-on, Worrell offered advice and encouragement to his bowlers, and he and Wes conferred at length before Wes walked back to his mark at the start of the final over. Obviously, Grout's intention would be to get Benaud on strike, and Worrell's words to his fast bowler were designed to calm Wes rather than offer advice: 'I want you to keep it tight, Wes, Benaud is going to try to get a single.' Wes replied: 'Keep your eyes on me, skipper, and you will see something special this over!' This was not arrogance or bravado, but an expression of his feelings; he was relishing being at the centre of the action. He had already bowled 17 overs in the innings, but he was desperate to be involved in 'something exciting'. He would not be disappointed!

### PAUL AKEROYD

• • •

A day before the third and final India-South Africa one-day international, played on 14 November 1991 in New Delhi, Wessel Johannes “Hansie” Cronje purchased a leather jacket from the city’s Connaught Place shopping centre. How much did he pay for it? I asked him as he entered the Oberoi Hotel lobby. “Rs.3,000 [\$116 approximately]. Is the price OK?” the 22-year-old Cronje replied. That was my first sight of him.

Cronje was one of the four non-playing members of the Clive Rice-captained team that was in India to play its first series after the end of the apartheid era in South Africa. Back then, hardly anyone knew about Cronje but when, nine years later, he visited India for the fifth time – having toured there in 1993 and twice in 1996 – this time as captain, he became the centre of a match-fixing storm that rocked the cricket world. The scandal led to bans on several players in India and South Africa. A few of the players later returned to cricket but the match-fixing earthquake was so severe that its tremors are still intermittently felt today.

#### **QAISER MOHAMMAD ALI**

• • •

I’m not sure how you’re supposed to pronounce “MI Cape Town”. And the fact that cricket – intelligent, literate, pedantic cricket! – has begun to throw us such shouty, mindless challenges fills me with despair.

But let’s assume the Cape Town franchise taking part in South Africa’s latest stab at an IPL-style T20 league rhymes with “pie”. That it’s supposed to tap into a Capetonian sense of loyalty and belonging. If that’s the case – spelling abominations notwithstanding – we may at least be sure that MI’s marketing dream team have plenty to work with.

The Newlands faithful are a peculiarly parochial bunch, you see. I know. I’m one of them.

#### **RICHARD ASHER**

• • •

I learned only recently that Sir Geoff Hurst, England’s hat-trick hero in the 1966 World Cup final, played a single first-class game for Essex in 1962 alongside Trevor Bailey and Jim Laker. No matter that he spent three days in Liverpool where he batted at No.10 against Lancashire, didn’t score a run or have a bowl; Hurst might not have made it as a professional cricketer but he did achieve first-class status and that marks him out as a very decent player. Around that period, indeed for many years prior to then and right up to the mid-1970s, it would be possible at any one time to identify perhaps half a dozen individuals who, unlike Hurst, did successfully manage to combine both football and cricket professionally. But things have changed. It seems that it is no longer feasible to compete in both first-class cricket and league football. These days it has to be one or the other.

#### **JOHN STONE**

• • •

In any writing, the start has to be right. If not, readers stop reading.

I’ve had five kind cricketers write forewords to my books. Walter Hadlee helped with my research and inspired me to complete my first book, *NZ Cricket Captains* (2002): “I’ve read the manuscript and found it quite absorbing.” Stephen Fleming kindly wrote one too. His manager David Howman helped: “I am fortunate to have followed outstanding individuals such as Walter.”

Peter Sharp did the honours for *Canterbury Cricket 100 Greats* (2002). Sharp was a former Canterbury off spinner turned schoolmaster and radio commentator. He used to tell me off.

“What’ve you been up to?”

“I’ve been proofreading your bloody book.”

#### **MATT APPLEBY**

• • •

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