

SAMPLE EDITION

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SPRING 2023

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.

Edited by Matt Thacker, *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 41 – SPRING 2023

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# THE WEEK OF LIVING DANGEROUSLY

*Cameron Ponsonby on his Pakistan experience.*

As we touch down in Islamabad, my new friend Shaz, sitting two along to my left, gives me his number and insists I have dinner with his family. It's a wholesome, lovely, start to the trip.

Not a half-a-second later and Kamran, my other new friend who's immediately to my left, slides me his business card and mutters under his breath: "If you want any girls, or any gear. Give me a call."

Righto. I guess we're in Pakistan.

• • •

For the first time in 17 years, England are back in Pakistan. A terrorist attack on the Sri Lankan team in 2009 had forced all international cricket to come to a halt and it would be over a decade before any touring teams returned. Sri Lanka themselves had come back, so too the West Indies, South Africa and also Australia. Now, it was the turn of England, who had played some T20s in the country in October, but the Tests in December were the real showpiece.

The tour would take place across three cities: Rawalpindi, Multan and Karachi. Three siblings born of the same family but with vastly different characters. Rawalpindi, the quiet, beautiful town where your grandparents live. Karachi the wild city whose underground scene bubbles visibly above the surface and Multan, where something might have happened at some point in history but I'd be damned if it was of any interest. I hated my week in Multan. And yet it sits fondest in my memories.

Sit next to Multan at a dinner party and you'll leave two hours later shell-shocked but none the wiser. Chaotic and in your face, Multan works in recruitment. What just happened? Multan just happened.

Of course, it would be naive to the point of ignorance to claim any sort of deep understanding of a nation experienced through a four-week, police convoy-fuelled, gora gap year-styled, David Attenborough extravaganza. You saw the bits you were meant to see, you didn't see the bits you weren't.

Multan, for instance, far from being a culture-less void, is one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world. It was founded by the great grandson of the Prophet Noah. As in, *that* Noah. The one with the big boat.

And yet security measures meant it existed for me largely between the four walls of the Continental hotel with only the sound of the dual carriageway outside and Shoaib Akhtar (not that one) behind the desk for company. In all, it was a month in Pakistan that was a continuous push and pull of what you could, couldn't, would and wouldn't, be allowed to see.

• • •

Inspector Ali is a big bastard. Built like Henry VIII, he's got a beret, a moustache, a cigarette on the go and a gun on his hip. He tells me I'm not going anywhere tonight. I agree. Good point, Ali. I hadn't thought of it that way.

Ali is part of the "normal" police. But his colleagues in the Special Forces seem filled with even more *joie de vivre*. The logo plastered across their back says "No Fear" in English and it is made up of bullets and guns as if an eight-year-old had been tasked with creating the most comically evil get-up you could imagine.

In Multan, the second stop on the trip, security is by far the highest it has been in Pakistan. And no one really knows why. Some mutter that it's because the Taliban recently called off a ceasefire. Others say it's because of a gang-related shooting that occurred near the team hotel. Both of these things are true in isolation but false in context.

The truth lies blurrily in the fact that whereas Islamabad and Karachi had hosted a number of games before, Multan hadn't. A few ODIs against the West Indies in March but that was it. Routines weren't set in stone, no one really knew what was what and so it was all dialled up to 11.

Arriving at the hotel where I was meant to be staying, I was turned away for being foreign. It took me a while to realise the man behind the desk was being serious.

"No foreigners allowed."

"Excuse me?"

"No foreigners allowed."

Only a handful of hotels in the city were allowed to host non-Pakistanis. Those locations were provided with around-the-clock police presence, with guests not allowed to go anywhere without an armed guard in attendance. A friend spoke of the surreal moment during a rare dinner out where the armed policeman, perched awkwardly at the end of the table, finished his shift and was replaced by a new policeman with a new gun. Evening all. Don't mind me.

The tour was too big to fail for Pakistan. And if these were the requirements for the ECB to be satisfied and cricket to continue its return then so be it. But it did result in an at times farcical week.

After confirming I wasn't going to be allowed to stay in hotel number one, the man behind the counter set about ringing half the city until he found somewhere where there was still room at the inn. I was stuck

on the back of one motorbike, my suitcase ferried by two other lads on another, and we criss-crossed our way through night-time Multan and to the Hotel Continental, where Shoaib and Inspector Ali awaited.

My relationship with Shoaib got off to a rocky start. It had been a long day. The six-hour convoy down from Islamabad had come in at closer to 10 and the stress of arriving in an unknown city and then being moved across town to a second anonymous hotel where there was, as it stood, the promise of only one night, was beginning to kick in. A situation that wasn't helped when Shoaib chastised me for not having booked with them directly and being sent by a different hotel.

"Now we have to pay them a referral fee," he sighed in genuine irritation.

"Sorry. I didn't realise," were the words that came out of my mouth; and "F\*\*k you, f\*\*k you and f\*\*k you", the ones that stayed in.

The situation was calmed by Hasan, a British-Pakistani from London who was in town for work. Realising that I was out of cash, he covered my room. And realising that I was stressed, and by this point also hungry, took me out for dinner with his colleagues. It had been one of the worst days of the trip, followed by one of the best evenings. The full Multan experience.

• • •

The next challenge was getting to the ground. Officially, I was meant to travel with the other fans staying in the hotel who, for the most part, had found

themselves in the same situation as I had the previous night. Also officially, this wasn't going to work. The rest of the media were staying in hotels a ten-minute walk up the road and were leaving earlier and getting back later. Times that I too needed to travel.

Getting out for dinner the previous night had been negotiated by Hasan and his colleagues, who had found the whole ordeal ludicrous. There were seven in their group, who had so far been able to come and go as they pleased, but add in the need for the Caucasian carpet to be rolled out and things were confused. As ever, the answer came in the shape of a gun. And we all went out for dinner once a personal armed guard for me was arranged.

But now I was by myself. And the idea of a white lad strolling about by himself wasn't an option. Fortunately, working in cricket was a cheat code in Pakistan. And the big bad Inspector Ali soon became my best mate. While the special forces wanted all journeys made in cars, Ali had a motorbike. When other policemen told me I had to queue and wait my turn, Ali, once again, had a motorbike.

Each morning, he'd greet me with a big handshake and tell me he liked me - "I like you, Cameron." Then he'd turn to his colleague and confirm what he had already said - "I like this guy" - and finish by saying that before I left I must give him my number and we'll message on WhatsApp. Anything for you, Ali.

And like magic, in the time this interaction took to play out, a

motorbike would appear and I'd be whisked away. The first two times, the policeman driving would take me the seven-sides-of-an-octagon route to the other hotel. But once we'd mutually and silently agreed that no one cared, it'd be straight along the much shorter, much more illegal route that took us up a one-way road and passed the gates of Multan's high court.

"The high court," the policeman pointed as we drove past. "Very corrupt."

It'll forever remain the contradiction of security in Pakistan to me. That, in Multan at least, I was at all times guarded by a policeman with a gun, and that same policeman would drive me the wrong way up a one-way road, past the corrupt high court as the wind blew through my helmetless hair. We can't have you getting shot. But we can have you squashed.

• • •

In truth, the trip threatened to finish without ever a glimpse of the "real" Pakistan. In Islamabad we had been treated to a fantastic evening out in a beautiful mountain-side restaurant. We had also visited the British High Commission, which was a bizarre make-believe English village hidden behind three walls of high security in the middle of Islamabadshire. Both were events. And both were manufactured.

Similarly, a party was thrown for us in a Karachi mansion. A once-in-a-lifetime experience, but as much the "real" Karachi as the set of *Made in Chelsea* is the "real" London. And, on the off

chance of ever getting another invite, absolutely nothing about it shall be written here. Just know that there was a statue of a hippo on a moped by the front door.

It was both sod's law but also a relief that sprinklings of Pakistan arrived once the cricket was over and everyone had returned home. With two days left before my own flight, my Pakistani colleagues took me out, with evenings ending up at a late night tea joint rather than a hotel bar and arguments over Karachi vs Lahore bias thrashed out rather than who bats five when Jonny Bairstow is back.

My very final hours in Pakistan were spent at the home of my hotel manager in Karachi, having a Christmas dinner.

An undercurrent throughout the trip had been Pakistani Christians introducing themselves to me with, "I'm Christian too". And somehow it never felt appropriate to explain that, well, actually, I haven't really believed in that since primary school.

So, no. For the sake of politeness. I was Christian Cam. Protestant, Church of England. Forgive me father for I am lying.

For the most part this caused no internal conflict, with pleasantries exchanged, the day of the other person improved and the world moving on. The only difficulty came when I ended up talking to Musaddiq, the hotel manager, on most days of my stay, and, within a wider invitation, he said that it would be his honour to have another Christian over to his house so close to Christmas.

Errrrr....Amen.

Furthermore, for reasons I never fully grasped, the trip had to be done in secret. Musaddiq had conflicts with one of the taxi drivers at the hotel who was a devout Muslim and had a relative who was high up in the hotel business. The driver had been giving me lifts throughout the week and before any trip, Musaddiq would tell me the price and tell me not to accept any changes. I didn't think anything of it until later when he explained that the driver wasn't to be trusted and referred to his faith. Types like him were bad people, Cameron, but you'd know that, wouldn't you? Good Christian that you are.

It was a brief insight into religious politics within the nation and nothing more, but a contributory factor to why we left for dinner under the pretence

of Mussadiq taking me to the shop along the road, before ordering a rickshaw once we were out of sight. And I was dropped off a block away afterwards so I could walk the rest by myself with a reminder not to mention where I'd been.

Secrecy aside, it was a fantastic end to the trip. I was taken into a home, rather than a hotel, and treated to an array of delicious food. I met Musaddiq's wife, a teacher, and his three children, who were excited for Christmas.

As I left I was presented with a traditional shawl, had photos taken and thanked them for their hospitality, before returning to the hotel and getting straight into the taxi to take me to the airport. It had taken a month, but whatever the "real" Pakistan is, I'd found it. Just.

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## EXTRACTS

Imagine if your seven-times-great great-grandchildren rocked up in a time machine, and told you that 300 years in the future you were in the history books – what would you want to be there for? Your extraordinary love life? Your world-changing inventions? Your work saving the planet from the damage wrought by industrialisation?

### IAN MARCHANT

• • •

Not only were the sport's historical roots in single-innings contests, but the idea of a knockout event in cricket had been around for almost as long as the FA Cup. As early as 1893, a couple of decades after the launch of football's oldest competition, MCC had canvassed counties about such a tournament. Few had wanted it; six teams agreed to trial it; and, after one initial game between Kent and Sussex at Lord's, everyone abandoned it.

### DAVID TOSSELL

• • •

sandwiches glued together like we were glued to our seats, the match

out there unblinking, stoic figures in coloured clothing, England bowling

in the height of the sun, not a cloud in sight, the Durham crowd unbowed

### S.J LITHERLAND

• • •

Drinks flow, the Barmy Army are in voice and there's a distinct feeling that this could be a pub anywhere in the world. Someone points to an impossibly beautiful Pakistani man across the bar. With his chiselled jaw, washboard stomach and flowing locks, I assume he's a film star. Instead, I'm told that he's the plastic surgeon who fixed Malala's face. Two nights previous, she had been staying in my hotel in Lahore.

In the corner, Vic Marks and Simon Mann stand unobtrusive, silently getting more and more irate as the man in front of them gives running updates on the game. "Mbappe scores this," he announces to no one in particular, the feed on his phone running about two minutes ahead of the game being projected "live" on the huge, whitewashed wall.

### WILLIAM DOBSON

• • •

It is hard to overstate how visible and integral cricket is as part of Pakistani culture, even in the mountains. From using the dual carriageways of Islamabad as a wicket, to playing in grounds carved out of the mountains surrounded by jagged peaks, every inch of the country is a potential wicket. Sunset is the hour when everyone comes out to play, and in one park alone, we witnessed some 30 games going on simultaneously, each criss-crossing through one another, making it impossible to follow the ball.

### MICHAEL SHERIDAN

• • •

On the face of it, cricket and chess seem worlds apart. Yet an outdoor team sport and an indoor game played between two individuals have more in common than the complexity of their rules. Both are subject of a "battle for the soul" with new formats bringing broader appeal while challenging the supremacy of the format long held to represent the true mark of champions.

### JEREMY SMITH

• • •

Approximately 1.5 million South Asians live in Qatar. That's five for every one Qatari (at only 350,000 people, Qatari nationals are a small minority in their own country). South Asians can be found at all rungs on the Qatar social hierarchy. Indian accountants, Sri Lankan HR managers and Pakistani engineers keep state ministries running and private business ticking over. Most low-paid manual labour in Qatar is completed by South Asians. They range from Muslims to Hindus, Sikhs and Christians. They hail from Karachi, Kerala, Kathmandu and Colombo and speak Punjabi, Tamil, Sinhalese, Malayalam and Bengali. The subcontinent in all its extreme diversity is represented.

South Asia's favourite sport – cricket – has become Qatar's.

### JOHN MCMANUS

• • •

Again: "I can honestly say I never had any real periods of self-doubt or ever questioned what I was doing there or whether I would be better off at home" – the final phrase of which is not necessarily how Laurie Potter remembers it. "I used to get phone calls on a Friday night, Kev saying 'If you're not going to bowl me more I'm going home.' I would tell him I was captain and I do what is right for the team. 'If it's right for you to bowl, you will bowl.' Looking back, I was surprised by how often I didn't bowl, and that was basically to give Kev a go, to try and keep him happy. He obviously had ability with the ball at that stage, but he wasn't doing as good a job as Bully and I were. He turned it big, but didn't have the consistency. I felt he could be more successful for us as a batter."

By sublime coincidence, 2000 was the year Harry Enfield's absurdly stropky teenager, Kevin Patterson, received a movie-length platform for his huffing and sulking, *Kevin and Perry Go Large*. Meanwhile, having gone large against Smethwick, the still-teenage Kevin Pietersen's mood was improved somewhat by an invitation to bowl at Edgbaston in the lead-up to England's series-opening Test against West Indies, who had seven lefties in their top eight to be exploited (the visitors won by an innings).

### SCOTT OLIVER

• • •

As with daily life, so it is with sport. The more obscure the better. I once dragged (well, he came willingly) a friend to San Marino to watch their national football team play Estonia. To say we were there, even more so as the Sammarinese snatched a rare point, is surely a bar-room tale to trump having been one of 80,000 England fans at Wembley.

### PAUL EADE

• • •

This is how it always begins. Suddenly, the door shakes in its frame. A key stirs wildly in the stomach of the padlock and the links of the door chain jostle each other like metal punks in a mosh pit. Someone curses the padlock and walks away.

They're coming for me. Again.

### JAMES THELLUSSON

• • •

As well as matching his best single-season haul, for Saltaire in the Bradford League in 1922, reaching 150 would be an apposite addition to his feats of longevity. When Barnes became an OAP in 1938, it was still something of an achievement, rather than the routine rite of later-life passage it has since become. Life expectancy rose substantially during his lifetime, but was still in the low 60s.

If not already invalids, 65-year-old males were not expected to do anything much more physically demanding than gentle golf, bowls or gardening. Barnes, meanwhile, signed up for his 44th consecutive year as a professional cricketer.

### HUW RICHARDS

• • •

This winter has been a busy one for England's senior teams. The Over-60s have been in Barbados for the Big Man Caribbean Cup, a series of matches dubbed "The Grey Ashes". Over 10,000 miles away, "The Silver Ashes" are also taking place, in Queensland, with England's Over-70s taking on Australia in three ODIs, as well as playing eight matches against other local sides.

These are grown men living out their childhood fantasies. And they're loving it.

### RICHARD EDWARDS

• • •

Wittgenstein became fascinated with cricket and followed the game keenly, having been a student at Cambridge University and later teaching and carrying out research there for many years, so finding himself in the company of many who enjoyed the game. Analogies with cricket are to be found in a number of his writings. On learning this, I became curious about what he may have come up with on the issue of how best to establish batting averages as a single indicator of comparative ability.

### PETER KETTLE

• • •

The team's successful run is well-known, but what is less known is that the Mean Machine was the first South African side to break the colour barrier. At its peak, the team lined up as follows: Jimmy Cook, Henry Fotheringham, Alvin Kallicharran, Graeme Pollock, Clive Rice, Kevin McKenzie, Alan Kourie, Ray Jennings, Hugh Page, Neal Radford, Sylvester Clarke.

#### C.S.CHIWANZA

• • •

Frank Chester lost his right arm in the First World War. He was just 22 years old. This was a personal tragedy which robbed cricket of one of its brightest young players and led ultimately to the early introduction of Chester to the umpires' panel. Almost certainly as a consequence of his relative youth in comparison with his newly acquired peers, Chester was better able to demonstrate the commitment and levels of concentration required to take umpiring to a considerably higher level. In short, Chester was the first great umpire. It was he who trod the path which the very best umpires have since followed. But while the elevation of umpiring standards will always be his principal legacy, no consideration of his overall contribution to the game would be complete without some reference to his brief but brilliant playing career.

#### JOHN STONE

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