

SAMPLE EDITION

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SPRING 2025

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.

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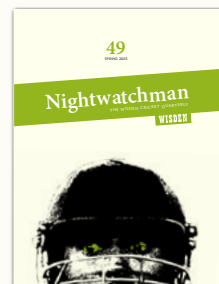
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## CRICKET SAVED MY LIFE

*Annie Chave meets Waleed Khan, left for dead in a terrorist attack, but who has recovered thanks to his love of cricket*

*A loud noise; deafening bang after deafening bang. A piercing sound cuts through the air and fills your ears, replacing the laughter that a moment ago had rung out across the room like music. A dark stream of blood replaces the wide smile that had lit up your friend's face. He has been shot. Shot in the head. He falls to the ground, one of a growing body count littering the hall.*

*It's confusion rather than terror that fills you. Minutes ago, you were standing happily on the stage in your school hall with your teachers. Now it is a battlefield as men with guns burst through the doors. "Shoot at their heads," they shout. A cacophony of chaos and screaming, gun shots, frenzied footsteps. Searing pain like you've never known. You've been shot in the face, and you cry out with a mixture of despair and agony. The gunman comes closer, searches your tear-filled eyes. Seeing that you're not dead he shoots you. Again and again. You're hit six times, your jaw spread across your face, your teeth lost, your nose broken,*

*but you are not dead; helpless, but not dead. You are left to die in pain.*

*In this nightmare, you realise that if you want to stay alive you need to leave the smoke-filled auditorium. Unable to help your dying friends, you manage to crawl out, but you're so weak that you fall, and those fleeing behind you in blind panic trample over your broken body. No one is looking down, only ahead, desperate to escape. You can't speak because your face is an open wound, and your hands and wrists are trampled on and broken in the terror of the moment. You are paralysed with fear and pain.*

*You are discarded in a pile of the dead and struggle to stay conscious. You can't move, can't talk. You are dimly aware of the emergency services that have replaced the terrorists, and of the true horror unravelling around you. School transformed into war zone. You do everything you can to breathe deeply, blood bubbling in your open mouth, somehow knowing that to stay*

*awake is your only chance, and then you are discovered. You remember nothing more.*

• • •

I meet with Waleed in Birmingham in September 2023. He is a delightful and incredibly sincere 21-year-old with fading scars on his face, a battlefield of bruising signalling the atrocities that a young life should never have witnessed. His recovery, he claims, is down to superb medical support, his family, friends, and an intense passion for cricket.

A school should be a haven, and the Army Public School was seen as the best in the Peshawar area of Pakistan, Waleed explains as he begins to relay his story to me: a well-practised monologue of a terrible tale. His parents would have been content knowing their two youngest sons were safely at school. It was 16 December 2014, a normal morning sitting in the café with his friends at breakfast, still basking in the glory of their latest sporting success. The week before, he and his friends they had won the inter-school sports competition, winning prizes in table tennis, cricket and basketball. It was a fantastic achievement and they had been greeted with much praise. "We were in celebration mode," he tells me. "We could not stop talking about it."

Waleed, at 12 years old, was not only captain of the cricket team but also one of the school's youngest ever head boys. After breakfast, together with around 500 students aged between 11 and 18, he attended a first aid talk in the main hall. One of the bonuses of being head boy was to be on the stage with the principal and, on this occasion,

the army doctor, who was delivering the talk. He was standing up there, between these two men, judiciously avoiding eye contact with the friend who was trying to make him laugh when gunshots were heard. With an army barracks next door, these were not unusual sounds, so there was no immediate concern inside the huge auditorium, but the reassuring words from the principal were soon silenced as the shooting became closer and louder. So loud.

The teachers' smiles began to fade as they rose to lock the doors, instinctively telling everyone to hide under their chairs. A deathly silence inside; a barrage of bullets outside, released into the bodies of the hapless gardeners. The group of terrorists made their way up the steps to the front of the school and broke through the doors of the hall. 153 people were killed in the brutal attack, 132 of them children. Waleed lost all of his close friends in a matter of moments. 27 Twenty-seven members of his class were killed – every single person except him. His place on the stage meant that he witnessed the full horror of the vicious attack. "I stayed standing where I was on the stage, too confused to move," he says, and the stark reality is that had he been with his friends, he would not have survived.

Not that the stage remained safe for long. Waleed himself soon became a target and, after he had been shot repeatedly it is incredible he managed to move as far as he did. It certainly saved his life. It was only when he was finally found that he lost consciousness. He was rushed straight to hospital, but his chances were slim: 0.5% slim, he was later told. "They told my family that they should not expect me to survive,



and the doctors gave them an eight-day cut-off, which meant that if I didn't regain consciousness by then they would not continue to treat me."

Fortunately, on the eighth day Waleed woke from his coma. He had been given another chance, a last-gasp reprieve. His immediate reaction when he woke, he says, was to panic and try to tear the oxygen mask off his face, to free himself from the bed. Terror was still foremost in his mind, and he was petrified if any doctor or any stranger entered his room for days afterwards. His survival was a miracle, and his family worked hard to protect him from the truth of the event, not allowing him to see his own face or to hear all that had happened. "My mother even tried to convince me I'd been in a bicycle accident," he smiles, but he had some recollection, his memory returning like the end of the reel in an old movie. It was when he was finally left alone that he decided he needed to search for the truth. He found the news on the internet. "When I saw it on social media," he tells me, "It was the most devastating thing in my life."

He'd known it was a massive attack. He could remember the noise and the pain, reliving the fear every time he closed his eyes, but learning the whole truth meant he had to come to terms with losing his friends all over again. And then, when he finally saw his face in a mirror, it was another hammer blow. The person looking back at him was so changed. So damaged. "I thought how am I going to face the world now? It took away all of my self-esteem. I had nothing left."

As well as being subjected to long and complicated surgery, Waleed was suffering from post-traumatic

stress disorder. He received regular counselling and was carefully supported by his family. Because of the number of operations, the recovery time needed, plus the inevitable mental-health issues, it was two years before he was able to return to education. In the meantime, he needed an outlet. That came in the form of cricket, his great passion, and it helped not only to give him a sense of normality and focus, but also to get him to follow a "yellow brick" pathway that led to some of the best experiences of his life.

It is clear from the way he recounts it that he received very careful treatment, both under the knife and in the counsellor's chair, but the reality was Waleed had just reached his teenage years and needed to lose the victim status that had been stamped on his face with such cruel scars. Thankfully, early on in his time in hospital, whilst recovering from major surgery both in Pakistan and in England, Waleed had two experiences that had a huge impact on his journey of recovery.

The first was a fairy tale for any fan of cricket. Just before he left for England, the Pakistan cricket team were playing the 2015 Cricket World Cup, and the players all came to visit him in hospital. Among the visitors was Shahid Afridi, who, as Waleed excitedly explains, was and is his ultimate hero. He had followed the Pakistani team avidly since he was a young child, letting cricket rule his moods, as so many sports fans do.

Before the incident, Waleed admits with a shy smile, he attributed many of his happiest and darkest moments to the successes and failures of the Pakistani cricket team, finding it hard to separate their results from the successes and failures of his own life. "Since my

childhood I've been really attached to cricket - it was my elder brother who got me watching it from a very early age, and I remember, in 2011, when Pakistan lost the [ODI World Cup] semi-final to India, three days afterwards, when I got my exam results and I'd done very well, I was so miserable that the teachers asked my mum why isn't he happy? And she had to say he's still unhappy about the cricket."

It was an amazing experience for Waleed to meet the Pakistan side, his heroes all there to see him and him alone. It was hard though, he agrees, not to have his friends to share this with. How often, when your dreams meet reality, do you want to reach out to those closest to you and relive the experience with them? But the visit reinforced just how much cricket and those who played it mattered to him, and this served to give renewed purpose to a life that, for the previous year, had been solely focused on recovery and loss.

It took five long and very tough months before his body was sufficiently healed to allow him to travel to Birmingham for the necessary facial reconstruction. His panic had subsided, but it was a very fragile young man who arrived in England six months after the nightmare attack.

His past life was left behind, although the massacre constantly replayed in his memory, his brain still fighting desperately to alter the inevitable ending. The hospital in Birmingham was a sanctuary of sorts, but it was hard to escape the online media story that pursued him. His father left his job in Pakistan to travel with him and stay at his side as he recovered and underwent endless operations.

The second experience took place shortly after he had made the journey to England and was trying to adjust to life in hospital when a stranger, who had heard his story, set about trying to improve his situation through a shared love of cricket. Waleed had just undergone a 12-hour operation which left him even more incapacitated than before. "In order to reconstruct my jaw, they had to take a bone from my leg, which meant I wasn't able to walk. My doctors told me I wouldn't be able to walk without crutches for four to six months. It was quite a hard thing for me, being such a cricket lover."

Shortly after this surgery, Farukh Kazi, the owner of Forward Drive Cricket Academy in Birmingham, a man who claims to eat and sleep cricket, got in touch to ask if there was anything he could do to help him. Farukh has a true generosity of spirit and Waleed is one of many he has invited into his home. Aged 13, having barely left his hospital bed in months, accompanied by his dad, this young boy, leaning heavily on his crutches, must have been overwhelmed by being in a new environment with children his own age again. It's hard to imagine what mental pictures it must have evoked, but the cricket bug is a strong one, and he found himself unable merely to stand by and watch. "It was tough to watch other kids playing and, as they were showing me around, I kept saying I wanted to bowl. Everyone, including my dad, kept saying that I couldn't and that it was too difficult on crutches, but I was so desperate." Eventually, seeing that there was no telling him, they gave him a tennis ball and told him to be careful and not hurt himself. "I was holding my crutches, and I started bowling with the other hand, that's how much I wanted to bowl."

The cricket flame had been reignited, and that meant that he could start identifying as a cricketer, not a victim of terrorism. That identification will never leave him, he's quick to say, but before he could become the inspiration to others that he has become, he needed to find a reason to recover.

"The reason I started walking earlier than expected was when I looked at those kids playing cricket, I had such a longing to do the same. I was there with my crutches, unsteady on my feet after getting out of a bed that I'd been in for such a long, long time, and I didn't want to be there any more. There was a voice inside that was shouting at me 'Join in!'. I wanted to go back on that field and do what I was best at and what I loved the most. Sport does that, it takes you out of yourself."

Over the following months, Farukh treated him as part of his family, and later, when Waleed was able to move without crutches, he allowed him to come and go as often as he needed at the academy, with free access to all the facilities. He went there regularly, working obsessively on his strength and fitness, and getting stronger and stronger, eventually being able to run again, albeit not as fast as before. It was a huge part of his recovery, both physically and mentally, and it meant that, after two years, when he was able to start school he had the confidence and the strength to sign up and get selected for the cricket team. "Cricket is more than just sport," he said in a BBC film about his recovery. "When I'm upset or having those nightmares, it really plays a big role. Cricket is one of the most important things in my life, it really helped me in my rehabilitation process."

As in Pakistan, Waleed went on to be the captain of the school team. Despite his obvious injuries he could still bowl at a good pace. "Everyone was shocked when I bowled my first ball and asked me, 'How can you bowl so fast?'" he tells me conspiratorially. He lights up when he talks of cricket. The shy seriousness is replaced by an almost arrogant countenance that is so alien to this self-effacing, quietly spoken young man. It is the self-confidence that comes with ability.

His skill with the ball was such that he was recommended to Warwickshire and he went along for their trials. Unfortunately, the nets coincided with another leg operation, which meant that at the same time as he was starting his recovery, he had temporary post-op problems with his running. "When I went for my trials, it was something I wanted to take forward," he tells me, "but then it struck me that I was going to have more and more surgery, and realistically I would train for maybe three or four months, and then another surgery would be required, and I would need to leave my training for it."

This is a maturity that can only come to someone who has already lived a lifetime of horror and sadness, I think as I digest his words. Most young people would either feel sorry for themselves or think only of a future return to full fitness. Waleed is pragmatic beyond his years and for a while we discuss his 'living for the moment' attitude. He is very assured about this. "One thing that changed in me after this incident is that now I always live in the day. I always feel that if I get through this day, then that's great, it's my achievement."

It's a sobering way of thinking, but I can't deny it is understandable. How

do you plan for a future when you've been so close to losing yours? Time spent at the academy helped Waleed to keep focused. He talks a lot in these terms, so adept at using positive language, language he's learned from years of counselling, and years of his own motivational speaking thereafter. It was through the training and the strengthening work he did at the academy - endlessly bowling, endlessly practising - that he felt confident enough to approach two local clubs.

He joined Lyndworth CC and Weoley Hill CC Junior team. This was another step up. "I'm a different person on the cricket pitch." He looks at me as he says this. It's something he doesn't do readily. His eyes, that by some miracle escaped injury in the attack, are so dark and yet so expressive now as he talks about the Waleed he is on the pitch, where he is able once again to be part of a team and thus to travel beyond the hospital boundary, losing himself in the competition on the field.

"When I play cricket, I'm incredibly passionate about it, and sometimes I get really aggressive and competitive too. I get lost in a different world and you see a different me. It was the reason I so wanted to play again. Number one, it was my passion, and number two, I needed desperately to get away from all the negativity that surrounded me. It takes me to another world, one where I don't think about those things and where I'm just engaged in the game. It has helped me so much just by playing a lot of matches. It gives me a sense of freedom and has helped my physical and mental recovery."

Waleed, I suggest to him, has needed what he has learned through cricket to gain the confidence, after two years

away, to step into a school building and face education again. "Yes, the trauma sticks with you," he admits, "but going back to school was the best decision I ever made."

He joined the University of Birmingham School, and it was tough, tougher than we can imagine, where he repeated, relived, repeated, relived. Where noises and strangers made him jump every day. "After weeks of people asking, 'Why do you look like that? Why have you got scars on your face?' I had had enough," he sighs, the frustration clear in his tone of voice.

He decided to do one of the bravest things he could possibly do. Stepping out of the social shadows that he hid in, he asked to stand up on stage and, in front of the whole school, in full detail, he told them what had happened. "I'd become antisocial because of the trauma, and I didn't want to make any friends because I had this fear of losing them again, so doing that was a big step for me. The moment I got up there I started regretting it, I was thinking, what am I going to say to them all? The night before, in my room, I had tried to write it down and so my bedroom floor was full of screwed-up papers. I was worried I wouldn't be able to start, and it was truly terrifying to stand up there, but then, as I was thinking I'd made a terrible mistake, I remembered something my mentor in Pakistan, Muniba Mazari, told me. 'If you're talking to a room of 500 people, you know 499 people won't listen to you, but there will be one person who will be listening to you, and you're there for that one person, to change their life. Don't think of the other people, just think of that one person.' So, I just started talking and talking, and I don't know how long I was there,

but I noticed it had become very quiet, and when I looked up, I saw tears in the students' eyes and the teachers were crying. It was the first time someone had got a standing ovation in our school, and that's when I realised my words had so much power because of the story I had to tell. Something that I thought of as my weakness was actually my biggest strength."

Waleed can only nod when I suggest he has now become a celebrity in his school. And it's true, he is now well known across the country for the motivational speeches he has gone on to give. He is keen, he says, to share his story with other young people, and to help them understand how terrorist organisations work, how they try to radicalise people using the umbrella of religion. "I want to show their true face by talking about everything my friends and I went through." Shortly after he gave his school speech, Waleed became one of the early ambassadors for the #Iwill movement, which was started in 2013 by the then Prince Charles. It was set up to give opportunities to young people to express and assert themselves. This is a movement that Waleed fits perfectly, since it gives both support and empowerment for the young "to make a positive difference on issues that affect their lives, their communities and broader society". I can see that it is a movement he clearly loves, and he promotes it brilliantly.

Waleed has also spoken within the cricketing world. In 2019 he was invited to talk at a fundraiser for the Shahid Afridi Foundation. In his naturally self-deprecating way, when we speak of this, he is more excited about sharing a table with the great man than about the fact that he was asked to speak there, but he does admit that it was a

great delightful experience. It's hard to imagine that there were many dry eyes in the house.

The emotion was certainly in evident and widespread when, in 2018, he was invited onto Test Match Special during the second day of the England v Pakistan Test Match at Headingley. "I didn't know it was such a big thing before I got there," he admits. During his interview with Jonathan Agnew, as well as talking about the role cricket has played in his recovery, he praised his mother, who gave him strength immediately after he discovered the true horror of the attack. "I was so angry at first," he told Agnew, "but she told me to look positively at the fact I was saved and to get better for my friends." She inspired the idea that it was better to finish this incident with education rather than anger. And Waleed, to the thousands listening, shared a well-rehearsed and deeply felt statement: "With guns and bullets we can only kill a terrorist. With education we can kill terrorism." He may well have made some listeners blush when he claimed that "kids here take the opportunities and the peace in their country for granted." His message was clear. "I've been given the opportunity to change lives," he said. And there is little doubt that he inspired some cricket fans that day.

Again though, Waleed tells me, he was overwhelmed by having so many great cricketers in the box with him. He was so humbled, he smiles, to be in the box with Waqar Younis, Wasim Akram and Geoffrey Boycott. The view from there, he said, was incredible, and the whole experience surreal. Second only to this was appearing in the same 2019 edition of Wisden as Imran Khan, who had recently become Prime Minister.

"So, you've finished your further education and done your A levels, What now?" I ask. "I always live in the day," he replies, but he does admit to having long-term plans. "I just don't worry too much about them." "So, if it's not cricket, what are the plans?" I ask. The answer, "I want to pursue a career in aerospace," isn't what I expected, but then I ponder. He's obviously a very intelligent young man, he's undergone one of the worst experiences anyone could endure and not only overcome it but made something positive out of it. Why not aerospace? They'd be lucky to have him.

"And cricket?" I ask, and there it is, that twinkle in his eye, that lop-sided smile, that air of authority and confidence. "I have more surgery planned next year," he explains, "but I play when I can." He has a new role now though. "I take my younger brother to the academy to play, he's passionate about cricket. He was still very young when he joined me in England, and he'd see me watching Test or one-day cricket and ask, 'Why are you watching this?' He was only interested in T20s at the time, but the more he watched the more addicted he became, he kept saying, 'This is real cricket,' and he got hooked."

We talk for a while about the limitations of T20 cricket and the joy of Tests. It is hard to exaggerate the sparkle and the change in him as he describes the Tests played on green pitches and the competition between bat and ball. But mostly we talk of a sense of unity unification that the game of cricket instils and how, with a good number of overs in the day, Test cricket is, as Waleed says, "the best example of discipline, unity and determination." He wants to help his brother, he says, to experience the joy of cricket, but also to

maybe go on and have the professional experience that he couldn't. "He's started playing for his school team and is learning to bowl leg spin. I practise with him as much as I can because I want him to take further what I wasn't able to."

It's significant, and eerily poignant, that his brother is currently the age Waleed was when the attack happened. A perfect age to develop your potential, I suggest. A moment, but just a moment, of silence, while the reality reaches those cautious eyes. "Yesterday," he says with a laugh, "he was home ill from school, and instead of lying in bed he asked if he could go and play cricket, and so mum grounded him, saying he was supposed to be ill."

Waleed plans to take his brother to Edgbaston as much as he can, both to watch games and to play in the indoor facilities there. He tries to go as much as possible to watch England, but of course Pakistan, and especially the team he grew up with and met, are his passion. He has nothing but praise for Babar Azam, whom he describes as "a game changer". It was when he watched Babar score a hundred live in the World Cup in 2019 at Edgbaston when Pakistan beat New Zealand that he became a huge fan. "Babar Azam can play all formats, he's our Virat Kohli," he beams. It's easy to love the Pakistan team, we agree, and we slip happily into discussing their unpredictability.

And so Waleed, spared death by the barest of margins, will go on to inspire. His motivational speaking and his volunteering work are extremely important to him. No, he won't be the Pakistan cricketer he dreamt of being as a young boy, but he's made a big impact in the world that he inhabits.

“The incident has taught me that real happiness is living for others. I don’t think I got this second chance without a purpose. It happened and it was terrible, but I have to live with it now and make the best of it. The worst thing I can do is to feel sorry for myself, and I know that because I was in that place for a while, as we’re all human, but giving up on something is not helpful. My face lowered my self-esteem to begin with, but the day I accepted myself the way I am was the day I started meeting people, when I started talking and feeling confident and feeling better.”

And I honestly believe he does feel better, I think as we finish our coffee, and I stop recording his voice. How else does a young man who has been a victim of such a traumatic experience agree to meet a stranger in a coffee shop and tell his story to

her? A story that involves so much sorrow, so much bravery and so much cricket. It’s huge credit to Waleed, and to the careful planning of his family, that he has been able not only to accept leaving his childhood home at such a vulnerable age but also to continue his education and fashion a life in a new country.

“You know to this day I don’t know how I managed to survive. I still dream of it sometimes, and even now if I’m walking through the city or there are strangers around I don’t feel comfortable, but cricket kick-started the process of surviving, and through that process I have become passionate about campaigning and helping others.”

This is an extract from Annie’s book *Cricket Changed My Life*, available to pre-order now.

• • •





## EXTRACTS

I suppose it was like someone in their sixties meeting an unrequited love from schooldays at a reunion and, discovering that both are unattached, heading off into the sunset for consummation of a long-held passion. At least that is how I felt when the delivery driver knocked on the front door and handed over a long rectangular package containing the object of my desire.

### DAVID TOSSELL

• • •

It's a warm, languorous Friday evening in September, the last weekend of the season. Half a dozen boys and girls, a coach and the odd parent are clustered around an artificial wicket in the centre of a vast outfield. Fielders dart after the ball and batters scamper up and down while parents idly watch on from the boundary.

It is a scene replicated in some form or other across England and the cricketing world as adults down tools and youngsters take up bat and ball to usher in the weekend. The scene in front of me, though, is playing out in central Porto, in a green enclave a few hundred yards north of the Douro where cricket has been played for about as long as it has at the MCG or The Oval.

### MARCUS LEROUX

• • •

Ensnconced in the little bubble his parents had created, Muyeye was blissfully unaware that first-class cricket was no longer played in Zimbabwe as he took his brand new bat to the backyard. In 2004, a player exodus had forced Zimbabwe to "voluntarily" agree to suspend international cricket. In 2005, those that remained went on strike, protesting the imposition of Mugabe's henchmen to positions in the Zimbabwe Cricket Union.

Things were so bad that in one particular case, Mashonaland fielded a team of 11 debutants, only two of whom averaged more than 10 with the bat. The best had an average of 15.5. Their captain, a specialist batter, averaged 5.7. He had never played beyond the weekend warrior level before assuming the captaincy.

### CS CHIWANZA

• • •

Things move slowly in the Vale of York: rivers, traffic, cricket administrations. It's probably down to the vale's glacial past, a broad plain scoured by ice inching down from the Dales and Pennines 20,000 years ago.

Sometimes things stop altogether. The glaciers did. The traffic definitely does. And last September, after 91 years, the York Vale Cricket League reached its terminus.

### LIAM HERRINGSHAW

• • •

Memory is of course necessarily finite, but even committing recollections to paper is no guarantee of immortality. The fragility of the written word is aptly illustrated by a note on the MCC's website, which tersely states "*Please Note: 1787-1820 No records remain - the fire of 28 July 1825 destroyed them*". The cause of this fire at Lord's was never established, but it is possible that a stray candle or discarded cigar ignited the wood in the pavilion at the still relatively new (third!) Lord's ground. Within an hour and a half, the flames had incinerated all but the brick foundations.

### OLIVER PARK

• • •



Apart from his penchant for playing big shots, two things fascinated India's swashbuckling batter-keeper Rishabh Pant when he was a child: silver and firecrackers. He continues to love them just as passionately as he did when he was growing up in Roorkee, a second-tier city some 200 kms north of New Delhi, located in the foothills of the Himalayas' Shivalik Hills. While it is natural for kids to get excited at the sight of the bright light of bursting firecrackers, it is unusual for a child to develop a liking for silver so early.

#### **KAISER MOHAMMAD ALI**

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In 1975, Gary Gilmour took nine wickets in his only Test in England and 6 for 14 in the World Cup semi-final, both at Headingley, swinging the ball round corners. In 1975-76, at home against the West Indies, he was so good that he was given the new ball ahead of Dennis Lillee. Geoff Dymock was also on the 1975 and 1977 Ashes tours but didn't get a Test. Dymock did play in the 1979-80 series in India and at home against England and the West Indies, though, and took 53 wickets at 23, including 6 for 34 against England bowling into the Fremantle Doctor, the sea breeze that assisted swing bowlers at the WACA.

In another world, Gilmour, who hadn't turned 30 when the Australian team arrived in England for the 1981 Ashes, might have been a real handful at Headingley in those conditions. Ditto Dymock. The Queenslander was 36 in 1981, but tight lines and nagging accuracy, and Gilmour's big in-duckers, would at least have given the future Sir Ian something different to think about.

#### **CRIS ANDREWS**

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Many television detective dramas feature episodes centred on cricket matches. Sometimes, as in *The Inspector Lynley Mysteries* (2003), *Midsomer Murders* (2016) or *Death in Paradise* (2017), a cricketer is murdered. In *Father Brown* (2015), a cricketer is framed, while in *Inspector Morse* (1987), a cricketer is the killer. These stories use the familiar backdrop as shorthand to create a cozy atmosphere and play on the cliché that murder is "not cricket." But there have been some unsettling real-life parallels because murder has, at times quite literally, crossed onto the cricket field. Even Test players have been involved, on both sides of the crime.

#### **GILES WILCOCK**

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Barnes is famous for many things – the mind-boggling heft of his numbers, the temperament that makes Grumpy Jimmy seem like Timmy Mallett, the total mastery of skill and accuracy that would surely have Anderson purring in admiration – but his unique place in the game is owed to the fact that he is the only person to be picked for his country while not playing regular top-level cricket. For 23 of his 27 Test appearances – bringing tidy career stats of 189 wickets at 16.87 – 'Barney' was doubling as professional at Porthill Park in the North Staffordshire and District League, whom he joined in 1906 as a 33-year-old whose back had already been turned on the county game, freeing himself from the yoke of the Good Old Boys who controlled the counties, running the game for their own amusement while men like Barnes (albeit without the finger genius, the trajectory guile) laboured in the mills and factories they owned and whose profits they tapped. Which is not to place Sydney in the lineage of Marx and Engels – more arcs and angles – only to say that he figured out at least one worker's autonomy. While the other Golden Agers went to Hollywood, Barnes would largely work off-Broadway.

#### **SCOTT OLIVER**

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fake signatures scribbled by a bored twelfth man while the rest of the side are out in the field, and some have unlikely autographs which have little connection to cricket. I have a bat signed by Gary Mason, the heavyweight boxer, and Jim Capaldi, the late prog-rock musician, among several illegible others. Of slight interest and almost no value, but hardly a nostalgic memory of times gone by. Heaven knows where I picked it up.

A bat that I came across the other day, however, has made me slightly less cynical about these bits of memorabilia, even though the autographs on it are not, at first glance, much above the ordinary. At least they appeared to be a good cross-section of county cricketers of their era. This particular Stuart Surridge Extra Special bat is owned by a friend, who told me that the bat was discovered in the attic when her grandfather died. She had heard that he had got the autographs on the bat when he was a young boy watching cricket at The Oval, sometime around 1930. The question was, who were all the signatures, and was the story likely to be true?

#### **JO RICE**

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When one makes old friends out of new acquaintances later in life, they tend to be more vital, more of the moment, than those made at school or university. Take Stephen as a good example.

In the late 1970s I ventured into the West End world of advertising, taking a short lease on ground floor and basement offices in a newly refurbished mews in Warren Street.

Warren Street's reputation, forged in the mid-50s, was that of a distinctly undesirable kind, it being the centre of the stolen motor car trade. Sell your car at one end of the street and two hours later it emerged at the Cleveland Street end – different colour, different number plates, different chassis number – at twice the price you were paid. Arthur Daley, eat your heart out.

#### **ROBBIE BOOK**

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There is something melancholy about a cricket clubhouse in winter. The dreams of warmer times are abandoned within, amidst the lugubrious scent of mildewed pads, a bitter hint of wintergreen and bass notes of linseed oil and dead wasps. Yet once a month people gather here, trudging through the sludgy blackness on days when the sun is on a zero-hours contract and summer seems like a rumour. They will warm the old place up again and briefly it will seem like a July afternoon, when rain has stopped play and there are no players to interrupt the chatter with wickets, boundaries and other trifles. Because with cricket there's a certain sense that the memory of the game is always more glistening than the reality.

#### **HARRY PEARSON**

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In early April 1945, even while Hitler remained alive, directing phantom armies from his bunker beneath the Reich Chancellery garden in Berlin, the English cricket authorities decided it might be possible to stage a number of Test-level matches with Australia over the course of the summer.

#### **CHRISTOPHER SANDFORD**

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The alarm goes – a reminder that today is a day in the shoes of a professional athlete, with responsibilities and obligations towards my franchise. There's only the call to prayer echoing through the air. And the faint buzz of anticipation – today, like every day, there's the ever-present pressure to perform.

#### **ARYAMAN VARMA**

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“Excuse me young man, can I grab my germy rag?” I recognise the voice instantly. I tell myself to play it cool but can only offer a jittery, “Er? Yeah, sure, no worries,” as former England captain, now legendary broadcaster and journalist – and my number one childhood cricketing idol – Michael Atherton leans across to retrieve a mucus-filled cloth from the desk just to the right of my laptop.

#### **JEFF THOMAS**

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